



The cost of electoral administration in Great Britain

Financial information survey 2007–8 and 2008–9

June 2010

Translations and other formats

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Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Summary | 4 |
| About this research | 4 |
| Key findings | 5 |
| 1 Introduction | 8 |
| About this research | 8 |
| Data quality | 10 |
| 2 Funding of electoral administration | 12 |
| 3 Electoral administration costs across Great Britain | 14 |
| Split of expenditure between registration and elections in Great Britain | 15 |
| Expenditure per elector across Great Britain | 17 |
| Itemised expenditure across Great Britain | 19 |
| 4 Electoral registration costs across Great Britain | 21 |
| Breakdown of registration expenditure | 22 |
| 5 Costs across Great Britain of conducting elections | 25 |
| 6 Conclusion | 27 |

Appendices

| | |
|---|----|
| Appendix A – Total funding in Great Britain 2007/09 | 29 |
| Appendix B – Total funding in types of English authority 2007–9 | 30 |
| Appendix C – Total registration costs in Great Britain | 31 |
| Appendix D – Total election costs in Great Britain | 32 |

Summary

The Electoral Administration Act 2006 (EAA) gave the Electoral Commission powers to request financial information from Returning Officers (ROs) and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs)¹ on the costs of delivering their election and electoral registration functions. This is the first time that such comprehensive financial information has been collected across Great Britain.

The purpose of this analysis is to provide a baseline of the current levels of expenditure for electoral registration and the conduct of elections across Great Britain. To gain further comparative data and to ensure the development of a long-term evidence base we will collect this information at the end of each financial year. We aim to focus our analysis on the efficiency and effectiveness of this expenditure.

The data we have collected so far has provided us with an essential starting point to ascertain the true cost of electoral services in Great Britain. In future years we will be able to use this information in conjunction with our analysis of performance by ROs and EROs to more clearly establish relationships between performance and funding for electoral administration. We will be able to identify where overall expenditure is significantly more or less than comparable peer authorities, and also where the balance of expenditure between different activities reflects differing priorities (for example, identifying whether there is a link between funding for public awareness activities and performance by EROs and ROs).

About this report

This report provides details on the first two years' data collection covering the 2007–8 and 2008–9 financial years. Electoral services activity falls into two statutory functions, electoral registration and the conduct of elections. The electoral activities covered by our 2007–8 and 2008–9 surveys are summarised in the table below.

Table 1: Electoral activities covered by 2007–8 and 2008–9 survey

| Financial year | Event |
|-----------------------|---|
| 2007–8 | Elections to the Scottish Parliament |
| | Elections to the National Assembly for Wales |
| | Local government elections across most of England (with the notable exception of the 33 London authorities) |
| | Autumn 2007 annual canvass |

¹ The provision to direct EROs and ROs introduced by the EAA do not apply in Northern Ireland or to local government elections in Scotland.

Rolling registration activities throughout the year

| | |
|--------|---|
| 2008–9 | Local government elections in England |
| | Local government elections in Wales |
| | Greater London Authority elections |
| | Autumn 2008 annual canvass |
| | Rolling registration activities throughout the year |

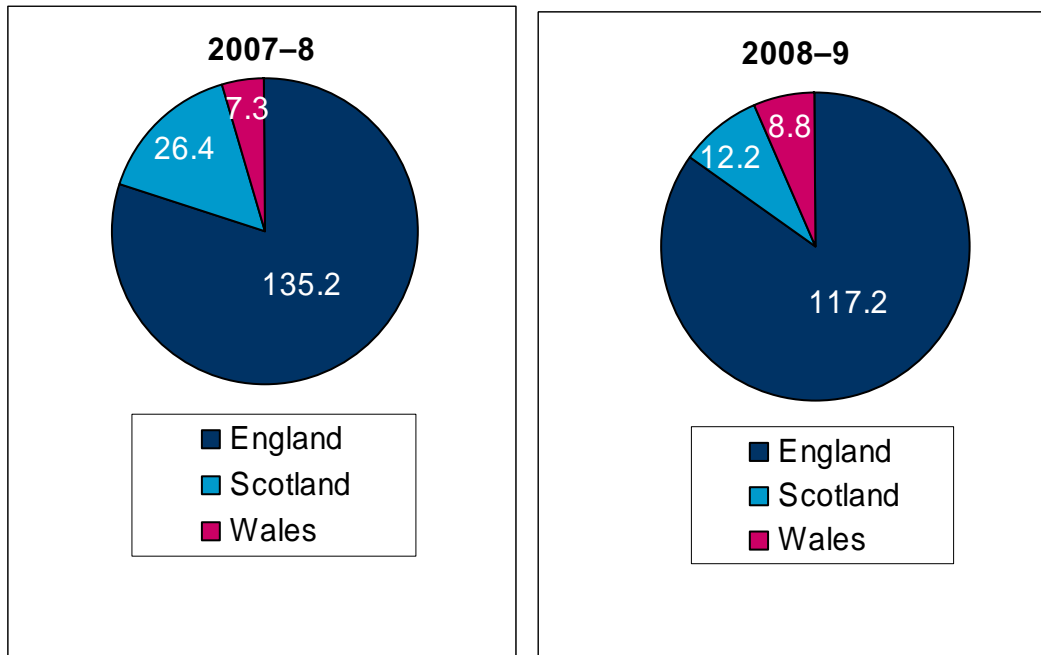
In the two years covered by this data the electoral registration function has been unchanged by legislation or cyclical events and so this data does bear comparison on a year-to-year basis. In the conduct of elections however, the picture is less consistent. Due to the timings of elections and various funding sources, consistent comparisons are difficult to achieve. At present there is no consistent pattern of electoral cycle for local authorities in England, and the frequency with which authorities elect their members varies considerably both between and within local authority types. One of the overall effects of these disparities in electoral cycles is that there is no consistent pattern to the scale of local elections from year to year.

Key findings²

- In 2007–8 electoral services teams across Great Britain received around **£145.3 million** in funding, nearly 8% more than the **£133.9 million** received in 2008–9. The majority of this funding came from local authorities (£119.3m in both years) with the remainder coming from external sources (such as from the UK Ministry of Justice or Electoral Claims Unit).
- In 2007–8, local authorities across Great Britain spent a total of around **£168.9 million** (gross) on electoral administration. In 2008–9 total spending was lower at roughly **£138.2 million** (gross), which reflects the fact that there were fewer elections and therefore a reduced cost.
- Our analysis has identified a discrepancy where the overall amount spent on electoral administration (by the electoral services teams) exceeds the funding provided by local authorities and specific grants. This issue seemed to be widespread across Great Britain, but due to limitations of the survey in 2007–8, the available information is not sufficient to identify why this gap exists. We will be doing further work on this following this year's survey.

² We received a response rate of over 80% in each year. Since the survey did not reach a 100% response rate, and some responses did not complete all the questions, totals were 'grossed' using class total trends from this year's and last year's returned data.

Figure 1: Electoral administration costs in Great Britain, 2007–8 and 2008–9 (£millions)



- The total expenditure is split between spending on electoral registration and conducting elections. In 2007–8 the split was almost equal with **£81.1 million** (gross) spent on registration and **£87.7 million** (gross) on elections. However in 2008–9 the split was much wider with a similar amount spent on registration, **£82.8 million** (gross), but far less on elections at **£55.4 million** (gross). This reflects a smaller number of elections across Great Britain in 2008–9, when no elections were held in Scotland and there were around 140 fewer local government elections in England.
- Although a broadly similar amount was spent on electoral registration in both years, figure 2 shows that the proportion of spending was higher on registration in 2008–9 because of the lower relative spend on elections.

Figure 2: Split of expenditure between electoral registration and elections across Great Britain, 2007–8 & 2008–9 (£millions)



- After taking into account any income, net expenditure on the annual canvass was slightly more in 2008–9 (**£47.6 million**) than the previous year (**£42.1 million**). Similarly, more was spent in net terms outside the annual canvass period in 2008–9 (**£32.3 million**) than in 2007–8 (**£27.9 million**).

