



NORTH TYNESIDE  
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**Chronicle Live**

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## Sleaze

The notorious wallpaper scandal, in 2021, was seen by many as the start of Boris Johnson's downfall. A leaked copy of the cost of renovations to Downing Street totalled more than £200,000. Items included gold wallpaper costing £2260 and a £3,675 drinks trolley. It was apparently like one owned by the ballet dancer Rudolph Nureyev, and a £500 kitchen table cloth to go with it.

This bill was sent to the Cabinet Office whose budget for renovation of the PM's official Downing Street flat was £30,000. The rest of the cost was secretly funded by Lord Brownlow of the Conservative Party. Boris Johnson apologised later and Johnson, or the Conservative Party, it's still not clear, had to repay the money.

In 2021 Keir Starmer, then leader of the opposition, referred to Johnson as Major Sleaze. He accused him of being mired in sleaze, cronyism and scandal. Starmer even turned up at a John Lewis store and was photographed in the wallpaper department. He denied this was a publicity stunt.

Fast forward to 2024 and Keir Starmer appears to be doing exactly what he called out in Johnson. Since 2019 he has accepted more than £100,000 worth of gifts. Since April this year he has accepted £45,297.28 worth of gifts including clothes and glasses totalling £39,122.28 provided by Lord Ali. He was then given access to Number 10 after Starmer's election success. Angela Rayner has been given the use of Lord Ali's £2.2 million holiday apartment in New York over the New Year. Compare this to Jeremy Corbyn who declared he had received two sets of tickets 2 years in row for Glastonbury totalling about £450 .He didn't accept any other hospitality.



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Patrick O'Flynn, of the Spectator, a paper I rarely agree with, is right to point out that accepting freebies from the ambitious Labour Peer Lord Ali could prove toxic. Even down to a £5000 dress for his wife. As he goes to the Labour Party conference, he's earned the nickname "free gear Keir." Tory Shadow Science and Technology Minister, Andrew Griffith, said 'that it beggars' belief that the Prime Minister thinks it's acceptable that pensioners on £13,000 a year can afford to heat their homes while he earns 12 times that and cannot afford to clothe himself or his wife.

There is no such thing as a free lunch. This is proving so for Starmer as his approval ratings have dropped by 45 points since this July. He is now less popular now than Rishi Sunak. That free gear is turning out to be very expensive when it comes to the trust he has lost with the public.

**Sincerely,**

**Cathy Davis**

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