

Freeman must appear before Holyrood to answer liar accusation

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Health secretary Jeane Freeman must appear before Holyrood this week to answer accusations from one of Scotland's top public officials that she lied, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

Ousted NHS Lothian chairman Brian Houston said Ms Freeman wasn't telling the truth when she claimed she personally halted the opening of Edinburgh's new Sick Kids hospital, over-ruling the health board in the process.

In an explosive interview in today's *Edinburgh Evening News*, he also said Ms Freeman told him to resign or she would sack him over the fiasco.

The showdown came when the health secretary was under intense pressure for other failings across Scotland's health service, not least the significant delays to the flagship children's hospital, which was supposed to open in 2012.

Today, shadow health secretary Miles Briggs questioned whether his SNP counterpart used the Sick Kids crisis to create an impression she had a grip on the NHS.

Mr Houston said today: "To come out and say she was over-ruling NHS Lothian was a lie."

And he added: "We got absolutely zero engagement. The response from the cabinet secretary was contemptuous. She didn't argue. She didn't debate. She simply kept expressing and signifying her impatience and contempt. It was embarrassing."

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

"Scotland's health secretary has been called a liar by one of the most senior public officials in the land.

"That's an incredible situation, and one which she must address immediately.

"We're demanding she makes a statement to Holyrood this week on the fiasco.

"It seems from Mr Houston's account that Ms Freeman – who was already under intense pressure because of other health failings across Scotland – used the Sick Kids crisis to show who was boss.

"That would be playing politics with one of the worst NHS scandals since devolution.

“And amid all this fighting, let’s remember that the new Sick Kids remains empty, and patients and staff have to endure conditions in a relic of a building nearly a decade after they were supposed to move.”