1 Introduction

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 to ensure integrity and public confidence in the democratic process. This aim is underpinned by two objectives – transparency and integrity in party and election finance and well-run elections, referendums and electoral registration. Our corporate plan sets our strategic direction over the five years from April 2010.

About this research

1.2 The Electoral Administration Act 2006 (EAA) gave the Electoral Commission powers to request financial information from Returning Officers (ROs) and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) on their conduct of elections and electoral registration costs. This report provides an analysis of electoral administration expenditure covering the 2007–8 and 2008–9 financial years.

1.3 Although funding for some elections is provided by the UK Government, details of the costs of those elections are not routinely published. Therefore by collecting this information, we have started, for the first time, to analyse the costs required to deliver core electoral administration functions across Great Britain. This analysis was undertaken in order to:

- provide a better understanding of current expenditure and levels of funding for electoral services across Great Britain
- help identify any funding barriers to the completeness and accuracy of electoral registers
- identify any funding barriers to well-run elections

Financial information survey 2007–8 and 2008–9

1.4 In order to carry out this research, we worked with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) during spring and summer 2007 to develop a financial information survey, which we also tested with a selection of local authorities.

1.5 The survey covered details of actual expenditure on elections and electoral registration work, broken down to show the type of spend, together with information about funding sources. The survey followed CIPFA's Best Value Accounting Code of Practice (BVACOP) which itemises expenditure in two ways: subjective expenditure and objective expenditure.

1.6 The first section of the survey looked at subjective expenditure. This is a breakdown of expenditure by the type of goods or services purchased, including:

- employee costs (core and temporary)
- premises expenditure
- transport costs

- supplies and services
- third party payments
- support services

1.7 The structure of this section of the survey followed that of the Revenue Outturn form which is submitted to either the Communities and Local Government department of the UK Government, or the Welsh Assembly Government, or the Provisional Outturn and Budget Estimate form, which is submitted to the Scottish Government.

1.8 The final section asked questions on objective expenditure. This is the breakdown of expenditure according to when costs were incurred, either during or outside the annual canvass period for electoral registration and during the election period by:

- core team staffing
- design and printing
- mail distribution
- distribution of canvassing
- processing forms, queries and appeals
- publicity/outreach
- management and compilation of register
- other³

Request for information from ROs and EROs

1.9 In September 2007 we sent our survey to ROs and EROs across Great Britain, asking them to provide information about their expenditure for the 2007–8 financial year by completing and returning the survey by 31 July 2008. In Scotland, surveys were returned separately by the ROs for Scottish councils and by the EROs appointed to act for those councils.⁴

1.10 The key electoral administration activities which took place during the 2007–8 financial year included:

- the autumn 2007 annual canvass of electors
- rolling registration of electors outside the canvass period between April 2007 and March 2008
- elections to the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales in May 2007
- local government elections across most of England (with the notable exception of the 33 London authorities) in May 2007, which included 36

³ Note that temporary staff costs are not listed separately, they are included under the 'other' headings.

⁴ Scottish councils may appoint either one of their officers, an officer of an adjoining council, or an officer appointed by a combination of councils, to act as the ERO for the authority. Currently, 10 EROs are appointed by groups of two, three or four councils, representing 27 of the 32 Scottish councils. The remaining five councils have appointed one of their own officers to act solely for their own area.

metropolitan borough councils, 45 unitary authorities and 231 district councils

1.11 Although the period also included elections to all Scottish councils, our powers under the EAA do not extend to Scottish local government elections, and therefore we were not able to collect cost and funding information on this basis.

1.12 The financial information survey covering the 2008–9 financial year was sent out to ROs and EROs in April 2009, and asked for ROs and EROs to provide information about their expenditure for the 2008–9 financial year by completing and returning the survey by 31 July 2009.

1.13 The key electoral administration activities which took place during the 2008–9 financial year included:

- the autumn 2008 annual canvass of electors
- rolling registration of electors outside the canvass period between April 2008 and March 2009
- local government elections across most of England in May 2008, which included 36 metropolitan borough councils, 38 unitary authorities and 80 district councils
- local government elections across Wales
- Greater London Authority elections

Use of gross and net expenditure

1.14 The first section of the survey, subjective expenditure analysis (registration of electors and conducting elections), was completed with gross expenditure and income separately identified. The second and third sections (funding and objective expenditure analysis) gave 'net' totals (with income already deducted from the gross expenditure). It should therefore be noted that the subjective analyses are based on gross expenditure and the objective and funding analyses are based on net expenditure. Therefore the figures will not be equal.

Data quality

1.15 We received responses from 85% of officers in 2007–8 and 80% in 2008–9. The most common reason given by those who did not respond was a lack of staff time (from both electoral services managers and local authority finance teams) to complete the survey, or an inability to retrieve the information in the format that our survey requested. We have now revised the survey, in conjunction with CIPFA and a number of electoral administrators, to make the guidance clearer and the survey more understandable and easier to complete. We now expect that the survey can be completed more easily and consistently by all authorities, and we will work to ensure a full response rate this year.

1.16 As we did not receive a full set of returns, and some of the returns we did receive were incomplete, to account for this, we grossed class totals⁵ up using class total trends from both years' returned data. 'Grossing' is a process where information is taken from authorities who responded to both years' surveys and then trends are calculated and applied to those areas where data is missing.

1.17 In order to ensure that the information returned to us was accurate and consistent, CIPFA carried out a thorough verification process. Wherever the data validation process raised doubts about the quality of the data, CIPFA contacted the relevant local authority to clarify any inconsistencies and request resubmission of the data if appropriate. As part of this process we received updated figures from many authorities. However, some authorities did not return communication or could not produce figures in the format the survey requested. We have addressed this for future surveys to ensure that contradictions and errors are kept to a minimum.

1.18 Interpretation of the Notes of Guidance for the survey also differed from authority to authority. For example, support service costs should have been apportioned across the categories in the objective expenditure section. On the survey a number of authorities stated that these costs were included in the 'other' category. This has had the effect of increasing the proportion of 'other' costs. It has not always been possible to identify where these differences of interpretation have occurred.

1.19 Another area where authorities had difficulty apportioning costs was when permanent staff covered both registration of electors and conducting elections. A number of returns stated that it was not possible to accurately apportion staff across the two categories. As with the concerns of 'other' costs noted above, this has led to uncertainty over the accuracy of proportions.

1.20 Coding of functions by authorities also produced varied results. For example, core teams were often coded in such a way that their costs appeared under support services.

⁵ Class totals refer to the sum of similar types of authority, e.g. a class total for inner London would be the sum of all authorities classed as an inner London authority.

2 Funding of electoral administration (electoral registration and elections)

2.1 The second section of the financial survey looked at the funding options available to Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and Returning Officers (ROs). These included:

- the budget received from the local authority
- additional funding received in the form of special or specific grants (such as from the UK Ministry of Justice or Electoral Claims Unit)

2.2 Funding of electoral registration and the costs of elections to local councils are found from within local authority budgets, with no dedicated budget or ring-fencing. Funding for national elections is from the Consolidated Fund⁶, and is provided in the form of specific grants for predefined activities.

2.3 Appendices A and B show the full figures for funding across Great Britain, England, Scotland and Wales and local authority types across England (both total and per elector figures).

