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- SNP bow to Scottish Conservative pressure on support for terminally ill patients

20 Apr 2018



Scottish Conservative MSP Jeremy Balfour has been successful in convincing the Scottish Government to change the policy regarding benefits given to those who are terminally ill.

Mr Balfour had originally secured an amendment to the Social Security (Scotland) Bill that extended the period that terminally ill patients received benefits from six months up to two years.

However he has been successful in forcing the SNP Government to go further, with patients now receiving individual assessments from medical professionals to ensure that they receive the appropriate level of support based on their condition.

It represents a significant climb-down from the Scottish Government who had originally defined a person as terminally ill if they are in the last six months of life.

This unfairly excludes many people living with terminal conditions from accessing the benefits quickly, and the Scottish Conservatives had joined with organisations involved in palliative care such as Marie Curie and MND Scotland to fight for this change.

Scottish Conservative spokesman on welfare reform Jeremy Balfour MSP said:

“It’s welcome that the SNP Government has finally bowed to pressure and made this change.

“The previous situation only provided financial support for those who are terminally ill for six months – that’s simply not good enough.

“That’s why we called for it to be extended, and we’re pleased that all patients will now receive support tailored to their situation.

“Terminally ill patients need as much security and support as possible through what is a traumatic time and this should now ensure that they get it.

“We’d like to thank Marie Curie and MNDScotland for working with us through this battle to make the SNP finally see sense.”

[Scottish Conservatives triumph in Perthshire by-election](#)

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- Scottish Conservatives triumph in Perthshire by-election

20 Apr 2018



The Scottish Conservatives have won a vital council by-election in Perth and Kinross, with the candidate securing nearly 50 per cent of the vote.

John Duff saw off the SNP comfortably in the fight for the area’s Highland ward.

Of the 4086 voters cast, Labour, the Lib Dems and the Greens scraped just 421 between them.

The triumph follows a direct plea by SNP deputy leader John Swinney, who wrote to constituents begging them not to vote for the Scottish Conservatives.

He conceded the vote would be a straight fight between the two parties, and senior SNP MP Pete Wishart also campaigned hard.

Despite that, Cllr Duff won the ballot by a clear margin, reinforcing the Scottish Conservatives’ position as the largest party on the council.

The by-election was called following the death of Perth and Kinross Council leader Ian Campbell.

Scottish Conservative Mid Scotland and Fife MSP Murdo Fraser said:

“This by-election reinforced the fact that, not only are the Scottish Conservatives the sole challengers to the SNP, but we can beat them too.

“The second most important figure in the SNP personally wrote to constituents begging them to vote for his party.

“This result is a snub to John Swinney, and a snub to the nationalists whose bid to break up Britain has alienated and ignored voters.

“The outcome also confirms every other party in Scottish politics to be little more than a total irrelevance.”

Cllr John Duff said:

“It is a huge honour to have been elected to represent my home area on Perth and Kinross Council.

“I would like to thank all those who voted for me in the election, and all those who helped me campaign.

“I now pledge myself to work for all the residents of the Highland ward, whether they voted for me or not.

“I set out in the campaign how I would make myself available to constituents, and I fully intend to live up to these promises.”

[‘Unfair’ council tax rise disparity revealed](#)

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- ‘Unfair’ council tax rise disparity revealed

20 Apr 2018



Huge disparities have been revealed across Scotland as part of this year’s SNP council tax rises.

Official statistics have shown the average household will pay £37 more in 2018/19 in comparison to last year.

However, a postcode lottery has also emerged between local authorities.

The average household in Argyll and Bute will pay £95 more this year, whereas in neighbouring West Dunbartonshire the increase is only £18.

The Scottish Conservatives added that the hikes will wipe out any saving the SNP claims will arrive as a result of tax changes for some low-income households.

And it will re-inforce Scotland’s position as the highest-taxed part of the UK, the party’s local government spokesman Alexander Stewart said.

Other notable increases from last year will occur in Edinburgh, where the

average bill will jump from £1217 to £1275, and in East Renfrewshire where the additional annual burden will be £54.

