

SNP delays ferry fare reductions indefinitely

13 Sep 2018



The Scottish Conservatives have criticised the SNP after it emerged that reduced ferry fares to Orkney will be indefinitely delayed.

The SNP has already missed the deadline to implement ferry fare reductions on Orkney ferries by 10 weeks, and in a written response to Jamie Halcro Johnston MSP the SNP Minister Paul Wheelhouse confirmed that the delay is now indefinite.

The Scottish Conservative MSP said that the SNP has left Orcadians 'disadvantaged' compared to Scotland's other island communities.

Reduced fares were introduced for routes to and from Shetland at the beginning of July this year, when the roll-out to Orkney ferry services was also due to take place.

No agreement has yet been found with ferry operators for the Orkney route.

In his letter, the Minister also confirmed that further discussions with the ferry operators will not be considered as a complaint has been made to the European Commission regarding the Scottish Government's proposals. Mr Wheelhouse continued that he may give full notification of the scheme to the European Commission, a process which "normally takes around 18 months" but there is no definitive timescale.

Highlands and Islands MSP, Jamie Halcro Johnston said:

"The SNP promised to introduce reduced fares to Orkney and it has failed.

"Two and a half months after the SNP's deadline to introduce reduced fares to Orkney, which would reduce the disparity between Shetland and the Western Isles, the scheme has been delayed indefinitely.

"While in previous statements, Ministers said they would consider re-opening talks with ferry operators, it is now clear that will not happen any time soon. As a result, Orcadians are left disadvantaged compared to Scotland's other island communities.

"It is clear that the SNP Government's approach was flawed from the very beginning, leaving too little time to find agreement with operators, failing to engage with representatives from the islands and imposing deadlines that they couldn't meet.

"I will continue to press Ministers to ensure that action is being taken to

introduce lowered fares for Orkney, in line with their promises made to the islands.”

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Vital information for parents on their local school’s performance is only being provided by a handful of secondaries – despite SNP government regulations having been in place for six years.

New research, due to be published next week, will reveal just six schools in Scotland comply with the Education (Schools and Placing Information) regulations.

Those rules were hailed at the time by SNP ministers, who stated: “When parents are successfully and meaningfully involved in their child’s learning, and in the life of their schools, children do better.”

However, Professor Jim Scott’s analysis will show only seven per cent of schools make this information on the curriculum and attainment readily available, while 20 per cent don’t meet any of the requirements set down.

The issue was raised at First Minister’s Questions by Ruth Davidson, who said it was the latest example of the SNP claiming education was a priority, but that not being matched by results on the ground.

The Scottish Conservative leader added that, too often, parents were “left in the dark” about their child’s education and overall school experience.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

“According to the SNP government’s own rules, schools should give parents clear data on the curriculum and on performance.

“And we agree that it’s crucial that parents can find out about the school they’re entrusting their children with, or make an informed decision about which school to choose.

“But now we learn that parents have almost no chance of doing this, with 93

per cent of schools not fulfilling these requirements.

“Too often in Scotland’s secondaries, parents are being left in the dark as to what’s actually going on inside the school gate, and that needs to change.

“This is just another let down from an SNP government that has proved timid and weak in improving our schools.

“It’s dumped its own Education Bill because it finds it too hard, introduces an action plan it refuses to put into law, and then brings in rights for parents it won’t enforce.

“Nicola Sturgeon likes to say education is her top priority – but when she’s put to the test on this, she fails.”

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A north-east MP fighting for a change in the law on pet theft has joined campaigners from across the UK who presented a petition to Number 10 Downing Street.

Scottish Conservative Ross Thomson wants existing legislation to be amended to recognise the status and importance that pets have within families.

At present, pets are treated as possessions and no different from any other inanimate object that is stolen, such as a TV or a car.

The MP for Aberdeen South proposed a ten-minute rule bill to parliament in July amend the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 to make the theft of a protected animal a specific offence. The bill is due for its second reading on Friday, October 26.

