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- Campaign to protect police dogs is launched in Scotland

23 Apr 2018



Liam Kerr MSP has launched a campaign, today, calling for a new criminal offence of causing injury to police dogs. He made the announcement after visiting the police dog unit in Baluniefield, Dundee.

Currently it is not a specific crime to injure or kill a police dog. In Scotland offenders who harm service animals such as dogs or horses can only be charged under a patchwork of laws unfit for this purpose.

The Scottish Conservatives have pledged to introduce a new criminal offence of harming or killing a service animal. This would adequately punish those who harm trained animals like dogs and horses who serve the police, fire service, military or other public services. It could also cover assistance animals like guide dogs.

The campaign continues the work undertaken by PC Dave Wardell requesting a similar change to the law in England. PC Wardell started his campaign after his police dog Finn was repeatedly stabbed during an attempted arrest.

During the visit Liam spoke to Chief Inspector Neil Anderson and his team regarding the work the dogs undertake on behalf of Police Scotland, the danger they are put in and the importance of their role. The visit to the Unit was facilitated by Police Scotland at the request of Liam Kerr MSP.

Commenting on the campaign, Liam Kerr said:

“Service animals are highly trained members of Police Scotland and are repeatedly put in dangerous situations.

“Police dogs and horses undergo extensive training. We ask them to work for us and risk their lives to keep us safe and yet the law does not fully protect them when they are hurt.

“Introducing a criminal offence of causing injury to police animals will ensure criminals who attack police animals are dealt with effectively, raise awareness of the severity of the crime and deter further attacks.

“Ultimately this gives service animals the legal protection they deserve and goes some, small way, to saying thank you for their dedicated service.”

PC Dave Wardell, who began the campaign for Finn's law, said:

"Service animals are vital to all of us. Police and prison animals are vital to our safety. A variety of other highly trained service animals offer services that positively change people's lives and help society.

"Isn't it about time that these amazing animals are recognised for the incredibly important role they play in helping and protecting us? Isn't it about time these animals were protected in law by having their own specific offence of assaulting them? It's time for Finn's Law!"

Chief Inspector Neil Anderson said:

"Police Scotland is not, and cannot, actively support any campaign to have laws created or amended, however this does not prevent us from welcoming any potential legislation which can provide further support to our officers, dogs, horses, or other specialist units in the future, particularly in areas beneficial to their welfare."

[Children's hospital admissions at an all-time high](#)

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22 Apr 2018



Children's admissions to hospitals are at an all-time high, according to a written answer received by Miles Briggs, Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary.

The answer reveals that the number of children admitted to hospitals across Scotland has risen from 268,670 in 2010 to 310,496 in 2017.

This shows that 40,000 more children were admitted to hospital in 2017 than 2010, an increase of 16 per cent.

Recent reports have highlighted that there is no evidence of an increase in child ill-health and therefore this could be a result of a lack of GP availability.

The Scottish Conservative campaign 'Save our surgeries campaign' has called on the Scottish Government to support primary care and halt the decline in GP

surgeries.

Miles Briggs, Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary said:

“No parent wants to take a child to A&E except under the most urgent of circumstances.

“We know that children are not becoming more ill so this substantial increase in admissions could be explained by the dwindling number of alternatives thanks to the SNP.

“This considerable increase in children’s admissions will be causing parents and children significant distress and contribute to increased pressure on A&E departments.

“The SNP has presided over a relentless decline in primary care and is, as a result, forcing sick children to be treated in unsuitable healthcare settings.

“Our campaign ‘Save our Surgeries’ calls for increased funding for primary care to boost recruitment and retention of GPs and, as a result, give more support to parents and children who need these services.”

[SNP bow to Scottish Conservative pressure on support for terminally ill patients](#)

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- SNP bow to Scottish Conservative pressure on support for terminally ill patients

20 Apr 2018



Scottish Conservative MSP Jeremy Balfour has been successful in convincing the Scottish Government to change the policy regarding benefits given to those who are terminally ill.

Mr Balfour had originally secured an amendment to the Social Security (Scotland) Bill that extended the period that terminally ill patients received benefits from six months up to two years.

