

5 measures SNP must adopt as Scotland stands on brink of recession

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4 Jul 2017



The Scottish Conservatives have set out five key initiatives to boost the country's economy – with Scotland potentially 24 hours away from recession.

Tomorrow's GDP figures will confirm whether or not Scotland entered a second quarter of economic downturn in the first three months of 2017.

If it did, it will mean Scotland is in a technical recession for the first time since the global economic crash, while the rest of the UK experiences growth.

As a result, shadow economy secretary Dean Lockhart has called on the SNP government to adopt pro-business measures, and set out five areas where ministers could begin.

Proposals include restoring business rates parity with the rest of the UK by cutting the large business supplement; boosting tourism by scrapping APD on long-haul flights; and working more closely with businesses towards a more flexible apprenticeship and skills framework.

Building on a Scottish Conservative plan for local growth, he added that the Scottish Government should empower councils to drive growth locally.

And removing the threat of a second independence referendum altogether would reduce uncertainty for firms north of the border.

Mr Lockhart was also critical of the SNP's moves to make Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK.

Scottish Conservative shadow economy secretary Dean Lockhart said:

"Scotland stands on the brink of recession, and the nationalists have no-one to blame but themselves.

"They can't point to Brexit, because the rest of the UK is powering ahead – this is all on the SNP's shoulders.

"Even if Scotland does escape technical recession in these GDP figures, it's been far too close for comfort.

“That’s why the Scottish Government has to adopt these ideas to kickstart Scotland’s economy, and at least begin to catch up with other parts of Britain.

“The large business supplement has to be cut to ensure our firms aren’t at a competitive disadvantage with the rest of the UK, and there is much that can be done with APD to encourage more visitors on long-haul flights.

“We also want to see ministers work harder with apprenticeships, and allow local authorities more control to drive growth locally.

“And, of course, the easiest thing of all for the SNP to do to help reduce uncertainty is to take the threat of a second independence referendum off the table.

“The Scottish Government could also use the UK-wide Industrial Strategy as a coherent framework to maximise the potential of Scotland’s sectors and to increase our export base.”

The Scottish Conservatives today set out five initiatives which could steer Scotland clear of recession in future:

In the last set of GDP figures, it was confirmed that Scotland was halfway to recession:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/04/scotland-halfway-towards-recession-under-the-snp/> And last week, the Fraser of Allander Institute said whether or not Scotland officially plunged into recession was “in the balance”:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/06/recession-for-scotland-in-the-balance-say-experts/>

[Huge rich-poor divide revealed in u18 pregnancies](#)

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4 Jul 2017



Girls under the age of 18 in deprived areas are seven times more likely to get pregnant than those in the wealthiest areas, new figures have revealed.

ISD Scotland published teenage pregnancy statistics today, which showed a general reduction across the board in recent years.

However, the rich-poor divide remains stark. According to the data, 40.2 in every 1000 under 18s in the most deprived areas got pregnant in 2015.

That compares to just 5.7 in every 1000 for the least deprived girls.

And while most health boards recorded a decrease in teenage pregnancies generally, rates went up in both NHS Ayrshire and Arran and NHS Dumfries and Galloway.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

“It’s extremely worrying that the social background of under 18 girls is so influential when it comes to the likelihood of their getting pregnant. “

The fact that risk increases seven-fold from the wealthiest to the poorest areas should be a wake-up call.

“Of course, it’s welcome to see teenage pregnancy rates in general decrease.

“And it’s also worth noting, particularly at the older end of the scale, many of these pregnancies will have been planned and result in happy family lives.

“But we can’t neglect the fact that more needs to be done to help those younger teenagers in some of Scotland’s most deprived areas.

“An unplanned pregnancy at that age can be emotionally damaging and have a very serious impact on life chances.

“I hope the Scottish Government looks at these figures and sets out what it intends to do to close this gap.”

To see the full ISD Scotland report, visit:

<https://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/Sexual-Health/Publications/2017-07-04/2017-07-04-TeenPreg-Report.pdf>

The report stated that an under 18 girl from the most deprived area was seven times more likely to get pregnant than one from the least deprived. When considering the under 20 bracket, the gap falls from seven times to five times more likely.

Poverty report exposes SNP's neglect of colleges

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3 Jul 2017



The SNP's attitude to college education has been criticised in a comprehensive report about poverty in Scotland.

Poverty and inequality adviser Naomi Eisenstadt produced the document examining the causes and impact of deprivation north of the border.

It said the "social class gradient is deeply worrying" and life outcomes are too heavily based on the wealth and social class of someone's parents.

She also said the colleges had been over-exposed to funding cuts, adding:

"The overall picture suggests that the university sector has had greater protection from hard financial times than the further education and the college sector."

The Scottish Conservatives have repeatedly attacked the SNP's record on colleges.

