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24 Jan 2019



The deaths at a Glasgow hospital from infections linked to pigeon droppings raise wider questions about the SNP's stewardship of the NHS, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

Interim leader Jackson Carlaw told Nicola Sturgeon that public confidence in the Queen Elizabeth hospital was shaken following the scandal.

At First Minister's Questions today, he said the incident was the latest in a catalogue of problems at the £840 million flagship facility, which only opened in 2015.

Two people, one of whom was a child, died after contracting an infection which came from pigeon droppings in the hospital, sparking an official Scottish Government review.

Yesterday, the Scottish Conservatives revealed the number of workers within maintenance and estate at NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has been cut in recent years.

Now the party says the scandal points to wider problems within the SNP-run health service across the board.

Scottish Conservative interim leader Jackson Carlaw said:

"Anyone using the Queen Elizabeth hospital deserves to do so safely and securely.

"However, that confidence will have been shaken in light of recent events.

"This alarming story has also raised wider questions about the SNP government's record on the NHS.

"There is now a £900 million maintenance backlog in the NHS estate, which perhaps explains why we are seeing worrying incidents such as the one at the Queen Elizabeth.

"And what's more, the SNP government hasn't even planned a way to deal with this.

“This can’t be blamed simply on a lack of resources, especially with record investment coming north through the Barnett Formula.

“Nicola Sturgeon needs to set out a sustainable long-term plan for the future of the NHS in Scotland.”

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Maintenance staff at the health board at the centre of the pigeon disease death scandal have been significantly reduced in recent years, it has been revealed.

Analysis of figures by the Scottish Conservatives has shown there was an 11.5 per cent cut in maintenance and estate workers in the two years to September 2018.

And the ISD Scotland data states, at NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, the numbers have reduced by 18.6 per cent since 2009.

The SNP government is under increasing pressure over the deaths of two patients at the Queen Elizabeth hospital on Glasgow’s southside, one of whom has now been revealed as a child.

Reports today show the scale of hygiene problems at the “super hospital”, which cost £850 million and was only officially opened in 2015.

The most recent statistics show there were 385 “maintenance and estate” staff in Glasgow’s NHS in 2018.

That compares to 435 in 2016 and 473 in 2009.

Across Scotland, there were 1651 such workers in 2018, compared to 1749 in 2016 and 1963 in 2009.

Shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said the reduction in workers was one of many questions the SNP government had to answer about the crisis.

Ministers were informed of the deaths on December 21 last year, yet health

secretary Jeane Freeman only addressed Holyrood yesterday on the matter.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

“Only now, after this scandal has been brought to light, is the SNP reviewing maintenance at Glasgow’s super hospital.

“For Jeane Freeman to say infection control at the hospital is adequate is absolutely astonishing, particularly in the wake of two deaths, one of whom was a child.

“That’s a complacent attitude, and one which simply won’t cut it with patients or staff.

“The big question is why ministers are failing to stop things like this happening in the first place, and why it takes a scandal like this for them to act.

“In Glasgow alone, dozens of maintenance staff have been cut in recent years in the lead up to this scandal.

“Across Scotland, patients will look at the nationwide reduction and wonder what other desperate consequences these SNP cuts could have.

“With that in mind, is it any wonder that – more than a month after a patient has died – we are still seeing rooms plastered in pigeon droppings?”

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The Scottish Conservatives have called for the SNP to urgently commit to implementing a network of mobile abattoirs across rural Scotland.

The number of abattoirs in Scotland has been decreasing over the last few years, most notably with the closure of the abattoir in Orkney.

This has meant that animals from Orkney must now travel a considerable distance by boat and road to abattoirs on the mainland and beyond.

The lack of rural abattoirs means that many animals face long journeys, but also, many larger abattoirs do not provide a 'private kill' service, meaning that farmers must sell through a supermarket. This inevitably impacts farm revenues and prevents farmers from selling directly to customers.

Mobile abattoirs that visit individual farms are widely considered to be beneficial for animal welfare, removing the distance animals must travel.

As well as Canada and New Zealand, many EU countries already have mobile abattoirs that enhance animal welfare and biosecurity.

The SNP government has confirmed in a response to a parliamentary question that it has started the process to assess the viability and sustainability of mobile abattoirs in Scotland.

