

March 2009

The
Electoral
Commission



Local elections in Wales May 2008

Report on campaign expenditure by
election candidates

Translations and other formats

For information on obtaining this publication in another language or in a large-print or Braille version, please contact the Electoral Commission:

Tel: 020 7271 0500

Email: publications@electoralcommission.org.uk

Contents

1	About this report	1
2	Key findings	2
3	About election campaign expenditure	3
4	Spending breakdown	4
	Background	4
	Contested elections	4
	Uncontested elections	8
	Sources of funding	8

1 About this report

1.1 The Electoral Commission is an independent body set up by the UK Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA). Our aim is integrity and public confidence in the UK's democratic process. The aims and objectives of the Commission are underpinned by two key priorities – demonstrating and enhancing our effectiveness as the regulator of party and election finance and leading the drive for increasingly high standards of electoral administration. One of our objectives is integrity and transparency of party and election finance.

1.2 In line with this objective, this report contains information about the money spent by election candidates standing in local elections held in Wales on 1 May 2008. It focuses primarily on the amounts that candidates spent and how their campaigns were funded. It also reports what candidates spent their money on and provides a breakdown of spending according to political affiliation.

1.3 This is the first time that a report of candidate spending at local elections in Wales has been produced. The Commission has already published its report on the administration of the elections held in May 2008 and that report contained information about issues relating to candidates such as the process of standing for election.¹

¹ The Electoral Commission *Local elections in Wales 2008* (2008)
www.electoralcommission.org.uk/document-summary?assetid=57840

2 Key findings

2.1 Campaigning by candidates in the local elections was very localised in nature, with no high profile national advertising by political parties and only sparse distribution of placards and other such election materials outside of the highly contested wards.

2.2 In line with this, the campaigns conducted by candidates across Wales were predominantly leaflet based, with the vast majority of reported spending identified under the category of unsolicited materials to electors.

2.3 The overall level of spending by candidates across Wales was low, with no more than 31% of the total amount that candidates were allowed to spend across Wales being used.

2.4 A feature of the elections in 2008 was the increase in the number of independent candidates, with more independent candidates being elected than from any single political party. Independents are not supported with funds from political parties and this factor contributed to lower spending levels.

3 About election campaign expenditure

3.1 Spending by election candidates, in all elections in Wales, is limited by the relevant law, in line with the rest of the UK. For the local elections in 2008, the amount that could be spent was limited to £600 plus 5p per elector for the ward which the candidate was contesting.

3.2 Candidates contesting local elections are required to submit campaign expenditure returns that contain information about how much money they spent on their campaigns, what they spent it on and whether they received any donations to fund their campaigns.

3.3 At local elections, unlike at general elections for the National Assembly for Wales or for the UK Parliament, political parties are not required to submit expenditure returns for any spending the parties incur themselves.

3.4 It is not feasible, therefore, to provide a comprehensive analysis of the amount that political parties spent campaigning at the elections. However, a section of the returns that must be completed by election candidates requires information to be provided about the sources of money spent by candidates. This provides an insight into the flow of funding from parties into individual candidates' campaigns and is detailed in Table 7.

3.5 Additionally, political parties with financial transactions above a certain threshold are required to submit to the Commission annual statements of accounts detailing all of their income and expenditure over their financial year. All the four main political parties in Wales submit annual statements of accounts. These will allow for further analysis of the level of spending by political parties at the elections.²

3.6 The campaign expenditure returns for candidates had to be submitted to the relevant Local Returning Officer within 35 calendar days of the declaration of the result of the election. For those whose election results were declared by midnight on the day of polling, this deadline was 6 June 2008. The expenditure returns are publicly available for viewing at the office of the relevant Returning Officer.

3.7 This report contains information collated by the Commission from the returns submitted by candidates to Local Returning Officers and provides an overview and analysis.

² www.electoralcommission.org.uk/party-finance/database-of-registers/statement-of-accounts

4 Spending breakdown

Background

4.1 At the local elections in 2008, campaigning was very localised in nature with little noticeable national advertising by parties. Street placards were the main visible signs of campaigning and the prevalence of these was variable. It was largely a campaign conducted through the distribution of leaflets and unsolicited materials. This is reflected in levels of spending, which as the analysis below illustrates, were relatively low.

4.2 Another feature of the elections was the increase in the number of independent candidates contesting seats. The very nature of independent candidacy means an absence of national or regional campaigning and the absence of political party funds to support local campaigns. Across Wales, more independent candidates were elected than candidates from any single political party.

