

[Lack of SNP planning sees courts and police buildings lying dormant](#)

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- Lack of SNP planning sees courts and police buildings lying dormant

11 Feb 2017



Around one in six Police Scotland buildings are not in daily use, while the Scottish Government is sitting on £1 million worth of empty courtrooms.

Information obtained by the Scottish Conservatives has revealed that, of 412 police properties across Scotland, 60 are “not currently in day-to-day use”.

And the research also revealed that sheriff courts which have shut, but not sold, total an estimated value of around £1.13 million.

The Scottish Conservatives have said it shows a lack of forward-planning by the SNP, which is prepared to oversee the closure of courts and police buildings without thinking about what to do with the buildings thereafter.

Police Scotland embarked on a programme of front counter closures in 2014, and outlined plans for even more to shut last year.

The Scottish Conservatives criticised that move, saying people still valued local police stations and they played an important role in cutting crime.

In its response to the party’s Freedom of Information request, Police Scotland said: “Out of 412 properties, 60 are not currently in day-to-day use. A number of those are still used occasionally and some are subject to ongoing engagement with stakeholders regarding future use.”

A number of court closures have also occurred on the SNP’s watch, with 17 sheriff and justice of the peace facilities closing since the decision was announced in 2013.

However, it has now emerged many of these buildings are still on the taxpayer’s books, including Arbroath, valued at £240,000; Cupar, valued at £200,000; and Stonehaven, valued at £330,000.

The Scottish Conservatives also criticised the court closures programmes, warning it would make life harder for victims and witnesses, and add an additional burden to those courts remaining.

Scottish Conservative MSP Margaret Mitchell, convener of Holyrood’s justice committee, said:

“We were critical of SNP plans to close police stations and court buildings from the outset.

“But what this shows is that those proposals went on regardless, without any thought as to what to do with the buildings.

“It means the public has far reduced access to justice, yet the taxpayer hasn’t benefited as a result.

“In the face of the absolute refusal to change its mind on these closures, at the very least the money raised from their sale, now the Scottish Government has deemed them surplus to requirements, could go some way to improving justice in Scotland.

“It’s yet another example of the SNP making sweeping decisions without even trying to think the whole process through.”

To see a copy of the Freedom of Information response from the Scottish Courts Service, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Scottish-Courts-FOI-response.pdf>

To see a copy of the Freedom of Information response from Police Scotland, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Police-FOI-response.pdf>

The Scottish Government’s programme of police station closures has been roundly criticised:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-37850332>

Similarly, the nationalists have been under fire for closing a fifth of Scotland’s courts:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2015/09/sheriff-courts-less-efficient-in-wake-of-snp-closure-programme/>

The Government has completely failed to deliver on NHS workforce planning-Madders

Justin Madders MP, Labour’s Shadow Health Minister, responding to reports that a lack of Government planning means that Locum Doctors are being paid up to £363 an hour, said:

“The Government has completely failed to deliver on NHS workforce planning and now they are losing control of NHS finances as well.

“It’s not right that this amount of money is leaking out the system to agencies and temporary staff at a time when funding is so tight that operations are being cancelled and services cut back.

“The cap on agency payments has been breached a shocking 2.7 million times in just nine months. The Government needs a solution to help the NHS get the permanent staff it needs to keep patients safe.

“Jeremy Hunt should be making sure money meant for the NHS is going to patient care, not private agencies.”

Ends

[Only 50 days to go until new vehicle tax rates come into force](#)

The way vehicle tax is calculated will be changing for new cars and some motorhomes from 1 April 2017. Time is flying by and we’re just 50 days away.

We’ve been busy behind the scenes and [blogging regularly](#) about what DVLA is doing to prepare for the changes internally and with our customers. Here’s a recap of where we are:

Over the past 12 months we’ve been working closely with stakeholders to make sure they’re aware of these changes. We’re changing the tax rules ready for 1 April and are developing a new service to register new vehicles to launch later in the year. To support the changes we set up and attended industry steering groups to hear the views of stakeholders, update progress and agree the changes.



We launched our public facing communications in November 2016 and have been informing customers about the changes. This publicity campaign is being run across social media, blogs as well as through messages on DVLA literature. We've also updated GOV.UK with the facts about the changes.

DVLA's contact centre is running an automated telephone service to quickly answer our customer's questions.

We also hosted [a webinar](#) in January for fleet customers with commentary provided by DVLA Service Designers Helen Jones and Rhian Townsend.

We've been keeping a close eye on how these communications are performing and what people think. From this we know that the most popular query amongst the public is whether these changes will affect existing vehicles. The answer? No they don't. The new rates only affect cars and some motorhomes first registered with DVLA on or after 1 April 2017.

