



BRIEFING PAPER

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Ministerial Residences

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Summary

Ministerial residences are assigned to ministers at the discretion of the Prime Minister. They include the living accommodation at numbers 10 and 11 Downing Street; the Foreign Secretary's residence in Carlton Gardens; and flats in Admiralty House. Accommodation at Hillsborough Castle and Stormont may be used by Northern Ireland Office ministers when on duty there.

In addition, three stately homes – Chequers, Chevening and Dorneywood – are available for ministerial use, in accordance with the wishes of their former owners. These properties are not owned by the Government but are administered by trustees. Chequers in Buckinghamshire has been used by successive Prime Ministers. Chevening in Kent is traditionally associated with the Foreign Secretary, although its use is currently divided between the Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union and the Secretary of State for International Trade. Dorneywood in Buckinghamshire is by convention placed at the disposal of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The *Ministerial Code* sets out rules and guidance on the use of official residences. Ministers who occupy residences are unable to claim accommodation expenses from the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA). They must also ensure they meet all personal tax liabilities, including council tax, if the residence is deemed to be their main residence.

Government property is not generally allowed to be used for party political purposes. However, the *Ministerial Code* makes an exception for official residences. The Code states that if a minister hosts Party or political events in these residences it should be at their own or Party expense with no cost falling to the public purse.

1. What are ministerial residences?

Ministerial or official residences are properties assigned to ministers by the Prime Minister either on the grounds of security or to allow them to better perform their official duties, including official hospitality.

Official residences available to government ministers include:

- Flats above 10 and 11 Downing Street, which are available for the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer;
- 1 Carlton Gardens, leased from the Crown Estate, which has been used as the official residence for the Foreign Secretary;¹
- Flats in Admiralty House;
- Hillsborough Castle and Stormont, which are available for ministers in the Northern Ireland Office while on duty in Northern Ireland.

In addition, three stately homes – Chequers, Dorneywood and Chevening – are available to ministers for both official and private use. None of these properties are owned by the Government. Instead, they are each run and administered by trustees, in accordance with the wishes of their former owners.

The Prime Minister has the use of Chequers. On 18 July 2016 it was announced that the Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union and the Secretary of State for International Trade would share joint use of Chevening. The current allocation of the other official residences has not been confirmed since the new Prime Minister, Theresa May MP, took office.

Following recent convention, the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, had the use of Dorneywood.

¹ In addition to 1 Carlton Gardens, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office also leases Lancaster House from the Crown Estate. In July 2015 the FCO said that Lancaster House is used “to provide business hospitality services as well as conference and meeting facilities across the whole of government. It is also used for a limited amount of commercial hire to corporate clients to help off-set running costs”. See PQ 7099 [Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Buildings], 14 July 2015

2. Rules relating to ministerial residences

Rules and guidance on the use of official residences are set out in the [Ministerial Code](#). This sets out any personal liabilities if a minister is allocated a residence.

2.1 Tax and expenses

The 2015 *Ministerial Code* states that Ministers who occupy an official residence will not be able to claim accommodation expenses from the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA). The Code also states that:

Where a Minister is allocated an official residence, they must ensure that all personal tax liabilities, including council tax, are properly discharged, and that they personally pay such liabilities.²

The question of whether an official residence is deemed to be the main residence of a Minister is important in determining who pays the council tax bill on it. This was explained by the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, in a parliamentary answer in June 2000:

The level and responsibility for payment of council tax is determined on whether the property is the Minister's main or secondary residence. If a main residence, the responsibility for payment of the tax falls to the Minister. If the property is a secondary residence, responsibility for payment falls to the responsible Department.³

Council tax in respect of Chequers, Dorneywood and Chevening is a matter for the trustees.⁴

2.2 Official hospitality

When ministerial residences are used for official hospitality, e.g. a meeting with a visiting head of state, expenses are met by the relevant government department. Transparency data relating to such hospitality is published on the Gov.uk website.

