

Ministers must start recording figures on acid attacks

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11 Aug 2017



The Scottish Government should start collating figures on the growing problem of acid attacks, an MSP has said.

A number of recent incidents have taken place across the UK amid calls for tougher sentences on perpetrators.

It has now emerged, following a parliamentary question, that ministers here don't collect statistics on acid attacks, meaning there's no way of telling how often they occur.

In his answer to Scottish Conservative MSP Rachael Hamilton, justice secretary Michael Matheson said: "Information on the number of acid attacks over the last five years is not held centrally. The statistics for assault held do not differentiate when corrosive substances have or have not been used."

He added that ministers are working closely with counterparts in the UK Government on an action plan, which includes looking at online sales of acid materials which could be used in an attack.

Last month, a man was found guilty of an acid attack on a journalist in Glasgow, and a schoolgirl in East Lothian was jailed this week for a similar assault.

The MSP for Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire said while it was understandable the Scottish Government didn't yet have statistics, it had to start collecting them in light of recent incidents.

Scottish Conservative MSP Rachael Hamilton said:

"Acid attacks appear to be a fairly new phenomenon, and authorities are still getting to grips with how best to deal with them.

"But there's no question they are becoming more of a problem, with a series of high profile incidents across the UK.

"That's why it's essential the Scottish Government starts collating these figures so we can assess the scale of the issue.

“Ministers are able to publish statistics on other crimes, and it’s now time for acid attacks to be included too.

“These are devastating attacks which change the lives of victims for ever and support mechanisms must be put in place for those affected.

“We need to do our very best to stamp these out, and assessing the scale of the problem in Scotland would be a good place to start.

“Scotland is a safe place to live, work and visit and we want it to remain that way.

“We need to engage with retailers to ensure that harmful substances are sold responsibly.”

Below is the parliamentary question from Rachael Hamilton, and the answer from Michael Matheson:

10 August 2017

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Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party): To ask the Scottish Government how many acid attacks there have been in each of the last five years, and what action it is taking to reduce the number of and prevent such attacks.

S5W-10337

Michael Matheson:

Information on the number of acid attacks over the last five years is not held centrally. Where someone uses acid or other corrosive substances to attack another person, a range of general criminal offences can be used to prosecute including the common law of assault. The statistics for assault held do not differentiate when corrosive substances have or have not been used.

The Scottish Government is committed to doing whatever it can within our powers to ensure our communities are safe from harm. This includes any steps that can be taken in relation to the availability of corrosive substances that can have such real and lasting harm if used against another person or property.

The UK Government has announced plans to prepare an action plan to tackle the use of acid or other corrosive substances in violent attacks. This follows a spate of such incidents in London. The action plan focuses on:

- effective law enforcement;
- ensuring legislation covering the use of acid and other corrosives in attacks is understood and consistently applied;
- working with retailers to restrict access to acids and other very harmful products; and

- ensuring effective support for victims through both the Criminal Justice System and health services.

Along with considering the operation of the criminal law of Scotland in this area, I can advise that the Scottish Government will be working closely with the UK Government on such issues as the online sales of corrosive substances as it is apparent that effective steps in that specific area will need to be taken on a consistent basis across the whole of the UK if possible.

[Edinburgh's new Sick Kids hospital delayed again](#)

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10 Aug 2017



A major project to build a new Sick Kids hospital in Edinburgh has been delayed again, it has been reported.

The latest setback means the £150-million facility won't be open until May 2018 at the earliest.

Previously, NHS Lothian bosses had planned to open the doors at Little France in the spring of next year.

Originally, the much-needed replacement hospital was supposed to be open by the winter of 2012, but the project has been dogged by delays since then.

Campaigners have expressed anger that, during the six years of delay, a similar facility in Glasgow has been completed with funding from the Scottish Government.

The health board said today it was putting back the opening date to ensure the "safe and effective" opening of the hospital, which will serve youngsters right across the east of Scotland.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

"Families, parents and patients across the Lothians and eastern Scotland will be deeply disappointed and frustrated at this.

"This appears to be yet another delay to the opening of a vital new hospital facility, despite NHS Lothian guaranteeing that it would open next spring.

“Families deserve answers and clarification from both NHS Lothian and the Scottish Government about the reasons behind this delay and I will be seeking these on behalf of constituents.

“The SNP government’s handling of this whole project – which it claims is one of its flagship infrastructure investments – has been incredibly poor from the outset, having originally indicated a new hospital could be ready by the end of 2012.

“Since then we have seen delay after delay and this is unacceptable.”

Notes to editors:

For more on the story, visit:

<https://planetradio.co.uk/forth/local/news/delay-opening-edinburgh-new-sick-kids/>

[Report concedes police are operating under ‘diminishing resources’](#)

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- Report concedes police are operating under ‘diminishing resources’

10 Aug 2017



Police officers in Scotland are working under “diminishing resources”, a situation impacting their ability to do the job, a report has found.

Today’s ‘Evaluation of Police and Fire Reform’ carried a series of warnings about the future of Police Scotland, just four years after it was created by the SNP.

