



dca

Department for
Constitutional Affairs
Justice, rights and democracy

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John Sills
Head of Electoral Policy Division
Department for Constitutional Affairs
6.20
Selborne House
54 Victoria Street
London SW1E 6QW
T 020 7210 8218
F 020 7210 2659
E elections@dca.gsi.gov.uk
www.dca.gov.uk

Dr John Stanforth
Chief Executive
Copeland Borough Council
The Council Offices
Catherine Street, Whitehaven
Cumbria CA28 7NY

COPELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL
LEGAL SERVICES
12 JAN 2006

COPELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
- 3 JAN 2006
PASSED TO:
ACTION/INFO:

22 December 2005

Dear *John*

Electoral Administration Bill: Funding for electoral services

As you may be aware, the Electoral Administration (EA) Bill is currently before Parliament and, subject to Parliamentary time, is expected to become law in summer 2006. On Monday 19 December the Government also laid in Parliament a package of regulations, primarily focussed on improving security for postal votes, to be taken forward alongside the Bill. These measures will be debated in both Houses in the new year and it is intended that they will be in place in time for the May 2006 local elections.

The Government recognises that the measures in Bill and the accompanying package of regulations will impose new burdens on local authorities' elections offices in the running of elections and registration services. The Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA), which has responsibility in Government for electoral policy, has therefore committed to providing £19.9m funding to Local Authorities in England in 2006/7 and 2007/8 to cover the additional costs of these activities. This figure equates to approximately 53 pence per elector (Source: Office for National Statistics, Electoral Registers, 1 December 2004: Local Government Electors). Consistent with wider Government and LGA policy, this money will not be ring-fenced but will be paid into the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services (EPCS) block of the Revenue Support Grant (RSG). It is also important to note that the distribution will not be exact as the grant is allocated to local authorities on the basis of an authority's relative circumstances. The total amount available for elections is visible in the table of new burdens and adjustments made to the EPCS block for the next year in the attached link:
<http://www.local.odpm.gov.uk/finance/0607/keytab3067.xls>.

This money is intended to cover the additional costs that will be involved in fulfilling the new legal duties of returning officers, registration officers and electoral administrators



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

under the Electoral Administration Act and the accompanying package of regulations. Examples of the measures that this funding will need to cover are set out overleaf at **annex A**. A full text of the Electoral Administration Bill is available at Hansard online: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmbills/090/2006090.pdf>

Not included in this list are the provisions made in the Bill for pilots of individual identifiers at registration and a new power for returning officers to promote participation at elections. These provisions will have funding in addition to the £19.9m, which will be administered separately; either by DCA or via the Electoral Claims Unit. A further additional amount will be made available to authorities for the purchase of barcoding equipment, excluding those in the four all-postal pilot regions in June 2004 who have already received funding for this as part of those pilots. As a one-off payment, this money will be made available through a section 31 grant and will be ring-fenced for this specific purpose.

Looking beyond the immediate future, it would also be extremely useful to us in the DCA if individual authorities could help to gather evidence on how much money they actually receive to cover the measures in the Bill. In particular we would welcome it if your finance departments could provide us with the following information:

- How much extra funding you received in the EPCS block for 2006/7 compared to 2005/6; and
- How much of this was allocated for electoral services in your authority.

We will send out a further letter with detail on arrangements for collecting this information in the new year. This will enable us to establish a national picture of how funding is distributed to, and allocated within, different local authorities and will help to inform future policy development and planning in this area. In the long term the Bill itself provides for the Electoral Commission centrally to collect data on elections spending from local authorities and to report on its findings, which will ensure a greater level of transparency than we have at present.

I am also writing to electoral administrators to ensure that they are informed of the latest position on elections funding.

Yours faithfully,



JOHN SILLS
Head of Electoral Policy Division

Electoral Administration Bill – summary of key provisions

- A new duty on registration officers to take all necessary steps to ensure comprehensive registers. Those steps include the following specific measures:
 - (a) Sending the canvass form more than once to any address;
 - (b) Making house to house inquiries on more than one occasion;
 - (c) Making contact by such other means as the ERO thinks appropriate with persons who do not have an entry in a register;
 - (d) Inspecting any records held by any person which the ERO is permitted to inspect; and
 - (e) Providing training to persons under the direction or control of the ERO in connection with the carrying out of the duty;
- moving back the last date for registration, enabling people to register to vote after an election has been called;
- opening polling stations at local elections from 7am until 10pm, in line with polling hours for general elections;
- enabling parents and those with caring responsibilities to take children into the polling station with them when they go to vote;
- providing for pre-poll information to be sent to all electors, including those on the absent voters list, with details about their vote;
- providing anonymous registration to electors who meet certain criteria showing that their safety might be a risk if their name and address were published on the register;
- printing new security markings on ballots papers, including barcodes as well as serial numbers and a watermark or underprinting instead of the perforation;
- conducting reviews of polling places every 4 years to ensure they meet accessibility criteria;
- producing a marked register of postal votes received, similar to that currently used for polling station voters; and
- requiring voters to sign for their ballot paper at the polling station to act as a deterrent to fraud.