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- Make parole changes now to avoid 'mopping up after injustice'

12 Jun 2018



Justice secretary Michael Matheson has been urged to make changes to Scotland's parole system now, rather than wait for another high-profile case to expose its current failings.

The Scottish Conservatives are proposing a series of reforms to bring Scotland into line with best international practice.

Now in a letter to the Scottish Government, shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr has said action is necessary to restore public confidence and stand up for victims.

He said the party wants to see a shake-up of the system, including victims being able to attend parole board hearings, more information being given throughout the decision-making process, and a stronger right to appeal those outcomes.

Focus has fallen on the parole system after similar recent failings in relation to dangerous criminals being released from jail under other processes.

Last week, killer James Wright was sentenced to life in jail for the murder of father-of-three Craig McClelland in Paisley.

Wright had been "unlawfully at large" for nearly six months having breached the terms of his home detention curfew.

And earlier this year it emerged another dangerous offender, Robbie McIntosh, was days into his monitored release when he tried to repeat the killing of a dog walker 16 years on from the original crime.

Both cases led to criticism of Scotland's justice system, and calls to improve monitoring and decision-making across areas like home release and parole.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr said:

"We believe there is a need for greater transparency and accountability in the way the Parole Board reaches decisions.

“These decisions are being made with little explanation as to why, nor are the views of victims being given enough weight in the process.

“Too often, politicians on both government and opposition benches only consider these matters in the wake of an egregious example, like the Worboys case or similar instances that we’ve seen here in recent weeks.

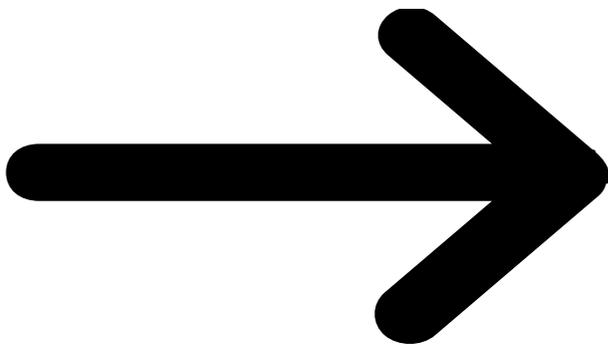
“This cycle needs to end.

“Rather than mopping up after injustice, it’s time we acted to prevent these cases from happening in the first place.”

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- Domestic issues merely ‘a warm-up act’ for Sturgeon’s independence speech

9 Jun 2018



Nicola Sturgeon has used her keynote conference speech to continue banging the drum for independence.

Despite claiming domestic issues like education are her priority, the First Minister told the SNP summit in Aberdeen that the “case for independence is strong, and getting stronger by the day”.

The Scottish Conservatives have accused her yet again of sidelining crucial devolved matters to instead play to the gallery on nationalist attempts to break up Britain.

Latest polling has shown no increase in support for separation, and Nicola Sturgeon’s personal approval ratings plummeting.

Scottish Conservative deputy leader Jackson Carlaw said:

“This was yet another speech where Nicola Sturgeon’s domestic responsibilities are a warm-up to the main act – banging on about independence.

“Bizarrely, despite claiming education was her top priority, she forgot to mention it altogether. Nor was there any mention of how to sort out our criminal justice system.

“She is out of touch and leading a divided party. This was a tired speech from a leader running out of time.

“We also saw the usual hypocrisy of Nicola Sturgeon simultaneously moaning about UK cutbacks while at the same time spending millions extra – thanks to UK funding.

“The SNP’s campaign used to be ‘It’s time’. Increasingly Scots are saying to Sturgeon that ‘Time’s up’.”

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- Scotland’s devolved benefits bill to soar by £68m

1 Jun 2018



Planned spending on welfare in Scotland is set to soar by an extra £68 million following revisions by the Scottish Fiscal Commission.

It was revealed yesterday that public services are already facing a £1.7 billion hit after the SNP was forced to concede it will collect less in taxation than it previously thought.

Now it has emerged, as well as reduced tax intake, social security spending is set to rise.

The SFC data shows, between 2019-20 and 2022-23, an additional £68 million will need to be set aside for newly devolved welfare payments.

