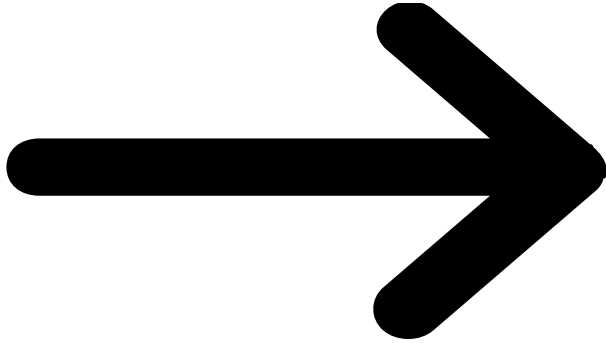


Sturgeon ramps up prospect of Labour/SNP deal

5 Jun 2017



Nicola Sturgeon has ramped up the threat of the SNP propping up Jeremy Corbyn in return for a second independence referendum in an interview on Radio 4's Women's Hour this morning.

Asked whether she would do a deal, she commented: "If the parliamentary arithmetic post the election supported this, I would want the SNP to be part of a progressive alternative to a Tory government."

She added "I'm talking something that would be...on an issue by issue basis."

With regards to the prospect of Jeremy Corbyn as Prime Minister propped up by the SNP, she said "It's no longer inevitable" that the arithmetic would not support it.

Paving the way for the deal, she positioned the SNP as trailblazing for Labour: "Jeremy Corbyn's manifesto...many of the key commitments in that, are policies that the SNP is already implementing in Scotland."

She also dismissed the idea that there should be no second referendum – even if unionist parties got over 50 per cent of the vote.

Scottish Conservative deputy leader Jackson Carlaw MSP said:

"It could not be clearer. The SNP are actively lining up to do a deal with Labour to get a second independence referendum – because they know that Jeremy Corbyn as PM is 'absolutely fine' with a second referendum.

"Across Scotland, only the Conservatives can stand up against the SNP now.

"So if you've had enough of Nicola Sturgeon, use your vote on Thursday to send Nicola Sturgeon a message she can't ignore: we've had enough – take a second independence referendum off the table and get back to the day job"

The BBC interview can be found here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08sks0y>

Cash-for-votes scandal: SNP overruled civil servants on £1m crofting spending announcement

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5 Jun 2017



A senior SNP Minister overruled civil servants who didn't want to make a press statement on spending for crofters because it breached purdah rules, new emails have revealed.

The fresh revelations comes after the Scottish Conservatives revealed last week that officials had admitted making "the wrong call" in unveiling a £8 million spending deal for Glasgow just before the local government elections.

The Scottish Conservatives have today said the growing scandal has shown that the SNP Government is "mired in sleaze".

On April 25th, Rural Affairs Secretary Fergus Ewing announced he would be spending £1 million on housing for crofters.

Emails published today show that civil servants advised him not to make the announcement because of the election period – but Mr Ewing ignored them and insisted it go ahead. Mr Ewing claimed the spending announcement was legitimate because it did not involve councils.

However, the guidance clearly states that Ministers should avoid spending announcements that could influence or could be seen to influence voters, particularly in local areas.

Scottish Conservative MSP for the North East Ross Thomson said:

"The evidence is in. It is now clear that Nicola Sturgeon's government indulged in a systematic breaking of the rules prior to last months' local government elections.

"This is a growing scandal that requires an urgent investigation.

"Mr Ewing was told by civil servants not to make this announcement but ignored them in an attempt to win a few headlines ahead of the local elections.

"Nicola Sturgeon must end her silence over this affair. After ten years in power, her government is now mired in sleaze.

"On Thursday, voters across Scotland can have their say and make it clear we've had enough."

1. See the full emails here:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017-06-03-Purdah2.pdf>

2. The release on the funds for crofters on April 25th is here

<https://news.gov.scot/news/croft-house-grants-awarded>

3. The guidance on announcements during an election period can be seen here:

<https://beta.gov.scot/publications/scottish-local-government-election-guidance-2017/>

4. The details of the email exchanges between civil servants and the Minister are here:

18 April 2017 10:05

From REDACTED in Crofting Policy to Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity (Fergus Ewing)

'I have purposefully not included the total budget for 2017/18, of £2m. This may raise unwanted questions such as why we approved half the budget in the first year

19 April 2017 08:39

From REDACTED in Local Government and Analytical Services Division to Minister for Transport and the Islands cc REDACTED

RE: Croft house Grant – News Release 'I take it the Local Government Election period does not create any difficulties with this announcement?'