Last month, it emerged the number of people studying at college in Scotland had fallen to a decade low, while the number of part-time students had dropped by 18 per cent.

Scottish Conservative equalities spokeswoman Annie Wells said:

"Education is such a key route in getting people out of a cycle of poverty.

"Yet now we see that SNP policies on free tuition are actually hindering that for many.

"They have led to colleges getting squeezed, even though they are so vital in delivering people the skills and education they need to make a difference for them and their families.

"This is why the Scottish Government must face up to the reality of its universal free tuition, and realise the damage it is doing to those who need help the most.

"The report also makes it abundantly clear that the gap between rich and poor in Scotland remains far too wide.

“This is the cost of having an SNP government which has completely ignored the needs of those who are worst-off in pursuit of its own constitutional goals.

“It’s more apparent in Nicola Sturgeon’s constituency than anywhere else in Scotland just how desperate life can be in our deprived areas.

“These findings should be a wake-up call for a complacent Scottish Government.”

To see the full report, visit: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00522051.pdf>

Campaign goes live on Frank’s Law

3 Jul 2017



A bill to introduce Frank’s Law – a guarantee that under 65s with conditions such as dementia receive free personal care – has today opened for a three month consultation.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs lodged his Member’s Bill proposal last Thursday and at the weekend sources suggested that the Scottish Government would now be open to introducing this change.

The bill, which will allow MSPs to vote on introducing the legislation has attracted support from every opposition party at Holyrood.

Some SNP MSPs too – including former health secretary Alex Neil – are also keen on the move.

Lodging the bill, Miles was joined in Holyrood last week by Amanda Kopel, the wife of former footballer Frank, who died three years ago having been diagnosed with dementia at the age of 59.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

“The consultation on my Member’s Bill proposal runs until October 6 and I urge individuals and organisations across Scotland to give their views during this period on Frank’s Law.

“That way we can demonstrate the level of support for removing the age discrimination that currently exists for people who need free personal care.

"While it is welcome that Scottish Government sources have belatedly indicated they will adopt Frank's Law, we need a firm commitment from ministers to that effect and a detailed timetable from them for its implementation.

"This consultation will help keep the pressure up on the Scottish Government to do the right thing and deliver Frank's Law without delay.

"If they decide not to do this, then I want to be in a position to take my Member's Bill proposal to the Parliament and ask all MSPs to back it as there is a majority in favour of Frank's Law."

Amanda Kopel said:

"I welcome the launch of this consultation as another important step in the progress of Miles Briggs' Member's Bill proposal.

"I encourage people across Scotland to make their thoughts known in this consultation.

"Frank's Law will benefit so many people across the country, including in the future many families who currently would never envisage having to care for a loved one under 65 with a condition like dementia."

*The Member's Bill proposal page with a link to the consultation document and online consultation response form are here:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/105518.aspx>

Report card proves strong opposition

30 Jun 2017



An end-of-term report card published by the Scottish Conservatives shows the party has fulfilled its pledge to act as a strong opposition to the SNP this year – as promised.

It shows the SNP government has been forced to adopt no fewer than 10 key Scottish Conservative policies from GP funding to economic development.

The Scottish Conservatives have inflicted six parliamentary defeats on the SNP – and would have made it seven if Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale had registered a vote in a debate on tax.

Meanwhile, Scottish Conservative campaigning in parliament has pushed the SNP

into u-turns on business rates, named persons, local taxation, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, drug driving and farming.

In addition, it was the Scottish Conservatives which stood up against Nicola Sturgeon's reckless plan for a second referendum – before taking 12 seats off the SNP in the Westminster election on June 8.

The 10 Scottish Conservative policies swiped by the SNP over the last year are:

- Increasing the proportion of NHS funding to GPs
- Introducing flexible childcare
- Reviewing NHS targets
- Introducing 24h mental health support in GP surgeries and A+E.
- Expanding Scottish Development International
- Creating South of Scotland Enterprise
- Expanding the role of Community Pharmacists
- Increasing powers for headteachers
- Creating a First Ministers' Reading Challenge
- Giving funding directly to schools to close the attainment gap

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"This parliamentary session will go down as the year the SNP's bubble burst.

"From blunders on farm payments and business rates to Nicola Sturgeon's reckless bid for a second referendum, they have blown their reputation for competence.

"The general election result this month showed that, all over Scotland, people have quite simply had enough.

"When we were elected as Scotland's main opposition party last year, we promised to hold the SNP to account and to say no to their second referendum.

"This report card shows that our team of 31 MSPs has made a good start delivering on that – not just by standing up to the SNP, but by offering alternative ideas that this clapped-out government has been forced to adopt.

"Over the next year, we are determined to step up the pace and show ourselves as a credible alternative government for Scotland."