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- Lawyers demolish SNP attempts to revise named person policy

20 Sep 2017



The SNP has been urged to “do the decent thing” and scrap named person plans altogether, after lawyers demolished the policy in Holyrood today.

The Law Society and Faculty of Advocates both gave evidence to the education committee criticising revised plans for the controversial scheme, after the Supreme Court ruled elements of it unlawful last year.

The Law Society’s Kenny Meechan told MSPs those responsible for delivering the policy would need “lawyers on speed dial” to understand the changes to the bill.

And Janys Scott QC, from the Faculty of Advocates, added there was still widespread misunderstanding of what the Scottish Government meant by the word “wellbeing”.

This would create confusion over what the threshold is for intervention by a named person, and what information should be shared and by whom, she said.

It’s the latest setback for the SNP as it attempts to get its state guardian plans not only through parliament, but past judges too.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

“The lawyers have demolished the Scottish Government’s attempts to respond to the Supreme Court judgement.

“There remains a complete lack of clarity in the new bill and, just as importantly, confusion over what will be in the code of practice.

“Both are a major worry for practitioners who are expected to have all the necessary training and skills to know when to share information and to be able to account for their decisions.

“None of this is clear within the Scottish Government’s revised policy and that has been made clear by practitioners, even some who were originally in favour of the named person policy.

“For families, the policy remains a potential source of intrusion into their family life and that is why the Scottish Government should do the decent

thing and scrap the new bill.”

Both Janys Scott QC, from the Faculty of Advocates, and Kenny Meechan, from the Law Society, appeared at today’s education committee in the Scottish Parliament.

To see the Faculty of Advocates’ written submission, visit:

<http://www.advocates.org.uk/media/2498/final-faculty-response-15-aug-2017-named-person.pdf>

[SNP and Labour must rule out raid on basic rate tax payers](#)

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- SNP and Labour must rule out raid on basic rate tax payers

20 Sep 2017



A tax raid on the majority of Scottish workers must be ruled out by other parties at Holyrood, the Scottish Conservatives will argue in a taxation debate.

Speaking as part of a Scottish Parliament exchange today, shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser will warn about the implications of increasing income tax across all bands.

The Labour Party business will claim that tax hikes are needed across the country, a position both the SNP and the Liberal Democrats are sympathetic to.

But the Scottish Conservatives will say that any increase in the basic rate will hit those workers who can least afford it, with more than 80 per cent of Scotland’s taxpaying workforce paid between £11,500 and £43,000 per year.

And they will add that increasing rates at higher levels will reinforce Scotland’s reputation as a high-tax economy, and lead to less cash being collected in the long-run.

Finance secretary Derek Mackay has written to all Holyrood parties asking for their views on taxation, even though he has yet to properly set out SNP policy.

When challenged at First Minister's Questions two weeks ago by Ruth Davidson, Nicola Sturgeon refused to rule out increases in income tax for workers north of the border on the basic rate.

This directly contradicts pledges made in previous SNP manifestos, and nationalist MSPs have repeatedly voiced their objections to hiking the basic rate.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

"Labour have been quite upfront in saying that they think all workers, including those on low incomes, should pay even more.

"We now need to hear from the SNP if it has changed its mind and also believes it's worth hitting more than 80 per cent of Scotland's taxpayers in the pocket.

"We simply don't accept that there is a case for increasing the tax burden on hardworking Scottish families.

"The reality is we are already spending much more on our public services than the UK average, but in too many cases having poorer outcomes.

"And with increasing taxes for those paying above the basic rate, there is a real risk that you end up with a lower tax take as a result.

"It sends out a dangerous message which suggests Scotland is not an attractive place to live, work and do business if we are the highest-taxed part of the UK.

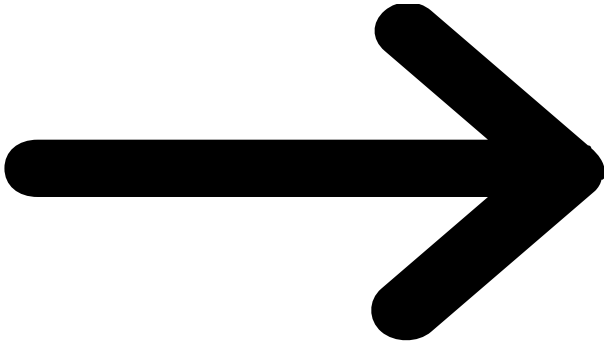
"We want competitive taxes in Scotland to help grow our economy, increase tax revenues and make Scotland the best place to be.

"We reject these calls from Labour to do the opposite, and urge the SNP to make its position clear."

[SNP warned not to 'sow division' on Brexit](#)

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19 Sep 2017



The SNP has been warned not to “sow division” on Brexit after Nicola Sturgeon teamed up with the Welsh First Minister in seeking changes to the process.

Both she and Carwyn Jones today repeated their claim that the EU Withdrawal Bill is “a power grab”.

However, the Scottish Conservatives have said the SNP has tried to use Brexit as a way of furthering its own independence agenda, and urged the nationalists to take a different tack.