19 April 2017 09:05

From REDACTED to Minister for Transport and the Islands cc REDACTED

'I agree with [Redacted] that we should double check this can be announced given restrictions around LG elections'

19 April 2017 11:41

From REDACTED to Minister for Transport and the Islands cc REDACTED

'Dear all, I have checked the guidance and discussed with comms colleagues and would advise against this being announced during the restricted period for the local government elections.

The funding is particularly relevant to a couple of council areas and could therefore be argued to potentially have a bearing on the local election campaign, particularly with crofting issues having been very topical recently.

'I'd suggest we don't issue the press release and there is no croft visit by Yousaf'

Fergus Ewing overruled them:

20 April 2017 12:46

From REDACTED on behalf of Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity To Minister for Transport and the Islands Cc Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity

'All, Mr Ewing has commented that a news release should still go ahead as it has nothing to do with the local government. Aware Mr Yousaf is already on Uist but would it be possible for a news release next week? If not please can you provide more details as to why this shouldn't go out and I will update Mr Ewing.'

21 April 2017 13:31 From REDACTED To REDACTED Cabinet Secretariat inbox

'Mr Ewing is keen for a Scottish Government announcement of funding for the Croft House Grant Scheme to be announced next week.

This would be to confirm that £948,000 has been awarded to help crofters in some of Scotland's most rural and remote communities benefit from better housing.

With 29 crofters sharing the funding which enables them to build or improve homes, helping to retain and attract people to rural communities.

Given the prominence and recent coverage around crofting and the fact that this is a funding announcement, initial consideration within comms was that it would be best to avoid announcing during the Local government pre-election period.

The Cabinet Secretary has now requested advice on whether the announcement could go ahead. Can I have a view from you?'

Senior Civil Servants fell into line behind Ewing – but broke their own guidance

21 April 2017 14:26

From Head of Media for the Rural Economy & Connectivity To Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity; Minister for Transport and the Islands

'I have discussed with Cabinet Secretariat and [Redacted] has confirmed [Redacted] is content for a factual release to be issued next week'

A further email followed from the Cabinet Secretariat confirming they were not of the view local election guidance would 'pose a problem' because 'the crofting counties are within a clearly defined geographical area, so I don't think there will be much surprise from a local authority standpoint.'

This is not what the guidance states. It is in fact the opposite of what the guidance states. The guidance, available here, states that:

'Particular care should be taken over official support, and the use of public resources, including publicity, for Ministerial or official announcements which could have a bearing on matters relevant to the local elections...national announcements by the Scottish Government may have a particular impact on local areas, for example, the publication of policy statements which have a specific local dimension.'

Ministers will wish to be aware of the potential sensitivities in this regard and might decide, on advice, to postpone making certain announcements until after the local elections.'

[Sturgeon again pledges to prop up Corbyn government](#)

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2 Jun 2017



Nicola Sturgeon has again promised to help Jeremy Corbyn form a government – this time by saying she'll support the Labour leader on an "issue by issue" basis.

It's the latest indication from both Labour and the SNP that they are plotting a post-election alliance.

The First Minister appeared on Radio 4's Today programme, where she admitted the SNP wanted to form a "progressive alternative" with Labour.

If follows admissions from Labour sources that they wanted to “cut a deal” with parties like the SNP after next week’s vote.

The Scottish Conservatives warned Labour that the nationalists’ first demand would be a second independence referendum, something Jeremy Corbyn has said he’s “absolutely fine” with.

Scottish Conservative candidate for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk, John Lamont, said:

“Nicola Sturgeon made it clear today that she’d be happy to form an alliance with Jeremy Corbyn next Friday.

“Top of her shopping list would be a second referendum.

“And given Mr Corbyn has said he’s ‘absolutely fine’ with this, there is a real risk of them dragging Scotland back to yet more division.

“As today’s poll reveals, Labour is too weak to take on the SNP right across Scotland.

“That means there is only one way to stop Nicola Sturgeon in her tracks next week and that is by voting for Ruth Davidson and the Scottish Conservatives.

