

# **AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 3 MARCH 2021**

## **Scale of Election Expenses 2021/22**

**Report by Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to note the Scale of Election Expenses for the financial year 2021/22, as shown in the Annex to this report, for the election of County Councillors and any other poll associated with the County Council during the year.**

### **Executive Summary**

2. The County Returning Officer, Yvonne Rees, is responsible for the conduct of the County Council elections and by-elections. The expenditure properly incurred by the Returning Officer is paid by the Council and, as such, a scale of expenses is set as a guide to such expenditure. With the County Council elections scheduled to take place in May 2021, the scale of expenses set out in the Annex would be applicable to those elections and to any by-elections held within the 2021/22 financial year.
3. In accordance with the Council's practice, a review has been undertaken in consultation with the County, City and District Council election specialists in Oxfordshire who assist the Returning Officer in running the County Council's elections and by-elections. The Districts will use this scale when acting on behalf of the Returning Officer and are generally mindful of the County Council's scale of expenses when setting their own scales of expenses.
4. The scale is brought to the Committee in the interests of transparency for this area of election governance.

### **Purpose of the Scale of Expenses**

5. The purpose of the scale of expenses is to set out the amounts that can be charged for organising and running county council elections and by-elections. In practice, this means that these are the amounts that the City and District Councils will claim back from the County Council for running elections on its behalf.

### **Levels for 2021-22**

6. As in the last financial year, most of the proposed fees remain unchanged, save for an approximate 2% lift in fees relating to a minimum cost of living increase paid for specific election roles undertaken. No significant issues have arisen in the previous year which needed addressing by the new scale. It is considered that the running of a County election in the context of COVID-19 will necessitate

a change to the level of the fee in relation to the preparation of ballot boxes, where the content and circumstance of collecting these will become more complex and time-consuming: as such, Item 21 has increased from £5 to £10.

### The main changes

7. At the suggestion of the Districts and the City Council, the main changes are the introduction of a payment for:
  - Count Management Team (Item 14 in the Annex): those few personnel who manage the running of the count itself e.g. the data within the count (working with count supervisors to check verifications). Such teams are small in number but Returning Officers have increasingly found these roles to be pivotal to the resilient and smooth running of counts.
  - Assistant Count Supervisor (Item 16 in the Annex). The deployment of Assistant Supervisors by Returning Officers proved very useful in the busy electoral year of 2019/20 (with the local, European and General elections). It helped to ensure the speedy but efficient running of the verifications and counts across the county.
8. Otherwise, the annual increases are shown as **bold** figures alongside last year's amounts. The City and District Councils have confirmed that the proposed scale of fees is pragmatic for the running of elections on the County Council's behalf and is consistent with their recent experience. As such, the scale of expenses will be effective in supporting the Returning Officer and her Deputies in achieving a robust, resourced and cost-effective set of County elections.

### **Financial Implications**

9. A separate budget is maintained for electoral expenditure, which is built up over time towards the County Council elections in an election reserve. This year element has been added to anticipate COVID related expenditure. As the County Council poll this year is combined with the Police and Crime Commissioner elections and (in Cherwell, Oxford and West Oxfordshire) with district council elections, some costs (e.g. polling stations, county/district devolved counts) will be shared in any case.

### **Legal Implications**

10. Under the Representation of the People Act 1983 Section 36(4) the Council may set a scale of election expenses, and the Annexed scheme accords with this. This responsibility lies with the Returning Officer and this report is brought to the Committee for the purposes of Transparency.

### **Equality and Inclusion Implications**

11. The setting of a scale of expenses does not in itself involve equality and inclusion implications. However, the levels of expenses included in the

scheme have been formulated to ensure that robust arrangements are in place to secure participation by candidates, staff and the public.

**ANITA BRADLEY**

Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

Background papers: Nil

Contact Officer: Andrea Newman,  
Senior Democracy Officer

Telephone: 01865 810283

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