

[Policing plan 'neglects' rural Scotland](#)

28 Feb 2017



Justice secretary Michael Matheson has been warned not to neglect rural Scotland following the publishing of a 10-year strategy for policing.

The single force failed to mention countryside communities once in its 'Serving a Changing Scotland', which was released yesterday.

And today, shadow justice secretary Douglas Ross warned the Scottish Government not to concentrate all its efforts on the central belt when it embarks on policing reforms.

He pointed out the population of Scotland's rural communities is growing at a faster rate than anywhere else north of the border.

And the omission comes despite the strategy highlighting challenges such as migration, health and inequality.

But despite that, Mr Matheson failed to give assurances in Holyrood today when challenged on the issue.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Douglas Ross said:

"It's all very well coming up with a plan for Scotland's cities when it comes to policing.

"But, as ever with the SNP, its obsession with the central belt leaves rural communities neglected.

"The document produced by Police Scotland doesn't mention our rural communities once, and that's utterly unacceptable.

"Crime in these parts of the country can differ significantly to offending in towns and cities, and it's regrettable the single force isn't acknowledging this.

"And when he had a chance in the Scottish Parliament to set the record straight, Michael Matheson failed to do so."

The Scottish Conservatives criticised the document when it was published yesterday:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/02/police-scotland-changes-must-not-deplete-the-frontline/>

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New figures released today have shown how NHS performance on waiting times has nosedived under the SNP.

Tables published by ISD Scotland have revealed the alarming slump since 2010 on both referral-to-treatment and new outpatient waiting times.

In December, just 83.8 per cent of patients were treated within 18 weeks of being referred, well below the target rate, and significantly poorer than the 92 per cent rate of five years ago.

Performance varied across health boards, with one in three patients in NHS Ayrshire and Arran breaching the target timeframe.

It means, at the end of last year, more than 15,000 patients were waiting longer than they should following a referral.

The official data also showed new outpatients in Scotland were receiving a far poorer service than in 2010.

One in four people were waiting longer than the 12-week standard for care for their first appointment, with many of them being forced to wait longer than 16 weeks.

In NHS Highland, nearly half of all outpatients weren't being seen to on time, while in NHS Lothian that figure was one in three.

It's the latest set of statistics showing the SNP's mismanagement of the NHS, and clear evidence of a drop in service levels for patients since 2010.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Donald Cameron said:

"This shows very clearly that in two important areas performance has declined sharply in the last few years.

"This is all on the SNP's watch, and it has to explain the disastrous slump in these crucial waiting times, given it's been running the NHS for almost a decade.

“It’s well-documented that the sooner someone begins treatment, the better chance they will have of recovery.

“Instead, the SNP hasn’t bothered to try and make improvements in this area, and that will be having a very direct impact on the health and wellbeing of vulnerable people.

“The Scottish public are getting increasingly sick of an SNP which, almost on a daily basis, is found wanting on the day job as it obsesses about the constitution.”

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A separate Scottish deal on EU or EEA membership would “result in the fracturing of the UK domestic market,” an expert group on Brexit has concluded in a major new report published today.

The paper – entitled ‘Scotland’s Trading Future’ – concludes that a “differentiated deal” as proposed by the Scottish Government is neither “deliverable” nor in Scotland’s “self-interest”.

Aside from the legal, political and technical obstacles to such a plan, the deal would “break our integrated domestic UK market, whose economic importance to Scotland is paramount”.

It concludes that:

- Unless the Scottish Government agreed to adopt the same immigration policy as the rest of the UK, it is “inevitable” that internal UK border controls would be introduced under their plan.
- Even in the absence of tariffs between Scotland and the rest of the UK, the flow of goods and services across the border which are four times more important to Scotland than EU exports would “inevitably be affected” by more restrictive controls.
- There would be a gradual “divergence” between Scotland and the rest of the

UK as Scotland through EU or EEA membership was forced to adopt more EU regulations and laws, while the rest of the UK did not.

The report also examines the prospects for a UK-EU trade deal and for the UK's global trading opportunities once the UK leaves the European Union in 2019.

It supports efforts to continue co-operation across Europe in law enforcement, intelligence gathering, high-quality university research and student exchange programmes.

It says a UK/EU free trade deal "need not be difficult" to agree as all tariffs, regulations, laws and standards would be identical on the day the UK leaves the EU.

The report goes on to say that "it is pivotal that all parts of the UK come together and present a united front, so that efforts are focused on getting the best possible deal".