Key information

- In 2007–8 local authorities across Great Britain received total funding of just over **£145 million** for electoral services. Roughly 80% (£119m) was funded by local authorities with the remainder coming from additional funding received in the form of special and specific grants.
- In 2008–9 the total amount of funding decreased to **£133.9 million**, but the total amount funded by local authorities remained the same (£119 million) increasing the proportion to just under 90%.
- Across England, in both financial years, 90% (£100 million) of electoral administration was funded by local authorities. The remainder (£10 million in 2007–8 and £12 million in 2008–9) came from additional funding received in the form of special and specific grants, mainly from the Ministry of Justice.
- A far larger proportion of the funding total was financed through the additional funding received, in the form of special and specific grants in Wales and Scotland (more than 40%). In 2007–8, this reflected the elections to the devolved institutions in that year.

2.4 In 2007–8 local authorities in Wales provided just under £4.6 million in funding compared with £3.3 million from additional funding in the form of special and specific grants. The cost to local authorities of the National Assembly for Wales elections were reimbursed by the Welsh Assembly

⁶ The Government's general account at the Bank of England. Tax revenues and other current receipts are paid into this Fund. Parliament gives statutory authority for funds to be drawn from the Consolidated Fund to meet most expenditure by the Government.

Government through the Returning Officers Fees and Charges Order 2007. This explains the higher figure in the additional funding section for that year compared to 2008–9. In 2008–9 local authorities in Wales contributed £7.2 million (over 85% of the total funding), with the remaining £1.2 million coming from additional funding.

2.5 In 2007–8 local authorities in Scotland provided £14.5 million in funding compared to £12 million from additional funding in the form of special and specific grants. The Scottish Parliamentary elections were funded through the Fees and Charges Order 2007, but the electronic counting for the local government elections was funded by the Scottish Government. In 2008–9 the local authorities provided £11 million in funding (representing 90% of the total funding), with the remaining £1.1 million coming from additional funding through special and specific grants.

3 Electoral administration costs across Great Britain (electoral registration and elections)

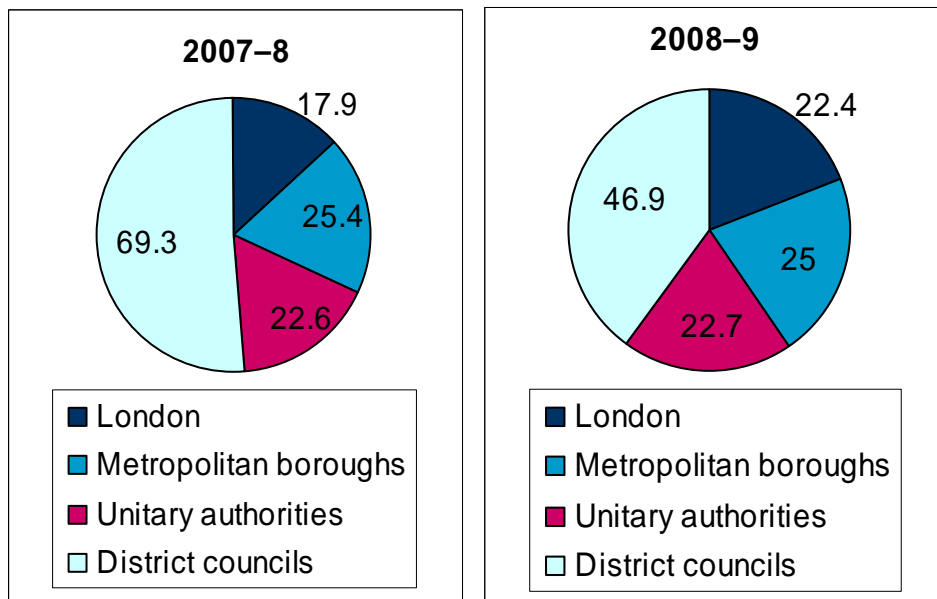
Key information

- In 2007–8, local authorities across Great Britain spent a total of **£168.9 million** (gross) on electoral administration. Fewer elections, and therefore a reduced cost, are reflected in the total spending in 2008–9 which was lower at **£138.2 million** (gross).
- In 2007–8, **£135.2 million** (gross) was spent on electoral administration in England compared to **£117.2 million** (gross) in 2008–9. In 2008–9, there were Greater London Authority elections, but fewer local elections as a whole.
- With no elections held in Scotland in 2008–9, local authorities there spent half as much on electoral administration in 2008–9 than in 2007–8, at **£12.2 million** (gross) and **£26.4 million** (gross) respectively.
- Local authorities in Wales spent more in 2008–9 at **£8.8 million** (gross) compared to **£7.3 million** (gross) the previous year. This is due to a higher spending on elections in 2008–9.

3.1 Almost 85% of the total revenue expenditure on electoral administration was spent by local authorities in England (a slight increase from 80% in 2007–8). These figures are to be expected as 86% of the Great Britain electorate is in England.

3.2 Figure 3 shows that there are differences in overall expenditure on electoral administration in England between 2007–8 and 2008–9. District councils have the highest overall gross expenditure in both years, which is to be expected as they account for more than half of the total authorities in England. In 2007–8 district councils' overall gross expenditure (£69.3 million) represented over half of the total local authority spend across England. This proportion dropped to just under 40% in 2008–9 (£46.9 million). This is due to fewer elections and therefore a reduced cost of elections for district councils in 2008–9 and a higher proportion of spend by London boroughs due to the Greater London Authority elections in 2008–9. Metropolitan and unitary authorities both spent proportionally the same amount in both years.

Figure 3: Electoral administration costs by type of local authority in England 2008–9 and 2007–8 (£millions)



Split of expenditure between electoral registration and elections in Great Britain

Key information

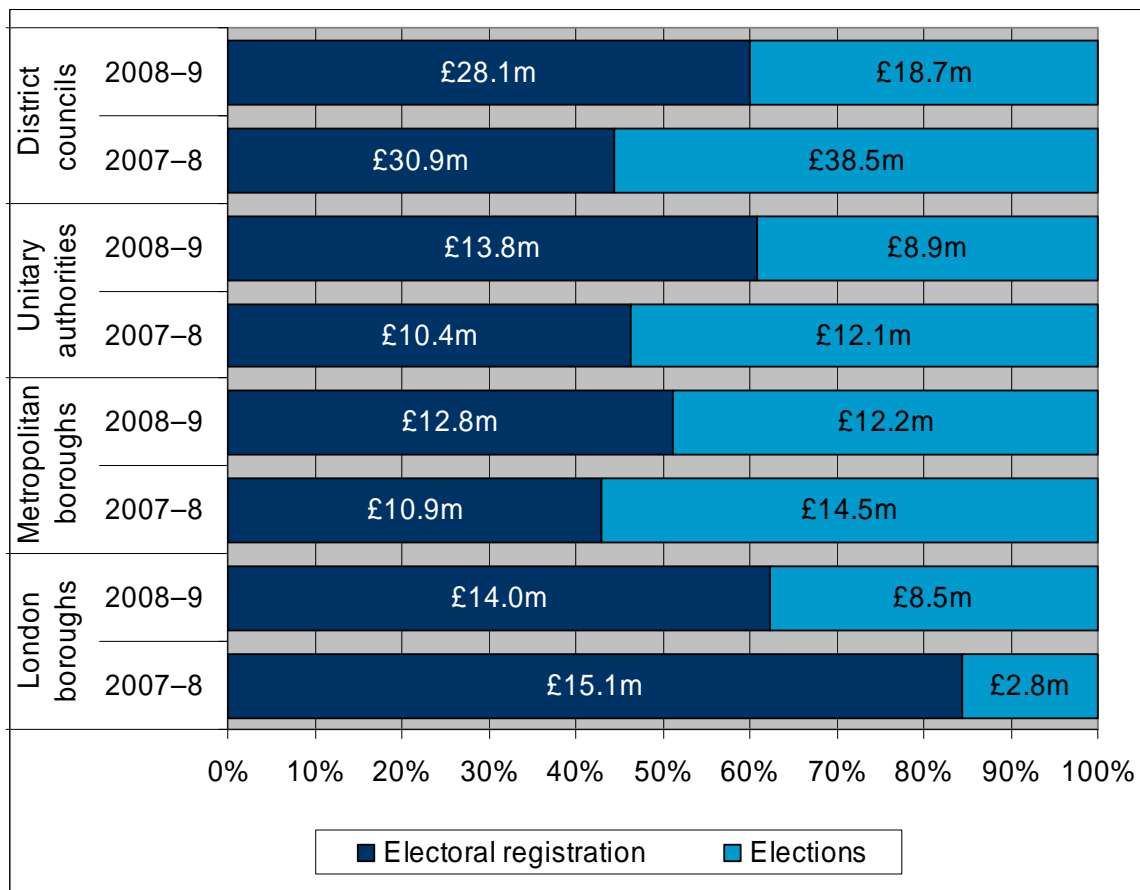
- The balance of spending was split almost equally between electoral registration and elections across England in 2007–8. However, the split was much wider in 2008–9 with a higher proportion of overall expenditure being spent on registration. This was due to the reduction in the number of elections, while spend on registration remained broadly the same.
- In 2008–9 Wales spent a slightly greater proportion of their total expenditure on conducting elections than on electoral registration. This was a change from 2007–8 when expenditure on conducting elections was marginally smaller than on electoral registration.
- In Scotland, where a greater proportion of the overall expenditure was associated with the conduct of elections in 2007–8, a substantially higher proportion of overall expenditure was spent on registration in 2008–9 when there were no elections.

