# Swinney's salary row and NHS crisis spark calls for accountability in Scottish Parliament



## Swinney's Confrontation in Parliament Highlights Conduct Concerns

In a recent session of the Scottish Parliament, a confrontational exchange between First Minister John Swinney and Conservative leader Douglas Ross brought to the forefront serious concerns regarding government accountability and the alarming state of parliamentary conduct. The debate turned particularly contentious around Swinney's handling of alleged salary increases for ministers amidst growing public frustration.

Despite the MSP code of conduct mandating members to treat each other “with courtesy and respect,” tensions flared as Ross challenged Swinney's claims about his salary, which reportedly surged following the lifting of a long-standing freeze. The decision to increase ministerial pay by over £19,000 was confirmed in April, with Swinney maintaining his salary at £135,605. Yet, Ross was quick to refute Swinney's declarations, highlighting a blatant disregard for transparency.

"I have got no worries about sharing that information...,” Swinney disingenuously asserted, doing little to quell the skepticism surrounding his accountability. Heckling from Ross led to a remonstrance from the Speaker, Ms. Johnstone, who warned that such interruptions could evoke severe repercussions. This spectacle raises red flags about the integrity of a government that seems indifferent to its own standards.

In a politically charged moment, Swinney lashed out at the Conservative Party, stating, “I think it says something about the depths that the Conservative Party has now reached that they are not prepared to take anything in good faith across this parliamentary chamber.” Ironically, this inflammatory language stands in stark contrast to the supposed commitment to decorum outlined by the MSP code, making one question whether this is the leadership Scotland deserves in its most challenging times.

Labour MSP Paul Findlay further underscored the inconsistency in conduct enforcement when he noted that while his previous criticisms of the Green Party were deemed unacceptable, Swinney's own caustic remarks toward the Conservatives went unchallenged. Such discrepancies reveal an alarming inconsistency in upholding professional standards in political discourse.

A significant focus of the session was Swinney’s ambitious pledge to create an additional 100,000 GP appointments. Labour’s Findlay condemned this as a “pathetic con,” referring to stark public health data showing a significant decline in GP appointments in recent years. His claims, supported by Public Health Scotland, indicated that under Swinney's leadership, there were 500,000 fewer appointments than the previous year. This disconnection from public concerns raises questions about the government’s competence and priorities.

In defense of his administration, Swinney pointed to a modest rise in the number of GPs, defending the pledges as essential to address crippling health issues like high blood pressure and obesity. Yet, the suggestion of tackling such systemic crises merely with increased numbers of appointments and allied professionals seems woefully inadequate given the pressing needs of the population.

As Swinney faced mounting criticism, Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar brought alarming statistics regarding the state of ambulance services to light. Reports revealed that ambulances had been left waiting outside hospitals for excessive periods, effectively turning car parks into ad hoc emergency wards. Sarwar illustrated this horror story with an example of a 15-hour delay faced by an ambulance at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, encapsulating the gravity of the NHS crisis. His stark assertion that “the party who created Scotland’s NHS crisis will never be the ones to fix it” resonates deeply with the public sentiment increasingly fed up with government failures.

In what can only be described as a tenuous defense, Swinney acknowledged the persistent challenges within the NHS but insisted that improvements were on the horizon. This bold proclamation fails to address immediate issues, making it clear that mere promises are not a substitute for substantive action.

As scrutiny intensifies over conduct and accountability in the Scottish Parliament, the discord between governmental assurances and opposition criticisms reflects broader concerns about the effectiveness of current initiatives. With a government grappling to maintain its credibility while facing thunderous opposition, it becomes imperative to demand genuine accountability and high standards that are supposed to govern our elected officials. The need for transparent, effective governance has never been more urgent, and indeed, the call for a change in leadership that genuinely addresses these pressing issues is echoing louder among the electorate.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25147953.findlay-swinney-given-free-rein-call-tories-disgusting/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.parliament.scot/msps/code-of-conduct> - The Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) outlines the standards of behavior expected from MSPs in their parliamentary duties. It emphasizes the importance of treating others with courtesy and respect, including fellow MSPs, parliamentary staff, and constituents. The code also covers areas such as registration of interests, paid advocacy, and lobbying, ensuring transparency and accountability in parliamentary activities. Compliance with the code is mandatory, and breaches can lead to sanctions imposed by the Parliament.
3. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-ministerial-code-2024-edition/pages/2/> - The Scottish Ministerial Code sets out the standards of conduct for Scottish Ministers, emphasizing high standards of behavior and propriety. It requires Ministers to treat all individuals with consideration and respect, including civil servants, parliamentary colleagues, and staff. The code also outlines principles such as collective responsibility, accountability, openness, and honesty. Ministers are expected to uphold these standards to maintain public trust and ensure the integrity of public life. Breaches of the code can lead to formal complaints and potential sanctions.
4. <https://www.holyrood.com/inside-politics/view%2Cin-context-msp-code-of-conduct> - An article from Holyrood magazine provides context on the MSP Code of Conduct, highlighting its requirements for MSPs to treat others with courtesy and respect. It also discusses the enforcement mechanisms, noting that complaints against MSPs are investigated by the Ethical Standards Commissioner. The article explains that the Commissioner determines the admissibility of complaints and conducts investigations, with reports delivered to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. If a breach is found, the committee may recommend sanctions ranging from temporary suspension to full expulsion from Parliament.
5. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/model-code-conduct-members-devolved-public-bodies-2/pages/2/> - The Model Code of Conduct for Members of Devolved Public Bodies outlines the standards of conduct expected from members, emphasizing key principles such as duty, selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, leadership, and respect. Members are required to act solely in the public interest, avoid conflicts of interest, and treat all individuals with courtesy and respect. The code also addresses issues like discrimination, bullying, and harassment, stating that such conduct is unacceptable and will be considered a breach of the code.
6. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/model-code-conduct-members-devolved-public-bodies-2/pages/3/> - Section 3 of the Model Code of Conduct for Members of Devolved Public Bodies focuses on general conduct, emphasizing the importance of treating everyone with courtesy and respect. It prohibits discrimination, bullying, and harassment, defining such conduct as a breach of the code. The section also outlines members' responsibilities regarding operational management, stating that members should not become involved in operational management unless invited by the Chief Executive. It further emphasizes the importance of respecting the authority of the Chair during meetings and adhering to the principle of collective decision-making.
7. <https://www.parliament.scot/get-involved/lobbying/code-of-conduct-for-lobbying-msps> - The Code of Conduct for Lobbying MSPs sets out the ethical principles that individuals and organizations should respect when lobbying Members of the Scottish Parliament. It emphasizes honesty, integrity, and respect, and prohibits offering payments or benefits to MSPs. The code also requires lobbyists to disclose their identity and the purpose of their lobbying, and to avoid providing false or misleading information. Additionally, it highlights the importance of MSPs ensuring that their staff adhere to the code when acting on their behalf.