

Scotland Office costs back in the spotlight

The Secretary of State for Scotland David Mundell MP may have retained his position in the Cabinet reshuffle at the beginning of the week, but no matter who is in the office Deidre Brock MP for Edinburgh Northern and Leith persists in questioning the merits of it, and in particular the expense of running it.

She has previously asked many questions about Mr Mundell's spending on social media advertising, and has now asked how much it costs to run Scotland Office buildings, both Scotland House in Melville Crescent here in the capital and in London at Dover House.



The answer to her latest written question is that with a slight dip in 2013-14 the costs of running Dover House doubled in five years to an eye watering £1 million in the period 2015-16, only to be reduced again to just over £600,000 in the last financial year 2016-17.

The costs of running Melville Crescent have gone up and down but increased once more to £253,217 last year. (See the tables of costs below)

Ms Brock eyes these costs as money badly spent.

In 2004 when a similar question was tabled asking the then Secretary of State for Scotland Alastair Darling how much rent was paid for both buildings the total for the two was less than £150,000. The rates paid for both amounted to about £180,000 and these figures combined are still much less than is currently spent.

The Edinburgh MP said : “Every penny that the Scotland Office spends is money that doesn’t get spent on services in Scotland. It costs £854,673 for David Mundell to rent and occupy plush offices in listed buildings in London and Edinburgh. That’s on top of the £686,166 on spin doctors, the £61,188 on events, and the thousands on social media advertising.

“All that money is being spent by a department that has hardly any governing responsibilities. On the one occasion that the post of Scottish Secretary might have been useful in recent years – standing up for Scotland in the Brexit negotiations – David Mundell was posted missing. Instead of bringing forward the amendments to the Brexit Bill to protect the rights and responsibilities of the Scottish Parliament as he promised, we saw nothing but excuses as the deadline passed and a hope that something would be done in the House of Lords to fix it.

“The Scotland Office is just a propaganda machine churning out endless negativity aimed at the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament. In a recent committee meeting I asked David Mundell why his costs were so high and why his spindoctor costs had gone through the roof. He told me it was the fault of the Scottish Government agitating for change, the referendum and having to implement the recommendations of the Smith Commission. He didn’t tell us why he needed spin doctors to pass new laws, though.

“The Scotland Office is an out-of-date and decrepit institution that does nothing to help Scotland. It’s time it was closed.”

We asked the Scotland Office for their response.

A UK Government spokesman said: “These claims are utter nonsense.”



David Mundell at Edinburgh International Book Festival ©2017 John Preece

The Secretary of State [refused to answer](#) Ms Brock's recent question about how much the Scotland Office had paid in relation to advertising to the Leith Agency and Carat Ltd on the grounds of 'commercial sensitivity'.

But there are three key personnel at the Scotland Office as listed below, and they were all included in a [Select Committee](#) session on the work of the Scotland Office and its role in the on-going Brexit negotiations in October 2017.

- [Lord Keen of Elie QC](#), HM Advocate General for Scotland
- [Rt Hon David Mundell MP](#), Secretary of State for Scotland
- [Lord Ian Duncan of Springbank](#), Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Scotland

During that committee Ms Brock pointed out that the Scotland Office had grown from 5 employees post-devolution to a current 71, and adding in the 50 staff in the Advocate General's office takes this number to 121.

She claimed that the staff costs now approach £9 million and asked how that was justified given that the responsibilities of the office had decreased and might decrease even further.

Mr Mundell denied that the responsibilities had decreased and claimed that with Brexit and other constitutional debates there are significant matters to deal with.

Ms Brock pressed the Secretary of State on the matter of his departmental spending on communications which has risen from £108,439 in 2010 to £690,000 in 2016-17. Further she raised the issue of the spending on social media advertising which we have written about before [here](#).

Costs of running Melville Crescent and Dover House

The costs of running the two offices were confirmed in an answer by The Secretary of State to Ms Brock's question on 7 December 2017 :

Melville Crescent	£253,217
Dover House	£601,456

The costs of the five previous financial years were confirmed in an answer by The Secretary of State to Ms Brock on 10 January 2018:

2015-16

Melville Crescent	£ 178,614.71
Dover House	£1,018,097.72

2014-15

Melville Crescent	£254,502.50
Dover House	£695,759.63

2013-14

Melville Crescent	£441,257.73
Dover House	£363,878.24

2012-13

Melville Crescent	£368,536.75
Dover House	£514,693.29

2011-12

Melville Crescent	£341,298.11
Dover House	£507,410.07