

# Sturgeon under pressure as 'systematic' spending in election periods revealed

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Ross Thomson is calling on Nicola Sturgeon to come clean about the sustained spending announcements made during previous general election campaigns.

The Conservative MSP has written again to Leslie Evans, the Permanent Secretary to the Scottish Government, calling on her to publish her investigation into the £8million investment into Glasgow and demanding a full investigation into what appears to be a systematic approach to spending announcements in previous election periods.

On Friday, the Permanent Secretary dismissed a complaint about the announcement of £8.35million development funding for Glasgow, which had been made just 48 hours before voters went to the polls in the council election.

She insisted the Scottish Government's reputation was 'unblemished'.

Announcements in previous election campaigns include:

- Over £300m of government funding announced in two separate tranches to keep energy bills low. These were made during the general election campaign period, when the Labour Party was explicitly campaigning on a pledge to freeze energy bills and made the cost of living a central plank of their general election campaign.
- Nearly £2m for community groups across Scotland – with several projects singled out in the Government press release in target seats: Gordon, Glasgow North East Kircaldy and Cowdenbeath, and Stirling.

In his letter to the Permanent Secretary, Ross Thomson argues:

- Leslie Evans' investigation into the Glasgow announcement needs to be published. • The circumstances surrounding the 16 other announcements in previous election campaigns need to be investigated in full, and the content of that investigation also need to be published.
- The concern is not that the Civil Service 'designed' policy to influence election campaigns. The concern is that the Scottish Government, both its

elected politicians and impartial Civil Servants, undertook activity which did 'call into question' their impartiality.

**Scottish Conservative MSP for the North East, Ross Thomson said:**

"When voters elect a government, they put their trust in the Government of the day.

"They trust that public money will be spent properly and they trust that the Civil Service supporting the government will be, and will be seen to be, completely impartial.

"I am now afraid that trust is being undermined.

"The First Minister needs to stop hiding from the issue.

"She needs to explain to the electorate why the SNP government has made spending announcement after spending announcement in communities across Scotland when the same communities are being asked to vote for her party.

"And the Civil Service need to protect their reputation for impartiality. They need to publish their investigation into the Glasgow spending announcement, they need to investigate what appear to be systematic and targeted spending announcements in recent elections, and they need to publish these findings in full too.

"Unless and until this happens, this scandal will grow – and voters across Scotland will rightly ask why they should put their trust in the SNP again".

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You can read a copy of Ross' letter [here](#).

**Local elections 2017 – three week campaign**

- **£1m to individual crofters.** 'Over £948,000 has been awarded to help crofters in some of Scotland's most rural and remote communities benefit from better housing. 29 crofters will share the funding which enables them to build or improve homes, helping to retain and attract people to rural communities' (*Scottish Government press release*, 25 April 2017, [link](#)).
- **£1m for Seafood Scotland.** 'Raising the awareness and enhancing the global profile of the Scottish seafood industry will assist the sector as a whole...This is just one example of why EU funding is so important...Our fishing industry is a vital part of the rural economy' (*Scottish Government press release*, 26 April 2017, [link](#)).

This announcement came just a day after the SNP was plunged into a row when two SNP MPs contradicted SNP policy to take fishermen back into the CFP by signing a pledge committing to keep them out (*Courier*, 25 April 2017, [link](#)).

In relation to the role that Marine Scotland plays in this allocation, I would again note this section of the guidance: 'National devolved public bodies spend public money and make public announcements, use Scottish

Government property and can employ civil servants. This guidance therefore also applies to their activities’.

- **Progress report into infrastructure spend across Scotland.** ‘Significant progress continues to be made in delivering our infrastructure investment plan, which is good for jobs, good for the economy, and good for Scotland’ (Scottish Government press release, 26 April 2017, [link](#)).

The report provides updates on projects across Scotland: 9 specific major road infrastructure projects, 5 specific ferry projects, 4 specific rail projects, 5 specific completed NHS projects, 4 specific ongoing NHS projects, and 18 specific completed schools (*Progress Report*, Scottish Government, 26 April 2017, [link](#)). The First Minister’s Chief of Staff herself promoted the report on social media, tweeting the figures for the North East to the SNP’s political account and the Press and Journal. I would note that the guidance states: ‘national announcements by the Scottish Government may have a particular impact on local areas, for example, the publication of policy statements which have a specific local dimension’.

- These are in addition to the announcement of 2 May 2017 in Glasgow.

### **General Election 2015 – six week campaign**

- **£1.9m for community groups across Scotland.** The Scottish Government minister is quoted in the release saying: ‘I know that the projects announced today will make a real and lasting difference at a local level’ (Scottish Government press release, 2 April 2015, [link](#)).

