

# SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT REPORT

By John McGiveron

## HEALTH

In October 2018, Audit Scotland published its annual report on the NHS in Scotland and warned that the NHS standards in Scotland are in decline because of lack of funding. It also said that no health board had met all of the key national targets and every one of them was struggling to break even. “Decisive action is required” to ensure that the NHS is fit ‘to meet people’s needs in the future. In 2017/18 42% of the Scottish Budget, (£13.1bn) was spent on the NHS, but Audit Scotland said that with inflation this was a “0.2% decrease from 2016/17”. According to them, Brexit will also bring additional challenges, and the Auditor General has stated that “The performance of the NHS continues to decline, while demands on the service from Scotland’s ageing population are growing.”

New figures from the Information Services Division Scotland reveal that the cost of the NHS in Scotland has risen above the rate of inflation in the last five years. The annual report on Scottish Health Service costs shows how much money has been spent on the NHS in Scotland and how it is distributed. Almost half of the money spent goes on staffing and shows that expenditure on the NHS has risen from “£10.44bn in 2013/14 to £12.02bn in 2017/18”. The Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh stated that the figures showed “the need for more funding for health” They went on to say that a range of factors may explain the increase, such as “people living for longer with multiple health conditions, costs associated with new drugs and treatments, funding to facilitate the integration of health and social care, and increasing staff costs,” and went on to say that “For the NHS to survive financially, a proper funding plan must be in place.”

## BREXIT

In November the First Minister stated to the BBC, that the “draft Brexit agreement between the UK and EU would be bad for Scotland” and the Scottish National Party had pledged to oppose it. She said that these proposals would remove Scotland out of the single market, while effectively Northern Ireland would stay in, which would have a “devastating impact on jobs and investment in Scotland. This is because of a ‘backstop’, a sort of safety net ensuring no ‘hard border’ between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, which is a member of the European Union. This will mean that Northern Ireland would stay “aligned to some EU rules on things like food products and food standards” and it will prevent checks on goods crossing the Irish Border. However some products brought over from the rest of the United Kingdom would be subjected to new checks and controls. It is felt that this is a bitter pill to swallow for Scotland, considering that Scotland voted to remain in the EU at the referendum, but it’s even more of a bitter pill as the draft agreement has no mention of Scotland. It must be noted that any “separate status for Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK” would be “seen as potentially damaging to the (UK) union as a whole.” The Prime Minister, Theresa May, said that the backstop could see the whole of the United Kingdom remaining aligned with the customs union (EU) for a ‘limited time’ after 2020. But the Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, “said that the backstop could not have a time limit.” So round and round we go!!

*Information for this section has been taken from BBC and, Scottish Parliament websites.*

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As I write this report (5<sup>th</sup> January) the Scottish Parliament is in recess for its’ Christmas and New Year break and should recommence business from the 7<sup>th</sup> January.