

Sturgeon risks becoming 'Beeching of Scotland's NHS'

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Repeated cuts to health services across rural communities could lead to Nicola Sturgeon being remembered as the "Beeching of Scotland's NHS", it has been warned.

Speaking ahead of a visit to Orkney, shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said hospitals and other NHS facilities in non-urban areas were feeling the impact of SNP government cuts.

And he said if they continue, the impact on health services would be similar to that felt by local rail networks following reforms by infamous trains boss Dr Richard Beeching in the 1960s.

While in the Northern Isles, Mr Briggs will meet with local healthcare professionals to discuss issues affecting the system away from the Central Belt.

He pointed to cuts to services in places like West Lothian, Perthshire and the Highlands as evidence of the SNP's centralising attitude.

Just this week, it emerged dozens of children a month are transferred by ambulance from St John's Hospital in Livingston to the Sick Kids facility in the centre of Edinburgh following the closure last summer of the 24/7 admissions unit.

A campaign has recently launched to retain services in the Perth Royal Infirmary which the SNP wants to move to Dundee.

In Fife, patients were furious when it emerged services provided in places like Dunfermline, St Andrews and Glenrothes would be focused on Kirkcaldy.

And in the Highlands, health chiefs have already asked for a bail-out totalling nearly £20 million as it struggles to balance the books as it embarked on cutbacks like the closure of the maternity ward at Dr Gray's in Elgin.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

"Nicola Sturgeon has become to Scotland's NHS in rural communities what Beeching was to railways.

"The SNP government's shocking record in office speaks for itself.

"It has mismanaged the workforce, finances and all the while has stripped away local services and centralised them elsewhere.

"There are examples of this all over Scotland, from Dumfries and Galloway and the Lothians, to Tayside and the Highlands.

"People in these areas have had enough of the constant SNP health cuts which have caused the loss of much-loved and much-needed services.

"If we are truly going to help build healthy, happy and sustainable rural and island communities, then we need a new approach.

"We need to rural-proof Scotland's NHS to meet the changing and challenging nature of health and social care needs.

"That requires the SNP to ditch its Central Belt obsession and start to govern for the whole of Scotland."