However he has been successful in forcing the SNP Government to go further,

with patients now receiving individual assessments from medical professionals to ensure that they receive the appropriate level of support based on their condition.

It represents a significant climb-down from the Scottish Government who had originally defined a person as terminally ill if they are in the last six months of life.

This unfairly excludes many people living with terminal conditions from accessing the benefits quickly, and the Scottish Conservatives had joined with organisations involved in palliative care such as Marie Curie and MND Scotland to fight for this change.

Scottish Conservative spokesman on welfare reform Jeremy Balfour MSP said:

“It’s welcome that the SNP Government has finally bowed to pressure and made this change.

“The previous situation only provided financial support for those who are terminally ill for six months – that’s simply not good enough.

“That’s why we called for it to be extended, and we’re pleased that all patients will now receive support tailored to their situation.

“Terminally ill patients need as much security and support as possible through what is a traumatic time and this should now ensure that they get it.

“We’d like to thank Marie Curie and MNDScotland for working with us through this battle to make the SNP finally see sense.”

[Scottish Conservatives triumph in Perthshire by-election](#)

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- Scottish Conservatives triumph in Perthshire by-election

20 Apr 2018



The Scottish Conservatives have won a vital council by-election in Perth and Kinross, with the candidate securing nearly 50 per cent of the vote.

John Duff saw off the SNP comfortably in the fight for the area’s Highland ward.

Of the 4086 voters cast, Labour, the Lib Dems and the Greens scraped just 421 between them.

The triumph follows a direct plea by SNP deputy leader John Swinney, who wrote to constituents begging them not to vote for the Scottish Conservatives.

He conceded the vote would be a straight fight between the two parties, and senior SNP MP Pete Wishart also campaigned hard.

Despite that, Cllr Duff won the ballot by a clear margin, reinforcing the Scottish Conservatives' position as the largest party on the council.

The by-election was called following the death of Perth and Kinross Council leader Ian Campbell.

Scottish Conservative Mid Scotland and Fife MSP Murdo Fraser said:

"This by-election reinforced the fact that, not only are the Scottish Conservatives the sole challengers to the SNP, but we can beat them too.

"The second most important figure in the SNP personally wrote to constituents begging them to vote for his party.

"This result is a snub to John Swinney, and a snub to the nationalists whose bid to break up Britain has alienated and ignored voters.

"The outcome also confirms every other party in Scottish politics to be little more than a total irrelevance."

Cllr John Duff said:

"It is a huge honour to have been elected to represent my home area on Perth and Kinross Council.

"I would like to thank all those who voted for me in the election, and all those who helped me campaign.

"I now pledge myself to work for all the residents of the Highland ward, whether they voted for me or not.

"I set out in the campaign how I would make myself available to constituents, and I fully intend to live up to these promises."

[‘Unfair’ council tax rise disparity](#)

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- 'Unfair' council tax rise disparity revealed

20 Apr 2018



Huge disparities have been revealed across Scotland as part of this year's SNP council tax rises.

Official statistics have shown the average household will pay £37 more in 2018/19 in comparison to last year.

However, a postcode lottery has also emerged between local authorities.

The average household in Argyll and Bute will pay £95 more this year, whereas in neighbouring West Dunbartonshire the increase is only £18.

The Scottish Conservatives added that the hikes will wipe out any saving the SNP claims will arrive as a result of tax changes for some low-income households.

And it will re-inforce Scotland's position as the highest-taxed part of the UK, the party's local government spokesman Alexander Stewart said.

Other notable increases from last year will occur in Edinburgh, where the average bill will jump from £1217 to £1275, and in East Renfrewshire where the additional annual burden will be £54.

In contrast, council tax in Aberdeen is reducing by £6 a year, and only rising by £23 in the Western Isles.

Scottish Conservative local government spokesman Alexander Stewart said:

"Householders in certain parts of Scotland will be absolutely furious at this postcode lottery.

"It's patently unfair that the average bill in some parts of the country is going up by almost £100, while in others there is little change.

"This is what happens when the SNP government slashes local government funding to the bone – it forces councils to get the money from elsewhere.

"Scotland is now far-and-away the highest-taxed part of the UK, and the geographical disparity in council tax increases is rubbing salt in that particular wound."