That’s significantly higher than the forecast set out in December, meaning by 2022/23 the total devolved welfare bill will be £498 million a year.

The Scottish Conservatives said this was more evidence of the SNP's drive to have a high-welfare, high tax economy, low-wage economy.

And shadow social security secretary Michelle Ballantyne urged ministers to develop a benefits plan which helped people back into work, rather than trap them on welfare.

The SNP's economic approach has been severely criticised, with the new forecasts meaning schools, hospitals and infrastructure will almost certainly have to suffer financially.

Scottish Conservative shadow social security secretary Michelle Ballantyne said:

"The SNP needs to design a benefits system which helps those who need it the most, and acts as a springboard for people to get in to work whenever possible.

"Instead, both Labour and the SNP seem to treat welfare as an inevitable trap.

"The consequence of a benefits bill our economy can't afford will see the most vulnerable in our society suffering the most.

"With the new powers coming to Holyrood, the SNP are about to find out just how difficult it is to deliver a welfare system that's fair and sustainable.

"These figures show that under the nationalists we are set to have an economy based on high welfare spending, increasing personal taxes and low wages.

"That will only harm growth and productivity, and do nothing to encourage prosperity for all."

[Cash to fund drug and alcohol support slashed](#)

1 Jun 2018



Money to tackle drug and alcohol addiction has been cut again, new figures have revealed.

In a letter to Holyrood's Health Committee, it was confirmed there has been a £1.5 million reduction in funding for drug and alcohol partnerships.

This is despite drugs deaths in Scotland reaching a record high last year,

and thousands dying as a result of alcohol use.

In her letter earlier this month, health secretary Shona Robison set out figures showing the total investment from a range of agencies – including the Scottish Government – reduced between 2016/17 and 2017/18.

They show the total spend this year was £101,716,000, compared to £103,211,000 in the 12 months before.

Across Scotland, there was considerable regional variation surrounding drug and alcohol addiction funding.

There were heavy reductions in Argyll and Bute (-15 per cent), Dumfries and Galloway (-13.7 per cent) and Glasgow (-11.6 per cent).

In contrast, ADP investment rose by nearly 60 per cent in Angus.

Scottish Conservative Glasgow MSP Adam Tomkins said:

“The drug problem across Scotland is now worse than ever – that’s confirmed by official statistics.

“And while some progress is being made with alcohol, our relationship with drink remains deep-rooted and complex.

“So quite why overall funding has been cut to this extent is a mystery.

“The SNP government keeps saying this is a priority area, yet it’s investing less money to help.

“ADP funding is vital to help people beat their addictions and get their lives back on track. Making a success of these would save lives and benefit both communities and the economy.

“But all the SNP seems interested in is pursuing fix rooms for people to inject heroin, something that will do nothing for those who want a life free from the scourge of drugs.”

[Petition to protect police dogs surpasses 30,000](#)

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1 Jun 2018



A petition to increase legal protection for service animals, including police dogs and horses, has exceeded 30,000 signatures.

The petition, launched on the 10 May this year, is part of a campaign organised by Scottish Conservative MSP Liam Kerr calling for a new criminal offence of causing injury to police dogs.

Currently it is not a specific crime to injure or kill a police dog. In Scotland offenders who harm service animals such as dogs or horses can only be charged under a patchwork of laws unfit for this purpose.

The Scottish Conservatives have pledged to introduce a new criminal offence of harming or killing a service animal. This would adequately punish those who harm trained animals like dogs and horses who serve the police, fire service, military or other public services. It could also cover assistance animals like guide dogs.

Commenting on the campaign, Liam Kerr said:

“It is extremely heartening to see the fantastic number of signatures this petition has gathered in such a short amount of time.

“The support this petition has gathered simply demonstrates the widespread public support for a change to the law to fully protect service animals.

“In Scotland, hundreds of service animals work with Police Scotland to keep us safe.

“This includes sniffer dogs, police dogs and horses; they all work with the same dedication to duty as the men and women in our Police force.

“Unfortunately, in Scotland, our laws don’t protect them the same way and currently, the law views a Police animal as little more than property.

“The Cabinet Secretary must listen to the thousands of voices calling for greater protection and status for service animals and change the law now.”