So, the countdown is well underway with only 50 days to go until the new vehicle tax rates come into force.

I'm sure this will fly by so please keep up to date with this topic and others by following DVLA on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) and subscribing to our [Digital Services Blog](#).

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[Press release: 50 days to go until new vehicle tax rates come into force](#)

From:

First published:
11 February 2017

DVLA is reminding motorists that there are just 50 days to go until new vehicle tax rates come into force for all cars and some motor homes that are first registered from 1 April 2017.

Rohan Gye, DVLA Vehicle Service Manager, said:

These changes won't affect any vehicles that are registered before 1 April 2017. So, for anyone who already owns a car or is thinking of buying a used car the rates of vehicle tax will not be changing. However, anyone considering buying a new car that will be first registered from 1 April should check the [vehicle tax rates table](#) on GOV.UK to find out how much they'll pay.

Under the changes, vehicle tax for the first year will continue to be based on CO2 emissions. After the first year, the amount of tax to pay will depend on the type of vehicle. The new rates are:

- £140 a year for petrol or diesel vehicles
- £130 a year for alternative fuel vehicles (hybrids, bioethanol and LPG)
- £0 a year for vehicles with zero CO2 emissions

In addition, for vehicles with a list price of more than £40,000, the rate of tax is based on CO2 emissions for the first year. After the first year, the rate depends on the type of vehicle (petrol, diesel, zero emission etc) and an additional rate of £310 a year for the next 5 years. After those 5 years, the vehicle will then be taxed at one of the standard rates (£140, £130 or £0) depending on the vehicle.

There is also [further information](#) available on the changes.

[Press release: Extracurricular cyber clubs to inspire and identify tomorrow's cyber security professionals](#)

The Cyber Schools Programme aims to support and encourage schoolchildren to develop some of the key skills they would need to work in the growing cyber

security sector and help defend the nation's businesses against online threats.

Up to £20m is available to deliver an extracurricular school programme which will see an army of expert external instructors teaching, testing and training teenagers selected for the programme, with a comprehensive cyber curriculum expected to mix classroom and online teaching with real-world challenges and hands-on work experience.

The Cyber Schools Programme, led by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), is aimed at those aged between 14 and 18, with a target for at least 5,700 teenagers to be trained by 2021.

This programme is for students with the aptitude and enthusiasm for the subject. It aims to appeal to children from all backgrounds, including those currently underrepresented in cyber security jobs.

Cyber security is an exciting industry with strong job prospects. Recent figures from the Tech Partnership show there are already 58,000 cyber security specialists in a growing sector worth £22bn a year to the economy. This is part of the Government's commitment to prepare Britain for the challenges it faces now and in the future.

Minister of State for Digital and Culture Matt Hancock said:

This forward-thinking programme will see thousands of the best and brightest young minds given the opportunity to learn cutting-edge cyber security skills alongside their secondary school studies. We are determined to prepare Britain for the challenges it faces now and in the future and these extracurricular clubs will help identify and inspire future talent.

Students will be expected to commit to four hours a week. This will include classroom-based and online-teaching with flexibility around exams and busier study periods.

The aim is for students to start aged 14 and complete a four-year programme. It will be delivered in modules, meaning older students can join at any point providing they meet the right criteria. The provider will have the flexibility to decide the most appropriate way to deliver the programme, and the pilot, to begin in September 2017, will be monitored and reviewed after the first year.

The programme is all part of the Government's National Cyber Security Programme to find, finesse and fast-track tomorrow's online security experts.

It includes the recently announced [CyberFirst bursary funding scheme](#), which offers grants of up to £4,000 for up to 1,000 students by 2020 to study a relevant degree, do a placement or attend a summer school and, depending on meeting requirements, the chance to work in national security on graduation.

There are 2,500 free places on CyberFirst in 2017 and an additional [CyberFirst Girls Competition](#), where teams of 13-to-15-year-old young women can pit their wits against one another to crack a series of online puzzles.

DCMS is also supporting leading employers in critical energy and transport infrastructure to train and recruit up to 50 highly skilled apprentices aged 16 and over to help defend essential services against cyber attacks. The [Cyber Security Apprenticeships for Critical Sectors Scheme](#) is open now for applications for those with a natural flair for problem solving and who are passionate about technology.

A [Cyber Retraining Academy](#), launched in January, is also helping more than 50 high-aptitude people fast-track into the cyber security industry with a ten-week intensive training course.

Notes to Editors

- Media enquiries – please contact the DCMS News and Communications team on 020 7211 2210 or out of hours on 07699 751153.
- DCMS are [seeking providers](#) to deliver this prestigious new schools programme. Bids close on the 13th March 2017.