The Scottish Conservatives have stated that given the challenges facing the rural economy and the detrimental effect travelling large distances has on livestock, the SNP government must commit to constructing the mobile abattoir network now.

Donald Cameron, Scottish Conservative shadow cabinet secretary on rural economy and connectivity said:

"The case for a network of mobile abattoirs has been well established and it must be set up now without delay.

"Transporting live animals should be minimised where possible but currently farmers have no choice but to drive their animals considerable distances.

"The SNP's failure to act has already had an extremely negative effect on the rural economy, and farmers cannot wait any longer.

"The SNP must stop the prevarication and make a commitment to construct the mobile abattoir network now.

"This is one of the most important ways the SNP can support livestock farmers and improve animal welfare at the same time."

[SNP exposing Scottish Prison Officers to unnecessary risk](#)

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The Scottish Conservatives have accused the Scottish Government of exposing Scottish Prison officers to unnecessary risk after it confirmed that body-worn cameras are not routinely provided to officers in Scottish prisons.

Currently, body worn cameras are provided to every prison officer across the rest of the United Kingdom.

The cameras are considered to be a 'visible deterrent' to disorder and violence against prison officers. They also provide evidence when required and support for prison officers in disputes.

Confirmation that the cameras were not routinely provided to officers or staff in Scottish prisons was provided to the Scottish Conservatives in a Scottish parliamentary written answer.

The Scottish Conservatives have accused the SNP government of failing to adequately protect Scottish prison staff.

Liam Kerr, Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary said:

"The SNP's failure to provide body worn cameras for prison officers in Scotland when they are provided to all other officers in the rest of the United Kingdom, is deeply irresponsible.

"Our prison officers work in extremely risky environments, and are often called upon to resolve disputes, many of which can, and do, turn violent.

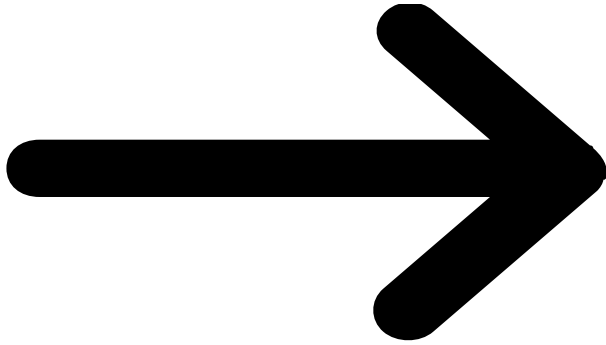
"The cameras are recognised to be a hindrance to that violence, and so, by their very nature, provide prison officers with extra protection.

"Scottish Prison officers should not be less safe than their counterparts elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

"The SNP must reconsider this approach and give Scottish prison officers the equipment they need to perform their jobs in safety."

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The Scottish Conservatives have accused the First Minister of double standards over her ducking and diving on the Alex Salmond affair.

At First Minister's questions, Scottish Conservative interim leader Jackson Carlaw challenged her to provide accurate information regarding the meetings she had with the former First Minister, Alex Salmond.

In response, Nicola Sturgeon refused to do so, saying such matters were for the inquiries to come.

However, in 2007 when challenging former Scottish labour leader Wendy Alexander over party donations, Sturgeon said that she should not hide behind any inquiries that were going on at the same time.

The Scottish Parliament is due to launch an inquiry into the botched Scottish Government investigation into allegations against the former First Minister, as requested by the Scottish Conservatives.

Nicola Sturgeon did confirm that she will give evidence, in person, to the Scottish Parliamentary inquiry.

Jackson Carlaw, Scottish Conservative interim leader said:

"The First Minister cannot continue to duck these questions in the chamber of the Scottish Parliament while her spin doctors are briefing in the corridors of the Scottish Parliament, with their version of the same issues.

"Nicola Sturgeon has been caught out – when the boot was on the other foot she said opponents couldn't hide behind inquiries, now she's in the spotlight she's dashing for the long grass.

"We have two completely contradictory version of events. Both simply cannot be right.

"For her to attack those asking legitimate questions about this scandal is beneath the office of First Minister.

"Numerous questions are still outstanding and the First Minister cannot hide forever.

"On the conduct of both the Scottish Government internal inquiry and the Scottish Parliamentary inquiry, these inquiries need to be thorough and transparent – and be seen to be so.

"The SNP must show they are committed to that so we get to the bottom of this affair."