

Divisions Affected – All

AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

16 March 2022

Scale of Election Expenses 2022/2023

**Report by Corporate Director Commercial Development,
Assets and Investment**

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Audit and Governance Committee is RECOMMENDED to note the Scale of Election Expenses for the financial year 2022/23 for any poll associated with the County Council during the year (Annex 1).**

Executive Summary

2. The County Returning Officer, Anita Bradley, 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 2022/23 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 2022/23

6. The proposed figures for 2022/23 are shown in bold alongside the amount agreed for 2021/22.

Proposed Changes for 2022/23

7. All fees have been reviewed to ensure the hourly rates reflects the Oxford Living Wage, which has been set at £10.50 per hour from April 2022.
8. As in the last financial year a cost of living award has been applied to the majority of fees. For 2022/23 this is approximately 2.5% lift in the majority of fees. This figure is taken from the County Council's budget papers as the assumes cost of living increase for 2022/23 in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
9. The Poll Clerk fee (paragraph 11) is the only fee to have been increased without reference to the 2.5% up-lift. Working on the basis of polling station staff working 16 hours (6.15am – 10.15pm), to ensure that the fee reflects the Oxford Living Wage, the Poll Clerk fee has been raised to £168.00, and would increase to £178.00 for a combined poll.
10. The provision for an additional fee in the event of three or more polls being held at the same time was introduced in 2021/22 due to the unusually high combination of polls. Although it is anticipated that this will ordinarily be needed, it is considered sensible to retain this additional fee.
11. At the suggestion of the Districts and the City Council, clarification has been given as to what constitutes "overnight working". This is defined as being between the hours of 9.00pm and 8.00am scale of expenses.
12. At the suggestion of the Districts and the City Council, the addition of a overnight working fee for the Supervisor for the issue and receipt of postal ballot papers (paragraph 22). This reflects the requirement for this role to work overnight on polling day to process the postal votes received prior to the close of poll at 10pm.
13. 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 to achieve a robust, resourced and cost-effective by-election, should it be necessary to .

Financial Implications

14. A separate budget is maintained for electoral expenditure, which is built up over time towards the County Council elections in an election reserve. Ordinarily in the year County Council elections are scheduled, they are a standalone election which means the County Council must meet the cost in full. Due to the postponement of elections in 2020 due to the COVID pandemic, the County Council elections in 2021 were combined with the Police and Crime Commissioner elections and (in Cherwell, Oxford and West Oxfordshire) with district council elections which resulted in some costs (e.g. polling stations, county/district devolved counts) being shared.

Legal Implications

15. Under the Representation of the People Act 1983 Section 36(4) the Council may set a scale of election expenses, and the scheme at the Annex 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

16. 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.

Sustainability Implications

17. There are no sustainability implications arising directly from this report.

STEVE JORDEN

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Annex: Scale of Elections Fees 2022/23

Background papers: Nil

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