Investment singled out by the Scottish Government in the release include target seats: Ellon in the Gordon constituency, Lambhill Stables in the Glasgow North East constituency, support for Greener Kirkcaldy in the seat of the former Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown’s seat, and nearly £150,000 for a community enterprise in the Stirling constituency.

- **Over £100m to ‘fight fuel poverty’.** The release states: ‘Scotland’s most vulnerable households will receive help to make their homes warmer and cheaper to heat thanks to a £103 million investment to tackle fuel poverty’. It goes on to break the full amount down by local area (Scottish Government press release, 3 April 2015, [link](#)).

This announcement was made during a campaign when the Labour party were explicitly campaigning across the UK on a pledge to freeze energy bills.

- **£224m for ‘tackling fuel poverty’.** Margaret Burgess, the Housing Minister, states: ‘By making sure people in the islands and in more rural parts of the country, have the same chances to make their homes, warmer, cheaper and easier to heat, we are tackling the inequalities that exist in our country’ (Scottish Government press release, 22 April 2015, [link](#)).

This announcement was, again, made during a campaign when the Labour party were explicitly campaigning across the UK on a pledge to freeze energy bills – and less than three weeks after the £100m announcement also on fuel poverty

- **£840,000 for trade union members.** The First Minister herself made this announcement, stating: 'I want to see every person in Scotland given the opportunity to get on in life and improve on the skills they already possess, and investing in our workforce is an important part of this' (*Scottish Government Press Release*, 21 April 2015, [link](#)).
- **£120,000 in local announcements to support veterans.** Keith Brown commented: 'The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that no member of the armed forces, service family member or veteran in Scotland faces disadvantage when accessing services and support' (*Scottish Government Press Release*, 30 April 2015, [link](#)).

The location of announcements include Edinburgh, Dundee, Ayrshire, Glasgow, Renfrewshire and the Scottish Borders. **European Elections 2014 – three week campaign**

- **£6.5m for new quayside at Nigg Energy Park.** First Minister Alex Salmond announced the funding on a visit to Nigg Energy Park (*Scottish Government Press Release*, 2 May 2014, [link](#)).
- **£2.1m in CashBack funding.** 'The Scottish Government has today announced that more than £2 million is to be invested to create life-changing opportunities for vulnerable young people' (*Scottish Government Press Release*, 6 May 2014, [link](#)).
- **£2.25m for 29 schools of rugby across Scotland.** The Scottish Government release specifically identifies Ayrshire as benefitting: 'One region in particular that has benefited from CashBack funding is Ayrshire, which now has over 3,600 registered players in clubs and schools across Ayr, Cumnock, Carrick, Marr, Kilmarnock, Irvine, Ardrossan and Garnock' (*Scottish Government Press Release*, 7 May 2014, [link](#)).
- **170 new homes in 4 areas.** Housing Minister, Margaret Burgess, welcomed the announcement by advocating: 'will deliver over 170 brand new and affordable homes to rent in Rosyth, Aberdeen, Inverness and Ardersier'.

She also used the Government press release to criticise the Westminster Government: 'Despite Westminster's cuts to our capital budget the Scottish Government is doing everything possible to stimulate growth, maximise our investment in housing and deliver on our target of 30,000 new, affordable homes over the lifetime of this Parliament' (*Scottish Government Press Release*, 8 May 2014, [link](#)).

- **£15m for Green Homes Cashback Scheme.** This announcement was used to make the case for Scottish Independence – during the period leading up to the European elections and in the same year as the Independence referendum. The Minister for Energy, Fergus Ewing, is quoted in the release: 'This new phase of Green Homes Cashback underlines our ongoing commitment to energy efficiency – we are doing all we can under existing arrangements to provide practical support to households. What's clear however is that we need the full powers of independence' (*Scottish Government Press Release*, 9 May 2014, [link](#)).
- **£2.1m to 28 specific organisations to help communities across Scotland.** The announcement states: 'Enterprising third sector organisations will benefit from a further £2.1 million in grants to help them deliver services to vulnerable people in communities across Scotland. The cash,

spread between 28 organisations, will be awarded through the Enterprise Ready Fund' (*Scottish Government Press Release*, 13 May 2014, [link](#)).

- **£40m for affordable housing.** Nicola Sturgeon, then Deputy First Minister, announced £40m more for the Help to Buy scheme, stating: 'This additional £40 million funding will allow more people in Scotland to buy their first home and continue to make it easier for 'second-steppers' and others to move to a new property' (*Scottish Government Press Release*, 16 May 2014, [link](#)).
- **£3.5m for 4 projects in Islay, Edinburgh, Fintry and Inverness.** The Energy Minister welcomed the announcement by stating: 'This latest round of Scottish Enterprise funding underlines the Scottish Government's commitment to Scotland's growing renewables sector' (*Scottish Government Press Release*, 21 May 2014, [link](#)).