The *Ministerial Code* states that Government property should not generally be used for constituency work or party activities. However, a particular exemption is recognised in the case of official residences. Section 6.2 states that "Where Ministers host Party or personal events in these residences it should be at their own or Party expense with no cost falling to the public purse".⁵

² Cabinet Office, [Ministerial Code](#), October 2015, para 7.10

³ [HC Deb 5 June 2000 c49-50W](#)

⁴ [HC Deb 17 Oct 2007 c1135W](#)

⁵ Cabinet Office, [Ministerial Code](#), October 2015, para 6.2

3. Individual ministerial residences

3.1 Chequers

Chequers in Buckinghamshire is the official country residence of the Prime Minister. The house, which dates from the 16th century, along with its 1000 acre estate, was bequeathed to the nation by Sir Arthur Lee (later Lord Lee of Fareham), when then MP for Fareham and Director-General of Food Production.

The objects of the gift were set out in a schedule to the [Chequers Estate Act 1917](#):

It is not possible to foresee or foretell from what classes or conditions of life the future wielders of power in this country will be drawn. Some may be as in the past men of wealth and famous descent; some may belong to the world of trade and business; others may spring from the ranks of the manual toilers. To none of these in the midst of their strenuous and responsible labours could the spirit and anodyne of Chequers do anything but good...

...the better the health of our rulers the more sanely will they rule and the inducement to spend two days a week in the high and pure air of the Chiltern hills and woods will, it is hoped, benefit the nation as well as its chosen leaders. The main features of this scheme are therefore designed not merely to make Chequers available as the official country residence of the Prime Minister of the day, but to tempt him to visit it regularly and to make it possible for him to live there, even though his income should be limited to his salary.⁶

The 1917 Act provided for a board of ex-officio trustees to administer the estate and trust fund. The board had increased to a total of fourteen trustees by 1958, but the [Chequers Estate Act 1958](#) reduced the total to six during the lifetime of Lady Lee (who died in 1967), and to five after her death – the Lord Privy Seal, the Prime Minister's nominee, a nominee of the Ministry of Works, the Chairman of the National Trust and the Public Trustee.

David Lloyd George was the first Prime Minister to occupy Chequers, in 1921.

Financial arrangements surrounding Chequers

The general cost and running of Chequers falls to the trustees. However, the Prime Minister's Office pays an annual grant-in-aid to the Chequers Trust as a contribution to staff salaries and maintenance.⁷ Details of this can be found in the Cabinet Office Annual Accounts. For the 2015-16 financial year the grant in aid was £702,972.⁸

Staff who work at Chequers are not civil servants, and the terms and conditions of staff who work there are a matter for the Chequers trustees.⁹

⁶ [Chequers Estate Act 1917](#), Schedule

⁷ [HL Deb 26 Oct 2011 cWA156](#)

⁸ Cabinet Office, [Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16](#), p87 n.7

⁹ [PQ 31134](#) [Chequers: Gardens], 15 March 2016

Details of official hospitality at Chequers is published on Gov.uk on a quarterly basis.

3.2 Chevening

Chevening, near Sevenoaks in Kent, is a 115-room neo-classical house built in the early 17th century (reputedly to designs by Inigo Jones) and set in some 3,500 acres of land. It was left to the nation in 1967 by the seventh Earl of Stanhope on condition that it was occupied by either the Prime Minister of the day, a Cabinet Minister or a descendant of King George VI. Since 1981 the residence has conventionally been the country residence of the Foreign Secretary.

The [Chevening Estate Act 1959](#) and [Chevening Estate Act 1987](#) gave statutory effect to the vesting deed and trust instrument, and established a board of trustees responsible for the administering the trust fund and maintaining the house.

Who can occupy Chevening?