“We are on the up, we have what it takes to beat the SNP and we can send Nicola Sturgeon a message she can’t ignore.

“It’s quite clear after today: a vote for Labour risks a second referendum. A vote for the Scottish Conservative can stop it.”

For more on the story, visit:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2017-40131538>

Labour sources said the party wants to “cut a deal” with the SNP on June 9:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/04/reports-state-labour-will-pursue-election-deal-with-snp/>

And the first item on Nicola Sturgeon’s shopping list would be a second referendum:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/05/sturgeon-and-corbyn-confirm-indy-ref2-would-be-first-priority-of-snp-labour-alliance/>

Officials admit they DID break purdah

rules over SNP Glasgow funding deal

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2 Jun 2017



SNP government officials privately admitted they DID break the rules over a controversial Glasgow funding deal before last month's local elections, the Scottish Conservatives can reveal.

Freedom of Information documents published today show that civil servants and even the First Minister's official spokesman conceded privately it was "the wrong call" to announce £8.35m funding for Glasgow just two days before Council elections.

The revelations call into question Nicola Sturgeon's senior officials' handling of the scandal.

After complaints by the Scottish Conservatives into "cash-for-votes" affair, the Scottish Government's permanent secretary, Leslie Evans, insisted that there had not been a breach of pre-election guidance.

The Scottish Conservatives are today calling on Nicola Sturgeon to launch a full investigation into affair.

The party is also today publishing all the FoI material it has received.

Scottish Conservative North East MSP Ross Thomson said:

"After we pressed them, Nicola Sturgeon's top official tried to claim in public that the government had done nothing wrong.

"Now we know the truth – officials admitted they made 'the wrong call', and then the SNP government tried to cover it up.

"Nicola Sturgeon must now launch a full investigation into this entire murky affair.

"First, the SNP government unveiled a spending announcement in its key target area of Glasgow, just days before the council elections.

"Now we learn, ahead of next week's general election, it tried to cover up its mistakes. "This whole affair stinks – and it has shone a light on the SNP's culture of secrecy, denial and evasion.

"Nicola Sturgeon cannot wash her hands of this any longer. She must act."

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1. **FoI material can be accessed here. The Permanent Secretary's letter to Ross Thomson is at the end of the documents.**
<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/FoI-response-letter-1-Jun17.pdf>
<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/FoI-final-response-issued-Annex-B-1-June-17.pdf>
 2. **The original press release publicizing the funding announcement is here.**
<https://news.gov.scot/news/gbp-8-35-million-to-support-urban-regeneration-in-the-heart-of-glasgow>
 3. **A summary of the FoI material is here**
 1. **Civil servants and the FM's spokesman accepted they had 'made the wrong call'**

After Ross Thomson complained, civil servants exchanged a number of emails. In one of the first of these, the Director for the relevant team apologised and said it was the wrong call:

3 May 2017, 18:47

*Lesley Fraser, Director for Housing and Social Justice, Scottish Government
To Sarah Davidson, DG Communities '*

Just spoken to [redacted] who is apologetic for not having questioned this further...my apologies to you and Perm Sec, Sarah. I think this has been a genuine error of judgment about regular announcements that affect communities across Scotland – but clearly the wrong call on this occasion. I think that Barbara will also want to consider the comms role here, and happy to work with her and James H to learn lessons.' (p95)

How did we consider and apply the guidance on activity during the pre-local government election period?

Both communications and policy colleagues were aware of the guidance. The view was that as this was the third of 3 regeneration announcements this year, there was a pre-existing format and process for this third announcement and an element of comfort afforded in this. Other considerations were: the previous 2 had attracted little attention [more reasons are listed]...All colleagues in policy and communication teams now recognise that this was an error of judgement.

Note: this clearly follows the line taken in Fraser's previous email, implying the error of judgement was to breach purdah guidelines.

Lessons learned

These decisions are ultimately a judgment call and it is clear on this occasion the wrong call was made. Both the Communications team and policy team were aware of the guidance and raised it in the email exchanges they had. With hindsight specific question should have been asked about who had been consulted (senior management, cabinet secretariat, etc) and if there was

any precedent for such a geographically specific announcement to be made at a politically sensitive time. There was no pressing time factor behind making the announcement at this time. All those in the policy and communications teams involved have been spoken to and understand why their judgement was wrong in this instance. They will all be coached further in gaining a full understanding of the pre-election guidance. ' (p132)

Sarah Davidson, DG of Communities, replied on 4 May at 21:44 saying 'Great note Lesley, really clear and professional.'

