

Scotland's New First Minister & Cabinet: Briefing

Thursday 9th May 2024

John Swinney MSP sworn in as the new First Minister of Scotland.

On Monday, the SNP confirmed Swinney was the sole nominee for party leadership and as such was selected unopposed as their leader and candidate for First Minister. Yesterday, Humza Yousaf submitted his formal resignation to the King and a vote to nominate a new First Minister was subsequently held.

Swinney was backed by 64 votes from his own party, the Scottish Greens abstained on the vote - enabling John Swinney to reach the simple majority needed to be elected. Speaking after his election, the new SNP leader thanked his wife for the sacrifices she had made to allow him to step up to serve the country at this time.

This afternoon, following his formal swearing in ceremony at the Court of Session, Swinney announced his new Cabinet. Notably, in a bid to unite his party, he has appointed Kate Forbes, his main leadership rival as Deputy First Minister with responsibility for the Economy and Gaelic. The Economy portfolio has been taken out of the merged Energy and Net Zero brief that Mairi McAllan has held since the mini shuffle in February. McAllan will go on maternity leave in July so there will be more changes to come in this department. Shona Robison, who was Deputy First Minister published a letter today stating she had advised John Swinney to offer Kate Forbes her role in order to unify the SNP.

Cabinet

First Minister	John Swinney	NEW
Deputy First Minister with Economy portfolio and responsibility for Gaelic	Kate Forbes	NEW
Cabinet Secretaries		
Finance and Local Government	Shona Robison	Reduced portfolio
Education and Skills	Jenny Gilruth	
Justice and Home Affairs	Angela Constance	
Net Zero and Energy	Mairi McAllan	Reduced portfolio
Transport	Fiona Hyslop	
Health and Social Care	Neil Gray	
Social Justice	Shirley-Anne Somerville	
Constitution, External Affairs and Culture	Angus Robertson	
Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands	Mairi Gougeon	

Ministers

John Swinney has brought in one of Kate Forbes closest allies, Ivan McKee, as Minister for Public Finance working under Shona Robison. The post was previously held by Tom Arthur who has been moved to Employment and Investment working under Kate Forbes. This ensures balance of both sides of the party in each of the important Economy and Finance teams.

What may upset harmony in the SNP is the decision to scrap the office for Minister for Independence. The previous post-holder, Jamie Hepburn has been moved to Parliamentary Business (Whip), leaving Paisley MSP George Adam without a government role.

Emma Roddick's role as Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees has been dropped, as has Joe Fitzpatrick's Local Government and Planning Ministerial role – it is unclear which Minister will take forward the responsibility for planning policy at this stage, though it may sit with Tom Arthur as a key proponent of economic growth and investment.

Biographies

John Swinney MSP - First Minister

Perthshire North

Often referred to as a "safe pair of hands" – the SNP looked to this former Leader and Deputy First Minister to unite the party ahead of the General Election. This is his second term as SNP Leader, having served from 2000-2004 in opposition.

Swinney's political career began when he joined the SNP in 1979. He quickly rose to prominence, serving as National Secretary from 1986 to 1992. In 1997, he was elected as Member of Parliament (MP) for Tayside North and later became an MSP for Perthshire North in 1999, holding dual mandates until 2001. Throughout his career, Swinney has held various Scottish Cabinet roles under First Ministers Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon, including Deputy First Minister, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy, and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.



Kate Forbes MSP - Deputy First Minister

Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch

Kate Forbes narrowly lost the last SNP leadership contest to Humza Yousaf last year. She represents a more economically liberal sect of the party, and her appointment as DFM shows the aim of this Cabinet is to ensure party unity.

Forbes appointment will not be welcomed by the Greens and could make it more difficult for the SNP minority government to count on their support on some votes. Forbes is quite socially conservative, though she did vote for Green MSP Gillian Mackay's Buffer Zone Bill to ban protests outside abortion clinics in Parliament last week.

Born in Dingwall, Scotland, in 1990, Forbes was raised in India and Scotland. She attended a Scottish Gaelic school, where she became fluent in the language. She earned a BA degree in history at Selwyn College, Cambridge, and then an MSc in



diaspora and migration history from the University of Edinburgh. After completing her degree, Forbes worked briefly in the Scottish Parliament as a researcher for SNP MSP Dave Thompson. She was elected as an MSP in the 2016 Scottish Parliament election and quickly rose within the SNP. Nicola Sturgeon appointed Forbes as the Minister for Public Finance and Digital Economy, serving as the deputy to the Scottish Finance Secretary, Derek Mackay. After Mackay resigned, Forbes was appointed Finance Secretary by Sturgeon.

Reaction

Scottish Conservative chairman Craig Hoy's reaction:

"This is simply Humza Yousaf's cabinet with a different figurehead."

"The return of Kate Forbes is a desperate attempt by both John Swinney and his new deputy to gloss over the huge splits in the SNP and fixate on independence. A year ago, Mr Swinney questioned whether Kate Forbes was an 'appropriate individual' to lead the SNP, but now he deems her fit to be his second in command."

"Similarly, Ms Forbes, who warned that 'continuity won't cut it', has now joined a Cabinet with continuity at its core in return for a top job under Nicola Sturgeon's right-hand man."

Anas Sarwar MSP, Leader of Scottish Labour said:

"The Continuity Cabinet. All about managing their party, nothing to do with running the country".

Alex Cole Hamilton MSP, Leader of Scottish Liberal Democrats called the cabinet a "recipe for disappointment", adding:

"This parade of similar faces proves that nobody in the SNP ever pays the price despite one in seven Scots being stuck on NHS waiting lists, sewage dumping in our rivers reaching record levels, and islanders waiting forever for ferries".

Scottish Green Co-Leader, Patrick Harvie has said:

"There will be many people across our country who will be very concerned and who will want to know that this Scottish Government remains committed to a greener and more equal future for Scotland."

"When it comes to delivering fairer and more progressive taxation, a just transition from oil and gas and a watertight ban on so-called conversion therapy, it is vital that this government does not dilute the longstanding commitments that it has made."