4.3 In total, 3,224 candidates stood for election to 1,254 seats. Of these, 104 (8.3%) seats were uncontested, with candidates elected unopposed. Taking multi-candidate seats into account, this meant that 3,121 candidates contested 1,150 seats.

4.4 The following analysis includes information on local elections held in Wales on 1 May 2008. It does not include information from any polls which were countermanded or by-elections held after 1 May 2008.

4.5 The figures presented have been taken directly from the expenses returns submitted by candidates and agents. No verification of the figures has been performed. We have attempted to identify all joint candidates and adjust the spending limits accordingly.

4.6 In some cases, the expenses returns that were submitted by candidates were incomplete or with information that was arithmetically inaccurate. These returns have been excluded from the analysis where specified but the issues raised will be considered by the Commission as set out at paragraph 4.27.

Contested elections

4.7 The total spending limit for candidates in contested wards was £2,186,615. This equates to an average spending limit of £701 per candidate.

4.8 Not all of the expenses returns submitted were arithmetically correct.

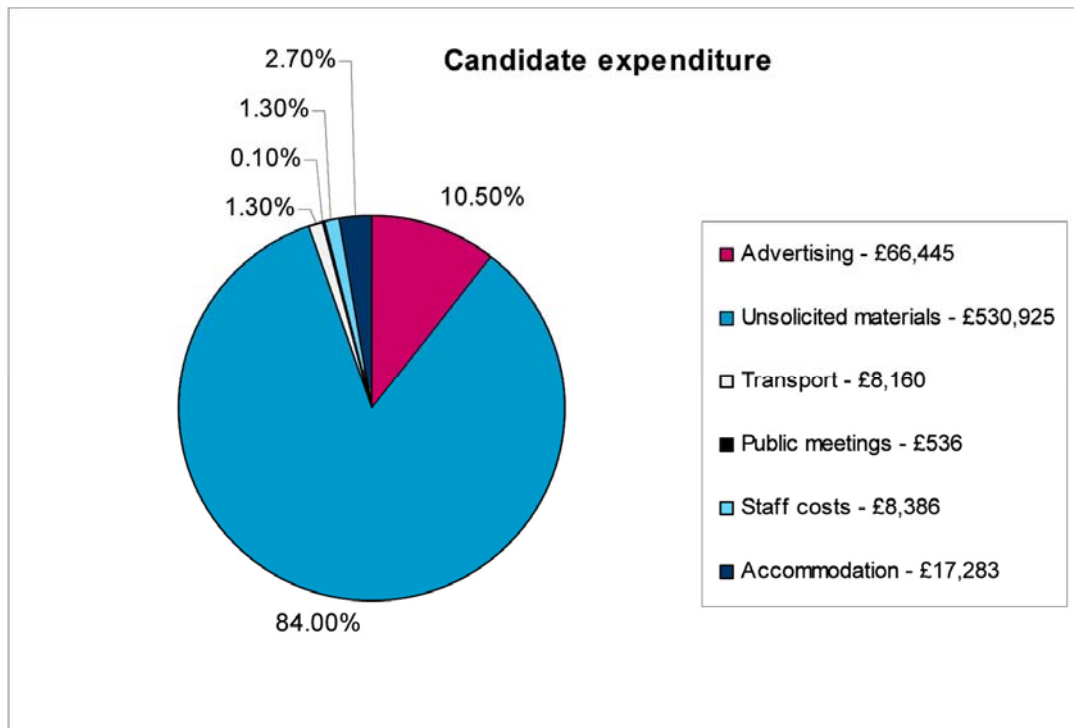
4.9 The following analysis is based on the returns submitted by the 2,930 candidates whose returns were arithmetically correct:

- the total statutory spending limit for these candidates was £2,051,730

- the total spending amount declared as spent was £631,736 (31% of the statutory limit)
- this equates to an average spending of £216 per candidate

4.10 The highest category of spending by candidates was on unsolicited materials sent to electors (such as leaflets and flyers), which accounted for 84% of total candidate spending. Advertising costs accounted for 11% of spending, with candidates incurring just 5% of spending on the remaining categories.

Figure 1: Spending according to category



4.11 The following table shows the total amount spent by candidates according to political affiliation. Candidates standing on behalf of the Conservative Party and the Labour Party spent the most, though only just over a third of the limit allowed; 37% and 36% respectively.

