

Sturgeon should cut beleaguered Freeman loose

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Nicola Sturgeon must part company with beleaguered health secretary Jeane Freeman before even more mistakes are made in the running of Scotland's NHS.

The Scottish Conservatives said "enough is enough" in relation to Ms Freeman's position after more revelations emerged today.

And the party has now identified 10 further occasions where the health secretary has been lucky to keep her job as the health service north of the border continues to flounder.

It was reported today that frontline hospital staff are still not routinely tested for coronavirus, despite being months into the crisis, and that she doesn't know when that will change.

It also emerged that thousands of shielded patients have been wrongly sent a letter telling them it's safe to leave the house.

Scottish Conservative leader Jackson Carlaw said a number of other blunders during the Covid-19 pandemic should have cost Ms Freeman her role.

That includes the cover-up of the now infamous Edinburgh Nike conference; directly contradicting the First Minister on scientific evidence relating to asymptomatic patients; and misleading the public about the number of elderly patients discharged from hospital to care homes despite not being routinely tested for the virus.

In addition, she failed for weeks to pass onto supermarkets details of vulnerable patients and threatened to name and shame health boards for her own failure to properly roll out coronavirus testing in care homes. And prior to the coronavirus pandemic, a number of failings had occurred on Ms Freeman's watch.

Opposition parties had already demanded her departure over infection deaths of children at the new Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Glasgow, some of which were reportedly covered up.

Two-thirds of Scots are served by health boards which have been placed by the SNP government in "special measures".

The 12-week treatment time guarantee – despite being written into law by the SNP – has never been met, with cancer targets also well off-course.

And Ms Freeman was accused of lying by senior NHS Lothian chiefs over

significant delays to the new Sick Kids hospital in Edinburgh.

Scottish Conservative leader Jackson Carlaw said:

“Jeane Freeman was already on borrowed time before coronavirus hit.

“But as this crisis has unfolded, a number of issues have unfolded on her watch which were completely avoidable, and enough is enough.

“The testing structure under the SNP has been a disaster, to the point where care homes have been left in the lurch, and now she can’t even say when hospital staff will be routinely tested.

“The misplaced loyalty shown by the First Minister to her health secretary is having a negative impact on the NHS.

“A litany of problems had built up before, not least infection deaths of children at the SNP’s flagship hospital in Glasgow, and the continued unacceptable delays of the new Sick Kids in Edinburgh.

“These have been compounded by a dismal performance during the pandemic too.

“Nicola Sturgeon has to take the blinkers off and find someone who can actually get on top of these problems.”