Under the terms of the 1959 Act, the Prime Minister has the responsibility of nominating the person to occupy the house. This person can be the Prime Minister, a minister who is a member of the Cabinet, a lineal descendant of King George VI, or the spouse, widow or widower of such a descendant. According to the Chevening House website, the “Canadian High Commissioner, the American Ambassador and the National Trust all have remainder interests in Chevening in the unlikely event that none of the above would require the house”.¹⁰

The Prince of Wales initially accepted a nomination to occupy the house in 1974 but subsequently relinquished this. The house has since effectively become the country residence of the Foreign Secretary. Lord Carrington was the first holder of that office to occupy Chevening in 1981.

On 18 July 2016 it was announced that residency of Chevening would be shared between the Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson; the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, David Davis; and the Secretary of State for International Trade, Dr Liam Fox. According to the Prime Minister’s official spokesperson, the decision to share the residence “reflects the fact that all those secretaries of state will, as part of their work, be meeting and engaging with and hosting foreign visitors and leaders and it will provide an opportunity to do that”.¹¹

During the Coalition Government, the use of the house was shared between the Foreign Secretary, William Hague, and the Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg.¹²

A [list of recent occupants](#) of Chevening is given on the Chevening House website:

¹⁰ Chevening House, [Current Use](#) [accessed on 19 July 2016]

¹¹ ‘Boris Johnson, Liam Fox and David Davis share Chevening’, [BBC News](#), 18 July 2016

¹² [HC Deb 29 Feb 2012 c388W](#)

The Rt Hon Anthony Barber 1973
The Rt Hon The Lord Hailsham 1973-74
HRH The Prince of Wales 1974-80
The Rt Hon The Lord Carrington 1981-82
The Rt Hon Francis Pym 1982-83
The Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Howe 1983-89
The Rt Hon John Major 1989
The Rt Hon Douglas Hurd 1989-95
The Rt Hon Malcolm Rifkind 1995-97
The Rt Hon Robin Cook 1997-2001
The Rt Hon Jack Straw 2001-06
The Rt Hon Margaret Beckett 2006-07
The Rt Hon David Miliband 2007-10
The Rt Hon William Hague 2010-2014
The Rt Hon Nick Clegg 2010-15
The Rt Hon Philip Hammond 2014-¹³

Financial arrangements surrounding Chevening

A parliamentary answer from June 2014 stated that any repair or maintenance work at the Chevening Estate would be met by the Chevening Trust and not paid for from the public purse.¹⁴

Some “residual costs” for running Chevening may also be met by the public purse. For instance, for the financial year 2010-11 these residual costs totalled £3,695, excluding security costs.¹⁵

Details of official hospitality at Chevening is published on the Gov.uk website.

3.3 Dorneywood

Dorneywood, a 21-room house in Buckinghamshire, was donated to the nation (through the National Trust) in the early 1940s by Lord Courtauld-Thomson. While a convention in recent years has seen the Chancellor of the Exchequer have use of the house, the gift was originally made to provide an official furnished residence, besides Chequers, for the Prime Minister of the day, or for the use “of a Minister of the Crown, within easy reach of London”.¹⁶

Dorneywood is set in 215 acres and was largely rebuilt after a fire in 1910. James Lees-Milne visited the house on behalf of the National Trust in May 1942. He wrote:

The house is not up to our standard, although a fairly pleasant red brick building, now swathed in, rather dribbling with, great bunches of wonderful wisteria. The central part is possibly of Queen Anne’s time. Lorimer’s additions are indifferent in C[ourtauld]-T[homson]’s opinion which I felt free to corroborate. The outbuildings, motor-house, etc have been faked about in half-timbering to look olde-worlde. The green fields close to Burnham Beeches, in which the house stands, should be preserved.¹⁷

¹³ List is incomplete because the website has not yet been updated.

¹⁴ [HC Deb 6 Feb 2014 c307W](#)

¹⁵ [HL Deb 26 Oct 2011 cWA156](#)

¹⁶ House of Commons Library, Deposited paper 06/1243, Copy of the Trust Deed relating to Dorneywood, 9 November 1942, p5

¹⁷ J Lees-Milne, [Ancestral Voices](#), 1975, p59

Who can occupy Dorneywood?

