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- Sturgeon should cut the red tape to get hundreds of teachers into schools

14 Sep 2017



The SNP has been told to address the bureaucracy which is delaying hundreds of teachers from getting into the classroom.

The Scottish Conservatives said ministers must fast-track reforms which would allow teachers who have trained outside Scotland to get to work immediately.

It follows exchanges at First Minister's Questions when leader Ruth Davidson challenged Nicola Sturgeon over revelations that parents are being asked to help out in schools due to teacher shortages.

Earlier this week, it was reported that teachers at Trinity Academy are being drafted in from other subjects to teach maths.

Despite that, evidence presented to the Scottish Parliament's education committee has revealed there are currently 552 applications to teach, including 320 from people outside Scotland.

The cross-party committee concluded these individuals are being put off from getting into the profession by the lengthy registration and retraining process currently required.

Instead of addressing these concerns, Nicola Sturgeon spoke of changes made since 2012 to the registration process which merely allows experienced professionals to serve in classrooms as probationers.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"The current situation is ridiculous – parents are being asked to plug teacher shortages while, at the same time, more than 550 qualified teachers want to start work, but can't because of Scottish Government red tape.

"Scotland's teacher shortage is a national crisis.

"In such circumstances, the SNP must act now to put in place urgent measures so these teachers can apply for jobs without any further delay.

"It's not good enough for Nicola Sturgeon to point to changes made a few years back – we know they don't go far enough.

“Children only get one chance at their education.

“Maths lessons should be taught by maths teachers. Not English teachers, not drama teachers, and certainly not from parents who’ve received a begging letter.”

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13 Sep 2017



The Scottish Government needs a plan to cope with increasing numbers of people living with dementia, after new figures showed a rise in deaths from the disease.

Official statistics released today revealed a 17 per cent increase in dementia-related deaths over the past year, with the illness now accounting for a tenth of all deaths in Scotland.

High profile killers such as heart disease decreased, a consequence of Scotland’s ageing population.

And shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said while lower death rates among illnesses which used to plague public health was welcome, the shift brought new challenges for health and social care services.

Today’s report analysed causes of all deaths registered between April and June this year.

A total of 936 people died from dementia in that time, including 570 from Alzheimer’s – an increase of nearly a third from 12 months before.

However, heart disease mortality rates dropped by 5.3 per cent, while there were reductions in deaths from breast cancer and liver disease.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

“It seems that gradually the high-profile killers are being reduced, and of course that is to be absolutely welcomed.

“But they are being replaced by cruel and challenging conditions like

Alzheimer's.

"This reveals a major challenge facing Scotland's health and social care system.

"Longer life expectancy is good news for everyone, but we can't ignore the different challenges that brings.

"The SNP has had a decade in charge of health and social care to prepare for this, and we need to start seeing signs that this government has a plan."

To see the full report and commentary, visit:

<https://news.gov.scot/news/births-deaths-other-vital-events-2017-q2>

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13 Sep 2017



The SNP needs to think big if it is serious about tackling the country's housing crisis, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

The party used dedicated debating time in Holyrood today to set out a series of proposals to build more homes and improve existing stock.

Among the suggestions were the creation of a dedicated housing and infrastructure agency to drive forward change, and the subsequent appointment of a dedicated secretary at the heart of the Scottish Government cabinet.

The Scottish Conservatives also want to see a bill to create new towns across the country, and introduce measures to bring rundown empty properties back onto the market.

Housing deals for different parts of the country should also be available, so bespoke packages of support could be put together in certain areas.

Experts have said Scotland's housing crisis is the worst since the Second World War.

Scottish Conservative housing spokesman Graham Simpson said:

“We have huge challenges ahead and settling for more of the same is no longer enough.

“Big challenges require big thinking – but so far the SNP government has been found wanting.

“Housing is too often the poor relation of political debate, but nothing is more important than having a roof over your head, a warm, well-insulated property in good condition, security of tenure if you rent, and the right back-up if you need it.

“It’s time for a new wave of settlements, designed for active travel, designed to use less energy, designed for the people, with the people.

“To do that there should be a new national housing and infrastructure agency and a cabinet minister covering the same.

“Not to override councils but to lead from the front.

“There are opportunities to change things. These are opportunities the Scottish Government must seize.”

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13 Sep 2017



A series of measures will be set out tomorrow by the Scottish Conservatives aimed at tackling Scotland’s housing crisis.

The party will devote their parliamentary business to the issue, which it says should be among the Scottish Government’s very top priorities.

It comes as new housing figures have shown the number of new homes completed every year by the SNP has fallen by 30 per cent since it took power in 2007.

The annual housing statistics also revealed home ownership is down from 62.1 per cent in 2006 to 57.9 per cent in the most recent figures.

Compared to the last quarter, affordable home completions also slumped.

Included in tomorrow's Scottish Conservative proposals will be the creation of a new Housing and Infrastructure Agency to lead the drive for new housing in Scotland.

The promotion of a new generation of Housing Deals which would bid for bespoke packages of support in certain areas, and a New Towns Act to construct new garden towns and villages, will also be floated.

Bringing empty properties back onto the market as a matter of urgency would help more people find a suitable home, MSPs will argue.

And communities spokesman Adam Tomkins will suggest the appointment of a new cabinet secretary for housing and infrastructure, a move supported by housing charity Shelter.

Scottish Conservative communities spokesman Adam Tomkins said:

"A house isn't just four walls and a roof.

"It's where memories are made and families formed. For Scots it's the very essence of aspiration.

"To deliver this we need radical reform of our congested planning laws and a new 'can-do' attitude from Scottish ministers, who are asleep at the wheel.

"The housing shortage isn't a looming crisis or a distant threat.

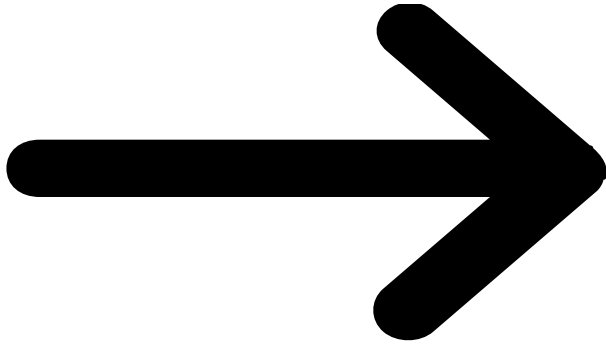
"We are living in it and we need political leadership to address it.

"I'm delighted to be setting out our ambitious but deliverable plan to tackle one of Scotland's major challenges."

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The Scottish Conservatives have urged ministers to drop their grievance agenda on Brexit and work to get the process through both the Scottish and UK parliaments.

Deputy leader Jackson Carlaw said the SNP had been engaged in “hyperbole” with talk of a “Westminster power grab”, but should now sit down with all parties to ensure the Legislative Consent Motion goes through.

Yesterday, Nicola Sturgeon used a speech to celebrate 20 years of devolution warning about the impact of Brexit on Holyrood.

But today Brexit minister Mike Russell agreed both he and Deputy First Minister John Swinney would sit down with the Scottish Conservatives to find common ground on the UK leaving the EU.

Scottish Conservative deputy leader Jackson Carlaw said:

“The SNP is seemingly ever in want of grievance – but now is not the time for that.

“It’s clear that Brexit is not politics as normal.

“If there is genuine concern matched by an equally genuine resolve to address and overcome this, then the Scottish Conservatives at Holyrood will play our part.

“We are keen to work to a position where we can all feel able to secure an LCM the Scottish Government will have confidence in placing before this parliament.”