

Conservative leader calls for resignation of Health Secretary over care home numbers

Jackson Carlaw, leader of the Scottish Conservatives, has written to the First Minister and said that the Health Secretary, Jeane Freeman no longer has the confidence of the public.

The letter comes after it emerged overnight that almost 1,000 hospital patients were discharged to care homes before compulsory Covid-19 testing was enforced. Mr Carlaw says this is significantly more than previously stated.

He says the figures are over three times higher than the previous number given by the Health Secretary, Jeane Freeman.

Earlier in the week think tank, The Common Weal, published a report on the failures which have led to the death toll in care homes. National Records of Scotland (NRS) reported that the Covid-19 related deaths as at 17 May 2020 were 3,546. These are deaths registered in Scotland where Covid-19 was mentioned on the death certificate.

The total number of deaths in Scotland during the week from 11 to 17 May 2020 was 1,415 which is 33% more than the average number of deaths in the same week over the last five years, although a decrease of 49 from the number of excess deaths in the previous week.

NRS have said that more than half of all deaths involving

Covid-19 during the week to 17 May occurred in care homes, although, again, the number of people dying in care homes is falling from previous weeks during the pandemic. Three quarters of registered deaths involving Covid-19 were people aged 75 or over.

Jackson wrote to the First Minister, "It was not inevitable care homes became the frontline, a serious strategic error made it so, and that you and the Health Secretary have, not for the first time in this crisis, failed to be transparent with key information."

He goes on to say, "It is surely impossible to see how in respect of Coronavirus in care homes, public confidence can be maintained in the Cabinet Secretary for Health."

Ms Freeman previously said that only 300 patients were discharged from hospitals to care homes during March to April 15 this year, prior to the new testing regime, as health boards raced to free up capacity.

The real figure, confirmed by the Scottish Government last night, is that 921 patients were released from hospital into care homes during this period.

Mr Carlaw says tthe total figure could be higher as this number does not include 15 April 2020 onwards.



Jackson Carlaw the day before the General Election 2019 in Edinburgh speaking to Conservative Party activists PHOTO ©2019 The Edinburgh Reporter

Jackson Carlaw, Scottish Conservative leader said: "This astonishing revelation poses real questions about the Health Secretary's competence, honesty and transparency.

"The care sector is at crisis point and has been for weeks.

"It was not inevitable that care homes became the frontline, a serious strategic error on behalf of the SNP government made

it so.

“In the light of these events, it is impossible to see how public confidence can be maintained in the Cabinet Secretary for Health.

“Jeane Freeman simply can’t be trusted on care home coronavirus.”

The full text of the letter is as follows –

Dear Nicola,

While much attention will today be on the government’s plans for a phased release from ‘lockdown’, I and others were astonished when it emerged late yesterday that 921 hospital patients were discharged, before mandatory Covid-19 testing was introduced, into care homes. This is significantly higher than the approximately 300 that both you and the Health Secretary, Jeane Freeman, have previously stated in both Parliament and at the Daily Briefing.

This data shows that it was not inevitable care homes became the frontline, a serious strategic error made it so, and that you and the Health Secretary have, not for the first time in this crisis, failed to be transparent with key information.

It also cannot be claimed that this was purely an operational matter for health boards – the approval of the purchase of care home beds was made at a ministerial level. There can be no question that the responsibility for this rests directly with the Scottish Government.

These discharges from hospitals to care homes clearly proceeded without the necessary information to protect care home residents and staff because testing was not deployed quickly enough where it was needed. I have raised this directly on a number of occasions from an early stage and, despite assurances that care homes and their residents were

being effectively protected, this clearly was not the case.

Such a huge discrepancy now requires that the public understand and have access to the full facts. Increasingly, claims of being open and transparent with the public are not matched with the reality and this can only undermine wider trust in information on which the public must be able to rely.

In this instance, the information which now appears to fundamentally contradict previous assertions made, surely demonstrates beyond doubt that the Cabinet Secretary for Health's handling of patient discharges from hospitals into care homes has contributed to the seeding of the Covid 19 virus throughout care homes across Scotland, a sector which we now know has suffered a disproportionate number of deaths.

Given these events and the enormity of the consequences arising, it is surely impossible to see how, in respect of Coronavirus in care homes, public confidence can be maintained in the Cabinet Secretary for Health.

Yours sincerely

Jackson Carlaw CBE MSP

Leader of the Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party