

Council award ceremonies

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February 2019



Introduction

This year many local councils in England will be allowed to raise council tax by more than 5 per cent^{1,2}. As many local authorities across Britain further limit service provision, often taxpayers are paying more for less. Meanwhile, most local authorities are continuing to spend significant amounts of money on a range of award ceremonies. This study shows the amount of money spent by councils on hosting, supporting or attending award ceremonies in the last three financial years.

Key findings

- In 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18 the UK's local authorities spent £6,593,523 on award ceremonies, with the average cost to the taxpayer per council being £18,064.
- Derbyshire county council spent the most at £218,483 on award ceremonies within the time period. This was over 12 times the national average and £14,658 more than all the Welsh councils combined.
- 65 councils, including South Derbyshire district council, spent nothing on award ceremonies. In many cases this was due to successful sponsorship arrangements.
- Northern Irish councils spent over 3 times more than the average local authority on award ceremonies.
- Welsh councils spent 44 per cent less than the UK average on award ceremonies.
- Scottish award ceremony spending was almost 40 per cent higher than the average spent by English councils.
- Average awards ceremony spending in London was well over double the English average.

Table 1: top ten UK councils by spending on award ceremonies

| Local Authority | Expenditure (£) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Derbyshire | 218,483 |
| Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon | 162,189 |
| Manchester | 155,500 |
| Glasgow | 144,284 |
| Hertfordshire | 143,653 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 138,054 |
| Wolverhampton | 128,548 |
| Perth and Kinross | 124,666 |
| Greenwich | 122,890 |
| Gateshead | 117,725 |

¹ In 2019-20 local authorities will be allowed to raise council tax by 3 per cent without holding a local referendum. Furthermore, local authorities with responsibility for social care have been allowed to raise council tax by up to 2 per cent annually between 2017-18 and 2019-20 up to a maximum increase of 6 per cent over that period.
 Brokenshire, J., *James Brokenshire sets out funding measures for councils*. Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2018. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/james-brokenshire-sets-out-funding-measures-for-councils>. Accessed 1st February 2019.

² HM Treasury., *Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015*. Page 33.

Table 2: top spending local authority by region

| Region | Local Authority | Expenditure (£) |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| East Midlands | Derbyshire | 218,483 |
| East of England | Hertfordshire | 143,653 |
| London | Hammersmith and Fulham | 138,054 |
| North East | Gateshead | 117,725 |
| North West | Manchester | 155,500 |
| Northern Ireland | Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon | 162,189 |
| Scotland | Glasgow | 144,284 |
| South East | West Berkshire | 40,349 |
| South West | Plymouth | 89,839 |
| Wales | Caerphilly | 49,037 |
| West Midlands | Wolverhampton | 128,548 |
| Yorkshire and the Humber | East Riding of Yorkshire | 114,591 |

[Click here to see how much your council spent](#)

Examples of spending

Burnley Business Awards. This bi-annual awards ceremony is organised by Burnley council and in 2017 was held at the historic Towneley Hall. The awards included a champagne reception, live musical performers and bespoke trophies. In addition, ten entertainers (dressed in highly elaborate costumes as trees, shrubbery and wildlife) were hired for photographs with guests. This award ceremony cost an estimated £25,000 of taxpayers' money. You can view photos of the awards [here](#).

Harrogate Shining Lights Award. An award celebrating businesses in Harrogate that have been trading for under three years. The 2015 award included a £3,000 cash prize to the winning business.

Made in Bury Business Awards. Whilst many councils organise business awards and count on private businesses for sponsorship, in Bury the local council has done the opposite, spending £16,000 per year to be a headline sponsor at these awards.

Wychavon W Factor. Wychavon district council each year throws a talent competition to find the top young talent in the area. Categories included: Singing 15 and under, Singing over 15, Ensemble, Drama and Dance. Over the past three years this has cost a total of £31,947.

Examples of alternative funding arrangements

Aberdeen Star Awards. Every year Aberdeen city council host the Star awards costing on average £19,487 per year. This cost is covered through supplier rebates, discounts and contributions of goods and services.

Kent Design and Development Awards. Co-ordinated by Kent county council this award had a budget of £15,000 in 2016 and £22,000 in 2018. Both years private sector sponsorship fully covered the event costs.

Ealing Foster Carer Awards Ceremony. By gaining full sponsorship for this annual award, Ealing council has saved taxpayers £41,058 over the time period.

Lewes District Business Awards. Despite a high budget of around £30,000, robust sponsorship and high attendance have seen Lewes council consistently generate a significant profit each year within the period with these awards.

Sources and methodology

The above data was gathered by making Freedom of Information requests to 419 councils across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The questions posed to the local authorities were:

- What was the total cost of award ceremonies in each of 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18?
- What was the total number of award ceremonies in each of 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18?
- What was the name of the award ceremony in each of 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18?

The 53 councils not included in this research either failed to respond, refused to fulfil the request or provided an inadequate response. 366 councils adequately fulfilled the request.

Where councils have reported the savings due to sponsorship of an award ceremony, this has been deducted from the total figure and in some cases meant no net cost to taxpayers.

Where councils have explicitly stated a figure is not inclusive of VAT, 20 per cent has been added.

References

Brokenshire, J., *James Brokenshire sets out funding measures for councils*. 2018.

HM Treasury., *Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015*.