

Johnson warned about damaging public health

Speaking ahead of the Prime Minister's speech which he is expected to make on Sunday evening, Scottish Greens Co-Leader Patrick Harvie MSP said: "Last week the UK claimed the unenviable position of having the highest number of Covid-19 deaths in Europe.

"Despite this it's been suggested that Boris Johnson plans to drastically rollback lifesaving lockdown measures to appease his backbenchers.

"The UK Government's handling of this crisis so far has been catastrophic and the idea that lockdown is to be lifted for populist, rather than public health reasons, is an appalling reflection on the Conservative government's priorities.

"The lack of adequate testing infrastructure in place across the four nations has hindered the effective response and meant that the test, trace isolate strategy employed in the early days of the outbreak had to be abandoned. There can be no doubt that this lack of preparedness has cost lives. A cursory glance at Germany for instance shows what could have been done.

"The UK Government's Brexit obsession shamefully took precedence over joining EU PPE procurement schemes. This ideological idiocy has left frontline health and care workers

unprotected. Greens have called for Covid-19 to be classed as an occupational disease, but let there be no doubt compensation after the fact cannot make up for the ministerial negligence that we have seen.

“The communications strategy employed by the UK Government this week has been dangerous, raising expectations that there is to be a significant rollback of the lockdown measures. There can be no doubt that this strategy has put lives at risk.

“We’ve seen UK Ministers talk in ridiculous terms about workers being addicted to the furlough scheme. Nobody wants to be stuck at home on 80% of their salary but this is a necessary public health provision and ending or reducing furlough payments before it is safe for people to return to work would be an appalling betrayal of millions of workers by Mr Johnson and his Chancellor.

“Whatever the Prime Minister announces this evening, it is vital that the devolution differences are emphasised. Public health in Scotland is the preserve of the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government. I welcome the cross party agreement between Westminster opposition parties on the need to keep putting public health first, and for economic support to continue throughout the crisis. The message from Westminster must not seek to undermine public health at a time of national crisis.”