3.3 Expenditure on elections in Scotland included the costs of using electronic counting systems for the combined Scottish Parliament and local government elections in May 2007. The analysis of itemised expenditure across Great Britain,

which follows later in this chapter, illustrates more clearly comparative levels of expenditure.

3.4 Figure 4 shows the balance of spending in 2007–8 and 2008–9 across the local authority types in England. The balance of spending between electoral registration and the conduct of elections was fairly similar across all local authority types in 2007–8, with the exception of the 33 London boroughs, where there were no scheduled elections held in May 2007. The overall proportion spent on registration was higher for district councils and unitary authorities in 2008–9, although the actual amounts spent were less. This is due to the lower spend on elections by district and unitary authorities in 2008–9, therefore a higher proportion of total spend was spent on registration.

Figure 4: Balance of expenditure on electoral registration and the conduct of elections by local authorities in England, 2007–9 (£millions)



Expenditure per elector across Great Britain

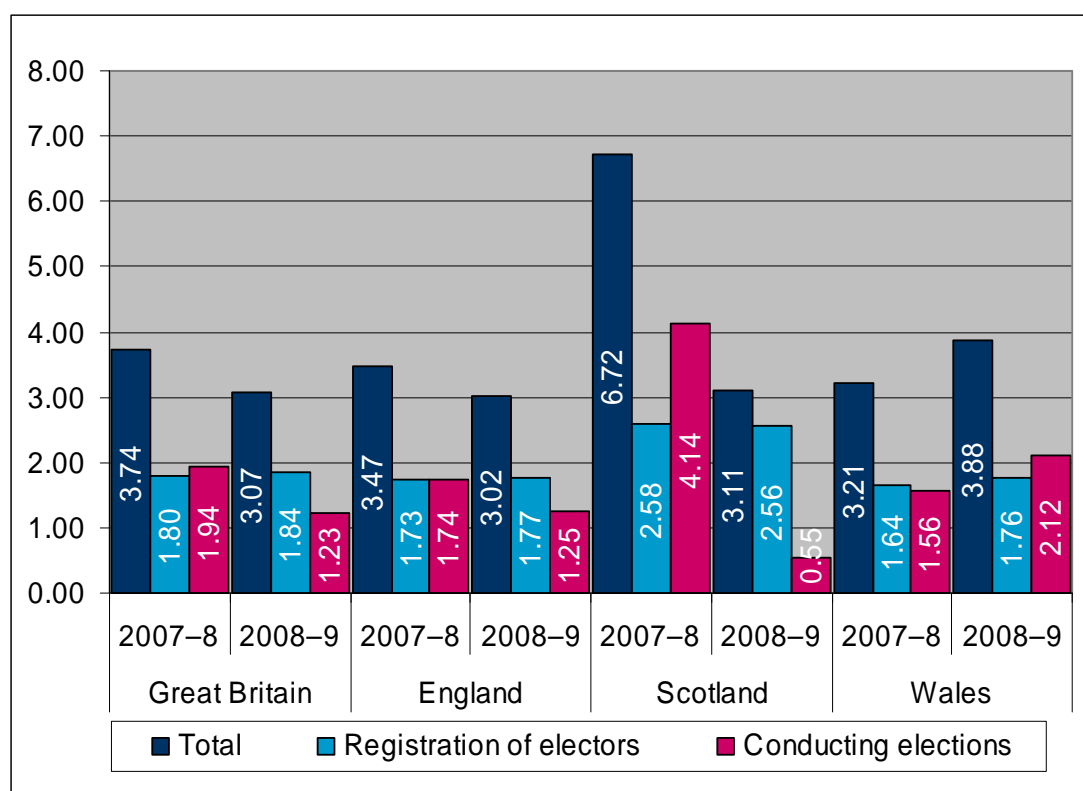
Key information

- In 2008–9, total expenditure across Great Britain was **£3.07** per elector (in 2007–8 this was **£3.74**).⁷ There was a similar decrease across England and Scotland, but the cost per elector increased in Wales. The variances in the cost per elector year on year are attributable to the differences of spend on elections in both years.
- In 2007–8, total expenditure per elector in Scotland was significantly higher than expenditure across Great Britain as a whole, at **£6.72**. This was due to the cost of elections being significantly higher in Scotland at **£4.14** per elector compared with **£1.94** across Great Britain as a whole. This is because in May 2007 Scotland's expenditure included the use of electronic counting systems in the elections.⁸ Overall costs per elector in Scotland decreased in 2008–9 in line with Great Britain, due to a lower spend per elector on conducting elections in that year.
- In 2007–8 expenditure per elector in Scotland on electoral registration was also higher than the spend across Great Britain as a whole, at **£2.58** compared with **£1.80** for Great Britain. This was maintained in 2008–9. We intend to carry out further work in this area on the reasons why.

⁷ Per elector costs for have been calculated using the total electorate of an area, figures obtained from ONS.

⁸ This was the first time that the single transferable vote (STV) system had been used for statutory elections in Great Britain and represented a change from the traditional system used in Scotland and the rest of Britain. Due to the additional complexity of counting STV compared to the first-past-the-post system, the Scottish Executive concluded that the traditional manual counting of the ballot papers would not be effective for the 2007 elections and that electronic counting technology would be required.

Figure 5: Expenditure on electoral administration per elector 2007–9 (£)



