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- Swinney must clarify parental rights on P1 test withdrawal

29 Aug 2018



The Scottish Conservatives are calling for a parliamentary statement from the Cabinet Secretary for Education, John Swinney, to clarify the legal position on the withdrawal of children from P1 testing.

Local authorities, schools and parents were informed in a letter from the Scottish Government's learning directorate that they do not have the right to withdraw their children from P1 testing unless there are "exceptional circumstances".

The Scottish Government said this letter was based on legal advice from the Society of Local Authority Lawyers in Scotland (Solar), but this point has been denied by Solar. It is therefore very unclear what the legal position actually is.

The Scottish Conservatives have therefore called on the Scottish Government to make a statement to Holyrood as soon as possible after the summer recess in order to clarify the current situation regarding parental rights.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

"It is not at all clear as to whether parents have a right to withdraw their children from the Primary 1 tests.

"The Scottish Government's own education department issued a letter stating that parents did not have a right to withdraw their children unless there were "exceptional circumstances" and that this statement was based on legal advice provided.

"It turns out that no such legal advice exists so it is only right that the Cabinet Secretary makes a statement to the Scottish Parliament as soon as possible to explain and clarify exactly where parents stand. "

'Anti-football' SNP must revisit fan-zone decision

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The SNP must abandon its hypocritical stance on a fanzone at one of Scotland's biggest stadiums, or earn a reputation as being an "anti-football" administration, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

It was reported earlier this week that senior nationalist figures in Glasgow scuppered a bid by Rangers to have a trial entertainment area installed near its Ibrox ground.

That's despite backing the very same idea for Hampden, Scotland's national stadium just a few miles away.

Now Scottish Conservative Glasgow MSP Adam Tomkins has written to sport minister Joe Fitzpatrick urging him to ensure his party properly considered such proposals not only in Glasgow, but right across the country.

He said it was the latest example of the SNP's dismissive attitude to football, despite it being Scotland's national sport and participation in it key to improving public health.

The nationalists have already been widely criticised for introducing the offensive behaviour at football legislation, which unfairly targeted law-abiding supporters and was later scrapped thanks to opposition MSPs in Holyrood.

And the party have also repeatedly rejected calls to introduce the option of drinking alcohol at football matches, despite fans, clubs and the SFA being in favour of a pilot.

Tomorrow, the SFA will decide on the future of Hampden, with SNP calls for a fan zone at the ground being a key part of the campaign to keep it as Scottish football's official home.

Scottish Conservative Glasgow MSP Adam Tomkins said:

"In seeking to deny Ibrox a fan zone – while backing one for Hampden – the SNP looks utterly hypocritical.

"All professional clubs and football authorities in Scotland should be encouraged to explore options to make the matchday experience ever better for

fans.

“Instead of blocking this, the SNP should be reaching out right across Scotland to see what it could do to help.

“The SNP is fast-gaining a reputation for being an anti-football administration.

“It passed legislation which criminalised supporters with its illogical offensive behaviour at football legislation, and continuously opposes alcohol at football matches even though the clubs, SFA and fans want it.

“Now it’s standing in the way of clubs who simply want to make a day out at the football more enjoyable and better value for money.”

[British Transport Police merger “in chaos”, Police Scotland papers reveal](#)

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28 Aug 2018



Police Scotland has admitted that it cannot even give an estimate of when the SNP’s botched merger of British Transport Police might take place, new documents reveal.

The official Police Scotland submission to this week’s Scottish Police Authority meeting concludes that it is “not currently in a position to recommend any revised ‘go-live’ date to either the Joint Police Board or the Scottish Police Authority.”

The release of Police Scotland’s submission on BTP coincided with Justice Secretary Humza Yousaf’s u-turn last night when he admitted he would now explore “further options” on the devolution of the transport police service.

The Police Scotland submission states: “It has been agreed in consultation with the Chief Constable and Deputies that there is insufficiently detailed evidence at this point on which to reach a conclusion on a revised ‘go live’ date.”

It adds: “We are not currently satisfied that the substantive matters raised

by SPA members or associated issues of concern to Police Scotland have been adequately resolved or that there is sufficient clarity around the future timeline or process to address these issues.”

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr said:

“This damning submission by Police Scotland exposes the SNP’s reckless approach to policing in Scotland.

“For months, the SNP refused to listen when they were told this merger would lead to chaos.

“It has taken Police Scotland to warn they can’t even provide an estimate for when the merger might go live for the Minister finally to wake up to the facts.

“There are fair and reasonable plans on the table to devolve British Transport Police, in line with the recommendations of the Smith Commission.

“The Scottish Conservatives stand ready to ensure that can be done while making sure we meet the first test of protecting the public.

“It’s time for the SNP to end the political games and act in the interests of Scottish policing and public safety.”

Ruth: We must reach out to win

24 Aug 2018



The Scottish Conservatives need to field candidates from the country’s diverse backgrounds, communities and faiths if they are to become the next government of Scotland, Ruth Davidson will say.

