

Local Government and Public Services Committee

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Meeting date: Thursday 30 March 2006

Venue: Committee Room 3, Senedd, National Assembly for Wales

Title: Funding for Implementation of New Electoral Duties

Purpose

To inform the committee of proposed changes to the Local Government MEG to create a new Budget Expenditure Line (BEL) to accommodate the additional funding from the UK Government which will be allocated to Welsh local authorities for implementation of the new functions proposed under the Electoral Administration Bill.

Recommendations

That committee notes the proposed changes in accordance with Standing Order 21.

Background

The Electoral Administration Bill was introduced to Parliament in October 2005 and proposes changes to the electoral system with the aim of providing access to voting for all; the highest possible turnout and lowest possible fraud.

Many proposals in the Bill are based on recommendations of the Electoral Commission from detailed studies and consultations.

In addition to the measures in the Bill some changes will be introduced via secondary legislation. The measures will place new duties on local authorities and the Department of Constitutional Affairs has made a commitment of funding for implementing the new duties to local authorities in England and Wales.

The extra funding for Wales has been calculated as £1.19m, calculated on the basis of 53p per elector. This figure was reached by the DCA costings of the entire added burden on local authorities brought about by the Bill, divided by the total electorate. Applying this formula will give Wales an additional amount above the Barnett formula of approximated £17,000. This is because the proportion of registered

electors to adult population in Wales is higher than that for the UK as a whole.

The additional duties that are likely to add to local authority expenditure are:

- Maximising registration levels – house to house visits.
- Extending polling hours to 10pm for all elections – additional staffing cost.
- Additional notice of poll to be sent to postal voters – printing and postage
- Power for returning officers to promote elections - printing costs
- Replacing stamping instruments with watermarks or security marks
- Creation of marked registers for postal voting – staffing costs.
- Adding barcodes to ballot papers – printing costs.

During the Committee's scrutiny of the Electoral Administration Bill, concerns were raised that insufficient consideration had been given to the additional cost in Wales for translation. In their report, the committee proposed that adequate funding be put in place for the implementation of the provision in the Bill and that the need for bilingualism in Wales needed to be acknowledged.

As the additional funding offered by the UK Government is above the Barnett formula and as matters including translation costs are not the major causes of extra expenditure, it is believed that an attempt to obtain additional funding would be futile. Officials have held discussions with DCA, who have indicated that they have no further funding available.

Financial Implications

A new budget expenditure line "electoral arrangements: funding for local authorities" will be created within the Local Government MEG to accommodate the additional funding in the new financial year. For 2006/07 the extra money will be paid to local authorities via a specific grant intended to pay for electoral services.

From 2007/08 the funding will be included as part of the revenue settlement.

Sue Essex AM

Minister for Finance, Local Government and Public Services

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