



The Association of Electoral Administrators

Policy Position Paper – Electoral Registration Funding *Great Britain only*

1. Introduction

This paper outlines the AEA's views of, and highlights issues related to, the funding for electoral registration.

2. Background

2.1 The appointment of the electoral registration officer (ERO)

In England, every district council and London borough is required to appoint "an officer of the council to be [electoral] registration officer for any constituency or part of a constituency ... situated in the [local authority area]."¹

In Wales, the same requirement falls on the relevant county or county borough.²

In Scotland, the structure of ERO and Returning Officer (RO) is different with EROs generally separate from local authorities. The ERO must either be appointed by the local authority or by a combination of local authorities. The appointed person must either be an officer of that council or an adjoining council.

Although appointed by the local authority, ERO responsibilities are personal. Technically, the local authority (or authorities) has limited control over the ERO's actions. The register of electors, for example, is the property of the ERO and not the council.

2.2 The role of the Electoral Registration Officer

An ERO's responsibilities include the following:

- the duty to maintain a list of UK Parliamentary and local government electors for the area for which s/he acts³;
- the requirement to take all steps that are necessary for the purpose of complying with the duty to maintain the lists of electors and for securing that as far as practicable, persons who are entitled to be registered (and no others) are so registered⁴.
- the requirement to conduct an annual canvass⁵.

3. Staff and Resources

The local authority has a duty "to assign such officers to assist the registration officer as may be required to carry out his functions under this Act"⁶.

Similarly, local authorities are required to pay any expenses "properly incurred" by the ERO in performance of his/her duties⁷.

¹ Sec 8(2) Representation of the People Act (RPA) 1983

² Sec 8(3) RPA 1983

³ Sec 9 RPA 1983

⁴ Sec 9A RPA 1983

⁵ Sec 9D RPA 1983

⁶ Sec 52 RPA 1983

⁷ Sec 54 RPA 1983

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In Scotland, if an ERO is acting on behalf of more than one local authority, each local authority should contribute to the registration budget.

At an election, funding is provided to the returning officer (RO) and at a national poll this is provided by the Government in the form of a Maximum Recoverable Amount (MRA). However, this funding only covers the RO costs of administering the election and does not cover the costs of any ERO functions associated with the election like processing the registration and absent vote applications triggered by the election.

4. Event Led Registrations and Absent Vote Applications

As previously outlined, local authorities must fund costs incurred by the ERO, but event led applications cause issues.

In our [2019 post-election statement](#) we highlighted that the UK Parliamentary general election (UKPGE) saw significant numbers of people register to vote late in the process, with 659,666 applications made on registration deadline day. There were also overseas elector applications to be processed and a significant number of absent vote applications made specifically for the UKPGE. This has been an issue for all national elections since the introduction of individual elector registration (IER) in 2014.

While these registration and absent vote applications were principally caused by a national poll, under current arrangements the costs must be met by the ERO and their local authority and not central government funding.

We believe central government funding should be made available for additional registration costs which occur as the direct result of a national poll.

We have previously made the following recommendation to the UK Government:

We urge the UK Government to introduce a mechanism where the full costs of registration should be reimbursed to the relevant local authority or Valuation Joint Board where it can be demonstrated that those costs were incurred because of a national electoral event.⁸⁹

5. AEA Policy Position

- Local authorities are unable to budget for unscheduled national polls and it is unfair to expect them to fund additional registration costs caused by those polls.
- Central government funding should be made available for additional registration costs which occur as the direct result of a national poll.
- Funding should be made available through the central government election accounts process.

6. Further Information

The Association of Electoral Administrators was founded in 1987 and is the professional body representing the interests of electoral administrators in the United Kingdom. We are a non-governmental and non-partisan body with just under 2,000 members, the majority of

⁸ [The Electoral Landscape in 2019 – an AEA position statement](#)

⁹ [AEA post election statement: The 2019 UK Parliamentary General Elections – delivered on time for Christmas](#)



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whom are employed by local authorities to provide electoral registration and election services. Eleven regional branches of the Association cover the United Kingdom.

Further details on the legislative background connected to this policy position are available on request.

If you require any further information, please contact Angela Holden, AEA Policy Manager – angela.holden@aea-elections.co.uk or 07752 630497.

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