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- Business rates mess intensifies as firms forced to wait extra month for appeal

7 Apr 2017



Businesses seeking to overturn crippling rises in rates will be forced to wait an extra month before their appeals are considered, it has emerged.

The Scottish Government has changed the legislation to state firms must now wait at least 105 days before a decision is made on their rates bill.

Previously, the limit was just 70 days, meaning those affected will have an additional 35 days of being out-of-pocket.

It's the latest set-back for the SNP as it struggles to address the business rates fiasco.

Earlier this week, it emerged finance secretary Derek Mackay's 12.5 per cent cap on increases was in fact a 14.75 per cent one, as he'd forgotten to factor in inflation.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

"This is yet more evidence of the SNP's business rates fiasco unravelling.

"Not only was the cap announced by Derek Mackay found to be misleading, but now firms are being forced to wait more than a month extra to get their appeals heard.

"Considering finances for many of these organisations affected will already be tight, they can hardly afford to wait an additional 35 days.

"This is just another indication of an anti-business SNP government, that would rather hit firms in the pocket than help them boost growth, jobs and the economy."

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- An appellant can request that the Valuation Appeal Committee hear the appeal within a time period that the appellant requests, but this cannot be less than 105 days (previously 70 days) from the date they make the

request in question.

- The “70 day” mentioned was changed very recently (16 March and coming into force on 1 May 2017) when The Valuation Appeal Committee (Procedure in Appeals under the Valuation Acts) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2017 was laid (*Legislation.Gov.UK, Scottish Statutory Instruments, [link](#)*).
- Previously, Section 8 (4 and 7) of The Valuation Appeal Committee (Procedure in Appeals under the Valuation Acts) (Scotland) Regulations 1995 stated (*LegislationGov.UK, Scottish Statutory Instruments, [link](#)*):

‘(4) The secretary shall give to each party not less than 70 days’ notice of the date, time and place set for the hearing of the appeal.’

‘(7) If an appellant considers that his appeal has not been or is not to be heard within a reasonable period of lodging it, he may request the Committee to hear the appeal within such a period as he may specify, being a period not less than 70 days from the date of his request, and if the Committee declines to hear the appeal within such a period-

- (a) It shall state its reasons for so declining; and
- (b) The Secretary shall notify both parties accordingly’.

- The Valuation Appeal Committee (Procedure in Appeals under the Valuation Acts) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2017 “70” for “105” in both these paragraphs 4 and 7 of regulation 8. It states: (*Legislation.Gov.UK, Scottish Statutory Instruments, [link](#)*)

‘(4) In regulation 8 (arrangements for hearing by the Committee)-

- (a) in paragraphs (4) and (7), for “70” substitute “105”;
- (b) in paragraph (5)([6](#)), for “giving such information” to the end substitute “to be published on an appropriate website”; and
- (c) in paragraph (6), for “name a place” to the end substitute “include a list of the appeals to be heard at that hearing”.’

- Therefore as of 1 May 2017 the period covered by these sections will no longer be 70 but 105 days. Therefore the minimum time that an appellant can ask is 105 days, and if the Committee declines to hear the appeal within such a period, it must state why and notify both parties that this is the case.

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6 Apr 2017



Crucial funding to tackle Scotland's drugs and drink crisis has been cut across Scotland, new figures have revealed today.

In half of all Scotland's 14 Health Board areas, support for Alcohol and Drug Partnerships has fallen this year, the statistics show.

It contradicts a promise by Health Secretary Shona Robison to ensure that treatment would be maintained at "existing levels" across Scotland.

The cuts follow changes to the way drug and alcohol partnerships are funded.

Ministers have reduced their own funding but said earlier this year that Health Boards would top it up to ensure cash was maintained.

However, a Freedom of Information request by the Scottish Conservatives has shown that, in several health board areas in Scotland, this has not happened.