And on future opportunities for Scotland, it concludes that if trends over the last 10 years are continued, rest of the world exports from Scotland will be two-thirds more valuable to Scotland than EU exports by 2025.

It calls on both the UK and Scottish Governments to do more to support Scottish exports, and says the experience of successful exporters – such as Scotch Whisky – should be used as "best practice" for other sectors which are less successful.

In the report's summary, the group declares:

"Our challenge has been to reach across the divide between those who voted to remain and those who voted to leave and to set out a way forward which, we believe, is in the best interest of Scotland and the whole United Kingdom.

"We believe it is in Scotland's self-interest to do nothing to fracture our own Union. And we believe it is in Scotland's self-interest to support the United Kingdom's efforts to increase global trade.

"We cannot see the self-interest in a so-called 'differentiated solution' for Scotland. It would have the effect of damaging the economy and reducing growth in Scotland."

Scottish Conservative MEP Ian Duncan, who chaired the expert group, said:

"Having spent time examining the plans of both the Scottish and UK governments, this report looks at how Brexit can best deliver for Scotland and – crucially – for the entire United Kingdom.

"While Brexit undoubtedly presents challenges as well as opportunities for our future trading relationships, it is clear that cooperation and presenting a united front will allow us to focus efforts on securing the best possible deal.

"I am grateful to my colleagues on this group for their expertise and input into the report, which is a serious and forward-looking appraisal of how we make Brexit a success for the people of Scotland.

"In presenting this report, our hope is that it will contribute constructively to the public debate, and ensure that securing jobs and growing the economy are the key priority over the coming months."

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"I would like to place on record my thanks to this group for the important work they have done.

"The report makes it very clear: none of the challenges posed by Brexit are answered by weakening or breaking up our own Union of nations.

"This report makes a compelling argument that, as we embark on our departure from the EU, the protection of our own Union is vital to Scotland's self-interest."

To see the full report, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Scotland%E2%80%99s-Trading-Future.pdf>

Below are biographies of those involved in the group:

Ian Duncan MEP

Ian Duncan was for seven years the Head of the Scottish Parliament's European Office in Brussels, responsible for relations between the Holyrood Parliament and the EU institutions. He later served as European Advisor to the Parliament and Clerk to the European & External Relations Committee. He resigned his position in February 2013 to seek the election to the European Parliament.

Gavin Hewitt CMG

Long British Diplomatic Service career culminating with Ambassadorships in Croatia, Finland and Belgium (1970 to 2003). Extensive multilateral and bilateral EU and international trade policy experience, including at Brussels and Geneva. Chief Executive of the Scotch Whisky Association (2003 to 2013). Remains active in the Scotch Whisky industry.

Allan Hogarth

Allan Hogarth is director of AH Strategies Ltd . Prior to this, he was director of Public Affairs for a leading consultancy and spent 8 years with CBI Scotland, latterly as Head of Media and Public Affairs. He also worked as the director of the British Lung Foundation in Scotland, establishing it as a leading medical research charity.

Rhona Irving

Rhona Irving is a retired partner from PwC where she specialised in corporate and international taxes and had roles leading the firm's Scottish tax practice and the learning and development programme for the UK tax practice. She currently chairs the board of the School for Social Entrepreneurs in Scotland.

Rhona graduated from Edinburgh University with a First Class BSc (Hons) in Mathematics and then qualified as a Chartered Tax Practitioner before becoming a partner in PwC.

Sir Iain McMillan CBE

Sir Iain McMillan spent twenty-three years with the TSB Group prior to joining the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) in 1993. He held the position of Director, CBI Scotland for nineteen years until his retirement in 2014. Sir Iain holds a number of Board positions in the business and charitable sectors. He is currently Chairman of SkillForce and the University of Strathclyde Business School Advisory Board, Honorary Patron of the Scottish North American Business Council (SNABC) and a Trustee of The Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland. In 2009, Sir Iain was appointed Honorary Air Commodore of 602 (City of Glasgow) Squadron, Royal Auxiliary Air Force.

Over the years, Sir Iain has served on other Boards and public policy groups, including the Commission on Scottish Devolution (Calman Commission). He also chaired the Independent Commission for Competitive and Fair Taxation in Scotland. In 2003, Sir Iain was appointed CBE for services to the business community and lifelong learning in Scotland. In 2015, Sir Iain was knighted for services to the Scottish economy.

Alexander Stewart MBE MSP

Alexander Stewart was first elected as a Member of the Scottish Parliament for Mid Scotland and Fife in the May 2016 election. He is the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party's Shadow Minister for International Development and External Affairs.