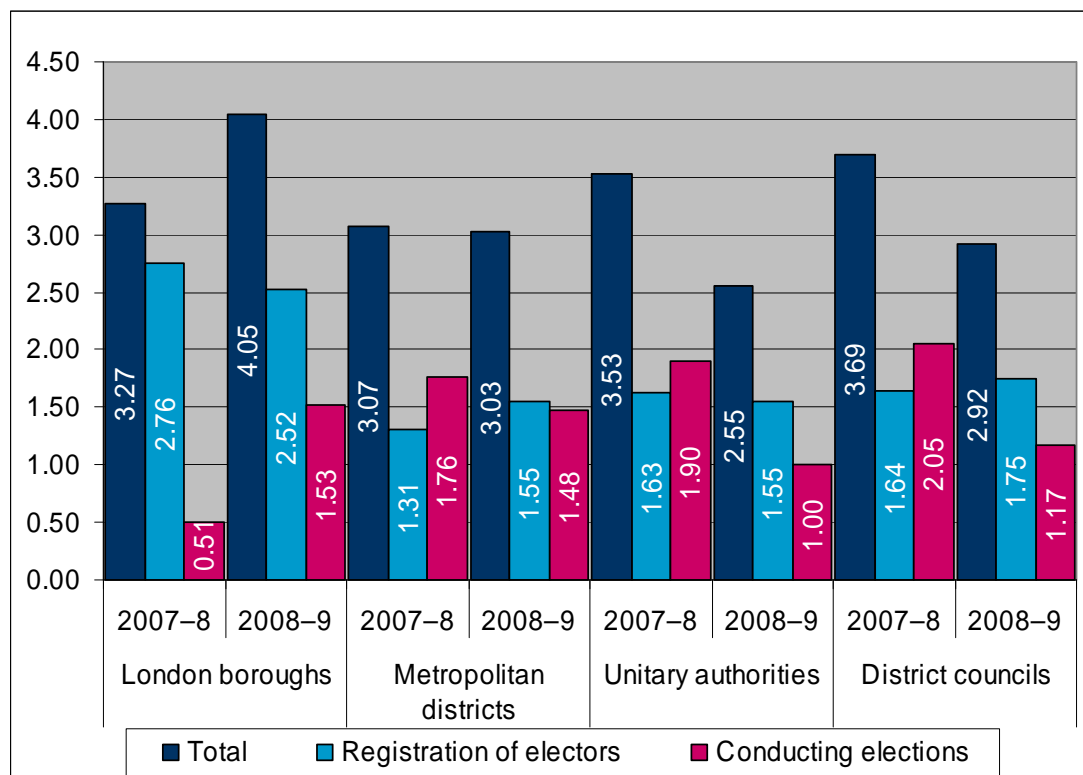
3.5 Figure 6 shows the expenditure on electoral administration per elector across the local authority types in England. In 2007–8, while electoral administration expenditure across England as a whole was **£3.47** per elector, expenditure by different authority types ranged from **£3.07** per elector by metropolitan districts to **£3.69** per elector by district councils. In 2008–9 the overall cost per elector dropped to **£3.02** in England but the range across the different types of local authority was wider, spanning **£2.55** to **£4.05**. The highest figure was in London and was due to higher electoral registration spend than in any other local authority type.

3.6 Metropolitan districts spent the least in 2007–8 on electoral registration, with unitary and district authorities spending roughly the same at **£1.63** and **£1.64** respectively. Similarly, metropolitan and unitary authorities spent the least in 2008–9 on electoral registration at **£1.55** per elector. Expenditure on electoral registration by authorities in London was **just over £1 higher** than across England as a whole in 2007–8 and **just under £1 higher** in 2008–9. This was significantly higher than all other authority types in both years.

3.7 London boroughs spent the least in 2007–8 on conducting elections, at **£0.51** per elector, due to no scheduled elections being held.⁹ In 2008–9 it was unitary authorities who spent the least, at **£1.00** per elector.

⁹ There were a number of by-elections held across London in 2007–8 which would account for the spend on elections within this financial year, as well as fixed costs of maintaining core services.

Figure 6: Expenditure on electoral administration by type of English local authority per elector 2007–9 (£)



Itemised expenditure across Great Britain

Key information

- Across Great Britain the largest category of expenditure on electoral administration was staff costs (**41.6%** in 2007–8 and just over **45%** in 2008–9). This included costs for both core electoral services teams and temporary staff, such as polling station staff and canvassers.
- The second highest costs (supplies and services) accounted for approximately one-third of the total spend in both years. This included expenditure on IT equipment, such as electoral management software, as well as design, printing and postage costs.
- The smallest area of spend was on premises and third party payments.

3.8 When looking in more detail at the costs of counting votes and IT systems we can see that in 2007–8 there was a much higher spend per elector on counting votes and IT systems in Scotland than that in England and Wales. £0.99 per elector was spent on counting votes (processing) and £0.63 on IT systems in Scotland, compared to £0.09 and £0.12 spent in England and Wales on counting votes (processing) and £0.09 and £0.03 spent in England and Wales on IT systems. This higher cost per elector is attributable

to the use of the electronic counting technology used at for the Scottish Parliament and Scottish local government elections in May 2007.

3.9 In Wales, supplies and services accounted for a slightly greater proportion of the overall expenditure than the equivalent spend in Great Britain as a whole in 2007–8. Local authorities in Wales reported no expenditure on third party payments (consultancy or joint working) in 2007–8 and a slight increase (0.5%) in 2008–9.

3.10 In England costs associated with staffing and supplies and services accounted for a greater proportion of the total spend across all local authority types. The Greater London Authority elections in 2008–9 meant that staffing costs in London accounted for nearly two-thirds of the total expenditure that year. Metropolitan districts and unitary authorities spent a higher proportion of their total spend on supplies and services compared to other authority types, with London boroughs spending the lowest proportion in this category.

3.11 Unitary authorities spent a large proportion of their expenditure on third parties (6.5%) in 2007–8. This was far more than all the other authority types, close only to London boroughs. However, this figure dropped to just over 1% in 2008–9 in line with the average across Great Britain.

3.12 District councils spent the highest proportion of total spend on support services, just over one-fifth in 2007–8 rising to just under 30% in 2008–9. All other authority types spent under 20% of their total spend on this area, with metropolitan districts spending the lowest proportion in both years.

4 Electoral registration costs across Great Britain

4.1 An Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) has a duty to maintain the register of electors. A proactive approach to this duty is required throughout the year, however, the ERO is also required to conduct an annual canvass. The annual canvass takes place every autumn and its purpose is to ascertain the name and address details of anyone who is entitled to be on the register of electors.

4.2 This chapter looks at the electoral registration costs across Great Britain and in particular the split of the cost during the annual canvass period and outside the annual canvass period.

4.3 The following analysis is based on data from Section 3 of the survey, the 'Objective expenditure analysis'. The information requested in this section was on a net basis where gross expenditure and income were not identified. Therefore readers of this report should note that figures in the following analysis and those in Chapter 3 may not be equal.

Key information

- The total expenditure on electoral registration in England was **£57.2 million** in 2007–8 and **£66.1 million** in 2008–9.
- Just under half of the total expenditure on electoral registration by local authorities in England was spent by district councils, with **£25.0 million** in 2007–8 and **£27.2 million** in 2008–9.
- Spend in metropolitan districts increased from **£10.1 million** in 2007–8 to **£11.8 million** in 2008–9.
- Spend in unitary authorities increased from **£9.4 million** in 2007–8 to **£13.4 million** in 2008–9.
- Spend in London boroughs increased from **£12.7 million** in 2007–8 to **£13.7 million** in 2008–9.
- The overall electoral registration expenditure in Wales was broadly the same year-on-year, at **£3.8 million** in 2007–8 increasing to **£3.9 million** in 2008–9.
- Spend in Scotland increased from **£9.0 million** in 2007–8 to **£9.9 million** in 2008–9.

4.4 Appendix C shows the total electoral registration cost and the split between the annual canvass period and outside the annual canvass period in England, Scotland and Wales in a table format.

