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Flash or frugal - what is the true picture of life in secret unit?

Mark Kennedy alleged that his bosses squandered millions of taxpayers' cash, but his claims appear to be challenged in new documents

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Are the police chiefs who are in charge of monitoring the country's political "subversives" doing their job in an incredibly parsimonious way or are they spending the taxpayers' cash like there's no tomorrow?

You can be forgiven for being confused judging by two contradictory accounts which have appeared in the media.

Mark Kennedy, [who spent seven years](#) as an undercover police officer in the environmental movement, sold his astonishing story to the Mail on Sunday earlier this year. He painted a [lurid picture of the spending habits](#) of his one-time employers, the secretive National Public Order Intelligence Unit.

In his account, he accused his former bosses of "squandering" millions of public money on "unnecessary luxuries". His handlers drove "top of the range BMWs and Audis, rented luxury apartments, and claimed huge sums in overtime", the paper reported. The spy said his bosses "would rent expensive apartments in central London". "Around 2002, I went to an apartment...which cost a fortune. It was for two officers attached to the unit. They were laughing about the luxury and how they had a view of Tower Bridge".

Contrast that with a [story in Friday's](#) London Evening Standard, headlined "intelligence on the cheap as Met covert squad lives on Big Macs". The Standard cites new documents which "show for the first time how frugal the operations of the intelligence unit are".

Based on these documents it has acquired, the Standard reports that the detectives from the unit "sleep in budget hotels and eat in fast-food restaurants including McDonalds, Burger King and Subway".

It is difficult to know which account to believe, but you can guess which story the heads of the NPOIU like the most.

The only way we can know for sure is if all the expenses claims are published.

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