Last week, deputy leader Jackson Carlaw said the party would work with the SNP to come up with a Legislative Consent Motion everyone was happy with.

Scottish Conservative deputy leader Jackson Carlaw said:

“This list simply sets out the policy areas currently controlled by the European Union that are coming back to the UK.

“Some will be best controlled by Holyrood, and it may be beneficial to have different approaches across the UK.

“Other areas should be left at a UK level so we don’t fracture the UK internal market.

“The test is simple. Let’s devolve what we can, but keep UK rules where necessary.

“That way we can ensure powers lie as close as possible to people while keeping the benefits to Scotland of one UK market.

“Unfortunately, the SNP’s record on Brexit over the last year has been to sow division and use it to push for a second referendum.

“We genuinely hope there is now an opportunity for a fresh start.

“With a reasonable approach from the Scottish Government, we can work together to both strengthen devolution and to keep the benefits of our own UK.

“As we set out last week, we have undertaken to listen to the Scottish Government’s concerns over the Repeal Bill and we will continue that process over the coming days and weeks.”

[Half of patients wait more than a month for AHP appointments](#)

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19 Sep 2017



Around half of patients needing appointments from allied health professionals for care such as physiotherapy have to wait longer than a month, a new report has found.

ISD Scotland said just 54.8 per cent were seen to within the target four weeks for musculoskeletal issues over the last quarter.

That means roughly 36,000 people waited too long for a visit from a physio, occupational therapist or someone to help with chiropody and podiatry problems.

Official Scottish Government targets dictate that health boards should see at least 90 per cent of patients requiring an AHP within four weeks.

In addition to AHPs, new statistics today revealed waiting times at Scotland's accident and emergency departments have dropped to their worst since April.

At a national level, 92 per cent of casualty patients were treated within the target four hours.

And at the SNP government's flagship hospital, the Queen Elizabeth in Glasgow, waiting times compliance was the worst in the country at 79.1 per cent.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

"These are patients who are often in a great deal of pain, and shouldn't be expected to wait longer than a month for an appointment.

"But yet again, we see an area of the NHS in Scotland which has been utterly neglected by this SNP government.

"The target is there in black and white that 90 per cent of musculoskeletal patients must be seen to be an AHP within a month.

"As it stands, about half are meeting that target, and that is another NHS

disgrace occurring on this SNP government's watch."

On A&E waiting times, he added:

"The SNP is running out of excuses for its performance on A&E waiting times.

"We're not in the grip of a winter crisis and, as we learned earlier this week, there's no shortage of funding coming to Scotland for health through the Barnett Formula.

"Yet still the SNP has managed to preside over a recruitment crisis which is leaving casualty departments short-staffed and over-stretched.

"The opening of the Queen Elizabeth hospital in Glasgow should have been an opportunity to address this, at least in one area of the country.

"But it's the worst-performing in Scotland, and has been consistently since it opened."

[Hundreds of criminals waiting months before starting community service](#)

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18 Sep 2017



Hundreds of criminals who were handed community payback orders last year didn't start the work for months afterwards, it has emerged.

Research by the Scottish Conservatives revealed that 338 offenders did not commence CPOs for more than four months after sentence was passed last year.

That's an increase of 22 per cent in the space of 12 months, with hundreds more waiting more than two months to get started.

The Freedom of Information response from the Scottish Government also showed some criminals have waited more than a year for their CPOs to begin, with at least one waiting 511 days in 2014-15.

Shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr attacked the delays, saying they made the court system look weak and damaged the rehabilitation prospects of those involved.

CPOs are likely to take on more importance as the SNP government seeks to impose a presumption against prison sentences of less than 12 months.

However, with so many delays in getting these underway, the Scottish Conservatives voiced concerns about the system not being ready to take on more demand.

In 2015/16, the most recent year for which figures are available, 412 criminals waited more than two months for their order to start, while 176 were delayed between three and four months.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr said:

“There’s clearly a problem with the system when hundreds of criminals are waiting months for their community payback to begin.

“These unacceptable delays create two serious problems.

“Criminals already show up to court knowing they stand a good chance of getting off lightly, and having months between the sentence being handed down and CPOs beginning will do nothing to change that mindset.

“And these waits will do nothing to help rehabilitation.

“Many offenders whose sentence is a CPO have challenging and difficult lives. Significant delays such as this can break the connection in the mind between the crime and the punishment.

“It would be far better for these offenders to receive the punishment and get the CPO completed as soon as possible, allowing them to move on from their criminal life.

“The SNP wants to empty jails across the country, and that will mean more of these CPOs will be used.

“But as it stands, the system is already unable to cope, and ministers must explain how they intend to address that.”

To see the full Freedom of Information response, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/FoI-17-01881-CPO-Delays.docx>

As part of her Programme for Government, Nicola Sturgeon said she wanted to abolish sentences of less than 12 months:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/09/ruth-responds-to-snps-programme-for-government/>

More than 1000 prisoners receive no work or education activity towards their rehabilitation:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/08/blow-for-rehabilitation-as-fewer-inmates-involved-in-purposeful-activity/>