Breakdown of electoral registration expenditure

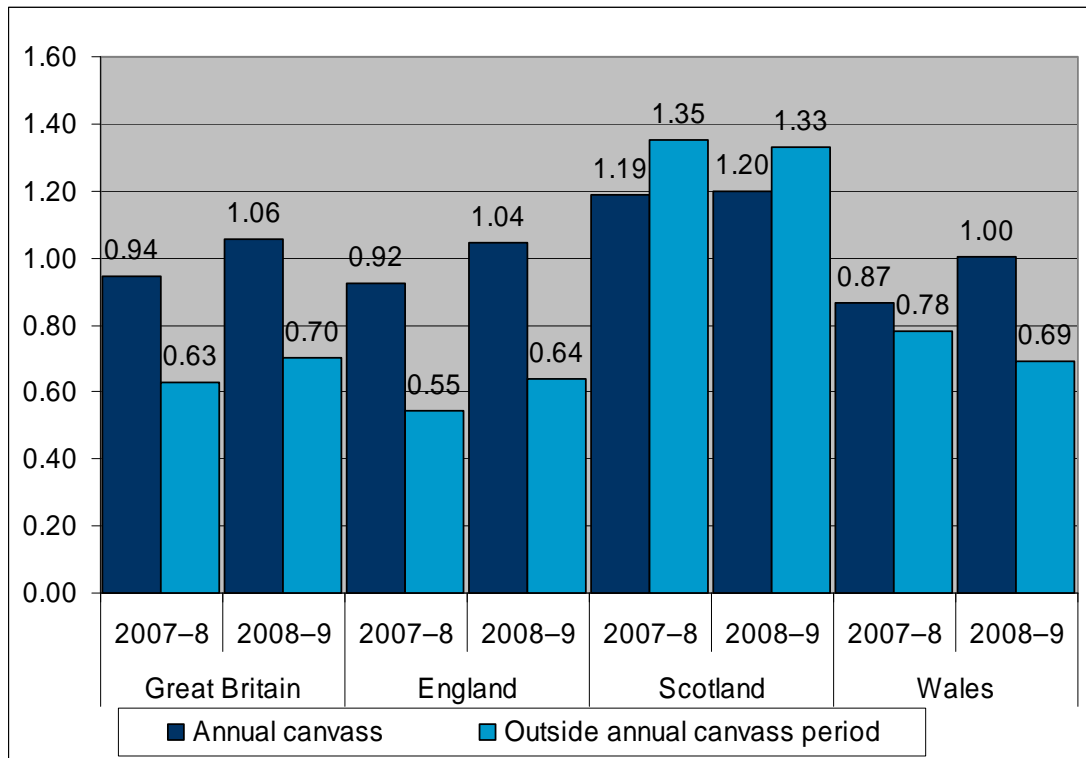
Key information

- In 2007–8 local authorities in Scotland spent less than half of their registration expenditure on the annual canvass compared to just under two-thirds in England and just over half in Wales. Proportions were broadly similar in 2008–9, although local authorities in Wales spent a slightly higher proportion on the annual canvass than the previous year.
- When looking at breakdown by English authority type, all authority types spent the majority of their expenditure on the annual canvass. This was most significant in metropolitan districts, where just under two-thirds of the total spend over the two years was spent during the annual canvass. The smallest proportion, shown within London boroughs, was still over half of the total registration outlay in 2008–9.

4.5 Figure 7 shows how the registration expenditure across Great Britain was broken down per elector.

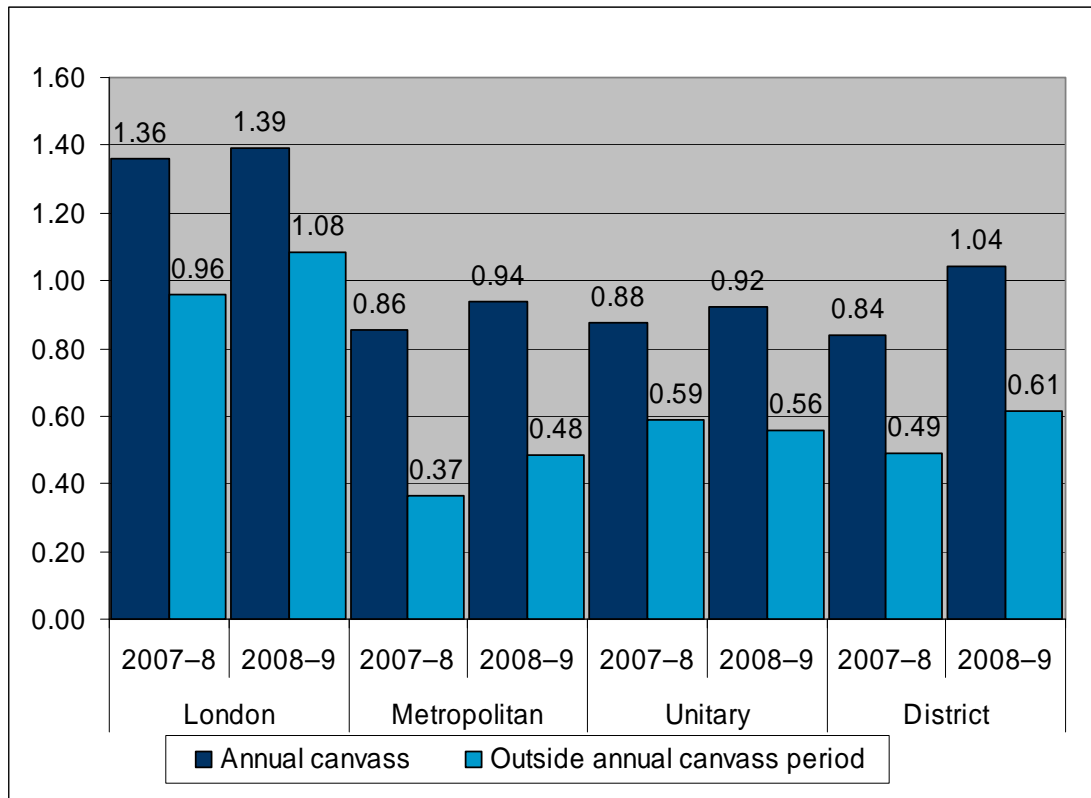
4.6 In 2007–8 and 2008–9 authorities in Scotland spent the most both inside and outside the annual canvass period. In 2008–9 costs per elector were £1.20 and £1.33 respectively and for 2007–8, £1.19 and £1.35. Authorities in England had the lowest spend per elector outside the annual canvass period with £0.55 for 2007–8. However, authorities in Wales had the lowest spend in the annual canvass with £1.00 per elector for 2008–9 compared to £0.87 in 2007–8.

Figure 7: Registration expenditure per elector across Great Britain 2007–9 (£)



4.7 When registration expenditure is broken down by type of English authority the largest spend on the annual canvass, in both years, was by London boroughs (Figure 8). Authorities in London also had the highest spend outside the annual canvass period.

Figure 8: Registration expenditure per elector by type of English authority 2007–9 (£)



5 Costs across Great Britain of conducting elections

5.1 The other core function addressed by the financial survey was local authority spending on conducting elections. Although electoral registration focuses on the annual canvass of electors, it is essentially a year-round activity. However, the overall spend on elections is highly dependent on where and when elections are held. The table below shows the elections that were held in 2007–8 and 2008–9.

| Financial year | Event |
|-----------------------|--|
| 2007–8 | English local elections (May 2007) Elections to the Scottish Parliament and Scottish local government (May 2007) Elections to the National Assembly for Wales (May 2007) |
| 2008–9 | English local elections (May 2008) Welsh local elections (May 2008) Greater London Authority elections (May 2008) |

5.2 The 2007–8 period covered elections to the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales, as well as local government elections across most of England (with the notable exception of the 33 London authorities). Although the period also included elections to all Scottish councils, our powers under the Electoral Administration Act 2006 do not extend to Scottish local government elections, and therefore we were not able to collect financial information on these elections. The 2008–9 financial year covered elections in London, as well as local government elections in England and Wales.

5.3 In total there were 122 local authorities who held local elections in both May 2007 and May 2008. Of these 122 local authorities, we received a complete financial return from 78 for both financial years. As we would expect, the total spend on elections by these local authorities was similar year on year, with £17.1 million spent in 2007–8 increasing to £17.5 million in 2008–9.

