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Trade union office space

By Harry Phibbs and Alex Wild

Previous TaxPayers' Alliance research has shown how trade unions received a subsidy of at least £108 million from taxpayers in 2012-13. This was made up of an estimated £85 million in paid staff time, plus £23 million in direct payments.

However taxpayer funding for the trade unions goes beyond salaries for thousands of union officials and tens of millions in direct payments. There is also the cost of providing unions with office facilities.

Many public sector organisations do not provide dedicated office space to trade unions. Indeed guidance from the Department for Communities and Local Government states that:

“Other than for trade union representatives who are engaged in matters related to Transfer of Undertakings, collective redundancies and health and safety, there is no statutory right for facilities to be made available for union representatives.”¹ Other departments have issued similar guidance.

However many public sector organisations continue to provide dedicated office space to unions.

This note looks at how much office space taxpayers are providing to unions.

The key findings of this research are:

- Trade unions are provided at least **273,753 ft²** of dedicated office space by public sector organisations.
- The actual amount will be greater as many organisations do not measure the amount of office space, or did not respond to the Freedom of Information request.
- This amount of office space would have an annual market value of:
 - £27.4 million in central London
 - £8 million in Birmingham
 - £7.9 million in Glasgow
 - £6.2 million in Cardiff
- Despite this, charges to unions of just £307,093 were identified.
- Councils provide trade unions with at least **162,000 ft²**.

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- The NHS provides trade unions with at least **59,999 ft²**. This is considerably more than the total floor space of **The White House** in Washington DC.²
- **TfL** provides trade unions with **5,685 ft²** of office space free of charge – the most of any public sector organisation.
- **Leicester City Council** provides trade unions with **4,812 ft²** of office space free of charge – the most of any local authority.
- **West Midlands Fire & Rescue Service** provides trade unions with **1,200 ft²** of office space free of charge – the most of any Fire service. Unions were charged just £60 rent.
- **Belfast Health and Social Care Trust** provides trade unions with **4,058 ft²** of office space free of charge – the most in the NHS.
- **Lancashire Police** provides trade unions with **3,982 ft²** of office space free of charge.

[The full data set can be accessed by clicking here](#)

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² <http://www.whitehousehistory.org/history/white-house-facts-trivia/facts-white-house-dimensions.html>



Background

Government guidance issued last year said that:

"Restrictions should be placed on the use of office facilities for trade union representatives.

"Office facilities should only be used for duties agreed in advance. Clear boundaries should set on the use of notice boards and the distribution of literature on departmental premises, with a process for managing infringement of such boundaries. For example, political material, or literature or content which incites industrial action, should not be produced or distributed on or using taxpayer-funded facilities. Local authorities should consider adopting a similar approach within their workforces and premises. This should include rigorous monitoring and management of how facilities are being used.

"In addition, the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 requires that trade unions must adopt rules providing that all expenditure on political objects (specific types of political activity, as defined by the Act) should come from a separately constituted, ring-fenced political fund, financed by a levy on trade union subscriptions.

It consequently follows that such political activity by unions should not be financed by council funds."³

Sources and Methodology

- This research was compiled using Freedom of Information (FoI) requests.
- Requests were submitted to Quangos, regional governments, central government departments, local authorities, NHS trusts, fire services and police forces.
- Each organisation was asked how much space was provided solely for trade union use, the annual value of the space and if the unions were charged for use of the space.
- The cost of office space in 4 major UK cities in square feet was calculated as below:

³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136079/Taxpayer_funding_of_Trade_Unions_-_Sensible_Savings.pdf#page=6

	London, West End ⁴	Birmingham ⁵	Glasgow ⁶	Cardiff ⁷
€ per m ²	921	367	361	283
€ to £ exchange rate on 30/06/2013 ⁸	0.8558	0.8558	0.8558	0.8558
£ per m ²	1076.39	314.08	308.94	242.19
ft ² in 1m ²	10.7639104	10.7639104	10.7639104	10.7639104
£ per ft²	100.00	29.18	28.70	22.50

⁴ http://www.cbre.eu/portal/pls/portal/res_rep.show_report?report_id=3253#page=5

⁵ <http://www.joneslanglasalle.com/SiteCollectionDocuments/EMEA/EMEAMap/Birmingham.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.joneslanglasalle.com/SiteCollectionDocuments/EMEA/EMEAMap/Glasgow.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.joneslanglasalle.com/SiteCollectionDocuments/EMEA/EMEAMap/Cardiff.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.oanda.com/currency/historical-rates/>

Guide to tables:

Table 1: Organisations which provided trade unions with more than 2,000 ft² of office space.

Table 2: Office space provided by local authorities, by region.

Table 3: Value of office space provided to trade unions had it been in London, Birmingham, Glasgow and Cardiff, by organisation type.

[Click here to see the full data](#)

Table 1: Organisations which provided trade unions with more than 2,000 ft² of office space

Organisation	Floor space provided (ft ²)
Transport for London	5,685
Leicester City Council	4,812
Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames	4,746
Stoke on Trent City Council	4,638
Birmingham City Council	4,429
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust	4,058
Lancashire Police Authority	3,982
Vale of Glamorgan Council	3,838
Hertfordshire Constabulary	3,637
Royal Borough of Greenwich	3,378
Luton Borough Council	3,196
London Borough of Barnet	2,959
Coventry City Council	2,928
London Borough of Camden	2,739
Scottish Prison Service	2,695
Aberdeen City Council	2,476
Fife Council	2,465
Newcastle upon Tyne City Council	2,450
London Borough of Haringey	2,445
Kirklees Council	2,331
London Borough of Harrow	2,262
Metropolitan Borough of Oldham	2,014



Table 2: Office space provided by local authorities, by region

Region	Floor space (ft ²)
East Midlands	15,110
London	33,199
West Midlands	19,795
Wales	10,311
East of England	10,597
Scotland	14,662
North East	6,785
Yorkshire and Humber	12,229
North West	17,146
South East	13,548
South West	7,808
Northern Ireland	880



Table 3: Value of office space provided to trade unions had it been in London, Birmingham, Glasgow and Cardiff, by organisation type

Type	Floor space (ft ²)	Value – London, West End (£ per annum)	Value - Birmingham (£ per annum)	Value - Glasgow (£ per annum)	Value - Cardiff (£ per annum)
Council	162,070	16,207,002	4,729,018	4,651,704	3,646,627
Department	1,084	108,400	31,630	31,113	24,390
Fire	6,159	615,892	179,710	176,772	138,578
NHS	59,999	5,999,904	1,750,703	1,722,082	1,349,997
Police	26,693	2,669,300	778,871	766,138	600,601
Quango	17,748	1,774,787	517,863	509,396	399,333