Table 1: Spending according to political affiliation

Party	Spending limit (£)	Total spent (£)	Percentage spent	Number of candidates	Average spending (£)
Conservative	337,597	124,720	36.9%	484	258
Labour	543,074	197,138	36.3%	820	240
Liberal Democrat	294,663	73,955	25.1%	409	181
Plaid Cymru	333,697	96,996	29.1%	469	207
Independent	405,580	114,164	28.1%	568	201
Others	137,118	24,764	18.1%	180	138
Total	2,051,730	631,736	30.8%	2,930	216

4.12 Of the candidates who were successfully elected, 1,121 submitted expenses returns that were arithmetically correct. The following analysis is based on the returns submitted by these candidates.

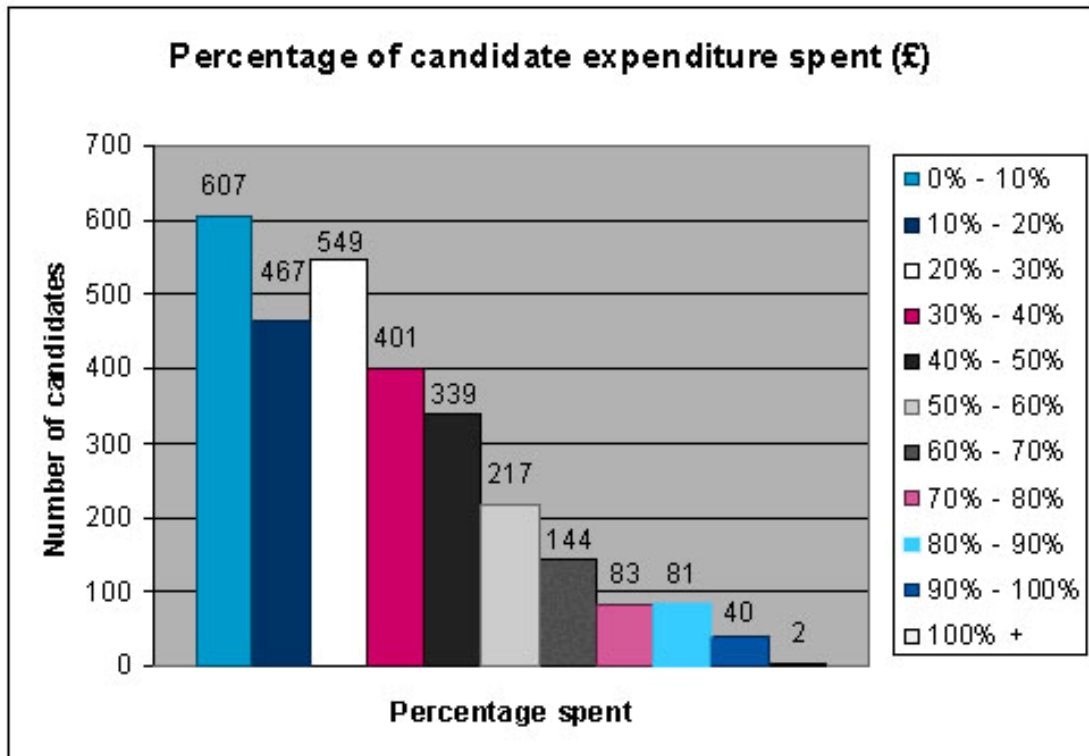
4.13 Proportionately, more was spent by candidates who were successfully elected than by all candidates. The total amount spent by candidates who were successfully elected was £293,879 (39% of the statutory limit, compared with 31% for all candidates). The following table shows the average amount spent by candidates according to political affiliation.

Table 2: Spending according to political affiliation and electoral success

Party	Number elected	Spending limit (£)	Total spent (£)	Amount spent per elected member (£)
Conservative	162	106,333	50,774	313
Labour	315	202,962	81,326	258
Liberal Democrat	151	107,828	45,177	299
Plaid Cymru	178	117,080	44,272	249
Independent	278	198,755	65,744	237
Others	37	23,838	6,586	178
Total	1,121	756,796	293,879	262

4.14 In general, levels of spending were relatively low and less than one-fifth of all candidates (19%) spent more than half of the spending limit allowed. The following figure shows the percentage of the spending limit utilised by all candidates.