The report comes on the back of a number of apparent single force blunders which are now being investigated by the official watchdog, and two of the force’s most senior figures under the spotlight amid allegations of bullying.

It stated: “The perceptions of those involved in the routine delivery of local services was that they are operating with diminishing resources, that work to strengthen connections with communities was often hampered by other organisational pressures, and the reductions in the budgets of other public services sometimes frustrated attempts to work more collaboratively.”

The engagement between officers and their local communities had worsened, the report said, and people were dissatisfied about the performance of the non-

emergency 101 number.

Morale among rank-and-file officers was also said to be low.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr said:

“This is a damning report, exposing the great many problems that exist within the SNP’s single police force.

“It shows clearly that the Scottish Government is expecting officers to operate with fewer resources, and creating a context in which they are not being given sufficient time to properly engage with the public.

“The report suggests that morale is at rock bottom among the rank and file which is understandable if they are being prevented from doing a very hard, intense job by decisions taken at Scottish Government level.

“There’s no doubt that on the SNP’s watch, things have gone downhill.

“Its project was meant to make Scotland safer, policing better, and establish a more transparent and accountable force.

“Instead, this report suggests the opposite has occurred and our dedicated, professional and brave police service are being held back by political decisions.

“The SNP has some very serious questions to answer on this.”

Notes to editors:

To see the full report, visit:

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00523031.pdf>

[Exam results achieved ‘in spite of Scotland’s schools system, not because of it’](#)

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8 Aug 2017



Children across Scotland achieved their exam results “in spite of Scotland’s schools system, not because of it”.

Shadow education secretary Liz Smith congratulated youngsters who received pass marks as part of today’s exam results.

More than 150,000 exam passes were recorded by pupils across the country, although the number has decreased slightly from last year.

Despite that, some subjects saw a notable decline in both participation and attainment.

Tables published by the Scottish Conservatives show a significant reduction in those choosing to take subjects like French, German and History.

At Advanced Higher level, there was a dip in attainment across English and Biology.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

“Many congratulations to all the pupils who worked so hard to get their grades today.

“Today is also a day to thank all the teachers and parents who supported them over the last few months, and have done so much to give today’s school leavers a great start in life.

“It is also good to see that, in contrast to previous years, there are no major issues around pass marks and that the exam process appears to have been conducted professionally.

“However, it is not all good news – and there are some clear warning signs contained in today’s figures which ministers must take account of urgently.

“In some key core subjects – including history and some modern languages – there is a marked drop in the number of entries. And in many subjects, we also see attainment falling, particularly at Advanced Higher level.

“The fundamental problems remain the same.

“We have too few teachers in classrooms. And, as the Sutton Trust recently declared, we have a school system that doesn’t give enough children the opportunity to really excel and push on.

“Today’s figures show that thousands of school children have done brilliantly and worked hard to earn their results.

“But the fact is that, in too many cases, this is in spite of Scotland’s school system, not because of it.”

Notes to editors:

For a breakdown of results, by subject, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/SQA-Results-2017.docx>

[Hundreds of seriously ill patients discharged too early](#)

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8 Aug 2017



Hundreds of patients last year were discharged from intensive care and high dependency units too early, and a lack of resources are to blame.

An audit into critical care in Scotland analysed outcomes for people released from ICUs and HDUs in 2016, including those who were readmitted within 48 hours, their discharge having been deemed a mistake.

According to the figures, 438 were discharged prematurely from HDUs, as well as 298 from ICUs.

The total figure represents around two per cent of all discharges from ICUs, and 1.4 per cent from HDUs, the official report by NHS Scotland concluded.

It stated: *“High rates of early discharges are a concern as they reflect a discharge that is felt by the clinical team not to be in the patient’s best interest. This is due to underlying pressure of beds or staff reflecting a lack of available resource.”*

The report showed a variation in performance across the country.

46,000 patient episodes were recorded in critical care units last year.

Aside from those discharged too early, auditors found nearly a quarter of those patients were actually delayed – for at least four hours – in their discharge.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

“While it is only a small percentage of those who are discharged too early, it still represents hundreds of patients.

“The report is stark in its admission that these patients are not being

discharged early because of clinical error, but due to a lack of resources and staffing.

“This is yet another indication that poor stewardship of the NHS by the SNP government is having a very real impact on patient safety.

“When dealing with tens of thousands of admissions to critical care units, it’s obvious some people will end up having mistimed discharges.

“But for several hundred of these to occur is unacceptable, and the reasons set out in the report worse still.

“Ministers need to get a grip of this situation as a matter of urgency.”

Notes to editors:

The full report is here:

<http://www.sicsag.scot.nhs.uk/docs/2017/2017-08-08-SICSAG-Report.pdf?22>

It states there were 14,908 ICU patient episodes, and 31,297 HDU episodes.

Of the ICU episodes, the report stated two per cent of these resulted in “early” discharges, equating to 298 people.

Of the HDU episodes, 1.4 resulted in “early” discharges, equating to 438 people.