The criteria for the use of Dorneywood are set out in the terms of the charitable trust, established in 1942, which owns the property. According to the terms of the Trust Deed for Dorneywood, the Prime Minister of the day may use the house themselves or nominate, at their discretion a "Minister of the Crown" to become the resident.¹⁸ Previous residents have included Chancellors, a Home Secretary and other Deputy Prime Ministers

By convention, the Chancellor of the Exchequer is given the use of Dorneywood. It was allocated to Gordon Brown in 1997. However, he reportedly had little use for it and it became the country residence of the then Deputy Prime Minister (John Prescott) from about 1999 until May 2006.¹⁹ Alistair Cooke, former Deputy Director of the Conservative Research Department, wrote the following in a letter to *The Times* in June 2006:

Sir, the intense interest in the fate of the "key to Dorneywood" (comment, June 5) would have amazed Churchill, who in 1954 became the first person to dispense this piece of prime ministerial patronage.

Then, no one seemed to want it. Anthony Eden lived there briefly, but spent most of his weekends on the telephone to Chequers bickering with Churchill over foreign policy. Harold Macmillan, the next in line, turned it down. Eventually, however, it won the heart of Willie Whitelaw, even though Alan Clark, visiting him in 1986, ticked him off rudely for liking "this dreary redbrick house in flat country.

Clark did, however, concede that "the furniture is good" - quite a tribute from that expert.²⁰

Alistair Darling, the last Labour Chancellor, had the use of Dorneywood as an official residence as did the then Conservative Chancellor, George Osborne.

3.4 Downing Street

Ten Downing Street is traditionally the home of the Prime Minister. It was offered by George II as a personal gift to Sir Robert Walpole, who was First Lord of the Treasury and effectively, though not officially, Prime Minister. Walpole declined the gift but accepted the house as a residence for holders of the office of First Lord. He himself took up residence in 1735. The office of First Lord of the Treasury was not then synonymous with that of Prime Minister and the house was as frequently occupied by Chancellors of the Exchequer as by Prime Ministers during the next 100 years.

Eleven Downing Street has been the official residence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer since 1828. Tony Blair, lived with his family in the flat above 11 Downing Street when Prime Minister because it was larger

¹⁸ House of Commons Library, Deposited paper 06/1243, Copy of the Trust Deed relating to Dorneywood, 9 November 1942, p5

¹⁹ HC Deb 8 June 2006 cc832-3W

²⁰ Alistair Cook, "Lower house" (letter). *The Times*. 7 June 2006 p 16

than the 10 Downing Street flat. The latter was occupied by Gordon Brown as Chancellor. When Gordon Brown became Prime Minister, he moved into the flat above number 11 and Alistair Darling took over the flat above number 10.²¹ Similarly, David Cameron indicated early in his premiership that he would be moving to the flat above No. 11 while the Chancellor, George Osborne, would have the use of the flat above No. 10.²²

3.5 Other residences

1 Carlton Gardens

1 Carlton Gardens is the official residence of the Foreign Secretary, although a parliamentary answer from July 2014 stated that the property was currently used for official events and functions in support of Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and wider government objectives.²³ It was last used as an official residence by the William Hague until he stepped down as Foreign Secretary in July 2014. Philip Hammond used the property for official meetings and events with visiting Ministers from overseas, while he was Foreign Secretary.²⁴

1 Carlton House is leased from the Crown Estate by the FCO. It is a Grade I listed building comprising state rooms, which are used for meetings, receptions and entertainment, and a self-contained two-floor residential apartment. In July 2015 the FCO stated that it pays annual rent of £482,341 for the property.²⁵

Carlton House Terrace and its extension, Carlton Gardens, were built during the period 1827-1833 to designs by John Nash. Prince Louis Napoleon (later Napoleon III) lived in exile at No. 1 in 1839-40. Various foreign secretaries, including Lords Palmerston and Curzon, chose to live in the houses of Carlton Gardens, but No. 1 became the official London residence of foreign secretaries from 1945 when it was acquired on lease from the Crown Estates for Ernest Bevin.²⁶

