



Comhshaol, Oidhreacht agus Rialtas Áitiúil  
Environment, Heritage and Local Government

## **Gormley Announces Spending Limits for Local Election Candidates in June Elections**

### **-Report on Electoral Reform Also Published-**

Mr John Gormley T.D., Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, today (10 Feb. 09) announced that all candidates standing in the local elections to be held on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June this year, will be subject to limits on election expenditure.

For the 34 County and City Councils, a sliding scale with four separate spending limits, based on the population within each individual electoral area, will apply. A top limit of €15,000 will apply in the most populated areas, with limits of €13,000, €1,500 and €750 to apply to candidates in other county and city council electoral areas, depending on their population (see table below). The Minister indicated that he will shortly publish a Bill to give effect to these spending limits, which will be in force for the local elections due to take place in June 2009.

Due to their different administrative responsibilities, a standard spending limit will apply to all 80 of the borough and town councils. Candidates standing for election to these local authorities will be subject to a spending limit of €7,500 in all cases.

The Minister also announced that spending by candidates and political parties on the election campaign in the 60 days leading up to polling day will be covered under the new scheme of spending limits and such spending must be declared in their statements of election expenditure.

Up to now, all local election candidates were required to submit a declaration of election expenditure; however there were no limits on what could be spent. Candidates will continue to submit spending returns to their local authority as they have done heretofore, but will also be required to comply with the new spending limits.

The Minister said: "It is quite common for candidates to contest elections simultaneously for both a county council and an urban-based borough or town council. In these circumstances, a candidate will be able to

spend up to the limit for the county council electoral area, plus one quarter of the limit for the borough or town council”. The Minister added that given the economies of scale for a candidate in contesting two polls on the same day, it is reasonable to reduce the limit for spending in the case of the borough council or town council election.

The Minister said, “the purpose of introducing spending limits is to create as level a playing field as possible to ensure that candidates of modest means are not put at a disadvantage in contesting an election.” He said that “it will also bring local elections in line with other electoral codes where spending limits already apply.”

The Minister concluded, “building upon the existing system of election expenditure declarations by local election candidates will minimise complexity, and maximise compliance with the new spending limits. In setting the spending limits, a balance had to be struck. The limits have to be both realistic and reasonable. If they were set at too low a level, they might unduly hinder campaigning, particularly by new candidates. If the limits were pitched too high, they would defeat the objective of discouraging excessive spending. I am confident that this proposal strikes the right balance.”

### **Report on Electoral Reform:**

The Minister also published a detailed report on the establishment of an Electoral Commission in Ireland.

The report, by a team from UCD, was commissioned by the Minister. It arises from the commitment in the Programme for Government to establish an independent Electoral Commission which will take responsibility for electoral administration and oversight, implement modern and efficient electoral practices, revise constituency boundaries, take charge of compiling a new national rolling electoral register, take over the functions of the Standards in Public Office Commission relating to election spending, and examine the issue of financing the political system.

The UCD report now being published gives:

- an overview of the present arrangements for electoral administration in Ireland,
- an examination of the position in other countries,
- options for, and conclusions on, an Electoral Commission in Ireland – membership, functions, funding and relationship with others involved in electoral policy and administration,

- recommendations concerning approaches to the modernisation and consolidation of legislation in the context of the establishment of an Electoral Commission.

The report covers issues such as the registration of political parties, the electoral register, constituency revision, running elections and referenda, funding, and research and awareness activities.

“This is a major analysis of our arrangements for electoral administration which merits detailed consideration by all with an interest in this key area of our public life”, said Minister Gormley. “I want to thank Professor Sinnott and his colleagues in UCD for their excellent work”.

“The electoral system belongs to us all and I am determined to take forward change in this area on a consensus basis. For that reason, I am now inviting interested organisations and individuals to let me have their views on the important issues raised in the report. In this way, we will have a firm basis for implementation of the changes signalled in the Government Programme”, concluded the Minister.

The report is available on the Department’s website ([www.environ.ie](http://www.environ.ie)).

---

Media queries:  
Press and Information Office  
Tel: (01) 888 2638 (direct)  
(01) 888 2000  
E-Mail: [press-office@environ.ie](mailto:press-office@environ.ie)  
Web site: [www.environ.ie](http://www.environ.ie)

---

### **Notes for Editors**

- The spending limits for local elections will apply to individual candidates in the first instance. Candidates nominated by a political party will be deemed to automatically allocate 10% of their limit for use by the party’s National Agent. However, there will be scope to vary this figure upwards or downwards by written agreement between the candidate and the party.
- The spending limits are higher in county and city council areas that have larger populations. Based on past experience, expenditure by candidates varies widely, with candidates in more populated county and city council areas tending to incur greater expenditure.
- There is also considerable variation in the population of electoral areas. The county / city council electoral area smallest population is Drumlish in Longford, with 6,453 people. At the other end of

the scale, in Dublin City the Pembroke / Rathmines electoral area has the largest population, with 60,277 people. In setting the spending limits, the Minister has taken account of these differences.

- Given their different administrative responsibilities, there is a case for setting different limits for county and city councils on the one hand, and borough and town councils on the other hand. The spending limits for these local authorities will reflect this fact, with a standard limit of €7,500 applying to all borough and town council candidates.
- A summary of the proposed spending limits is set out in the following table:

<b>Electoral Area</b>	<b>Candidate Spending Limit</b>	<b>10% of Limit to be Allocated to Political Party</b>	<b>Effective Candidate Limit (Unless Altered by Written Agreement)</b>
County / City Council areas with population of 32,501 or over	€15,000	€1,500	€3,500
County / City Council areas with population between 22,501 and 32,500	€13,000	€1,300	€1,700
County / City Council areas with population between 12,001 and 22,500	€1,500	€1,150	€0,350
County / City Council areas with population of 12,000 or less	€750	€75	€775
All Borough and Town Councils	€7,500	€750	€6,750

- In all, there are 34 county and city councils, which are in turn broken down into 171 local electoral areas. The top limit of €15,000 will apply in the 43 most populated electoral areas. The limit of €13,000 will apply in 38 electoral areas. The limit of €1,500 will apply to the 66 electoral areas. The lowest limit of €750 will apply in 24 county and city council areas.
- The spending limit of €7,500 will apply to all 80 borough and town councils.

- The spending limits evidence-based, and have being informed by stakeholder consultation with local government representatives; the limits for Dáil elections; past spending patterns, and; the particular characteristics of local government in Ireland

### **Report on Electoral Reform:**

At present, electoral administration in Ireland is the responsibility of a range of bodies, including the Constituency Commission; Local Electoral Area Boundary Committees; the Standards in Public Office Commission; the Referendum Commission; Local Authorities (Electoral Register and Polling Schemes); the Clerk of the Dáil/Registrar of Political Parties; Dáil, Seanad, European, local, presidential and referendum returning officers; county registrars/sherriffs; and the Minister and his Department.

The law in the area is also complex and extensive. There are over 20 separate Acts of the Oireachtas dealing directly and solely with electoral matters.

**ENDS.**