

Cash for votes: 11 new breaches, and Russell overruled civil servants

- [Home](#)
- [All News](#)
- Cash for votes: 11 new breaches, and Russell overruled civil servants

6 Jun 2017



The Scottish Conservatives today revealed that in the past four weeks the Scottish Government has made 11 spending or policy announcements that look to have broken purdah rules – every single one in a marginal or battleground seat.

And new documents released under FOI reveal that Mike Russell overruled civil servants by adding political content to an announcement.

The list revealed today, in a letter from Ross Thomson to Leslie Evans, includes:

- On 1 June, an announcement of the expansion of graduate-level apprenticeships. The press release quotes a business in the UK parliament constituency of Gordon constituency, and Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen South.
- On 30 May, £50m for health boards to improve waiting times – coinciding with release of waiting time statistics, and the day of the SNP manifesto launch where the NHS featured, and the party publicised their controversial 'NHSNP' graphic. The press release mentioned NHS Grampian, which covers a number of UK constituencies.
- On the 17th May, £1.5m of innovation spending in Bridge of Allan, in the constituency of Stirling.
- On the 12th May, £2.5m spending on a sub-sea exploration project in Aberdeen, in Aberdeen South.
- On the 10th May, £3.6m for energy products described as 'manufactured in Thornliebank in Glasgow, supporting permanent manufacturing jobs in Glasgow' – in East Renfrewshire, £3.9m for renewable heat in Stirling, and £2.4m for energy projects in Orkney and Shetland.
- On the 17-18th May, 5 videos promoted online celebrating 10 years of the SNP – with Ministers appearing in East Lothian, Edinburgh South West, and Edinburgh West.

Scottish Conservative MSP for the North East Ross Thomson said:

"Millions of pounds of taxpayer funding has been announced, right in the middle of an election.

"It doesn't take a political genius to see the pattern – every one of these

announcements is in an SNP battleground seat.

“This increasingly looks like a systematic targeting of public resources at election targets.

“It stinks. And Nicola Sturgeon’s silence on this growing scandal cannot continue.

“Civil service rules state that no activity that ‘calls into question’ its impartiality should happen. I have written to Leslie Evans to clarify whether the guidance was followed.”

The Scottish Government also announced just under £1 million on Wednesday 26th April 2017, the week before the local elections, for aquaculture. This was in the same week that fishing was a major election issue, after two SNP MPs signed the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation’s Brexit pledge.

Civil servants advised that ‘The wording of the announcement should obviously be as straightforward as possible, given the sensitivities surrounding the various election periods’.

They sent a neutral statement for Special Advisers to clear. But the final version of the press release added explicitly political content, linking the announcement to ‘the importance of EU funding for Scotland.’

This follows the revelation that Fergus Ewing overruled civil servants to make an announcement on funding for crofters.

Ross Thomson added:

“It seems that in this case, the civil servants did the right thing – only for senior SNP figures to add in political content anyway.

“This just shows the arrogance of the SNP, happily ignoring rules designed to protect the impartiality of the civil service.”

Ross Thomson’s letter to Leslie Evans, with a list of further spending announcements, can be found [here](#).

Emails released under FOI on Mike Russell’s announcement of fishing funding can be found [here](#).

The emails show that:

Civil servants discussed the purdah guidelines – and agreed a neutral statement could be made by Fergus Ewing

20 April 2017 12:09

From REDACTED in the Marine Grants Team to REDACTED

‘We have a round of awards under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund which were due to be announced by Mr Ewing at a conference next Friday....’

The projects have been with us since January for decisions and the sign of has just happened through an assessment committee, which included the public and private sector.'

'Grateful for advice on the announcement and if we can announce, does it simply have to go out with no Ministerial commentary?'

The response to this email was entirely redacted in the FOI return.

20 April 2017 13:39

From REDACTED to REDACTED, copied to Cabinet Secretariat inbox

'I don't think that the other awards would be caught by either the local elections guidance or the UK general election guidance – there is no particular reserved/ cross-border angle to the grants, so that's why the UK general election guidance wouldn't bite. All this being the case, I conclude that there is no reason why the announcement should not be made by Mr Ewing in his speech from an elections guidance perspective. It would also be odd to announce some and not all of the grants in a particular round.

