# Keir Starmer faces scrutiny over Scotland's Lord Advocate amid SNP investigation



Keir Starmer, the new Labour Prime Minister, is already facing significant scrutiny over the contentious dual role of Scotland’s Lord Advocate, currently held by Dorothy Bain KC. This issue has come to a head amid the explosive police investigation into the Scottish National Party (SNP) finances, known as Operation Branchform, exposing just how out of touch his government may be with pressing ethical concerns.

In a tense exchange during Prime Minister's Questions, Conservative MP John Cooper raised a critical point about the ethical implications of a figure so deeply intertwined with the SNP's cabinet. “Incredibly, in Scotland we have a situation where the head of prosecutions there, the Lord Advocate, does sit in Cabinet,” he stated. This is a clear failure of oversight, especially compared to established practices in England and Wales where such roles are kept strictly separated to ensure accountability.

Starmer, seemingly reluctant to tackle the issue head-on, pointed fingers back at the SNP to resolve the matter. “The SNP has not acted on this. They need to bring forward proposals now to deal with a problem that’s been sitting there for a very long time,” he remarked. This hesitation exposes a troubling trend of evading responsibility at a time when decisive leadership is essential. Critics have rightly called out that such dual roles create unavoidable conflicts of interest, further complicating matters amid the ongoing police investigation into former First Minister Nicola Sturgeon’s questionable financial dealings.

Scottish legal expert Thomas Leonard Ross KC stressed that it is Westminster’s responsibility to correct this structure established by the Scotland Act of 1998, which inadequately devolved powers without proper safeguards. “Sir Keir should get busy sorting it out at Westminster while he holds such a huge majority,” he urged. The irony here is that Starmer now occupies the position of power necessary to effect change yet seems unwilling to confront the SNP's failures head-on.

Joanna Cherry KC, a former SNP MP, added to the controversy by suggesting that the problem isn't solely the fault of the SNP. “The Lord Advocate’s dual role is a long-standing problem not of the SNP’s making,” she said, attempting to shift the blame away from a party that has been mired in controversy. Even though past amendment attempts to rectify this situation were sidelined by both the Conservatives and Labour, Starmer's government now risks perpetuating this conflict of interest.

Despite reassurances from a spokesperson for the Scottish Government that the roles are dictated by legislation only amendable by Westminster, it raises uncomfortable questions around the Labour party’s commitment to meaningful reform. Justice Secretary claims readiness to engage with the Secretary of State for Scotland, but inaction amidst serious allegations brings this commitment into question.

Operation Branchform, intensifying since its inception in July 2021, has sparked a media frenzy, particularly following the indictment of Peter Murrell, former chief executive of the SNP, over serious accusations of embezzlement. The Lord Advocate’s withdrawal from decisions surrounding this investigation accentuates what seems to be a catastrophic failure to maintain independence and accountability in Scotland's legal processes.

As the Scottish Government dabbles in discussions about the separation of roles, they have yet to produce tangible proposals, thereby prolonging the debate and shifting responsibility away from those in power. The developments expose a glaring need for scrutiny over the Labour government's promises of integrity and accountability, especially at a time when the public's trust is fragile. If Starmer truly cares about justice and reform, he must act decisively rather than allowing political woes to fester unchallenged.

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

## References

* <https://www.politico.eu/article/scottish-labour-keir-starmer-anas-sarwar-scotland-elections/> - This article discusses the challenges Scottish Labour faces due to the current political climate involving Keir Starmer and his impact on Scottish politics. It highlights concerns about the party's strategy and performance in light of broader UK political developments.
* [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leader\_of\_the\_Labour\_Party\_(UK)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leader_of_the_Labour_Party_%28UK%29) - This Wikipedia page provides background information on Keir Starmer's role as the leader of the Labour Party, including his election and responsibilities. It helps contextualize his position and influence within the party.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This is the original source article discussing the controversy surrounding Keir Starmer and the dual role of Scotland's Lord Advocate, Dorothy Bain KC, amid the Operation Branchform investigation. It highlights concerns about accountability and oversight.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-64865452> - This BBC article might discuss the ongoing Operation Branchform investigation and its implications for the SNP and Scottish politics. It could provide updates on the financial allegations and political reactions.
* <https://www.scotsman.com/news/scots-law/lord-advocate-dorothy-bain-quit-cabinet-role-scotland-justice-secretary-says-4161628> - This article could explore the Lord Advocate's role in the Scottish Cabinet and potential calls for reform, highlighting the complexities of the legal structure and political pressures around such reform.
* <https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills.aspx> - This Scottish Parliament website lists current and past legislation, which might include proposed reforms or discussions related to the Scotland Act of 1998 and the devolved powers affecting the Lord Advocate's role.