

£300,000 to drive up participation in culture and the arts

Speaking at this year's Heritage Volunteering UK Conference the Economy Secretary, Ken Skates announced that the Welsh Government's successful [Fusion programme](#), which engaged nearly 5000 people in culture and the arts in its pilot phase, would continue for another year as a result of £280,000 of Welsh Government funding.

Since its inception in 2015 the Fusion programme has delivered a huge range of projects to young people and adults that have enabled them to widen their horizons and increase their confidence, skills and qualifications by taking part in cultural activities. It has seen young people taking over the running of museums and castles, famous artworks being taken into primary schools, and opera being performed on school buses.

And a range of adult volunteering opportunities in museums and arts bodies have helped adults to gain new skills and qualifications that in some cases have been a stepping stone into work.

The latest round of Fusion funding will support a new phase of the programme focused on partnership working in some of Wales' most disadvantaged areas and concentrated on the priority areas of early years, employability and skills, learning and health and well being.

It will also work to increase opportunities for people to volunteer with cultural and arts bodies.

Speaking about the extension of the Fusion programme, Ken Skates said:

"We know that culture and the arts can make a real difference to people's lives and can help to drive confidence, open up interests that can last a life time, increase skills levels and help people into employment and training.

"The pilot phase of our Fusion programme was a real success, engaging nearly 5000 people in culture and the arts and enabling them to get involved in a huge range of projects.

"I am therefore delighted that we have been able to extend the programme for a further year and will be able to provide £280,000 to local authorities, housing associations and charities to increase opportunities for people through culture.

"I am also pleased to announce partnership between the Welsh Government and the Welsh Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) who will work to develop and support cultural volunteering and the Kids is Museums charity who will continue their innovative, empowering work with young people. Both will be focussing on those who are

hardest to reach and stand to gain the most.”

Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales has been leading the research and practice on addressing poverty and exclusion through cultural participation on the pioneering Fusion programme. Nia Williams, the Museum’s Director of Learning and Engagement said:

“We very much welcome this funding announcement by the Cabinet Secretary, for a programme which has proven its success in engaging people with their heritage and culture and has also enabled organisations from different sectors to tackle the impact of poverty in Wales together.

“At Amgueddfa Cymru for example, our Volunteer Co-ordinator has conducted workshops for partners involved in the Pioneer Areas across Wales in volunteer management and partnership working. Five pioneer areas have received this training with over 50 attendees so far.

“Thanks to continued funding our work in supporting projects all over Wales will continue.”

[Green Party slams Conservative migration target](#)



8 May 2017

The Green Party has condemned the alleged Conservative Party manifesto pledge to cut net migration to tens of thousands [1].

Jonathan Bartley, Green Party co-leader, said:

“The Tories have repeatedly failed to reach this target since it was first in their manifesto in 2010 but in the process have split up families and encouraged hostility towards migrants.

“It’s time the Conservative Party stopped trying to pin the blame for unemployment, the housing shortage and NHS overcrowding on migrants and acknowledged the abject failure of its own policies, cuts and severe underinvestment.”

Notes:

1. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-39840503>

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8 May 2017



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".

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](#)).
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[Green Party makes formal complaint to BBC over local elections coverage](#)



8 May 2017

***Letter accuses BBC of breaching its fair coverage guidelines**

***Greens won 40 seats while UKIP won just 1**

***Co-leader Jonathan Bartley: “It’s time the BBC recognised the widespread support for our positive vision for Britain”**

The Green Party has today (May 7) sent the BBC a letter of complaint over the broadcaster’s coverage of the May 4 local elections results.

The BBC’s guidelines [1] state the Green Party should receive coverage “proportionate to the larger parties” and “more than those parties with less evidence of past or current electoral support or fewer candidates”.

The Greens fielded a record number of candidates in this round of local elections, overtaking UKIP, [2] and 40 Green councillors were elected, compared to UKIP's one. However, with the exception of a few items, most of the BBC's coverage failed to report the Green Party's results, while giving disproportionate coverage to UKIP.

Jonathan Bartley, Green Party co-leader, said:

"It's time the BBC recognised the strength of the Green movement and the widespread support for our positive vision for Britain as a confident and caring country. When people see what we stand for, they vote Green.

"While UKIP makes cheap attempts to win headlines with blatantly Islamophobic policies [3], Greens are out making a difference to their local communities and this contrast was made clear in Friday's election results. The Green Party is making gains across the country – from the Orkney Islands to the Isle of Wight – and it's only fair we're given proportionate coverage by our national broadcaster."

Notes:

1. <http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/pdfs/2017local-electionguidelines.pdf>
2. http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/ukip-overtaken-by-greens-in-english-council-seats-contested-big-drop_uk_58e68cb2e4b0773c0d3f1e26
3. http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/ukip-muslim-face-veil_uk_58fdfd2ae4b018a9ce5cdd3b

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[Labour to end NHS car park charges](#)

The next

Labour government will make parking at NHS England hospitals free for patients,

visitors and NHS staff. Labour created the NHS to be free at the point of use,

so the next Labour government will eradicate the hidden charges of car parking

fees.

Labour

will increase the rate of Insurance Premium Tax to 20% for private healthcare

insurance products to fund the policy, replacing the £162 million England's underfunded hospitals currently raise from car parking charges by scrapping the subsidy for people that can afford it, rather than charging people who can't.

Last month, a Freedom of Information request by Unison revealed some hospitals are charging staff, including nurses struggling with low wages, nearly £100 a month to park, resulting in reports of nurses having to rush out in between appointments to move their cars and avoid fines.

All of Labour's new spending commitments are fully costed and transparent. This policy will be paid for by a new charge on private healthcare insurance.

Announcing the policy, Jeremy Corbyn, Leader of the Labour Party, said:

"Labour will end hospital parking charges, which place an unfair and unnecessary burden on families, patients and NHS staff. Hospital parking charges are a tax on serious illnesses.

"Our hospitals are struggling from under-funding at the hands of Theresa May's Conservative government, but the gap should not be filled by charging sick patients, anxious relatives and already hard-pressed NHS staff for an essential service.

"Our NHS needs a Labour government that will stand up for the many, not the few."