The north-east MP has campaigned previously on animal welfare issues, successfully persuading the UK Government’s Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to look at changes to laws around the use of electric shock collars.

Mr Thomson was joined in Downing Street by fellow MP Gareth Johnson,

representatives of Stolen and Missing Pets (SAMPA), Pet Theft Awareness, Dogs Lost UK, campaigner Debbie Matthews and Dr Daniel Allen, Animal Geographer and the author of "Otter" and 'The Nature magpie'. The petition has been backed by more than 100,000 people.

Ross Thomson, MP for Aberdeen South, said:

"I was delighted to join campaigners pushing for a change in the law in Downing Street.

"The response to the petition has been overwhelming.

"For anyone unfortunate enough to have experienced pet theft, it can be truly heart-breaking, distressing and devastating.

"The theft of a pet should be recognised as a serious, criminal and punishable offence that recognises the status the animal has within their family.

"I want to see tougher sentencing guidelines for courts to deal with those that are caught.

"It is time for change.

"I am very pleased at the level of cross-party support I have received on this issue so far.

"I look forward to this bill proceeding to its second reading and I hope that we can deliver the change that is needed as soon as possible."

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The Scottish Conservatives are calling on the Scottish Government to listen to business opposition to devolving immigration and drop the policy.

Speaking at the CBI Scotland Annual Dinner last night, CBI Director-General Carolyn Fairbairn voiced her opposition to a Scottish immigration system.

The CBI is simply adding its voice to the growing list of business groups which oppose a Scottish immigration system, including the NFUS, Scottish Chambers of Commerce and Food and Drink Federation Scotland.

The First Minister Nicola Sturgeon also gave a speech at the event.

Adam Tomkins, Scottish Conservative shadow secretary on constitutional affairs has therefore urged the First Minister to listen to businesses across Scotland, drop the unworkable policy and focus on UK wide solutions.

The call also follows the announcement of a pilot scheme to allow fruit and vegetable farmers to hire workers from outwith the EU, after a campaign by Scottish Conservative MP Kirstene Hair.

Adam Tomkins, Scottish Conservative shadow secretary on constitutional affairs said:

“The SNP knows that devolving immigration risks a border at Berwick which would add delays, bureaucracy and costs.

“The CBI is simply adding its voice to the growing consensus that the devolution of immigration is unworkable and unwanted.

“The SNP must now listen to this consensus and propose UK wide solutions to ensure that Scotland has the work force it needs.

“The pilot scheme for seasonal workers, proposed by Kirstene Hair MP shows what can be achieved.

“The SNP must put their dogma aside and focus on what’s best for the Scottish economy.”

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A Scottish Conservative victory in a Fife council by-election in Gordon

Brown's home patch proves Labour are a busted flush, the party have said.

Candidate Dave Coleman increased the share of the vote and will now become the Inverkeithing and Dalgety Bay ward's second Scottish Conservative councillor.

It also means Labour have no councillor in that area, despite it being the stamping ground of former leader and Prime Minister Gordon Brown.

It was also the seat vacated by Labour's current deputy leader Lesley Laird.

The Scottish Conservative share of the vote increased, while that of Labour and the SNP fell, with Cllr Coleman securing 2309 first preference votes, far ahead of any of his rivals.

Scottish Conservative Mid Scotland and Fife MSP Murdo Fraser said:

"This is a devastating result for Labour, which shows they are a busted flush.

"This was the council seat vacated by the shadow Scottish secretary, and Scottish Labour deputy leader Lesley Laird, but still the Labour vote fell while the Conservatives increased.

"It reinforces the fact that, right across Scotland, it's a straight fight between the Scottish Conservatives and the SNP.

"Even in Labour's heartlands, we are the only ones who can stand up to the nationalists and their relentless pursuit of breaking up Britain.

"It also means Gordon Brown has two Conservative councillors to call on now for any local issues he may have, but not a single Labour one."