Key information

- In 2007–8 local authorities across Great Britain spent **£87.7 million** on conducting elections, of which over three-quarters (**£68 million**) was spent by local authorities in England. The total amount spent on conducting elections fell to **£55.4 million** in 2008–9, although the proportion spent by local authorities in England increased due to the higher number of elections in England.
- Local authorities in Scotland spent **£16.3 million** on the elections held in 2007–8, just under two-thirds of their total spend on electoral administration (total spend was £2.2 million in 2008–9 where there were no scheduled elections¹⁰).
- **£3.5 million** was spent by authorities in Wales on the elections to the National Assembly in Wales in 2007 and **£4.8 million** on the Welsh local elections in 2008–9. The increased cost is likely to reflect the much higher number of candidates and elections at local level.
- Local authorities in London spent **£8.3 million** on the Greater London Authority elections in 2008–9.

5.4 Appendix D shows the total election costs in England, Scotland and Wales in a table format.

5.5 In terms of a breakdown for total spend on elections across Great Britain 'core team' makes up the majority of spend as well as the 'other' category, which encompassed costs that do not fit into the other headings except for support services costs. However, several authorities have included support services costs in this category, possibly explaining why it is so large. The lowest area of spend across all countries was publicity and outreach work, followed by counting vote premises.

5.6 The same patterns exist across English authority type as in the national picture, with the largest areas of cost being for 'core team' and the 'other' category. District councils spent £0.28 per elector in 2008–9, a slight decrease from 2007–8. Authorities in London increased their spend on core teams to match district councils. The largest decrease occurred in the unitary authorities where 'core team' costs decreased from £0.22 in 2007–8 to £0.14 in 2008–9. Overall there was a marked increase in London boroughs' spend from £0.45 in 2007–8 to £1.57 in 2008–9 due to no elections being held in 2007–8 and the Greater London Authority elections held in 2008–9.

¹⁰ There were a number of by-elections held across Scotland in 2008–9 which would account for a spend on elections within this financial year as well as fixed costs of maintaining core services.

6 Conclusion

6.1 We have received a very positive response to our request for financial information from the vast majority of local authorities across Great Britain over the past two years. Our aim is to help ensure that adequate and appropriate resources are available to deliver elections and electoral registration. The information we have collected will help to provide greater transparency about the way elections are funded. The results of our analysis, however, are likely to have implications for our approach to engagement with responsible funding bodies and institutions in order to secure any necessary improvements in funding.

6.2 As we have noted previously,¹¹ the funding framework for elections in Great Britain is complex and fragmented. The range of bodies involved in providing funding for elections include different UK Government departments (Ministry of Justice and Communities and Local Government), the Scottish Government, the National Assembly for Wales and the Greater London Authority. Local authorities are responsible for allocating resources for the administration of electoral registration and for the conduct of their own local government elections.¹²

6.3 We have not previously sought to establish any benchmark figures for funding electoral services,¹³ recognising that responsibility for identifying local resource requirements lies with the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) or Returning Officer (RO), and that responsibility for allocating resources lies with either the relevant local authority or the Government. As we begin to establish a clearer and more comprehensive picture of both expenditure and performance, we will be able further to develop an idea on what we believe are reasonable levels of expenditure for different types and sizes of authorities.

6.4 In future, our analysis of expenditure on electoral registration and local authority elections will complement the figures for funding provided to ROs by governments for the conduct of elections above the local authority level. This data may provide confirmation that funding arrangements for different types of elections are equally effective – alternatively, the data may highlight disparities in the levels of funding provided for different elections. Again, while we have not previously played an active role in negotiations between relevant funding departments and the Treasury, we may in future wish either to engage more directly in funding discussions or to provide data to support appropriate funding bids.

¹¹ The Electoral Commission, *Funding electoral services: report and recommendations* (2003) www.electoralcommission.org.uk/document-summary?assetid=16048; The Electoral Commission, *Electoral administration in the United Kingdom* (2008) www.electoralcommission.org.uk/document-summary?assetid=62185.

¹² Section 54, Representation of the People Act 1983 requires that each local authority in Great Britain provides its ERO with adequate funds to carry out his or her statutory duties in connection with producing the registers of electors.

¹³ Although others have suggested that indicative figures should be published, including the Committee on Standards in Public Life in their 2007 *Eleventh report – Review of the Electoral Commission*, www.public-standards.org.uk/Library/OurWork/11thReport_FullReport.pdf.

6.5 This improved data and analysis will help us to ensure that the possible costs of any future changes to electoral policy or legislation can be properly evaluated. Again, we may wish either to engage directly in funding discussions or to provide data to support appropriate funding bids.

6.6 At the moment there are two years of data available. Whilst this is not to be devalued in any way, it is still early for there to be complete confidence in the data to make trend assessments and it is important to note the issues raised in the section on data quality when interpreting this report. The use of 'per elector' data does make comparisons more relevant, however, there are still too many individual authority 'quirks' for a level playing field to be assumed. The data provided so far provides an essential starting point in ascertaining the true cost of electoral services in Great Britain, enabling useful inter-authority comparisons to be made and assisting in national policy debate.

6.7 In order to gain better comparative data and to ensure the development of a long-term evidence base we have amended the survey to be used in the future. It has been simplified so that contradictions and errors are kept to a minimum, and so that the survey can be completed more easily, and consistently, by all authorities. In particular, we plan to supplement this information with a separate survey of local authority electoral services teams during 2010, to identify trends in the size, experience and management arrangements for the core electoral administration teams for local authorities across Great Britain.

6.8 Our final aim will be to use this information in conjunction with our analysis of performance by ROs and EROs to establish relationships more clearly between performance and funding for electoral administration. We will be able to identify where overall expenditure is significantly more or less than comparable peer authorities, and also where the balance of expenditure between different activities reflects differing priorities (for example, identifying whether there is a link between funding for public awareness activities and performance by EROs and ROs).

6.9 We will again carry out the survey this year, reporting on the cost of running the European Parliamentary elections in June 2009. Next year's survey will look at the costs of running the UK Parliamentary general election in May 2010, alongside the returns that ROs will be required to submit to the Election Claims Unit.

Appendix A – Total funding in Great Britain 2007–9

| | 2007–8 | 2008–9 | 2007–8 | 2008–9 | 2007–8 | 2008–9 | 2007–8 | 2008–9 |
|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| | Great Britain | | England | | Scotland | | Wales | |
| Local authority | 119.3m | 119.3m | 100.3m | 101.1m | 14.5m | 11.0m | 4.6m | 7.2m |
| Ministry of Justice / Scotland Office | | | | | | | | |
| - new burdens | 4.8m | 1.1m | 3.5m | 0.8m | 0.9m | 0.3m | 0.3m | 0.03m |
| - other | 8.3m | 1.3m | 0.4m | 0.3m | 7.9m | 0.3m | 0.05m | 0.7m |
| Electoral Claims Unit | | | | | | | | |
| - electoral participation fund* | 2.2m | 1.1m | 0.9m | 1.0m | 1.0m | 0.02m | 0.3m | 0.007m |
| - other* | 4.0m | 6.0m | 0.5m | 5.9m | 1.3m | 0.1m | 2.3m | 0 |
| Parish councils ¹⁴ | | 0.8m | | 0.5m | | 0 | | 0.3m |
| Other | 6.7m | 4.2m | 5.3m | 3.7m | 0.9m | 0.4m | 0.4m | 0.2m |
| Total (additional funding) | 26.0m | 14.6m | 10.6m | 12.2 | 12.0m | 1.1m | 3.3m | 1.2m |
| Total (all funding) | 145.3m | 133.9m | 110.9m | 113.3m | 26.5m | 12.1m | 7.9m | 8.4m |
| Local authority funding per elector | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ |
| Local authority | 2.58 | 2.61 | 3.69 | 2.79 | 2.01 | 3.17 | 2.64 | 2.65 |
| Ministry of Justice / Scotland Office | | | | | | | | |
| - new burdens | 0.09 | 0.02 | 0.24 | 0.07 | 0.13 | 0.01 | 0.11 | 0.03 |
| - other | 0.01 | 0.01 | 2.00 | 0.08 | 0.02 | 0.32 | 0.18 | 0.03 |
| Electoral Claims Unit | | | | | | | | |
| - electoral participation fund* | 0.02 | 0.03 | 0.24 | 0.01 | 0.13 | 0.00 | 0.05 | 0.02 |
| - other* | 0.01 | 0.15 | 0.33 | 0.04 | 0.99 | 0.00 | 0.09 | 0.13 |
| Parish councils ¹⁵ | | 0.01 | | 0.00 | | 0.15 | | 0.02 |
| other | 0.14 | 0.10 | 0.24 | 0.09 | 0.18 | 0.07 | 0.15 | 0.09 |
| Total (additional funding) | 0.27 | 0.31 | 3.05 | 0.29 | 1.46 | 0.55 | 0.58 | 0.32 |
| Total (all funding) | 2.85 | 2.92 | 6.74 | 3.08 | 3.47 | 3.72 | 3.22 | 2.97 |

