

Tory election spending claims: 12 police forces pass files to CPS

[theguardian.com/global/2017/mar/15/second-tory-reveals-police-investigated-him-over-spending-allegations](https://www.theguardian.com/global/2017/mar/15/second-tory-reveals-police-investigated-him-over-spending-allegations)

3/15/2017

Twelve police forces have passed files to the Crown Prosecution Service over allegations that [Conservatives](#) broke campaign spending laws at the last election, after a 10-month investigation by police forces across the country.

The revelation is likely to increase concern in Downing Street and the Conservative party about the seriousness of the investigations, which could affect several sitting MPs and even lead to election results being declared void if there are prosecutions.

The CPS said it had been passed files from Avon and Somerset; Derbyshire; Cumbria; Devon and Cornwall; Gloucestershire; Greater Manchester; Lincolnshire; the Metropolitan police; Northamptonshire; Nottinghamshire; West Yorkshire; and Staffordshire police.

They are among the 19 forces that applied for [extensions to time limits on investigating](#) election offences last year.

Police and the CPS are not naming any MPs or agents who may be under investigation as a result of allegations that spending on local campaigning was recorded as national spending in breach of election laws.

However, it emerged on Tuesday that Kent [police had interviewed Craig Mackinlay](#), the Tory MP for South Thanet, under caution over his spending returns relating to his [campaign against](#) the then Ukip leader, Nigel Farage, in 2015. They have not yet concluded their investigation.

Earlier on Wednesday, Will Quince, the Tory MP for Colchester, also revealed he had been interviewed under caution over allegations about overspending in the last general election. He said police told him there would be no further action against him after the interview, which took place in January.

Warwickshire police also said it had interviewed two people as part of its investigation, and that a decision would be made soon about whether to hand the file to prosecutors.



A separate Electoral Commission inquiry into whether the national party broke election spending limits is also under way and expected to come to a head soon, potentially within days.

Asked about the Mackinlay interview, a Conservative spokesman said: “We are cooperating with the ongoing investigations.” Mackinlay did not reply to a request for comment but has previously said his returns were “lawful and proper”.

The allegations, first uncovered by the Daily Mirror, are that spending in marginal seats on a battlebus tour was wrongly recorded as national, rather than local, spending. Channel 4 also revealed separate allegations concerning South Thanet about the expenses of a team of party officials, including Theresa May’s chief of staff, Nick Timothy, being recorded as national rather than local.

Mackinlay held Farage off by 2,812 votes and declared spending of £15,016, slightly below the limit of £16,000. Under election laws, any costs incurred to promote a candidate must be declared on local candidate spending

returns.

Receipts for national Conservative party spending show that £18,000 was spent on accommodation for party workers in the Royal Harbour hotel in Ramsgate, in South Thanet, and a Premier Inn in Margate, which is just outside it. A further £715 was spent on the Alpha hostel, used to accommodate a busload of activists who took part in a Stop Farage campaign.

The penalties for wrongly declaring local elections are steep, with possible criminal charges for MPs and their election agents. Results can also be declared void.

Speculation has been rife in Westminster that a series of byelections could be triggered by police prosecutions over spending or potentially encourage May to call a general election to avoid an embarrassing focus on the constituencies involved.