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- SNP has no idea how much the new benefits system will cost

28 Mar 2018



The SNP has been criticised by the country's public spending watchdog for failing to work out the cost of implementing newly devolved benefits systems.

In a report to be published tomorrow, Audit Scotland said ministers should publish the projected costs of the new Scotland Act powers, a warning it also issued to the SNP last year.

The UK Government has already handed Holyrood £200 million to bring in the new social security powers.

But auditors said it will cost "much more than £200 million to implement all these powers", and that additional costs would have to come from the overall Scottish budget.

The organisation said more transparency was required from the SNP, and warned "significant" work would be required to get all systems ready to deliver the new powers, particularly in IT.

Implementing new social security powers would be "hugely complex", the report added, and more work is needed to ensure sufficiently skilled staff are in place to deliver these.

There was also a warning that it would be "challenging" to ensure enough workers would be found in time.

The Scottish Government has already spent £62 million implementing new powers, and ministers themselves estimate the new social security powers alone will cost £308 million over the next four years.

Audit Scotland added: "The way the Scottish economy performs relative to the rest of the UK will have a greater influence on public finances than ever before."

Scottish Conservative shadow social security secretary Adam Tomkins said:

"In short, the SNP simply hasn't done its homework when it comes to the huge challenge of implementing these significant new powers that are coming to Holyrood.

“The nationalists are about to learn not only how difficult it is to achieve a fair welfare system that’s affordable and sustainable, but how complex it is to get it up and running.

“It’s incredible that the SNP government hasn’t at least attempted to work out how much this is going to cost.

“If ministers are caught out by these costs, the excess cash will have to come from the budget, and that will mean schools, hospitals and other public services being short-changed.

“Time is running out, and the people of Scotland will not forgive the SNP government if it makes a mess of the processing of this.

“We’ve seen what a farce the SNP managed to make with processing CAP payments for farmers in recent years.

“If that’s repeated with social security money, the chaos will be unprecedented.”

[Consultation launched on better protection for animals in pet shops](#)

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26 Mar 2018



The Scottish Conservatives are calling for there to be better protection for animals sold in pet shops throughout Scotland.

Scottish Conservative MSP Jeremy Balfour is today launching a consultation on a member’s bill that will ensure that local authorities have more power to protect the welfare of pets sold in shops.

Research from animal charity Blue Cross has found the current legislation governing pet shops, the Pet Animals Act 1951, is outdated, leading to issues with enforcement and interpretation as the legislation is being inconsistently applied.

The new member’s bill would seek to increase the transparency and consistency of standards required for pet shops, and give local authorities the tools they need to ensure effective compliance.

The Scottish Conservatives said the change should lead to better conditions for animals and ensure that Scots purchasing animals from pet shops are confident that they have been raised responsibly.

Scottish Conservative MSP for the Lothians Jeremy Balfour MSP said:

“With animal welfare being a fully devolved issue, the Scottish Parliament has a real opportunity to improve the lives of pets and pet owners across Scotland.

“Current legislation governing the sale of pets is outdated and failing to protect animals or pet owners.

“Every pet bought from a pet shop, no matter the species, is important to their new owner. It is the latest addition to their family.

“Every Scot wants their pet to have had the best start in life and be in good health at the point of sale.

“This legislation will ensure our system is sufficiently robust to protect animal welfare and enable the public to buy with confidence, safe in the knowledge that the pet shop they are buying from is a reputable, licensed establishment which has been subject to a stringent licensing process.”

Nigel Baker, the CEO of the Pet Industry Federation said:

“As the UK trade association for pet businesses, the Pet Industry Federation (PIF) welcomes the launch of Jeremy Balfour’s consultation on pet shop licensing.

“At over 60 years old, the legislation governing pet shops sales in Scotland is very outdated, and doesn’t fully take into account the changing business models around pet sales that have emerged in that time.

“The legislation is in urgent need of an overhaul in order to safeguard animal welfare and ensure that standards of licensing and inspection are applied and enforced consistently across Scotland.”

Becky Thwaites, Head of Public Affairs at Blue Cross said:

“We have been pleased to work with Jeremy Balfour MSP on this proposal to improve the licensing of pet shops across Scotland.

“Current legislation around the selling of pets is vastly outdated and we welcome the opportunity to bring it up-to-date to better protect the welfare of pets in Scotland.

