

Spending Limits Set for Local Election Candidates by Minister Gormley

Mr John Gormley T.D., Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, last week announced that all candidates standing in the local elections, to be held on the 5th 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, €11,500 and €9,750 to apply to candidates in other county and city council electoral areas, depending on their population.

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: "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."