

SNP scheme to secure delivery slots 'pitiful'

16 Apr 2020



The number of vulnerable people the SNP claims it has helped secure supermarket delivery slots has been described as "pitiful".

Pressure has been mounting on the SNP government to pass big stores its "shielded" list, containing the country's most vulnerable people who can't leave their home during the coronavirus pandemic.

But instead of following the UK Government approach, which saw that list being handed over last month, ministers here have "dithered" and chosen a more complex approach.

Today, after launching a text service which forced the shielded group to get in touch with the Scottish Government, Nicola Sturgeon revealed just 21,000 had been able to sign up to have their details passed onto supermarkets.

There has also been confusion over exactly how many people are in the shielded group.

The First Minister initially said there were 200,000, but it was quickly reduced to an estimated 120,000.

Then it was increased to 136,000 and, shortly after, 144,000.

Today, at the virtual First Minister's Questions exchange, Ms Sturgeon stated it was now 157,000.

Scottish Conservative leader Jackson Carlaw said:

"We are now weeks into this public health crisis, yet still the SNP hasn't managed to ensure vulnerable people can get supermarket delivery slots.

"The UK Government simply passed its list on to the big chains, which allowed them to prioritise delivery slots for those who needed them most.

"But here, the SNP dithered and eventually came up with a convoluted system, which hasn't worked properly, and resulted in a pitiful number of shielded people receiving the help they need.

"It's just another example of the SNP doing something differently for the sake of being different – and the consequences for the most vulnerable people have been serious. "The SNP government doesn't even seem to know how many people are on its shielded list, with the number changing radically each time a minister talks about it."

Pupils missing out on exams need assurances from SNP

15 Apr 2020



The prospects of school pupils unable to take exams because of the coronavirus must not be harmed, the education secretary has been told in a letter.

The Scottish Conservatives have set out a list of priority areas which have to be addressed by John Swinney, having spoken to concerned parents across the country.

Shadow education secretary Jamie Greene said people wanted clarity over consistency of marking, particularly as results will be down to teacher discretion rather than overall SQA oversight.

He also said parents were concerned that grades estimated by schools could be set aside in favour of national average measures.

And he urged Mr Swinney to offer reassurances that Scottish students who could not take exams would not be disadvantaged against those contemporaries from other countries who did.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Jamie Greene said:

“Although we agree that cancelling examinations to protect pupils from the coronavirus was the correct approach, John Swinney cannot ignore concerns from teachers and parents about shortfalls around fairness and consistency in the SNP government’s contingency plans.

“Any system must ensure that pupils, who have spent the year working hard and preparing for these exams, do not have their future prospects damaged because of the pandemic.

“The responsibility now lies with the SNP government to respond to these concerns and, where necessary, intervene to ensure that all pupils are given equal opportunities to succeed.”

Scottish Conservatives force u-turn on business relief

15 Apr 2020



The SNP government has bowed to pressure from the Scottish Conservatives to increase support given to businesses struggling to stay afloat amid the coronavirus pandemic.

After weeks of pressure from firms all across Scotland, finance secretary Kate Forbes finally agreed to provide emergency funds by property rather than by business.

The change still falls short of the UK Government initiative, and will see £25,000 given to the first business property, with subsequent premises given 75 per cent of that.

In England and Wales, all properties get 100 per cent of the £25,000 fund.

Businesses warned that the SNP's failure to replicate the UK Government scheme would ruin Scotland's high streets and cost thousands of jobs.

And up until this morning, SNP ministers had stuck resolutely to the original plan, claiming it was superior to Westminster's system.

As recently as yesterday afternoon's daily briefing, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon was still refusing to change tack.

Scottish Conservative leader Jackson Carlaw said:

"The SNP government has spent weeks defending its approach in the face of severe criticism from Scotland's business community.

"Now, after pressure from the Scottish Conservatives, it has finally accepted its failings.

"These changes should have been made sooner, and that would have spared a significant amount of anxiety across Scotland's small business community, among owners and their employees.

"We've always argued that if the SNP takes a divergent approach from the rest of the UK, it has to show why this is of benefit for Scotland.

"Nicola Sturgeon wasn't able to do so in this case, and I'm glad she's finally realised her mistakes in this critical issue."

More carers hit out over PPE shortages

14 Apr 2020



Care workers who help disabled people through the Direct Payments scheme have described “harrowing and deeply concerning” shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE).

The body which represents them has attacked SNP ministers for failing to respond to repeated pleas for increased provisions.

In an open letter to health secretary Jeane Freeman, the Scottish Personal Assistant Employers Network said workers “continue to report they have little or no access to PPE”.

Chief executive Colin Millar said: “They continue to be fearful for themselves, their families and loved ones and their employees, their employees’ families and loved ones – all of whom risk their own health and welfare on a daily basis to provide key social care services to people in their own homes and who are placed at unnecessary risk of transmission of this virus due to a lack of PPE.”

It’s the latest group in the care industry who have raised concerns about supplies of protective gear.

The organisation represents around 2000 vulnerable people who choose to use the Direct Payments set-up, or one like it, to employ their own carers.

Scottish Conservative leader Jackson Carlaw said:

“This is another arm of Scotland’s care industry which feels like it has been completely overlooked.

“These are extremely vulnerable people who are being cared for by professionals putting their own safety at risk every time they go into a service user’s home.

“Both the patients and the workers who help them deserve to be protected.

“It’s extremely disappointing that the SNP government appears to have ignored these calls, and that it’s taken such a desperate plea from the organisation to bring in some kind of change.

“We know how vulnerable these people are and how pressing a situation it is – the Scottish Government must sort it out now.”

Top medic: claims England being favoured for PPE 'rubbish'

14 Apr 2020



The Scottish Government's top medic has described claims that private firms were prioritising the NHS in England for delivery of PPE as "rubbish".

Clinical director Jason Leitch said he'd looked into the allegations on personal protective equipment, which were reported on the front page of an SNP-supporting newspaper this morning, and was satisfied they were wrong.

Instead, he said all of the UK governments were working well together to tackle the coronavirus pandemic.

Speaking on BBC Good Morning Scotland, he said: "We have looked into it and we think it's rubbish.

"We are in a four country fight against this virus, and that honestly, people might not believe me, but that four country fight is pretty aligned – the politicians are quite aligned around the science, the scientists are certainly aligned around the science, my clinical colleagues in the other countries along with those of us here, are working together very well."

Scottish Conservative leader Jackson Carlaw said:

"I'm glad this lie has been addressed by the most senior clinician around.

"Now everyone in Scotland's NHS can be rest assured that it is absolutely not the case that the English NHS is somehow being prioritised.

"That will allow us all to focus on what really matters – ensuring this virus is beaten, and that those leading that fight receive the best protection possible"