# Scottish Government’s £100 million PR spend sparks concerns over transparency and trust



The Scottish Government's recent spending spree on public relations has raised eyebrows, as figures reveal an astonishing investment exceeding £100 million in just three years. This outlay funds the employment of 642 public relations professionals across 94 Scottish public bodies, each tasked with presenting their respective institution in the best possible light. According to Michael Blackley’s reporting in the Scottish Daily Mail, this monumental cost underscores the Scottish National Party's (SNP) sprawling PR apparatus, which raises critical questions about transparency and accountability in governance.

As Scotland grapples with pressing issues, the absurdity of such extensive investment in spin is stark. It is reminiscent of an era when the state needed to convince its citizens of its successes rather than simply delivering credible governance. The money, ostensibly spent to promote a well-running government, seems to indicate a need to mask shortcomings amidst a public increasingly wary of governmental obfuscation.

Critics argue that substantial spending on spin has become synonymous with a lack of accountability and transparency within the Scottish Government. The public has witnessed various episodes where the SNP’s prioritisation of public relations over open communication has diminished trust between citizens and their leaders. The recent handling of a Covid-19 outbreak in central Edinburgh starkly exemplifies this lack of accountability. Despite the outbreak being traced to an international conference, the public was not informed for 69 days, a significant delay for a situation that could have had widespread implications. This breach of trust highlighted a troubling pattern of governance under Nicola Sturgeon, where critical information was withheld, only coming to light through investigative reports rather than the government’s own disclosures.

The current atmosphere within the government appears deeply entrenched in secrecy. During the UK Covid inquiry, revelations emerged that Sturgeon and key ministers had deleted all relevant WhatsApp messages, further casting shadows over transparency efforts. The deleted messages represent not just lost information but a significant impediment to understanding decision-making processes during a time of crisis. Sturgeon’s insistence that these actions align with government policy has done little to quell public concern. Many argue that this indicates a predisposition towards secrecy rather than the accountability that democracy demands.

In the broader context, the actions of the Scottish Government amid these scandals raise longstanding questions about its commitment to open governance. The reality, as suggested by critics, is that an expansive cadre of spin doctors aimed at controlling information rather than disseminating it creates an imbalance in the relationship between the electorate and its leaders. Journalists, tasked with uncovering the truth, often find themselves outmanned and outgunned by a government more invested in shaping narratives than in fostering open dialogue with the public.

The implications of such a substantial investment in public relations are far-reaching. It calls into question the integrity of a government that chooses to deploy such resources in ways that might insulate itself from scrutiny while failing to address pressing public needs. The public is left to wonder whether the exorbitant budget for spin reflects an understanding of their needs or a strategic effort to pacify dissent through manipulation rather than truth.

At its core, the SNP's approach raises a crucial ethical dilemma: can a government that invests heavily in safeguarding its image against criticism genuinely claim to prioritise the well-being of its citizens? If the Scottish Government continues to cloak itself in spin at such an exorbitant cost, it risks trading credibility for ephemeral public relations victories. Ultimately, it is the loss of public trust that poses the greatest danger—a trust built not just on adherence to policies but on the very openness and accountability that Scottish citizens deserve.

When governance is perceived as more about managing public perception than engaging in genuine dialogue, democracy itself is undermined. The SNP must reflect on whether its strategies align with the values of transparency and public service it claims to uphold. Trust cannot be bought; it must be earned through actions that demonstrate a commitment to the public's right to know. Hence, as the government advances its public relations agenda, it must recognise the pivotal truth that even the most well-crafted messages cannot obscure the reality of accountability.

### Reference Map

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14725075/STEPHEN-DAISLEY-SNPs-100m-empire-spin-comes-cost-money-buy-credibility-trust-voters.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14725075/STEPHEN-DAISLEY-SNPs-100m-empire-spin-comes-cost-money-buy-credibility-trust-voters.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - An article by Stephen Daisley in the Daily Mail discusses the Scottish Government's expenditure of over £100 million on public relations, employing 642 spin doctors across 94 public bodies. The piece criticizes this spending, suggesting it undermines transparency and accountability, and questions the effectiveness of such an extensive PR operation in fostering public trust.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-68032233> - The BBC reports that during the UK Covid inquiry, it was revealed that former First Minister Nicola Sturgeon had deleted all her WhatsApp messages related to the pandemic. This revelation has raised concerns about transparency and accountability within the Scottish Government's handling of the crisis.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/jan/19/nicola-sturgeon-deleted-all-pandemic-whatsapps-covid-inquiry-hears> - The Guardian reports that during the UK Covid inquiry, it was disclosed that Nicola Sturgeon, along with other senior ministers and health officials, deleted all their WhatsApp messages related to the Covid pandemic. This has led to criticism and questions about the government's commitment to transparency during the crisis.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-68152037> - BBC News reports that Nicola Sturgeon admitted to deleting her WhatsApp messages during the pandemic but denied presiding over a culture of secrecy. She stated that decisions were not made via informal messages and that the deletions were in line with government policy.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/oct/31/sturgeon-refuses-to-say-if-she-kept-pandemic-whatsapp-messages> - The Guardian reports that Nicola Sturgeon refused to confirm whether she retained or deleted her WhatsApp messages from the pandemic period. She stated she was committed to full transparency but did not disclose the status of her messages, leading to further scrutiny.
7. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/nicola-sturgeon-covid-pandemic-whatsapp-messages-inquiry-b1133547.html> - The Evening Standard reports that during the UK Covid-19 Inquiry, it was revealed that Nicola Sturgeon’s WhatsApp messages from the pandemic period were all deleted. This has raised concerns about the government's transparency and accountability during the crisis.