

Fewer people playing Scotland's national sport

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26 Dec 2017



Just eight per cent of people play football on a monthly basis, despite its reputation as Scotland's national sport.

Official figures have revealed more people take part in cycling, running and swimming, despite efforts to get more people involved in the Beautiful Game.

The Scottish Household Survey showed, when asked what sport people have taken part in over the past four weeks, just one in 12 said football.

The figures have remained broadly static over the past few years, even though general participation in regular physical activity has risen from 73 per cent to 79 per cent since 2007.

The Scottish Conservatives said more had to be done to encourage people to play football and improve access to facilities in leisure centres.

The survey also revealed that, on a monthly basis, six per cent of people play golf, six per cent play snooker or pool, and two per cent have a game of bowls.

Physical activity is key to reducing rates of obesity in Scotland, which are soaring to their worst ever levels.

And the party said increasing participation in sport was also key to improving mental health.

Scottish Conservative sport spokesman Brian Whittle said:

“Football is supposed to be Scotland's national sport, but – for a sport that so many watch, enjoy and talk about – surprisingly few of us seem to have the opportunity to get out there and kick a ball.

“That has to change.

“If we really are to boost levels of physical activity across the board, football should play a key part in that.

“We need to have better, more affordable access to sports facilities for all ages and abilities.

“Even the most basic things like taking down ‘no ball games’ signs and making sure the grass is cut on public pitches would give the public more opportunity to play.

“If more people played on a regular basis, not only would the nation’s health improve, but we could foster new talent for our national team as well.”

[Third of SNP education targets delayed, dropped or ducked](#)

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21 Dec 2017



A third of education targets set out by the SNP in its own report card have been delayed, dropped or ducked.

Ministers provided an update on 75 action points designed to help schools, including increasing teacher numbers and encouraging more to step up to headteacher roles.

However, it has now emerged that the deadlines have been missed for 23 of these aims, despite Nicola Sturgeon claiming education is her government’s top priority.

At First Minister’s Questions today, Ruth Davidson highlighted three specific failings from the National Improvement Framework.

The Scottish Conservative leader said a flagship scheme to encourage high-quality graduates into teaching had not yet been launched, despite a pledge for it to be up and running by now.

In addition, a scheme to improve school inspections has also been delayed, while a dedicated programme to help teachers rise through the ranks to become heads has also been shelved.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

“Nicola Sturgeon has made great play of the claim education is her number one priority.

“But when you go through 75 actions the Scottish Government specifically identified to improve education last year, it turns out a third have been

delayed, dropped or ducked.

“A scheme to get more graduates into teaching is overdue, a drive to boost inspections has been shelved, and a plan for more headteachers kicked into the long grass.

“All the while, schools across the country are struggling to recruit teachers, and pupils are suffering as a result.

“Parents and teachers will look at these failings and conclude the First Minister is simply not living up to the commitment she’s made on education.”

[A&E waiting times worst in nearly 3 years](#)

19 Dec 2017



Accident and emergency activity statistics released by ISD Scotland have shown that the percentage of patients seen within the four hour target is at its lowest level since March 2015.

The figures released today show that only 86.9 per cent of patients are being seen within the four hour timescale.

The Scottish Government’s own target is that 95 per cent of all patients should wait no longer than four hours in A&E departments.

In addition, the statistics from ISD Scotland show that NHS Lothian has the worst NHS board figures with only 77.3 per cent of patients seen within four hours.

And more worrying still, Edinburgh Royal Infirmary was the worst of all departments at just 64.1 per cent.

Commenting on the figures Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

“SNP ministers have repeatedly boasted about A&E performances but these figures will give them nothing to crow about.

“The systematic failure of the Scottish Government to invest or support primary care has led to a predictable displacement of patient activity, driving up waiting times in emergency departments.

“The sad reality is that emergency departments cannot cope with this increase

in patients, as well as seasonal pressures so patients are waiting longer, many of whom are in serious discomfort.

“We know from the recent RCN survey that many nurses are considering leaving the profession due to unacceptable demands and an inability to provide the care they want.

“So the situation will continue to deteriorate until the Scottish Government heeds our warnings and starts investing in primary care and supporting our GPs.”

And specifically on the situation in NHS Lothian;

“These waiting times are particularly bad and patients in Lothians will be very worried about the delays they face should they need emergency care over Christmas.