“We hope that interested parties will take the opportunity to take part in this consultation to ensure both pets and their owners are protected at the point of sale.”

A link to the consultation document is available here:

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/108075.aspx>

[Health board where nearly no chronic pain patients get treated on time](#)

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13 Mar 2018



Figures released today on chronic pain have revealed a Scottish health board made almost all of its patients wait too long for treatment.

ISD Scotland stated just six per cent of people living with months of chronic pain in NHS Ayrshire and Arran were seen to within the target 18 weeks in the last three months of 2017.

It means 221 people waited beyond that timeframe for a first appointment at a pain clinic or service, with only 14 being dealt with on time.

Other health boards also struggled with the target, with NHS Grampian seeing just a quarter of chronic pain patients on time, and Dumfries and Galloway only 59 per cent.

Across Scotland, there was a 72.3 per cent compliance rate with the 18-week target.

The statistics come despite the issue of pain receiving more prominence, with campaigners and opposition politicians repeatedly calling for better care of those with chronic pain, which is defined by experts as continuous, long-lasting pain which has persisted for more than three months.

Shadow health secretary Miles Briggs currently co-convenes the Scottish Parliament's cross party group on chronic pain.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

“Life can be utterly miserable for someone living with chronic pain.

“To make them wait more than 18 weeks for an appointment is verging on scandalous, and it's hard to see what the excuse for this could be.

“The national average of 72.3 per cent is bad enough, but for one health

board to be seeing just six per cent of people in this time is shocking.

“Chronic pain is a matter of extreme importance and should be regarded as such by the SNP government.

“The nationalists have been in charge of health for more than 10 years, and the failings in this area are all on them.”

[Number of Special Constables in Scotland has more than halved since 2013](#)

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12 Mar 2018



Research by the Scottish Conservatives has found that the number of Special Constables in Scotland has more than halved since 2013.

The figures, from a Freedom of Information request by Maurice Corry MSP, show that since 2013, over 750 officers have been lost, with numbers down from 1387 in 2013 to 610 in 2018.

This appears to be the result of a failure to recruit new Special Constables which have also been falling dramatically from 251 in 2013 to only 85 in 2017.

At a local level, the response shows that there are only 23 officers in Renfrewshire & Inverclyde (K Division), while the whole of Lanarkshire (Q Division) has only 27. These two areas had 63 and 126 specials respectively in 2013.

Commenting on the figures Maurice Corry, Scottish Conservative community safety spokesman said:

“Special Constables make an important contribution to the policing of our streets, deterring crime and interacting with communities.

“The SNP has presided over years of declining numbers of Special Constables without addressing it in any meaningful way.

“I am extremely concerned about this massive drop in numbers of Special

Constables given their importance and the effect this is having on Police Scotland capability.

“The SNP must explain why it has let this happen, if it is by design or just sheer incompetence.

“The SNP must address this decline quickly and ensure that the policing capability in Scotland is not compromised in any way.”

[Ruth Davidson and Michael Gove back a fair deal on fishing](#)

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11 Mar 2018



Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson and Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Michael Gove have today released a joint statement backing a fair deal for Britain’s fishing communities.

It comes after fishing leaders last week criticised EU draft guidelines last week on access to UK waters.

Please see the full text below.

“In the referendum campaign in 2016, we were on opposing sides. However, now that the vote has happened and Britain has decided to leave the EU, we are united in our determination to ensure Brexit delivers for Britain’s fishing communities.

“We believe it is vital that we regain control over our own fisheries management. We want to use the opportunity of Brexit to secure a sustainable marine environment for the next generation.

“As proud Scots, we feel a particular debt to fishing communities who are looking to government to deliver a better deal for them. We agree we must deliver a fairer allocation for the British fleet in our own waters.

“As we leave the EU, we want the UK to become an independent coastal state, negotiating access annually with our neighbours. And during the implementation period we will ensure that British fishermen’s interests are properly safeguarded.

"The Prime Minister has been clear: Britain will leave the CFP as of March 2019. We both support her wholeheartedly.

"Whatever differences we had on Brexit, we both agree that our fishing industry stands to benefit from our departure from the Common Fisheries Policy. We are both committed to doing all we can to make those benefits real."