The biggest cut is in Lanarkshire. Spending from central government and the NHS board amounts to a cut of £700,000 on 2015-16. Funding has also gone down in Dumfries and Galloway, Fife, Grampian, Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles.

This is despite the fact Ms Robison said in January that she would be "maintaining alcohol and drugs treatment performance at existing levels across ADP locales."□

Scottish Conservative lifestyle spokesman Brian Whittle said:

"When she announced this changes, Shona Robsion could not have been clearer – overall spending on alcohol and substance misuse would be maintained at existing levels across Scotland.

"It has taken our own research to show this is simply not the case. A fall of nearly three quarters of a million pounds in some areas can only mean that support for drug and drink addiction is being cut.

"Cutting funding on alcohol and drug support is a false economy – because people with addictions often cost far more to the justice system and the NHS, not to mention to themselves, if they do not get treatment earlier on.

"Once again, we see SNP pledges falling apart at the seams.

“The Scottish Government must now urgently review the funding of this vital projects to assess whether people who need support are not getting it because of these cuts.”

Please see a copy of Shona Robison’s letter on ADP funding, dated January 16th.

In it, Robison wrote:

“From the increased board baseline budgets we would expect a total of £15 million to also go towards supporting these efforts and maintain the overall spending on addressing alcohol and substance misuse, maintaining alcohol and drugs treatment performance at existing levels across ADP locales.”

Document including full figures of ADP funding:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/adp-funding/>

Spending cuts are as follows:

NHS Lanarkshire: -£693,740

NHS Grampian: -£243,922

NHS Dumfries and Galloway: -£233,834

NHS Western Isles: -£130,510

NHS Fife: -£125,000

NHS Orkney: -£68,843

NHS Shetland: -£66,515

[Cost of second referendum could instead address Scotland’s teacher recruitment crisis](#)

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- Cost of second referendum could instead address Scotland’s teacher recruitment crisis



Nicola Sturgeon must focus on delivering her day job, not threatening a second referendum, the Scottish Conservatives have said today.

Following the First Minister's fresh threat to hold another vote in a speech in California last night, the Scottish Conservatives are highlighting the potential cost of such a plan.

The 2014 referendum cost £17 million to stage.

Meanwhile, a potential legal challenge on the powers to hold a referendum – raised by the First Minister last night – would also run into hundreds of thousands of pounds.

Combined, the cost of this unnecessary constitutional plan would be enough to put 750 teachers through their probation – helping to tackle Scotland's crippling recruitment crisis in the classroom.

Scottish Conservative constitution spokesman Adam Tomkins said:

“There is a price to pay for Nicola Sturgeon's constitutional tunnel vision.

“If the First Minister decides to go to the courts, or ram through her own referendum, millions of pounds of taxpayers' money which could be spent on hiring teachers will instead go on her independence vanity project.

“The wider cost is a government in charge of the NHS, education and public services which isn't focused on improving our quality of life, but is instead campaigning for separation.

“It is a lose-lose situation for the Scottish public. Nicola Sturgeon has dug herself into a hole on the constitution.

“It is time to stop digging and get back to the day job she was elected to do.”

Notes to editors:

- It cost £15.8 million to run the first independence referendum. This was £2.1 million more than had originally been estimated by the SNP (Scottish Parliament, *Question S4W-27304*, 4 September 2015, [link](#)).
- It cost £1.2 million to print and distribute copies of the white paper (Scottish Parliament, *Question S4W-20080*, 11 March 2014, [link](#); *Ibid*, *Question S4W-20080*, 17 December 2014, [link](#)).
- Teacher probation salary in 2016/17: £22,416 (*The Educational Institute of Scotland*, [link](#))
- The cost of a legal challenge is unclear – however, the Scottish Government spent £136,000 purely to intervene in the Article 50 case at the Supreme Court before Christmas.

Scotland halfway to recession under the SNP

5 Apr 2017



Scotland's economy contracted over the last quarter, meaning the country is now on the path to recession under the SNP.