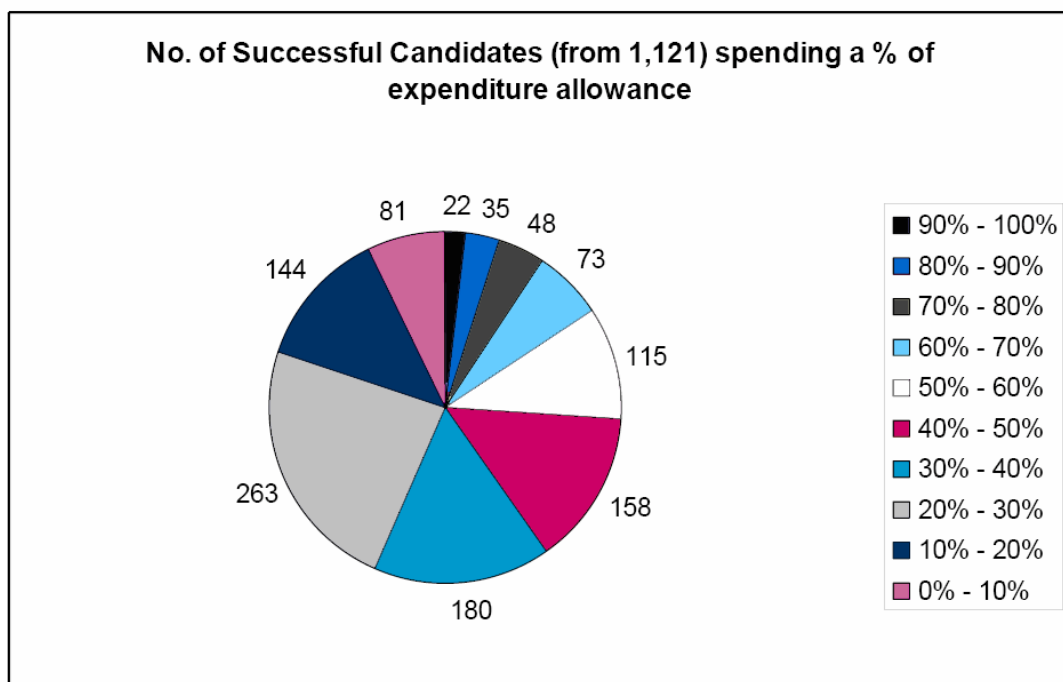
Figure 2: Percentage of spending limit utilised by candidates



4.15 Similarly, successful candidates did not spend particularly close to their limits. Only 26.2% of successful candidates spent over 50% of the statutory limit.

4.16 The following figure shows the percentage of the spending limit utilised by successful candidates.

Figure 3: Percentage of spending limit utilised by successful candidates



Uncontested elections

4.17 In uncontested elections, a candidate stands unopposed and is elected to the relevant ward without contest. This generally leads to a reduced amount of campaigning by candidates in such wards as there is no rival to campaign against.

4.18 There were 98 candidates who were returned in uncontested elections and who submitted arithmetically correct expenses returns.

4.19 Electorate figures were available for 52 of these candidates. The following analysis is based only on returns submitted by these candidates, as electorate figures are required to determine the relevant spending limits available and subsequent calculations, in line with figures presented throughout this report.

4.20 The total statutory limit available to candidates in uncontested elections across Wales was £35,050. Of this, just £1,115 (3.2%) was spent. Again, this was primarily spent on unsolicited materials sent to electors.

Table 3: Spending by uncontested candidates according to category

Category	Spending (£)	Percentage
Advertising	80	7.2%
Unsolicited materials	950	85.2%
Transport	0	0%
Public meetings	0	0%
Staff costs	75	6.7%
Accommodation	10	<1%
Total	1,115	

Sources of funding

4.21 There were 2,051 candidates who submitted expenses returns that contained information about donations made to the candidate. The following analysis is based on arithmetically correct returns submitted by these candidates.

4.22 The following tables show how candidates funded their campaigns. Sixty-three per cent of funding was provided by the political parties, usually from the local constituency branches. Thirty-five per cent of spending was met by the candidates themselves, with only 2% provided via other sources.