The First Minister's official spokesman agreed 'we called it wrong'.

In exchanges editing the report, Shirley Laing specifically left in an explicit reference it was the wrong decision:

4 May 2017, 15:40

Shirley Laing, Deputy Director, Social Justice & Regeneration Division, Scottish Government

To: REDACTED

'The version I have sent back takes on board the bulk of your changes.

I have however left in the judgement call reference and an indication that we called it wrong on this occasion as Lesley and I felt it was important to address that up front.' (p124)

The First Minister's Official Spokesperson replied saying:

4 May 2017 15:16 From First Minister's Official Spokesperson To Shirley Laing

"Hi Shirley – I am ok with that – I just thought it was implicit that it was a wrong call given where we are."

James Hynd then watered-down the meaning of 'error of judgement'

- James Hynd, Head of Cabinet, Parliament and Governance Division then asked Lesley to clarify what 'error of judgement' meant (p. 146, 5 May 13:37).

In the first instance, and a primary concern, is that colleagues failed to follow the guidance to seek advice from senior management/Cabinet Secretariat etc on cases like this. If I had been asked, I would have been concerned that this could have been perceived as falling within the scope of the restrictions, and I would have instructed colleagues to seek further advice from Cabinet Secretariat.'

- James Hynd also mentions a conversation. This conversation would appear to be the source of the 'clarification' – which clearly changes a breach of rules into a more technical failure to check if rules were being broken.
- Hynd replied that this 'further clarification would allow the Permanent

Secretary to decide her response’.

- 5 May, 13:44. Hynd then emailed Leslie Evans saying that ‘Lesley has confirmed that this is a reference to the process failure of her team to seek advice from senior levels within the Directorate.’ Hynd does not mention in his note to Leslie Evans any of Lesley Fraser’s comments that ‘the wrong call was made’, or the apology in her first email after
- Hynd’s draft letter to Evans – which she sent on to Ross Thomson – repeats this strong language that no guidance was broken.

In other words, Hynd’s report and Evans’ subsequent letter misrepresent what Leigh and Fraser said, contradicts the view of the communications team, and of the FM’s Official Spokesman.

[Desperate Sturgeon blames everyone else for her education failings](#)

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1 Jun 2017



Nicola Sturgeon today refused to take responsibility for Scotland’s falling education standards – 24 hours after her education secretary admitted SNP cuts “probably” went too far.

At First Minister’s Questions, Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson highlighted how the SNP’s “boom and bust” approach to teacher training meant schools across the country were struggling to recruit staff.

John Swinney conceded this was the fault of the SNP’s workforce planning, which previously saw too many teachers being trained in relation to demand.

However, the First Minister instead tried to shift the blame to the UK Government, even though education is entirely devolved to Holyrood.

Ms Sturgeon also failed to condemn a series of tweets by SNP MSP John Mason, suggesting Scotland had “moved on” from the need for high standards of literacy and numeracy.

He also claimed surgeons don’t need to spell, IT workers shouldn’t bother with grammar, and that there was too much emphasis on “the academic” in the past.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

“The education secretary admitted the SNP was to blame for a shortage of teachers – but today Nicola Sturgeon wanted to put that blame on everyone else.

“If the First Minister is serious about sorting out education, she has to address what’s gone wrong on the SNP’s watch.

“Instead, she wants people to forget about a decade of failure, forget about the mess the Scottish Government has made of education, and forget about the children who’ve been failed by the SNP.

“And instead of facing up to the consequences of SNP failings, Nicola Sturgeon wants to lay the blame at everyone else’s door.

“That’s not competent government and, if John Mason’s views on education are anything to go by, it explains exactly why Scottish education under the SNP is in such a mess right now.”

John Swinney admitted yesterday the SNP “probably” went too far in cutting teacher training numbers:

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/scotland/cutbacks-in-scottish-teacher-training-went-too-far-swinney-admits-sl60sz63m>

Student leaders previously called for an end to “boom and bust” training numbers:

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/education/teacher-training-places-are-cut-by-40-1-789809>