Statistics released today showed a 0.2 per cent dip in the fourth quarter of 2016.

If that performance is mirrored in the first three months of 2017, Scotland will officially be in recession.

In contrast, the rest of the UK's economy grew by 0.7 per cent in the final quarter of last year.

It comes as First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has been accused of neglecting the day job by touring the US to talk about Scotland's place in the world, and predicting separation from the UK in years to come.

Today's figures also revealed that Scottish GDP per person contracted by 0.3 per cent during October, November and December, while production and construction were the main sectors to struggle.

The statistics do not take into account revenues from North Sea oil.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

"These are deeply worrying figures which show that Scotland under the SNP is now on the brink of a recession.

"Nicola Sturgeon's Scottish Government must take responsibility for this mess.

"She has made Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK and created more instability and uncertainty with her threat of a second referendum.

"Now we see the real-life impact of her mismanagement.

"These figures also smash the SNP's claim that Brexit is to blame for a slowdown.

"If that was the case, why is the rest of the UK powering ahead, while Scotland comes to a standstill?"

“More than ever, Scotland needs a First Minister in charge who gets back to her desk, ends her obsession with a second referendum, and focuses on her day job.

“Scotland’s economy is facing a crisis. We need a Scottish Government in charge, not a campaign for independence.”

Notes to editors:

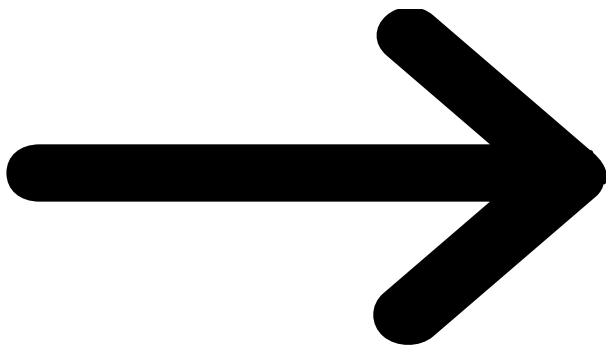
For more on the figures, visit:

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0051/00516361.pdf>

[SNP set to finally give go ahead on Pentland Studio](#)

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4 Apr 2017



The Scottish Conservatives have welcomed the news that a major new film studio looks set to receive planning permission after ministers said they were minded to approve it.

The decision about whether to give the go ahead on the proposed £55 million Pentland Studio on the outskirts of Edinburgh had been with the Scottish Government for months, despite all funding being in place.

But developers received notice from the Scottish Government’s chief planner that ministers were intending to approve the application, subject to conditions and the completion of a planning obligation.

One of these conditions related to improving infrastructure on the Edinburgh city by-pass, but if completed it would provide Scotland with a world class

96-acre site with a water stage and six sound stages.

The latest instalment of the Avengers franchise recently began filming in Edinburgh, but not all of the filming can take place in Scotland due to the lack of a world leading film studio.

It is hoped that once completed, the new facilities could attract more programmes to be shot in Scotland, and help retain industry expertise.

Scottish Conservative culture spokesman Jackson Carlaw, who recently raised the matter of studio capacity at FMQs, said:

“Having dragged their feet for months I’m delighted that the Scottish Government has seen sense and decided to give this project the go ahead.

“Provided that the conditions of the approval are met, this should provide Scotland with an international, world leading film studio complex.

“I have no doubt that this will help attract major film and television productions to Scotland, and finally allow us to match and exceed facilities elsewhere in the UK.

“It will also give us a real opportunity to develop and nurture creative arts skills in Scotland, and give us the ability to retain talent rather than see it go elsewhere.

“Once finished, this new development will see us have a capacity and talent base to match the unrivalled variety of our natural landscape locations.”

The Scottish Conservatives urged the SNP to approve the application back in January:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/01/ministers-must-reveal-fate-of-55m-film-studio/>