She is due to make the comments at an event in Glasgow this evening to mark the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha.

She will tell the gathering that, for too long, the Scottish Conservatives haven’t “looked or sounded enough like the Scotland we seek to represent.”

She will say that, ahead of the 2021 elections, the party would now seek to promote and elect candidates from every part of Scotland – including the Muslim community.

Ruth will be addressing the European Conservative and Reformists Group Eid al-Adha Dinner in Glasgow.

Ruth will say:

“As Muslims mark Eid al-Adha across the world, it is important we recognise and celebrate the contribution of the Muslim community here at home. Scotland is a far richer nation, both socially and culturally, because of the work you do, the faith you show, the charity you give and the leadership you bring across Scotland’s towns and cities.

“And, at a time when the politics of identity is rearing its head across the globe, it is important that we celebrate the diversity and integration of Scotland – something we want to see enhanced and deepened. We cannot allow for prejudice or hate to sow false division between our faith communities.

“And it would be wrong to think we in Scotland are immune from such attacks – whether that is the disgraceful incident of the Catholic priest spat upon during an Orange Walk in Glasgow’s East End last month or the on-going examples of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic hate speech we see across the internet and in public discourse on a near-weekly basis.

“The right to religious expression is a foundation stone not just of the United Kingdom, but of all advanced societies. And that freedom must apply to everyone equally.

“So when Muslims feel inhibited in the expression of their faith due to harassment or hostility, it isn’t just a problem for your faith, it is an insult to people of all faiths and none, and an affront to the British values that we share, too. And those of us who believe in those values have a duty to act.

“I have said this before over the last year, and I repeat it tonight. Political parties must play their part in this. And, while that part requires us to speak out, it needs more than simply words – it needs actions too.

“Politics only works if the whole country is represented. And, for too long, my party hasn’t looked or sounded enough like the Scotland we seek to represent.

“It is not enough to have representatives speaking on behalf of communities of place, of purpose or of faith – we need to have representatives who are from those communities too.

“I’m incredibly proud that Nosheena Mobarik is currently serving as our Scottish MEP in Brussels – the first female Muslim returned to any of Scotland’s elected parliaments, and I thank her again this evening for her tireless work both here and in Brussels too.

“But with that post ending when we leave the European Union next year – when Nosheena will return to the House of Lords – we simply must ensure that when we next face the electorate, they see Conservative faces that reflect all Scotland’s richness.

“The talent and leadership we see in Scotland’s Muslim community – in business, in the professions, in community action – is an enormous resource,

and I want to see more of it in parliament, too.

“This is a non party-political gathering, so I speak to everyone when I say, if you feel you have something to give, a commitment to make or a cause to champion, please consider standing as a candidate – we need more voices from more communities at every level of Scottish politics.

“And, if I could be allowed to make a direct plea as the leader of my party – the Scottish Conservative and Unionist party – we want to hear from you. We are working hard over the next few years to build up the number of candidates across the country ahead of the 2021 Scottish election.

“If I am to be the next First Minister of Scotland, we need to fill the Holyrood benches with the brightest talent and greatest experience we can find, support, promote and elect from every community in this country. That includes the Muslim community.

“If you want Scotland to remain part of the United Kingdom and if you want to build a stronger Scotland for all – where we champion this country’s entrepreneurial spirit and strive for excellence in our schools – that makes you a Scottish Conservative.

“And if you believe in those values, I ask that you join us – because you will find a home with us.”

[SNP to miss affordable housing promise by 5 years](#)

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The SNP will miss their affordable housing promise by five years, according to new research by the Scottish Conservatives.

In 2016 the SNP pledged to build 50,000 new affordable homes by 2021. Since then they have completed less than 10,000, leaving approximately 40,000 to be completed by 2021.

On this current trajectory, the SNP will only achieve this target by 2026, five years later than the promise the SNP made to the Scottish public.

A year after Ruth Davidson outlined innovative proposals to revitalise the housing sector, the Scottish Conservatives have attacked the SNP's complacency and called on the Scottish Government to fulfil their promise so that more Scots have an affordable home to live in.

The proposals outlined by Ruth included a commitment to build 100,000 new homes over the course of this parliament – with half of them affordable housing, refurbish the nearly 30,000 empty properties in Scotland to bring them back into use and a new national Housing and Infrastructure Agency.

Ruth also proposed expanding simplified planning zones across the country and the creation of new towns.

Scottish Conservative housing spokesman Graham Simpson said:

“The SNP's complacency on housing is staggering, they are on track to miss their own target by 50 percent.

“This means that 25,000 Scots will have to wait even longer to be able to afford a home.

“The SNP must come clean and admit that they are woefully behind their target.

“When we talk about housing, we are not simply talking about bricks and mortar. We are talking about the homes that provide the security and opportunity for a family to grow and flourish.

“The dream of home ownership shouldn't be unobtainable. The SNP must get back to work and deliver the promise they campaigned on.”