Prior to his election to Holyrood, Alexander worked as a management professional in the hospitality, housing and retail sectors and, for a time, ran his own fashion-retail business in Crieff. In 1999, Alexander became a local councillor on Perth & Kinross Council and was subsequently re-elected on three occasions. During his time on the council, he has served in a number of senior positions, including Leader of the Opposition and Convener of the Scrutiny and of the Housing and Health Committees. In the 2016 New Year Honours List, he was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire by Her Majesty The Queen.

Prof Adam Tomkins MSP

Adam has taught constitutional law at the University of Glasgow since 2003. He played a high-profile role in the Better Together campaign, with frequent media appearances and press articles, often based on his blog, Notes from North Britain.

After the referendum Adam was one of the Scottish Conservatives' two nominees on the Smith Commission, negotiating along with former party leader Annabel Goldie a deal that will see significant new powers coming to Holyrood.

After the general election the Secretary of State for Scotland, David Mundell

MP, appointed Adam as constitutional adviser to the Scotland Office, helping the ministerial team at the Scotland Office and their officials to steer the Scotland Bill onto the statute book, delivering the Smith Commission Agreement in full and on time. He was elected Conservative MSP for Glasgow in May 2016.

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The number of school pupils in Scotland requiring additional support has more than doubled in six years, a report to Holyrood's education committee will reveal on Wednesday.

The report will show that the total number of pupils in need of additional support has seen a sharp 153 per cent rise since 2010.

Among the highest number of additional support was the need for social, emotional and behavioural difficulty assistance.

A total of 36,030 students have been revealed to require this form of support, a striking increase from 1 per 1,000 students to 4.1 per 1,000 since 2002.

The report also reveals that 2,044 young carers required additional support during 2016.

The worrying statistics have intensified criticism of the SNP on additional support needs, after a report released in January revealed that the 2,896 additional support teachers employed was the lowest since 2007.

With these figures revealing the ever-increasing demand for additional support teachers across Scotland, the Scottish Conservatives are now calling for answers from the SNP as to why it has continually slashed the number of support teachers.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

"The SNP has repeatedly declared that education is a major priority, but its

actions suggest otherwise.

“The growth in the number of pupils being identified with additional support needs has been accompanied by a fall in the number of teachers with the relevant specialist skills.

“Because of this fall in additional support teachers, many pupils are being badly let down.

“There is a very important debate to be had about the effectiveness of mainstreaming for some of our most vulnerable children, but that will not happen if there are too few teachers with the relevant skills.”

Copy of the education report papers:

http://www.parliament.scot/S5_Education/Meeting%20Papers/ESCtteePublicPapers20170301.pdf

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The Scottish Conservatives are demanding the SNP to start providing the necessary support to the businesses across Scotland who have been negatively affected by the Air Weapons and Licensing Act (AWLA).

The act was implemented last year despite the Scottish Conservatives voting against it.

It has recently emerged that as a result of the SNP's legislation many businesses face an uncertain future, particularly in the private car hire industry, many of whom have voiced concern.

Wedding car operators are just one of the industries sucker-punched by the AWLA provisions.

Many of them are being forced to pay the large cash sums in order to pay for

the licenses that are needed to meet the additional costs.

The unfair regulations saw West of Scotland MSP Jamie Greene echo the worries of the affected businesses to Nicola Sturgeon during last week's First Minister's Questions.

Mr Greene asked the First Minister: "What action is being done to mitigate the impact that their Weapons and Licensing Act is having on industries?"

Ms Sturgeon replied: "With any piece of legislation it's vital that we strike the right balance between the legislation doing what it is intended to do without putting unnecessary burdens on business or anyone else."

Mr Greene's question was not the first time he had brought the issue to the SNP's attention, and he is now demanding that the SNP provides the support needed for the businesses hit.

Scottish Conservative West MSP Jamie Greene said:

"The SNP simply has to start providing solutions and answers for these many businesses affected.

"Despite numerous attempts to reach out to the SNP I have yet to receive any real clarity on the matter.

"During First Minister's Questions I brought to light the story of one of my constituents, Mr Brian Jay of Saltcoats.

"Mr Jay owns and runs 'Jay's Luxury Wedding Cars' and as a result of this act risks having to shut the private hire part of his business.

"The SNP needs to find a way to address the issues business face as a result of the Air Weapons and Licensing Act, and provide some clarity for the likes of Mr Jay and many other businesses across Scotland.

"The uncertainty is already damaging confidence in the industry.

"It's vital that the SNP outline what assessments they will be undertaking on individual operators and set out a clear time frame for doing so."