The wording of the announcement should obviously be as straightforward as possible, given the sensitivities surrounding the various election periods, but a Ministerial comment would be in order, I think – subject to any thoughts Gillian might have on that from a Comms perspective.'

The announcement was then given to Russell to make – with his team insisting he attended the event

24 April 2017 14:49

From REDACTED to REDACTED

'[I] flagged up that there is high possibility that Mr Russell will make this announcement only if [Redacted] and the team in Brussels can fit it in his programme to attend. I have discussed with [redacted] who are happy for Mr Russell to make it.

Finally, SpADs are also content on the basis that Mr Russell attends the expo.'

Civil servants sent around a draft press release with neutral language...

25 April 2017 11:04

From REDACTED to REDACTED

Re: SEG 17 Press release

'I will circulate a draft news release shortly announcing the £09m EMFF grant'

25 April 2017 14:26

From REDACTED in Acquaculture Policy unit

Re: SEG 17 Press release

'Important that we include a reference to aquaculture – suggested line below.

"Aquaculture provides employment and investment, particularly in some of our most remote, coastal communities. It is worth over £1.8 billion to the Scottish economy, supporting 8,300 jobs. Recent export figures show the potential for future stronger growth.

Salmon is key to this success. We are the world's third largest salmon producer, accounting for 94% of the EU's total production. We also export around 172,000 tonnes globally 48,000 tonnes of which heads to the EU each year – with Heathrow exporting over 50,000 tonnes per annum alone. This is therefore a truly global industry."

25 April 2017 15:02

From REDACTED to REDACTED

'I have tweaked an included your suggested quote into the release. [Redacted] – are you content I share this with comms spads?

Either SpAds or Mike Russell changed the release to include political content

25 April 2017 16:02

From Special Advisor to the First Minister to REDACTED.

Tweaks in attached.

25 April 2017 17:24

From REDACTED to REDACTED

Hello [redacted] CC – Mr Ewing's office for info. Please find attached draft release announcing £0.9m EMFF grant. We would like to issue the release in the morning to coincide with Mr Russell's attendance at Seafood Expo. Can you please confirm if Mr Russell is content.

There is no further correspondence published. The FOI return makes clear that no correspondence was withheld from publication. The final quote was very different to that suggested by civil servants and had added, purely political, content. As no correspondence was withheld from publication – in other words, there appears to have been no further editing by civil servants – this therefore means that either Mr Russell or the First Minister's Special Advisor changed the release.

The final quote with different content from version suggested by civil servants highlighted in italics and outwardly political content in bold:

"Raising the awareness and enhancing the global profile of the Scottish seafood industry will assist the sector as a whole, while helping individual businesses to expand into new markets and increase consumer awareness of their fine products.

"This is just one example of why EU funding is so important as it is helping showcase our fisheries sector, improve the quality of its products and develop more environmentally friendly practices.

"Our fishing industry is a vital part of the rural economy, with our fishing

fleet generating £437 million last year and fish and seafood recording an increased [sic] exports.

“Salmon is key to this success. We are the world’s third largest salmon producer, accounting for 94% of the EU production. Each year we export around 172,000 tonnes globally – of which more than a third heads to the EU, ***illustrating the crucial importance to Scotland of the European marketplace.***”

[SNP challenged on fishing as all 59 Conservative candidates sign Brexit pledge](#)

- [Home](#)
- [All News](#)
- SNP challenged on fishing as all 59 Conservative candidates sign Brexit pledge

6 Jun 2017



The SNP has been challenged to address its “chaotic” stance on fishing and sign the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation (SFF) Brexit pledge to leave the EU and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

On the eve of polling day, the Scottish Conservatives have confirmed that every one of the party’s 59 general election candidates have now signed the pledge.

The Conservative manifesto made a clear commitment to the fishing industry to come out of the EU, the CFP and the London Fisheries Convention.

The SNP manifesto, meanwhile, said that an independent Scotland would remain in the EU and claimed that the disastrous CFP could be “reformed”.

Only two SNP MPs – Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) and Mike Weir (Angus) – have signed the SFF pledge so far. However, both politicians voted against the triggering of Article 50 to leave the EU.

Other senior SNP figures, including Fisheries Minister Fergus Ewing and First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, have refused to sign.

David Duguid, Scottish Conservative candidate for Banff and Buchan, said:

“The SNP’s chaotic and confused position on the EU and fishing has been

exposed in this election.

