

AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 15 MARCH 2023

Scale of Election Expenses 2023/24

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 2023/24, 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, Dr Martin Reeves, 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. The scale of expenses set out in the Annex would be applicable to any by-elections held within the 2023/24 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 2023-24

6. The proposed figures for 2023/24 are shown in bold alongside the amount agreed for 2022/23.

The main changes

7. All fees have been reviewed to ensure that the hourly rates reflect the Oxford Living Wage, which has been set at £11.35 per hour from April 2023.

8. As in previous years, a cost of living award has been applied to the majority of fees. For 2023/24 an approximate 8% up-lift has been applied to the flat-rate fees, based on the increase in the Oxford Living Wage.
9. This level of up-lift for the hourly-rate fees have been increased in line with the NJC pay award hourly rates, as the national pay award was of fixed amount rather than a percentage base increase.
10. At the suggestion of the Districts and the City Council, a new fee had been introduced for “stand-by” staff. The arrival of COVID has highlighted the risk to the running of elections, should staff suddenly become ill and unable to work on a poll at very short notice. Returning Officers have needed to ensure that some staff are available to be called upon at very short notice to staff polling stations. The new fee reflects the willingness of staff to be prepared to go to a place of poll at very short notice to fill sudden vacancies. It is not envisaged that the fee will be paid in addition to a poll staff fee.
11. The provision for travelling expenses has been amended to read the HMRC rate, so as to ensure that this remains in line with HMRC advice moving forwards.
12. 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 in achieving a robust, resourced and cost-effective by-election should it be necessary.

Financial Implications

13. An annual budget is held for electoral expenditure, which is built up over time towards the County Council elections in an election earmarked reserve. The scale of expenses for 2023/24 set out in the annex can be met from the available reserve.

Comments checked by:

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Legal Implications

14. 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.

Comments checked by:

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Equality and Inclusion Implications

15. 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 and Governance & Monitoring Officer

Annex: Scale of Elections Fees 2023/24

Background papers: Nil

Contact Officers: Simon Harper, Head of Governance
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February 2023