“However worrying these waiting times are, hopefully they are now accurate, and NHS Lothian can now act to reduce them as a matter of urgency.”

Council tax hikes will more than cancel out the starter rate of tax

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18 Dec 2017



Savings for lower earners from the SNP's new starter rate of tax would be cancelled out by a local council tax rise of as little as 2%, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

The most that can be saved from Derek Mackay's proposed changes to income tax rates and bands is £20, just 38p.

The Finance Secretary's draft budget has allowed local authorities to increase council tax by 3% next year. Last year, 21 of 32 councils raised levels by the full 3%, with two more increasing the rate by 2.5% and one by 2%.

The average council tax paid by the owner of a Band A property will increase by £31.85 with a 3% rise.

Even in the local authority area with the lowest level of tax, Comhairle nan

Eilean Siar, bills would go up by £29.70 at 3% and £21.23 at 2%.

Murdo Fraser, Scottish Conservative finance spokesman, said:

“The SNP has said that their income tax plans will mean savings for those on lower incomes, but any benefit would be wiped out by a council tax rise of 2%.

“As usual, Derek Mackay is giving with one hand while taking away with the other.

“Research by the Scottish Conservatives have shown that any increase in tax revenues could be achieved by cutting down on wastage in government spending.

“And as world-renowned economist Arther Laffer has said yesterday – increased taxation does nothing to grow the economy.

“The Finance Secretary, and the SNP, should think again before hammering Scots with tax rises at a time when our economy is struggling.”

The starter rate of tax will apply for the first £2,000 after the personal allowance and has been set at 19p (Scottish Government, *Draft Budget 2018-19*, p22, [link](#)).

Last year 21 of 32 councils increased council tax by the full 3 per cent, with a further two increasing it by 2.5 per cent and one increasing it by 2 per cent (Scottish Government, *Draft Budget 2018-19*, p13, [link](#); *BBC*, 2 March 2017, [link](#)).

The average council tax paid by a band A property will increase by £31.85 with a 3 per cent increase. Even in the council with the lowest tax, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar council tax will increase by £29.70. A two per cent increase would still see bills increase by £21.23.

	Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D	Band E	Band F	Band G	Band H
Scottish council tax average	1061.57	1238.50	1416.26	1593.29	2053.94	2511.35	2994.61	3709.80
Tax after 3 per cent increase	1093.42	1275.655	1458.75	1641.09	2115.56	2586.69	3084.45	3821.09
Increase in bills	31.85	37.16	42.49	47.80	61.62	75.34	89.84	111.29

These calculations include water and sewage charges and were compiled by manually averaging all the bands, direct from council websites.

SNP must review spending, say Scottish Conservatives

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18 Dec 2017



The Scottish Conservatives have identified £210m efficiency savings that the Scottish Government could use to invest in public services, rather than the increases in income tax announced in the draft Budget.

The Scottish Government has now confirmed that everyone being paid more than £26,000 – including nurses, primary teachers and police officers – would pay more income tax under the new Scottish Budget than if they lived in the rest of the UK.

The SNP has introduced a new rate of 21p for those earning between £24,000 and £44,000. That means, once a worker hits £26,000, they will be worse off than their equivalents in England, Wales and Northern Ireland under these SNP plans.

It is estimated around 1.16 million workers will be hit by these changes, a total of 45 per cent.

The Federation of Small Businesses, Scottish Chambers of Commerce, the Scottish Retail Consortium and Business in Scotland have all warned the Scottish Government against raising taxes due to the negative effects on the economy.

Murdo Fraser, Shadow Cabinet Secretary for Finance said:

“Our spending analysis clearly shows where the Scottish Government can make substantial savings that could be ploughed back into public services; almost as much as can be raised by raising taxes on hardworking taxpayers.

“The Scottish Conservatives believe that hitting hardworking families with higher taxes will only damage the Scottish economy in the long run, leading to less money to fund public services.

“The Scottish Government should instead seek to tackle areas of inefficient spending or else these inefficiencies will continue to spiral and take up a larger amount of spending in future.

“There is now a serious consensus within Scotland’s business community that the SNP should not increase income tax.

“The SNP must stick to the manifesto; there is no need to raise taxes when there are clear savings to be made.”