

# Bed cuts lay bare the 'deliberate downgrade' of major hospital

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The number of beds at one of central Scotland's biggest hospitals reduced significantly over recent years, despite promises it would not be downgraded.

New figures have revealed that general beds and intensive care beds at St John's Hospital in Livingston has reduced steadily.

This is despite repeated promises from the SNP that it was an essential acute hospital, and would not have its status reduced.

In 2007, then health secretary Nicola Sturgeon even visited West Lothian to give her "personal commitment" to the hospital.

However, last month it emerged the hospital's paediatric ward would cease to take admissions.

And now it's been revealed – despite a national increase – the number of intensive care beds has nearly halved.

In 2003, when the hospital was considered a major acute facility, there were 25 ICU beds.

But in 2016, that had dropped to just 14.

Over the same period, Scotland-wide intensive care beds rose from 700 to 943.

Shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said the fall was a sign that the Scottish Government considered the hospital increasingly irrelevant.

And bed numbers generally also fell, from 503 in 2003 to 432 last year.

Campaigners have long accused successive Scottish Governments and NHS Lothian of stripping away services from St John's.

In the 2007 local government elections, a number of councillors were elected as part of the Action to Save St John's action group, specifically to push the interests of the hospital.

**Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:**

"Nicola Sturgeon gave her word to the people of West Lothian that her

government was committed to St John's.

"But one closed children's ward and a halving of intensive care beds later, that is clearly not the case.

"This is a deliberate downgrade.

"People in the area have long suspected that St John's was being eroded from a respected acute hospital to little more than a day unit.

"In recent weeks, those fears have been confirmed.

"Everyone accepts cash is tight in the NHS, but St John's is a facility of critical importance.

"Instead of chipping away at the services it provides, the Scottish Government should be ensuring it can provide a top-class service to the huge swathes of central Scotland who rely on it."

**Damian Timson, leader of the Scottish Conservatives on West Lothian Council, said:**

"The reduction in beds is extremely disappointing.

"It confirms the fears of patients and staff that the SNP just doesn't take St John's seriously.

"But the truth is people all across West Lothian, as well as many in Edinburgh and elsewhere in central Scotland, depend on this facility.

"When you add the partial closure of the paediatric ward at St Johns to this, the question is how committed to West Lothian healthcare are the SNP and NHS Lothian.

"The residents of West Lothian are being treated like second class citizens and the SNP need to start providing a quality healthcare service across the central belt."