Table 4: Sources of funding for candidates' campaigns

Party	Provided by candidate (£)	Provided by party (£)	Provided by other (£)	Total (£)
Conservative	13,586	79,630	1,002	94,257
Labour	32,725	100,781	3,791	137,296
Liberal Democrat	15,634	37,194	1,877	54,704
Plaid Cymru	18,893	49,090	976	68,959
Independent	62,931	0	1,730	64,661
Others	11,350	6,332	187	17,870
Total	155,119	273,682	8,908	437,709

4.23 The following table shows how candidates from each party funded their campaigns, in percentage terms.

Table 5: Sources of funding for candidates' campaigns by percentage

Party	Provided by candidate (%)	Provided by party (%)	Provided by other (%)
Conservative	14.4	84.5	1.1
Labour	23.8	73.4	2.8
Liberal Democrat	28.6	68.0	3.4
Plaid Cymru	27.4	71.2	1.4
Independent	97.3	0	2.7
Others	63.5	35.4	1.0

4.24 At the time of writing this report 3,087 candidates (96%) had submitted an election expenses return, with 137 having failed to do so. Of these, there were 11 successful candidates who had failed to submit a return (five Independent candidates, four Conservatives³, one Liberal Democrat and one Llais Gwynedd).

4.25 Returning Officers across Wales conducted chase exercises for returns that had not been submitted by candidates by the due deadline. As only a small percentage of returns remain outstanding, it is possible to produce a sufficiently informative picture of spending at local elections in Wales from the figures available.

4.26 The overall picture of compliance across the reviewed returns indicated that local election candidates sought to comply with the requirements, with varying degrees of success. Where the requirements were not met, this

³ Since the writing of this report, the four outstanding successful Conservative candidate returns have been submitted. No alteration to the figures has been made to reflect these submissions.

appeared to be due to error or a misunderstanding of the information required, rather than an attempt to evade the controls on spending.

4.27 Errors in expenses returns, uncovered during the process of compiling statistics for this report, were generally not substantive and appeared genuine in nature. However, their frequency and the possible reasons for them will be taken into account by the Commission when reviewing the relevant forms and producing guidance and briefing materials for future elections.

The Electoral Commission
March 2009

How to contact us

Head Office

The Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW
Tel: 020 7271 0500
Fax: 020 7271 0505
Textphone: 18001 020 7271 0500
info@electoralcommission.org.uk
www.electoralcommission.org.uk

Devolved offices

The Electoral Commission
Scotland Office
28 Thistle Street
Edinburgh EH2 1EN
Tel: 0131 225 0200
Fax: 0131 225 0205
Textphone: 18001 0131 225 0200
infoscotland@electoralcommission.org.uk

The Electoral Commission
Wales Office
Caradog House
1-6 Saint Andrews Place
Cardiff CF10 3BE
Tel: 029 2034 6800
Fax: 029 2034 6805
Textphone: 18001 029 2034 6800
infowales@electoralcommission.org.uk

The Electoral Commission
Northern Ireland Office
Seatem House
28-32 Alfred Street
Belfast BT2 8EN
Tel: 028 9089 4020
Fax: 028 9089 4026
Textphone: 18001 028 9089 4020
inonthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk

English offices

The Electoral Commission
North of England Office
York Science Park
IT Centre
Innovation Way
Heslington
York YO10 5DG
Tel: 01904 567990
Fax: 01904 567719
Textphone: 18001 01904 567990
north@electoralcommission.org.uk

The Electoral Commission
Midlands Office, No 2 The Oaks
Westwood Way, Westwood Business Park
Coventry CV4 8JB
Tel: 02476 820086
Fax: 02476 820001
Textphone: 18001 02476 820086
midlands@electoralcommission.org.uk

The Electoral Commission
Eastern and South East Office
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW
Tel: 020 7271 0600
Fax: 020 7271 0505
Textphone: 18001 020 7271 0600
south@electoralcommission.org.uk

The Electoral Commission
London Office
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW
Tel: 020 7271 0689
Fax: 020 7271 0505
Textphone: 18001 020 7271 0689
london@electoralcommission.org.uk

The Electoral Commission
South West Office
Regus, 1 Emperor Way
Exeter Business Park
Exeter EX1 3QS
Tel: 01392 314617
Fax: 01392 314001
Textphone: 18001 01392 314617
southwest@electoralcommission.org.uk

The Electoral Commission

Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW

Tel 020 7271 0500
Fax 020 7271 0505
info@electoralcommission.org.uk
www.electoralcommission.org.uk

To contact our offices in Scotland, Wales,
Northern Ireland and the English regions,
see inside back cover for details.

We are an independent body set up by
the UK Parliament. Our aim is integrity and
public confidence in the democratic process.
We regulate party and election finance and
set standards for well-run elections.

Democracy matters