“They are trying to face both ways – telling fishermen in our coastal communities that they are behind them, while pursuing plans to drag them back into the EU and the CFP at the same time.

“In contrast, the Scottish Conservatives have been absolutely clear – we are coming out of the EU and the CFP and we are ready to seize the huge opportunity afforded by Brexit.

“Every single Scottish Conservative candidate in this election has now signed the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation Brexit pledge.

“Our fishing industry should expect nothing less after the democratic UK-wide vote to leave the EU.

“SNP candidates – and indeed the First Minister – must now say if they will also back our fishing industry.

“Fishermen know that, after four decades, the CFP cannot be reformed from within. The European Fisheries Commissioner has also been clear that Scotland cannot be a full member of the EU and opt out of the CFP.

“The choice in this election for people in coastal communities is clear.

“A vote for the Conservatives is a vote for a future free from the shackles of the CFP, while a vote for the SNP will drag our fishermen back into the EU and the disastrous CFP.”

The SNP has a long-standing policy for an independent Scotland to be a member of the EU: https://www.snp.org/pb_what_is_the_snps_position_on_the_eu

It has been confirmed by the EU fisheries commissioner that any new member of the EU would be tied to the Common Fisheries Policy: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/10/ruth-davidson-nicola-sturgeon-treating-fishermen-utter-contempt/>

SNP MPs Eilidh Whiteford and Mike Weir signed the Brexit fishing pledge from the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation: <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/politics/scottish-politics/413072/snp-mps-sign-fishing-pledge-that-would-keep-scotland-out-of-the-eu/>

[Dugdale challenged to condemn Jones’](#)

[comments on Barnett formula](#)

- [Home](#)
- [All News](#)
- Dugdale challenged to condemn Jones' comments on Barnett formula

6 Jun 2017



Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale has been challenged to disown comments from Carwyn Jones' that he is looking to scrap the Barnett Formula.

The Welsh First Minister said Labour would scrap the way that funding is distributed to the devolved nations if elected in Thursday's general election.

The Scottish Labour manifesto relied on the Barnett formula to fund its spending promises, with the UK party's manifesto also promising huge spending increases in Scotland based on Barnett.

The Conservatives have explicitly promised to keep the Barnett formula, and have challenged Labour to condemn the comments from Mr Jones.

Paul Masterton, Scottish Conservative candidate in East Renfrewshire, said:

"Kezia Dugdale has paraded herself as the defender of the Barnett formula.

"Yet now we learn her colleagues elsewhere in the UK are actively plotting to get rid of it, at huge cost to Scotland.

"It is a staggering u-turn and shows, once again, you cannot trust Labour with the Union.

"She has gone silent on this since Mr Jones spoke out last night. It isn't good enough.

"She must condemn his comments and make it crystal clear that she has a commitment from Jeremy Corbyn that this is not Labour party policy."

Scottish Labour's manifesto relied on Barnett to fund its spending promises:

- Labour will extend the current provision of free school meals to all primary school children in England, paid for by removing the VAT exemption for private schools. Scotland would benefit from the Barnett consequential of this policy, which would allow it to be replicated here. (p.42)
- A Labour government will give councils in England extra funding next year – and Scotland will benefit financially (p.84)

- Labour's pledge to recruit 10,000 more police officers to work on community beats in England and Wales will mean Scotland will benefit from an investment of £70 million. (p.76)
- A Labour government will halt cuts to fire services in England and Wales, and recruit 3,000 new firefighters – investment which would mean a boost to Scotland's valued emergency services (p.79)
- The arts pupil premium we will introduce for every primary school in England – a £160 million a year boost for schools – will mean more money for the Scottish government to invest in arts education. (p.93)

UK Labour's manifesto promised huge spending increases in Scotland based on Barnett:

- The Scottish Parliament will receive a huge funding increase from our policies, and massive numbers of Scots will benefit from our plans in areas reserved to Westminster (p.104).
- Labour said that £6.1bn would be released for the devolved nations in Barnett consequential.

