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- Five-fold rise in firefighting staff signed off with stress

11 Oct 2017



The number of fire and rescue staff signed off with stress has increased by five times in the past two years, new figures have shown.

In 2016, 137 employees of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service were recorded as taking sick leave due to stress.

That compares to 77 the previous year, and just 27 in 2014, the year after the Scotland-wide organisation was formed.

And up until mid-September this year, 123 workers had been signed off, meaning 2017 is well on course to be a record year.

The statistics were revealed following a Freedom of Information request by the Scottish Conservatives, and the figures include not just frontline firefighters, but control room and support staff too.

In the summer, it was revealed that around 1000 posts had been lost in the fire service since 2010, with unions warning that reduction would jeopardise public safety and place more strain on those left working for the brigade.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr said:

“This is an extraordinary and hugely concerning increase in the number of firefighting staff who’ve been signed off with stress.

“Being a firefighter is among the most brave and stressful jobs anyone could do.

“But this recent spike must be attributable to something more.

“And of course there’s far more to the organisation than just those on the frontline, and those crucial administrative workers will have been under huge pressure too.

“We know the fire service has been subjected to savage cuts from the Scottish Government, and the organisation – much like Police Scotland – is suffering from a lack of resources.

“These figures must be a wake-up call for the SNP government, which clearly

needs to do more to look after hardworking firefighters who do so much and give so much of themselves to ensure public safety.”

Notes to editors:

To see a copy of the FoI response, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Fire-service-stress.pdf>

Fire brigade unions have warned of cuts in recent years:

http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/15392685.Claim_of__quot_unsustainable_quot__cuts_to_Scottish_fire_service/

[Sturgeon fails to apologise for election failings as she again threatens indyref2](#)

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- Sturgeon fails to apologise for election failings as she again threatens indyref2

10 Oct 2017



Nicola Sturgeon has failed to say sorry to SNP delegates for recent election failings which cost the party its Holyrood majority and slashed the number of MPs.

Instead, the First Minister used her keynote conference speech today to issue “jam tomorrow” style promises and yet again threaten another independence referendum.

She told the event in Glasgow the need to break up Britain has “never been greater”, adding: “We will make the case for independence always.”

Prior to her appearance, deputy leader Angus Robertson reaffirmed to the crowd that there would be another referendum.

The content has been criticised by the Scottish Conservatives, who said delegates would have been left disappointed at the absence of contrition for SNP performance in the 2016 and 2017 elections.

Scottish Conservative chief whip Maurice Golden said:

“The one word missing from this speech was sorry.

“For the last year, Nicola Sturgeon put her reckless plan for a second referendum before her day job.

“But instead of apologising, the First Minister once again showed that the SNP simply doesn’t do humility.

“Despite all the broken promises over the last ten years in power, she made it clear in this speech that she thinks she can book in for another decade based on promises of yet more jam tomorrow.

“And despite people making it clear they want a break, the First Minister also made clear that her Scottish Government will continue to bang on and on about the only thing it really cares about – which is splitting our country in two.

“This was a speech that demonstrated the SNP simply doesn’t get it. Lacking in humility and failing to listen to people – it’s the same old SNP.”

On Angus Robertson’s comments on another referendum, he added:

“It’s quite clear that the SNP is at sixes and sevens over its reckless plan for a second independence referendum.

“Angus Robertson appears to want to go full steam ahead while Nicola Sturgeon doesn’t seem to have a clue.

“The only thing they can agree on is that they intend to bang on and on about it despite people saying they want a break.”

[Homicides increase by 10% in a year](#)

10 Oct 2017



The number of homicides in Scotland rose by 10 per cent last year, new figures have shown.

There were 64 victims in 2016/17, compared to 58 the year before, meaning it’s the first increase in seven years.

Sharp instruments such as knives were the most common method of killing, the statistics revealed, accounting for nearly half the incidents last year.

As it stands, three cases remain unsolved from that period.

However, instead of facing up to the hike in victims, justice secretary Michael Matheson chose to compare current data to that of 10 years ago, hailing it as a success for the Scottish Government.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr said:

“Whichever way the SNP wants to spin it, there has been an increase over the past year in homicides in Scotland.

“Instead of messing around with the statistics, Michael Matheson should be outlining to victims’ families what he intends to do to stop this increase.

“This rise in killings comes at a time when the SNP has never been softer on crime.

“Instead of confronting dangerous criminals head on, the nationalists want to get rid of jail terms of less than a year.

“Their conference even wants to focus on the legalising of drugs, which is further indication of their skewed priorities.

“The SNP should ditch the false boasting, and start giving hardworking police officers the support they deserve to tackle serious crime.”

Notes to editors:

The full Scottish Government publication is here:

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00525786.pdf>

For more on the story, visit:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-41564973>

[Parents deserve more information on knife crime in school](#)

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5 Oct 2017



Councils should improve the way they collect data on the number of children caught carrying weapons in schools, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

Around five instances a week are reported to the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration where under 16s are found to be in possession of items such as knives.

However, nearly half of Scottish councils are unable to produce relevant statistics, meaning no clear picture of the extent of the issue is available.

The matter was raised today at First Minister's Questions by Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson as the second anniversary approaches of the death of Aberdeen schoolboy Bailey Gwynne.

He was stabbed by a fellow pupil, with his death prompting a review of security in schools across the country.

In response, Nicola Sturgeon agreed to look at ways of ensuring all local authorities gathered data in the same way, to provide a clearer picture of the extent of knife crime in schools.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"We know the problem of knives in schools is an increasing one, with an 11 per cent increase in incidents referred last year alone.

"In the aftermath of the tragic death of Aberdeen pupil Bailey Gwynne, the Scottish Government rightly issued new guidance on weapons found in school.

"But nearly two years on, around half of Scottish councils are unable to confirm the number of weapons confiscated from pupils in their area.

"That's the kind of information parents and the wider public have a right to know.

"We think all local authorities should meet the same standards on this, and look forward to working with the Scottish Government to see how this could improve."

[Another blow for Scottish business as growth lags behind UK](#)

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4 Oct 2017



UK growth outstripped Scotland's economy by three times over the last quarter, new figures have revealed.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased by just 0.1 per cent north of the border between April and June.

And after a blip in the previous three months, it means the rest of the UK has outperformed Scotland in four of the last five quarters.

Shadow economy secretary Dean Lockhart said the statistics should act as a wake-up call for the Scottish Government, and that businesses across the country were suffering as a result of the SNP's anti-business agenda.

Yesterday, the Scottish Conservatives announced a new expert panel to look at ways to boost Scotland's growth.

Led by former Scotland Office minister Lord Dunlop, the group will report back and inform party policy ahead of the next Holyrood election.

Scottish Conservative shadow economy secretary Dean Lockhart said:

"These figures show Scotland's growth has been repeatedly slower than that of the UK in general.

"Alarm bells should be ringing for the Scottish Government, particularly as new powers mean our public services are becoming more dependent on the performance of the economy.

"Three months ago when a blip saw Scotland edge in front of the rest of the UK, the SNP furiously patted itself on the back.

"Now the wider trend is apparent, the nationalists should explain to the businesses and hard workers of Scotland why they are so badly letting them down."