

# War on Waste: Anti-eco civil service

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## Introduction

Wasteful spending by the civil service is not a new phenomenon. The TaxPayers' Alliance has released numerous reports on this subject, most notably the *Bumper Book of Government Waste*.<sup>1</sup> Politicians have also drawn attention to the misuse of taxpayer's money, with the Rt. Hon. Dame Margaret Hodge – the former chair of the public accounts committee – decrying the “mind-boggling waste of taxpayers' money right across government”, suggesting that officials feel no sense of “personal responsibility for spending our money”.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these concerns, civil servants continue to waste taxpayers' money, some of which is especially harmful to the environment. Such spending is in spite of parliament declaring a ‘climate emergency’. If the government wants to take climate change seriously then it needs to cut unnecessary spending which adversely impacts the environment.

This research shows the amount spent by departments in Whitehall on taxis and summer heating.

## Key findings

- Since 2014, the total amount spent by Whitehall departments on taxis and summer heating was **£15,383,904**.<sup>3</sup>
- Between 2016-17 and 2018-19, **£14,590,284** was spent by 11 government departments on taxis for members of staff.
- The department with the largest taxi costs was the **Ministry of Defence**, spending **£3,498,317**.<sup>4</sup> The Ministry of Defence also has the highest average cost per journey, with an **average journey costing £168**.
- **£793,621** was spent by five departments between 2014 and 2018 heating buildings during the summer. This is unlike most Whitehall departments who are required to be part of the Whitehall District Heating System.<sup>5</sup>
- The **Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy** spent the most on heating buildings during the summer between 2014 and 2018 at a cost of **£375,668**. Of this the department spent **£195,197** in 2018 alone, which was the joint warmest UK summer on record.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wild, A., *Bumper Book of Government Waste 2014*, The TaxPayers' Alliance, 15 June 2014, [www.taxpayersalliance.com/new\\_bumper\\_book\\_of\\_government\\_waste\\_exposes\\_120\\_billion\\_of\\_wasteful\\_spending](http://www.taxpayersalliance.com/new_bumper_book_of_government_waste_exposes_120_billion_of_wasteful_spending), (accessed 4 December 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Hodge, M., *Why can't Britain get value for money from government?*, CapX, 30 November 2016, [capx.co/why-cant-britain-get-value-for-money-from-government/](http://capx.co/why-cant-britain-get-value-for-money-from-government/), (accessed 4 December 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Information regarding summer heating costs is from 2014 to 2018. Taxi cost data is from 2016-17 to 2018-19.

<sup>4</sup> Figures from the Ministry of Defence include all taxi and chauffeur driven car costs since the Phoenix II contract commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016.

<sup>5</sup> The Whitehall District Heating System heats government office buildings in Whitehall. This system is turned off between 1 April and 1 October each year.

<sup>6</sup> Met Office, *Top ten UK's hottest years all since 2002*, 31 July 2019, [www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/press-office/news/weather-and-climate/2019/state-of-the-uk-climate-2018](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/press-office/news/weather-and-climate/2019/state-of-the-uk-climate-2018), (accessed 11 February 2020).

**Table 1: overall amount spent on taxis for members of staff, 2016-17 to 2018-19**

Department	2016-17 (£)	2017-18 (£)	2018-19 (£)	Total (£)	Notes
Ministry of Defence	340,812	1,396,021	1,761,484	3,498,317	Figures for this department are the costs for taxis and chauffeur driven car journeys
Department for Work and Pensions	1,224,310	842,167	1,083,628	3,150,105	
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	759,405	835,701	972,618	2,567,725	
Department for International Trade	Not held	Not held	Not held	2,089,024	Figures includes taxi services taken overseas and in the UK
Department for International Development	266,904	293,442	278,245	838,591	
Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy	182,863	221,120	241,937	645,920	
Department for Transport	135,817	171,617	198,183	505,617	
Department for Health & Social Care	122,645	144,149	130,044	396,838	
Department for Education	110,163	119,197	141,430	370,789	
Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs	40,114	85,055	138,498	263,667	
Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government	19,385	29,213	40,974	89,572	
Northern Ireland Office	18,981	30,365	37,921	87,267	
Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport	4,956	18,219	27,641	50,816	
Scotland Office	13,920	10,999	8,818	33,737	
Wales Office	Not held	719	1,580	2,299	The department does not hold the information for 2016-17

**Table 2: total amount spent on heating during the summer in 2014 to 2018**

Department	2014 (£)	2015 (£)	2016 (£)	2017 (£)	2018 (£)	Total (£)	Notes
Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy	Not held	Not held	Not held	180,470	195,197	375,668	Department created in 2016
Department for Work & Pensions	95,539	41,777	72,163	37,820	104,571	351,870	Figures include water heating not just space heating and includes other offices
Scotland Office	10,754	9,030	10,204	11,125	589	41,703	Figures are for Edinburgh and Whitehall offices. 2018 figure is for Edinburgh office only
Wales Office	3,345	3,620	3,547	4,252	3,739	18,503	
Northern Ireland Office	3,038	761	129	546	1,404	5,877	

## Methodology

This research was fulfilled by issuing freedom of information (FOI) requests to all government departments. The requests asked the following:

### **For taxi costs:**

*Please include the following information:*

- *The overall amount spent on taxis for members of staff in 2016-2017, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019.*
- *The overall amount of taxi journeys taken by members of staff in 2016-2017, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019.*

*If taxi costs cannot be provided under Section 12 of the FOIA, then I would prefer this request to be restricted to headquarters staff only.*

Of the 21 departments contacted, 18 fulfilled the request by providing partial or full responses by 17 December 2019. Of these 18, however, the information supplied was inconsistent. Not every department provided the full range of data required. Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act was often referenced when information was not provided. This allows a public authority to refuse to deal with a request where it estimated that it would exceed the appropriate time or cost limit. Additionally, it is common for the departments to say that they do not hold any information relevant to this request.

The figures given by the Ministry of Defence for the number of bookings were all made under the Phoenix II contract.

### **For summer heating:**

*Please include the following information:*

- *The total amount spent on heating in June, July and August in 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018.*

*If your department has more than 30 sites, please include information relating only to the headquarters buildings. The request excludes any agencies and public bodies.*

Of the 21 departments contacted, 19 fulfilled the request providing partial or full responses by 17 December 2019. Of these 19, however, the information supplied was inconsistent. Not every department provided the full range of data required. Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act was often referenced when information was not provided. This allows a public authority to refuse to deal with a request where it estimated that it would exceed the appropriate time or cost limit. Additionally, it is common for the departments to say that they do not hold any information relevant to this request.

Many departments responded with zero costs for summer heating during the months stated because they are part of the Whitehall District Heating System. This system heats government office buildings in Whitehall and stipulates that the heating is turned off between 1 April and 1 October each year.