Kezia Dugdale has previously said that scrapping the Barnett formula would lead to £4 billion in cuts and could cost 138,000 jobs

- "Whether it's the Tories or the SNP who set out to scrap the Barnett formula – it still means £4 billion in cuts. Four billion pounds. That's the equivalent of the entire Scottish schools budget or twice the budget for the whole of the NHS in Greater Glasgow and Clyde. Gone. (Kezia Dugdale, 12 January 2015, [link](#))
- 'Alex Salmond's plans to scrap the Barnett formula means £4 billion worth of cuts' (12 January 2015, [link](#))
- 'Buy a Daily Record to read why I'm backing Nicola Sturgeon's efforts to protect the Barnett formula.' (14 February 2016, [link](#))
- 'I'll keep the Barnett Formula today, tomorrow, forever @JimforScotland #Scotdebates' (8 April 2015, [link](#))
- 'Scrapping the Barnett Formula for Full Fiscal Autonomy is economic madness and would cost 138,000 jobs' (6 January 2014, [link](#))

Ian Murray has said Barnett was 'incredibly important' to Scotland

Ian Murray: "It is incredibly important that Scotland's position in the UK is maintained through the block grant and the Barnett formula" (Ian Murray, *Hansard*, 21 July 2016, [link](#)).

[Welsh Labour want to scrap Barnett Formula](#)



Responding to the news that Carwyn Jones has said that Welsh Labour would scrap the Barnett Formula, Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

“This is total chaos. The Scottish Labour manifesto is based on the Barnett formula operating – under their plans, spending on policies from arts education to council funding in England is supposed to lead to an increase in the Scottish budget.

“In the past, Kezia Dugdale has actually said that scrapping it would lead to £4 billion in cuts for Scotland.

“The Conservatives have explicitly promised to keep the Barnett formula.

“Jeremy Corbyn needs to come clean – and quick. Will Labour keep the Barnett formula? If they will, why is Labour in Wales saying they won’t?

“And if they won’t, why is it used in their manifesto and how much will Scotland lose if they cut it?”

Scottish Labour’s manifesto relied on Barnett to fund its spending promises:

The manifesto said:

- Labour will extend the current provision of free school meals to all primary school children in England, paid for by removing the VAT exemption for private schools. Scotland would benefit from the Barnett consequential of this policy, which would allow it to be replicated here. (p.42)
- A Labour government will give councils in England extra funding next year – and Scotland will benefit financially (p.84)
- Labour’s pledge to recruit 10,000 more police officers to work on community beats in England and Wales will mean Scotland will benefit from an investment of £70 million. (p.76)
- A Labour government will halt cuts to fire services in England and Wales, and recruit 3,000 new firefighters – investment which would mean a boost to Scotland’s valued emergency services (p.79)
- The arts pupil premium we will introduce for every primary school in England – a £160 million a year boost for schools – will mean more money for the Scottish government to invest in arts education. (p.93)

UK Labour’s manifesto promised huge spending increases in Scotland based on Barnett:

- The Scottish Parliament will receive a huge funding increase from our policies, and massive numbers of Scots will benefit from our plans in areas reserved to Westminster (p.104).

Ian Murray has said said Barnett was ‘incredibly important’ to Scotland

- Ian Murray: “It is incredibly important that Scotland’s position in the UK is maintained through the block grant and the Barnett formula” (Ian Murray, *Hansard*, 21 July 2016, [link](#)).

Kezia Dugdale has previously said that scrapping the Barnett formula would lead to £4 billion in cuts and could cost 138,000 jobs:

- ‘Alex Salmond’s plans to scrap the Barnett formula means £4 billion worth of cuts’ (12 January 2015, [link](#))
- ‘Buy a Daily Record to read why I’m backing Nicola Sturgeon’s efforts to protect the Barnett formula.’ (14 February 2016, [link](#))
- ‘I’ll keep the Barnett Formula today, tomorrow, forever @JimforScotland #Scotdebates’ (8 April 2015, [link](#))
- ‘Scrapping the Barnett Formula for Full Fiscal Autonomy is economic madness and would cost 138,000 jobs’ (6 January 2014, [link](#))

The Scottish Conservative manifesto reads:

‘We will continue to work in partnership with the Scottish and Welsh governments and the Northern Ireland Executive, in a relationship underpinned by pooling and sharing resources through the Barnett Formula’ (*Scottish Conservative Manifesto 2017*, [link](#)).

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

- [Home](#)
- [All News](#)
- Desperate Sturgeon blames everyone else for her education failings

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>