

# **Cole-Hamilton's claims over meeting during Covid are "simply inaccurate"**

**An outdoor event organised by Scottish Lib Dem leader Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP broke Covid-19 regulations – and now claims that he had special approval have been totally debunked.**

The Edinburgh Western MSP said that he was "allowed to breach Covid rules for the function of democracy" when he convened a public meeting in Gyle Park in August 2020.

Watch [our video here](#) at 27.41. Mr Cole-Hamilton can be heard saying only last month that he obtained special dispensation from the Justice Secretary at the time, and he has also said he sought approval from Police Scotland.

Now The Scottish Government has rejected his claims, while Police Scotland have confirmed the event, which attracted 1,000 people, breached lockdown rules in place at the time.

An investigation by The Edinburgh Reporter, using Freedom of Information, established there is no evidence of the supposed dispensation.

## **A Scottish Government spokesperson**

**said: “No special dispensation whatsoever was given by the Scottish Government to Mr Cole-Hamilton, to suggest otherwise is simply inaccurate.”**

And Edinburgh’s top police officer raised his concerns with council officials over the breach of regulations.

Chief Superintendent Sean Scott, Divisional Commander for Edinburgh, said: “Police Scotland was aware of the planned event. No police presence was required at the event, but local officers patrolled the area as part of routine duties.

“The officers observed the gathering was attended by a larger number of people than was permitted under legislation for live outdoor events and fed this information back to senior officers. The matter was then raised with council officials in relation to Covid-19 legislation.”



Alex Cole Hamilton speaking in St Margaret's Park in 2023 © 2023 Martin McAdam

Mr Cole-Hamilton claimed the meeting called to discuss the hotly debated potential introduction of a Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) in East Craigs, was given the go-ahead by then Justice Minister Humza Yousaf – now First Minister.

He said it was a face-to-face meeting with Mr Yousaf in the Garden Lobby at The Scottish Parliament, but there is no ministerial record of such an event, and the MSP said he does not know exactly when the meeting took place.

At a meeting held in Corstorphine in June, Mr Cole-Hamilton told the audience: "Three years ago I convened a very similar meeting in Gyle Park. It was at the height of the first lockdown. I got special dispensation from the Cabinet Secretary of Justice to breach Covid rules for the function of democracy."

A former Government minister we spoke to said that civil servants are meticulous in communications, and that where a

minister is concerned all meetings are recorded.

However The Scottish Government confirmed that no correspondence between the leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats and the Justice Secretary could be traced.

We also asked The City of Edinburgh Council if they were contacted in this regard and they have no record of any permission sought to use one of the city's parks, or any other kind of permission.

A Scottish Liberal Democrat spokesperson said: "Mr Cole-Hamilton sought approval from both the Justice Secretary and the police for a socially distanced event to take place on a matter of importance to his constituency. Many residents attended along with Conservative and SNP politicians. The police attended and raised no concerns."

During the Partygate scandal, Mr Cole-Hamilton accused Boris Johnson of showing contempt to the British people and demanded his resignation.

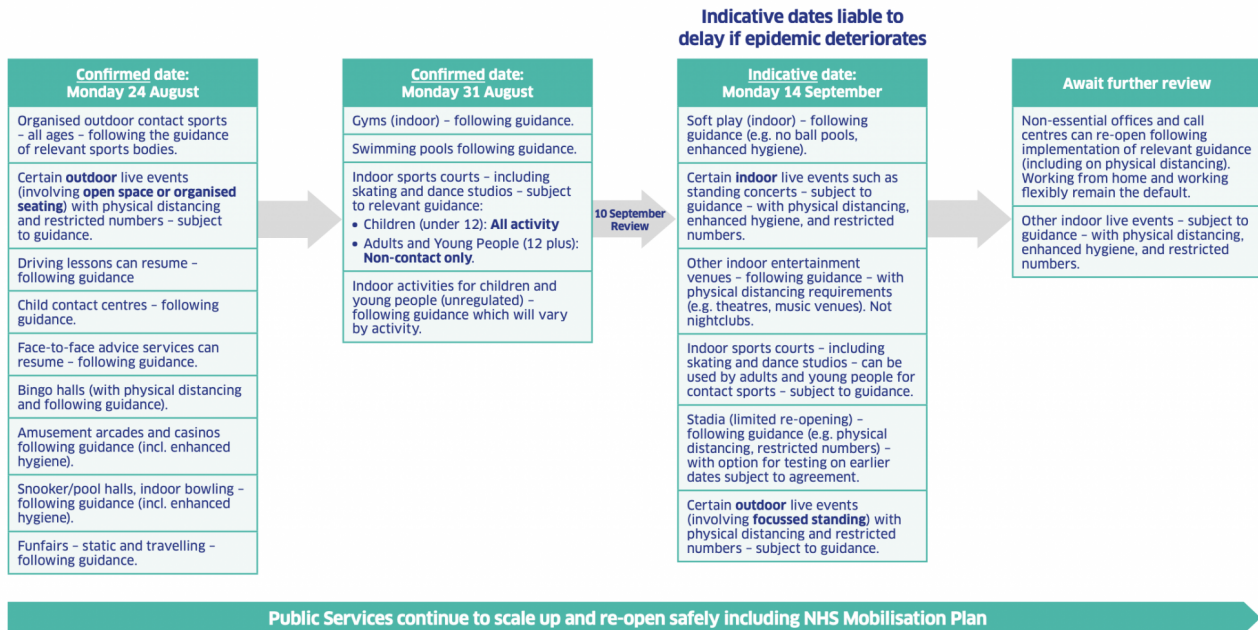
## **Lockdown rules**

As at 28 August the country was subject to Phase 3 regulations. Details of these are shown on the graphic below. One of the measures is that "certain outdoor live events (involving open space or organised seating) with physical distancing and restricted numbers – subject to guidance – might be allowed.

But the situation was changing day by day and week by week. After this on 10 September, the government introduced more stringent measures and restricted indoor and outdoor meetings to no more than six people from two households, reflecting the up to the minute data and case numbers.

Phase 3 regulations looked like this:

Guide to re-opening and scaling up over the remainder of Phase 3. Not all details are shown. Please refer to guidance and Q&A for more details. Relevant guidance and public health advice (such as physical distancing rules and enhanced hygiene measures) will apply to all changes shown below.



## [Public meeting in Gyle Park attracts hundreds](#)

# Low Traffic Neighbourhoods

The transport measures being considered then were dealt with under special Covid rules, mainly under Spaces for People.

The effect of the measures would be similar, but the process at this particular juncture was completely different. The UK Government funded a scheme to install measures to help with social distancing, such as you will have seen all over Edinburgh – black and white bollards to widen pavements and give people space.

There was also a move to create some segregated cycle lanes as more people were cycling rather than taking public transport.

The Scottish Government allocated half of the national funding – a sum of £5.25 million – to Edinburgh, and did not lay down any requirements whatsoever for consultation due to the public health emergency.

The idea was to put in measures for public health reasons just as quickly as possible. The Low traffic Neighbourhood measures in East Craigs were eventually scrapped due to the level of opposition.

Listen to Mr Cole-Hamilton making the claim in his recent speech at 27.41 in the video below.