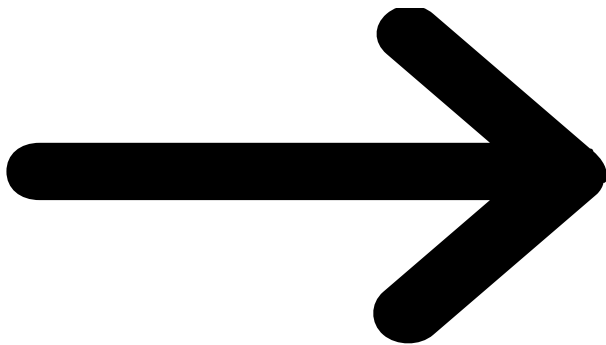


Sturgeon drives 'coach and horses' through her previous Salmond probe claim

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Nicola Sturgeon has been accused of “driving a coach and horses” through her previous assertions a face-to-face meeting with Alex Salmond was non-governmental.

The First Minister admitted today that she was accompanied by her taxpayer-funded chief of staff during a summit with her predecessor over sexual harassment complaints against him.

This is despite, just two days ago, saying the series of meetings with Mr Salmond at her home in Glasgow were entirely party-related.

It deepens suspicions over Ms Sturgeon’s role in the process, casting doubt on her claims not to have been involved at any stage in the dispute between Mr Salmond and the Scottish Government.

Scottish Conservative interim leader Jackson Carlaw said today’s revelations strengthened the need for a Holyrood inquiry, and was at odds with Scottish Parliament codes of conduct in relation to the roles of government-employed special advisers.

He accused her of “an astonishing lapse in judgement on more than one occasion”, adding that the two women at the heart of the complaints would feel let down by the fact Mr Salmond had “a series of private audiences” with the woman at the top of the very organisation they’d complained to.

Scottish Conservative interim leader Jackson Carlaw said:

“This astonishing admission from the First Minister drives a coach and horses

through her assertion from earlier this week that she met Alex Salmond in purely a party capacity.

“If that was the case, what on earth was her number one advisor as First Minister doing there?”

“The First Minister has shown an astounding lapse in judgement on more than one occasion.

“She should have severed all contact following the first meeting, but instead spoke with her predecessor on four further occasions about this matter.

“In effect, Alex Salmond has had a series of private audiences with the woman at the head of the very organisation that’s supposed to be investigating him over sexual harassment complaints.

“The brave women who made these complaints would be forgiven for being appalled at this situation.

“There are also huge question marks over the attendance of a special adviser at such a meeting, when the code clearly states this should not happen.

“These revelations strengthen the need for a Scottish Parliament inquiry into this fiasco, and that’s something all opposition parties should back.”