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- Merger of British Transport Police and Police Scotland should be put on hold

9 Sep 2017



The integration of British Transport Police with Police Scotland should be put on hold given the leadership vacuum in the national force, the Scottish Conservatives have said

It comes after the Chief Constable of Police Scotland, Phil Gormley, stepped aside on Friday while he contests allegations of gross misconduct.

The Scottish Police Authority is also without a permanent chair following the resignation of Andrew Flanagan in June.

Scottish Government Ministers previously rejected a call by opposition parties to push back the date for implementing the BTP merger with Police Scotland from spring 2019.

The Scottish Conservatives are now calling on the Scottish Government to think again, given the crisis in the force, and the leadership vacuum at the SPA.

Liam Kerr, Scottish Conservative justice spokesman said:

“Even before the latest crisis at Police Scotland, there were major question marks over why the takeover of British Transport Police was taking place. Now that the national force is facing such disruption, it would seem to be the height of recklessness to go ahead.

“The SNP Government has refused to listen to anyone over the BTP takeover. Nor has it ever given a good reason for it to go ahead. Surely now it must take heed. With Police Scotland in crisis, the sensible thing to do would be to put the entire business on hold.

“A failure to do so would only confirm that this SNP Government puts its own political ends before good decision-making.”

Police Scotland’s chief constable announced yesterday he was stepping aside <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-41201281>

The Scottish Conservatives have made repeated warnings about the BTP/Police Scotland merger

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/transport/plan-to-merge-btp-and-police-scotland-criticised-1-4224867>

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/03/btp-outlines-extraordinary-risks-of-merging-force-with-police-scotland/>

[Another hike in antidepressant use despite SNP pledge](#)

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- Another hike in antidepressant use despite SNP pledge

9 Sep 2017



The number of people in Scotland being prescribed antidepressants has soared again, despite an SNP pledge to stop the increase.

New statistics have revealed 6.4 million items were handed out last year, the equivalent of 17,500 a day.

That compares to 6.1 million the previous year, and 5.8 million in 2014/15.

In addition, the NHS now spends £44.6 million supplying medication to patients with mild-to-moderate depression or anxiety.

It is the latest set of statistics revealing the extent of mental ill health north of the border.

More than a decade ago, the SNP said it recognised too many antidepressants were being prescribed, and promised to ensure the numbers dropped.

However, in government the nationalists have failed every single year to do this, despite calls from experts and mental health charities to explore other forms of treatment, not least improved access to counselling.

The figures were published by ISD Scotland's Prescription Cost Analysis system.

Scottish Conservative mental health spokeswoman Annie Wells said:

“There will always be a place for antidepressants in the health system when it comes to the treatment of a range of mental health conditions.

“But the increase has got completely out of hand, and after 10 years the SNP has to do something about this.

“The nationalists were very clear that reducing the prescription of these drugs would be one of their priorities, but the opposite has happened.

“Mental health is becoming more important, and there’s consensus across parliament that more funding and attention have to go on it.

“The suspicion among many is that these pills are being handed out too readily when more appropriate solutions could be found.

“These figures should act as a wake-up call to ministers to address this particular issue once and for all.”

[SNP should accelerate Frank’s Law to be in place by 2018](#)

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- SNP should accelerate Frank’s Law to be in place by 2018

8 Sep 2017



The SNP should not wait until April 2019 to introduce Frank’s Law, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

Ministers confirmed the new legislation would be introduced after Tuesday’s Programme for Government.

However, shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said the target should be one year earlier, and his call to have the law effective from April 2018 has been backed by the campaign leader Amanda Kopel.

Her husband Frank, who gave his name to the campaign, passed away three years ago having been diagnosed with dementia at the age of 59.

He could not access free personal care because he wasn’t yet 65, something the new legislation will change.

After the announcement by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, which signalled a long-awaited change in policy from the SNP, Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said she’d work with ministers to ensure it could be put in place as soon as possible.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

“While the belated decision to commit to introducing Frank’s Law is welcome, I am very concerned the extension of free personal care will not come into force and be a reality for families until April 2019.

“For too many people in Scotland, Frank’s Law is needed today and was needed yesterday.

“A delay of more than 18 months just isn’t good enough.

“The Scottish Government should take all the actions necessary, and look at all the mechanisms, to ensure the policy change can be implemented from April 2018.

“If the SNP is genuinely going to get back to focusing on the day job, then fast-tracking Frank’s Law will be a key test.”