In contrast, council tax in Aberdeen is reducing by £6 a year, and only rising by £23 in the Western Isles.

Scottish Conservative local government spokesman Alexander Stewart said:

“Householders in certain parts of Scotland will be absolutely furious at this postcode lottery.

“It’s patently unfair that the average bill in some parts of the country is going up by almost £100, while in others there is little change.

“This is what happens when the SNP government slashes local government funding to the bone – it forces councils to get the money from elsewhere.

“Scotland is now far-and-away the highest-taxed part of the UK, and the geographical disparity in council tax increases is rubbing salt in that particular wound.”

[Call for more farming support after year of ‘brutal’ weather](#)

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- Call for more farming support after year of ‘brutal’ weather

17 Apr 2018



Farmers need increased financial support following 12 months of “brutal” weather for the industry, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

Shadow rural affairs secretary Peter Chapman called on the Scottish Government to provide farmers across the country with additional help amid rising death rates of cattle and sheep.

He said the ‘Beast from the East’ has led to more fatalities of cows and sheep, while the poor weather across the previous summer and autumn reduced the quality of feed, leaving stock in poor condition.

Silage quality is also very poor, he added, with feed and straw stock scarce and expensive.

That comes on the back of farmers already struggling to cope with the SNP’s

farm payments fiasco, which starved rural Scotland of hundreds of millions of pounds in recent years.

Farming income across Scotland has almost halved in the past six years.

Scottish Conservative shadow rural affairs secretary Peter Chapman said:

“The farming sector has been struggling for some time and it’s due to a range of factors.

“It’s nobody’s fault the weather has been so terrible, and of course there’s very little that can be done to mitigate the impact at the time.

“But it’s not just the ‘Beast from the East’ that’s hurt farmers – the weather across the whole year has been very poor.

“There has been a big rise in deaths of cattle and sheep, and the quality of silage has been very poor – this all has a cost to an industry already struggling to get by.

“This is where the Scottish Government should step in to help.

“Our hill farmers in particular need some extra help at this time.

“Assistance with the lifting of fallen stock would be one thing that could be easily done.

“Getting rid of the hated three-crop rule for this year would also be warmly received.

“And it would all go some way to reversing the damage caused by the SNP’s shambolic handling of vital CAP payments in recent years.”

[Health visitor vacancies rise by 50% as SNP struggles to hit target](#)

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- Health visitor vacancies rise by 50% as SNP struggles to hit target

12 Apr 2018



Health visitor vacancy rates in Scotland have increased by half in the space of a year as the SNP struggles to honour a pledge on increasing numbers.

Official statistics have revealed there are currently 144 vacancies across the country, the equivalent of nearly one in 10 posts.

That compares to a vacancy rate of 6.7 per cent 12 months before.

It comes as the SNP looks set to fall short on its promise to employ 500 extra health visitors by this year, a commitment made in 2014.

However, with just 1448 currently in place, the Scottish Government remains off-course to hit that target.

The 144 empty roles currently compares to 101 in September, and only 49 two years ago.

And of the current vacancies, 62 have been unfilled for longer than three months.

Scottish Conservative public health spokeswoman Annie Wells said more efforts were needed to recruit additional health visitors.

She said it was crucial not just to provide better care for patients across Scotland, but to take the strain off those already struggling with a hefty workload.

According to nursing publications, there were 1114 whole-time equivalent health visitors at the time of the SNP government's commitment in the summer of 2014.

Latest ISD data states there are now 1448, meaning the goal for an extra 500 workers is short by 166.

Scottish Conservative public health spokeswoman Annie Wells said:

"The SNP made a promise to secure 500 extra health visitors, a commitment we welcomed, but it looks like that is going to fall short.

"For any department to have a vacancy rate of nearly 10 per cent is alarming, and shows the strain workers must be under.

"It follows a pattern across health and other public services of not enough staffing and poor workforce planning.

"Health visitors are crucial for a range of needs in our society, it's not something we can afford to scrimp on.

"The SNP should come clean about progress on this target, and explain how it's going to secure the additional 500 health visitors it promised."