* National Assembly for Wales, Scotland Office, Greater London Authority or national equivalent

¹⁴ This information was not included in the 2007–8 survey

¹⁵ This information was not included in the 2007–8 survey

Appendix B – Total funding in types of English authority 2007/09

| | 2007–8 London | 2008–9 | 2007–8 Metropolitan | 2008–9 | 2007–8 Unitary | 2008–9 | 2007–8 Non-metropolitan | 2008–9 |
|--|------------------|--------------|------------------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| Local authority | 15.1m | 14.9m | 17.9m | 23.7m | 17.0m | 19.8m | 50.2m | 42.8m |
| Ministry of Justice / Scotland Office | | | | | | | | |
| - new burdens | 0.5m | 0.05m | 0.7m | 0.2m | 0.6m | 0.2m | 1.8m | 0.4m |
| - other | 0.005m | 0.02m | 0.05m | 0.02m | 0.03m | 0.04m | 0.3m | 0.2m |
| Electoral Claims Unit | | | | | | | | |
| - electoral participation fund* | 0.1m | 0.5m | 0.2m | 0.1m | 0.3m | 0.2m | 0.2m | 0.2m |
| - other* | 0.01m | 5.4m | 0.06m | 0.009m | 0.1m | 0.09m | 0.3m | 0.4m |
| Parish councils ¹⁶ | | 0 | | 0.04m | | 0.07m | | 0.4m |
| other | 0.1m | 1.2m | 1.4m | 0.4m | 0.09m | 1.5m | 3.7m | 0.5m |
| Total (additional funding) | 0.8m | 7.2m | 2.4m | 0.8m | 1.1m | 2.1m | 6.4m | 2.1m |
| Total (all funding) | 15.9m | 22.1m | 20.3m | 24.5m | 18.1m | 21.9m | 56.6m | 44.9m |
| Local authority funding per elector | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ |
| Local authority | 2.76 | 2.69 | 2.17 | 2.86 | 2.66 | 2.22 | 2.67 | 2.66 |
| Ministry of Justice/Scotland Office | | | | | | | | |
| - new burdens | 0.08 | 0.01 | 0.08 | 0.02 | 0.09 | 0.02 | 0.10 | 0.03 |
| - other | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.01 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.02 | 0.01 |
| Electoral Claims Unit | | | | | | | | |
| - electoral participation fund* | 0.03 | 0.10 | 0.03 | 0.02 | 0.05 | 0.03 | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| - other* | 0.00 | 0.97 | 0.01 | 0.00 | 0.02 | 0.01 | 0.02 | 0.02 |
| Parish councils ¹⁷ | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.01 | 0.00 | 0.02 |
| Other | 0.03 | 0.22 | 0.17 | 0.05 | 0.01 | 0.17 | 0.20 | 0.03 |
| Total (additional funding) | 0.14 | 1.30 | 0.29 | 0.10 | 0.18 | 0.24 | 0.34 | 0.13 |
| Total (all funding) | 2.90 | 3.99 | 2.46 | 2.96 | 2.84 | 2.46 | 3.01 | 2.79 |

¹⁶ This information was not separated out in the 2007–8 survey

* National Assembly for Wales. Scotland Office. Greater London Authority or national equivalent

Appendix C – Total registration costs in Great Britain¹⁸

| | 2007–8 | | 2008–9 | |
|--|--------|-------------|--------|-------------|
| | Total | Per elector | Total | Per elector |
| Total registration costs – Great Britain | | | | |
| Great Britain | £70.0m | £1.57 | £79.9m | £1.78 |
| England | £57.2m | £1.47 | £66.1m | £1.70 |
| Scotland | £9.0m | £2.54 | £9.9m | £2.53 |
| Wales | £3.8m | £1.65 | £3.9m | £1.69 |
| Annual canvass costs – Great Britain | | | | |
| Great Britain | £42.1m | £0.94 | £47.6m | £1.06 |
| England | £35.9m | £0.92 | £40.6m | £1.04 |
| Scotland | £4.2m | £1.19 | £4.7m | £1.20 |
| Wales | £2.0m | £0.87 | £2.3m | £1.00 |
| Outside annual canvass costs – Great Britain | | | | |
| Great Britain | £27.9m | £0.63 | £32.3m | £0.70 |
| England | £21.3m | £0.55 | £25.5m | £0.64 |
| Scotland | £4.8m | £1.35 | £5.2m | £1.33 |
| Wales | £1.8m | £0.78 | £1.6m | £0.69 |
| Total registration costs – English authority type | | | | |
| District councils | £25.0m | £1.33 | £27.2m | £1.69 |
| London boroughs | £12.7m | £2.32 | £13.7m | £2.48 |
| Metropolitan districts | £10.1m | £1.22 | £11.8m | £1.42 |
| Unitary authorities | £9.4m | £1.47 | £13.4m | £1.51 |
| Annual canvass costs – English authority type | | | | |
| District councils | £15.8m | £0.84 | £16.8m | £1.04 |
| London boroughs | £7.5m | £1.36 | £7.7m | £1.39 |
| Metropolitan districts | £7.1m | £0.86 | £7.8m | £0.94 |
| Unitary authorities | £5.6m | £0.88 | £8.2m | £0.92 |
| Outside annual canvass costs – English authority type | | | | |
| District councils | £9.2m | £0.49 | £10.3m | £0.61 |
| London boroughs | £5.2m | £0.96 | £6.0m | £1.08 |
| Metropolitan districts | £3.0m | £0.37 | £4.0m | £0.48 |
| Unitary authorities | £3.8m | £0.59 | £5.2m | £0.56 |

¹⁸ It is important to note that the following table is based on Section 3 of the survey the 'Objective expenditure analysis'. The information requested in this section was on a net basis where gross expenditure and income were not identified. Therefore readers of this report should note that the figures in this table and that in Chapter 3 may not be equal.

Appendix D – Total election costs in Great Britain¹⁹

| | 2007–8 | | 2008–9 | |
|--|--------|-------------|--------|-------------|
| | Total | Per elector | Total | Per elector |
| Total election costs – Great Britain | | | | |
| Great Britain | £77.6m | £1.72 | £54.6m | £1.19 |
| England | £57.6m | £1.48 | £47.9m | £1.20 |
| Scotland | £16.5m | £4.20 | £2.2m | £0.55 |
| Wales | £3.5m | £1.52 | £4.6m | £2.01 |
| Total election costs – English authority type | | | | |
| District councils | £32.1m | £1.71 | £17.7m | £1.10 |
| London boroughs | £2.5m | £0.45 | £8.7m | £1.57 |
| Metropolitan districts | £13.7m | £1.66 | £12.7m | £1.53 |
| Unitary authorities | £9.3m | £1.45 | £8.8m | £0.99 |

¹⁹ It is important to note that the following table is based on Section 3 of the survey the 'Objective expenditure analysis'. The information requested in this section was on a net basis where gross expenditure and income were not identified. Therefore readers of this report should note that the figures in this table and those in Chapter 3 may not be equal.

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