Admiralty House

Admiralty House is a Grade I listed building, constructed in the late 18th-century as a residence for holders of the post of First Lord of the Admiralty, the civilian head of the Royal Navy. It contains state rooms as well as residential accommodation. Winston Churchill lived there while he held the post from 1911 to 1915 and 1939 to 1940. Denis Healey found living arrangements “highly inconvenient” when he and his family moved there after his appointment as Defence Secretary in 1964.²⁷

The three ministerial flats have been assigned to various ministers in recent years. These have included Lord Malloch-Brown, Lord Falconer of

²¹ 10 Downing Street, [Morning press briefing from 18 July 2007](#)

²² HC Deb 12 July 2010 c463W

²³ [PO 7099](#) [Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Buildings], 14 July 2015

²⁴ [PO 7059](#) [Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Buildings], 14 July 2015

²⁵ [PO 7099](#) [Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Buildings], 14 July 2015

²⁶ HC Deb 31 January 1997 c425-6W

²⁷ Denis Healey, *The Time of my Life*, 1989, pp 253-4

Thoroton, Geoff Hoon, Margaret Beckett, John Prescott and Dr Liam Fox, while he was Secretary of State for Defence.²⁸

Hillsborough Castle and Stormont

Hillsborough Castle has been the official residence of Her Majesty the Queen since 1922. It also serves as the residence of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.²⁹

Until 2014 the castle was owned by the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) on behalf of the Government. On 1 April 2014, however, responsibility for the management and day to day running of Hillsborough Castle was transferred to Historic Royal Palaces (HRP), although a dedicated area of accommodation has been retained for occupancy by the NIO. HRP provides the NIO with a number of services, including the continued readiness of this area for use as a residence by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and by the Minister of State for Northern Ireland.³⁰

A parliamentary answer from February 2008 on official residences stated that both Hillsborough Castle and Stormont “are available for Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office while on duty in Northern Ireland”.³¹

Professor Derek Birrell has also provided a brief account of ministerial residences in Northern Ireland:

After 1975 the office of secretary of state was based in Stormont Castle adjacent to Stormont Parliament buildings and the main civil services offices. The adjacent Stormont House was adapted and renovated in 1978 to provide suitable and secure office and residential accommodation. Hillsborough Castle, the former Governor’s residence and officially the Queen’s residence in Northern Ireland also housed a flat for the secretary of state and apartments for ministers. Used for official functions and receptions it was where some secretaries of state resided [while in Northern Ireland], for example, Mo Mowlam.³²

Hillsborough Castle is a late eighteenth-century mansion house built by the first Marquis of Downshire. The sixth Marquis sold the estate to the British Government in 1922 after which it became the official residence of the Governor of Northern Ireland. Since 1972, the castle’s primary role has been as a residence for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, although it is also used by other Northern Ireland ministers when on duty in the province and is the primary royal residence there.³³

Government House in Pimlico

The Government previously owned a leasehold interest on Government House in Pimlico, London, which was available for ministers to use as an official residence.³⁴ According to a parliamentary answer from March

²⁸ [HC Deb 10 Oct 2011 c112-3W](#); HC Deb 13 March 2008 c591W; HC Deb 19 Feb 2008 c684W

²⁹ [HL Deb 11 Dec 2013 c773](#)

³⁰ HL Deb 17 June 2014 cWA39; PQ 206693 [Buildings], 21 July 2014

³¹ [HC Deb 3 March 2008 c2208W](#)

³² D Birrell, *Direct Rule and the Governance of Northern Ireland*, 2009, p25

³³ Historic Royal Palaces, [Hillsborough Castle: History and Stories](#) [accessed 19 July 2016]

³⁴ [HC Deb 17 March 2008 c807W](#)

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2008, the property was no longer required and was in the process of being sold.³⁵

³⁵ [HC Deb March 2008 c2208W](#)

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