Amanda Kopel said:

“Of course I’m delighted that finally common sense has prevailed and Frank’s Law will be delivered.

“However, to be told that it will be April 2019 is really no good for the under 65s who desperately need help now.

“Time is so very precious to them, and they don’t have it on their side.

“Sadly, a lot of them will not be here in 2019, so it’s imperative the date is brought forward.”

It was confirmed today that Frank’s Law would not be introduced until April 2019:

<https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/local/angus-mearns/504811/franks-law-to-come-into-force-by-april-2019-and-benefit-at-least-9000-families-articleisfree/>

[Sturgeon refuses to rule out tax hikes for Scotland’s workers](#)

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- Sturgeon refuses to rule out tax hikes for Scotland’s workers

7 Sep 2017



Nicola Sturgeon has refused to rule out introducing tax hikes which would hit basic rate taxpayers right across the country.

At First Minister's Questions today, Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson invited her to echo previous SNP pledges that there would be no increases.

However, Ms Sturgeon dodged the issue, instead saying her party would treat the prospect of heavy increases with "an open mind".

This directly contradicts what both she and the SNP manifesto said before the most recent Holyrood elections, where it was acknowledged that such a move could lead to a loss of revenue.

Earlier this week, the First Minister hinted at tax increases as part of her Programme for Government.

That prompted warnings today from business leaders, including the Scottish Chambers of Commerce and the Scottish Retail Consortium, that raising income tax could even drive Scotland back to the brink of recession.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"Nicola Sturgeon's message is loud and clear – she's coming for the pay packets of workers right across Scotland.

"The First Minister made a promise not to increase income tax rates for basic rate taxpayers, and now she's going back on it.

"She needs to listen to business leaders who are telling her unequivocally that, if Scotland has higher income tax rates than the rest of the UK, it will be bad for the economy.

"Jacking up taxes on working families and businesses in Scotland will damage the Scottish Government's stated objective to get the economy growing again.

"Doing so will damage Scotland's reputation as a good place to do business, and stifle the ambitions we all share for the country."

Nicola Sturgeon promised not to increase income tax for basic rate taxpayers: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/nicola-sturgeon-rules-out-raising-income-tax-rate-if-snp-is-re-elected-a6926786.html>

She also made the same pledge to the SNP conference (30 mins 55 secs): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R310bvBPRm0>

However, today she refused to rule out doing exactly that, and hinted at the measures in Tuesday's Programme for Government:

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

And earlier this week, SNP MSP Mark McDonald also failed to detail the SNP's proposals on tax when asked on Scotland Tonight. He said: "Well, I think we've set out our position very clearly that what we don't want to see is those in the lowest paid positions having to pay more tax and the part of James Kelly's answer that was missing, of course, was that the Labour party's position in relation to income tax going into the last election was that they would have seen those people having their tax bills increased."

[New figures show doubling of some STIs](#)

7 Sep 2017



New figures detailing the scale of sexually transmitted diseases in Scotland has revealed how rates of some have doubled in recent years.

Since 2009, cases of both gonorrhoea and syphilis have soared, while thousands are still treated for chlamydia despite a general downwards trend.

The statistics were published by the Scottish Government following a parliamentary question from shadow health secretary Miles Briggs.

They show that in 2009 there were 1021 cases of gonorrhoea, which rose to 2346 in 2015 – the latest year for which figures are available in that category.

Instances of syphilis increased from 190 in 2009 up to 356 in 2016.

And for chlamydia, while the overall figures are in decline, there was still a small increase in cases from last year to 15,147, meaning 41 people a day are being treated for the disease.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

"It's extremely concerning to see such an increase in certain diseases, especially at a time when awareness is meant to be high.

"These are infections which are easily preventable but can have long-lasting negative consequences for men and women.

"Of course it's not just down to the Scottish Government to ensure these statistics decrease and personal responsibility has to be involved.

"But it would seem, particularly where gonorrhoea and syphilis are concerned,

there is considerably more work still to be done.

“The sexual health of our young people is important. Getting the facts and medical help on sexually transmitted diseases is vital to support the health and wellbeing of young Scots.

“That is why Scottish Conservatives have called for a review of sexual health services in Scotland and the provision of GUM clinics.

“We also want to see what steps are being taken to provide confidential support as well as STI postal testing for people who live in rural, island, and remote communities.”

To see a full geographical breakdown of the figures, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/S5W-10637BIB-No-59019.pdf>