

AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 14 DECEMBER 2016

Scale of Election Fees and Expenditure 2017/18

Report by Chief Legal Officer and Monitoring Officer

Introduction

1. Each year the Council needs to set a scale of election fees and expenditure for the holding of elections of county councillors. In September 2016, the Committee agreed a scale of fees to apply for the remainder of the 2016/17 year. It was noted then that a fuller review would be needed for the scale of fees and expenditure to apply in 2017/18, particularly for the May 2017 County Council elections.
2. A full review has therefore been undertaken in consultation with the City and District Councils which have, of course, held various elections and the EU Referendum since the 2013 County Council election. This report therefore presents a revised scale of fees and expenditure which brings the scheme up to date.
3. The proposed scale of fees and expenditure is included as an Annex to this report. Committee is requested to approve the proposed Scale of Expenditure as set out ahead of the County Council Elections, which are to be held on Thursday, 4 May 2017.

Purpose of the Scale of Fees

4. The purpose of the scale of fees and expenditure 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 will be amounts that the City and District councils will claim back from the County Council for running elections on its behalf.
5. Most of the fees and expenditure remain unchanged. As you will see from the scale some of these costs are fixed and some are “actual and necessary costs”. The mileage rate is linked to the national authorised ‘all car’ rate of 45p per mile.
6. The main changes under this review relate to:
 - **Staffing**: setting fees and expenditure that achieve a comprehensive coverage of experienced staff (presiding officers and poll clerks) which is essential to the sound administration of the election. As part of this it has been important to reflect the Oxfordshire Living Wage.
 - **Training**: it is important that all staff, even experienced ones, are soundly trained and the Electoral Commission’s requirements would expect this. Uprated amounts are included to underpin this requirement based on the City and District Councils’ experience of developing training methods and achieving attendance/engagement.

- Overnight verification fee: the Returning Officer has determined that the ballots should be verified overnight on Thursday 4 May 2017. This has now been reflected in an evening/overnight fee for counting supervisors and assistants
- Postal ballots: revised fees for the issue and opening of postal ballots to make this more cost effective, moving away from a flat fee to a cost per-ballot.

Levels for 2017-18

7. The fee payable by Oxfordshire County Council for a Presiding Officer, is currently the lowest payment for a Presiding Officer when compared with the City and District Councils.
8. The fee currently payable by Oxfordshire County Council for a Poll Clerk, matches that currently paid by all the neighbouring District Councils, save for Oxford City Council.
9. The experience of recent elections and the EU Referendum has also shown that there would be difficulties in achieving sufficient county-wide coverage of Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks to staff the County Council elections and that modest increases in the fees would avoid this.
10. In summary, it is therefore suggested that:
 - a) The Poll Clerk's fee is increased from £115.00 to £135.00. This also matches the Oxford Living Wage of £8.93 for 15 hours of work;
 - b) The Presiding Officer's fee be increased from £180.00 to £200.00;
 - c) The fee for Poll Station Inspectors be increased from £190.00 to match that paid to a Presiding Officer;
 - d) A new rate of payment be introduced for evening/overnight counting and verification supervisors and staff;
 - e) The training fee paid to the districts for the provision of and undertaking of training be increased from £20.00 to £50.00 per staff member. Notwithstanding this 'ceiling', work is being undertaken with the City and District Councils to agree training, where possible:
 - f) A fee for the supervision of the issue and receipt of postal ballot papers at £16.00 per hour has also been agreed, coupled with a fee of £0.70 per postal ballot for the issue of and opening of postal ballot papers. This is in preference to an hourly rate and replaces a fee which was felt to be both generous and out of date given the changes in process brought in by new IT packages available
11. The City and District Councils have now indicated that the referred to scale of fees are acceptable to them for the running of elections on the County Council's behalf, are consistent with their recent experience and should therefore provide a robust and cost-effective means of delivering the May 2017 election, together with any other in-year elections and referendums. A benchmarking exercise has also been undertaken with a sample of other county council areas and the indication is that the fees and expenditure now proposed are within the scope of fees planned by those authorities.

Financial Implications

12. A separate budget is maintained for electoral expenditure, which is built up over time towards the County Council elections, due to be held in 2017. This also incorporates an element towards by-election costs which may also occur in the 2017/18 year.

RECOMMENDATION

13. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to approve the Scale of Expenditure for the financial year 2017/2018, as shown in Annex A to this report, for the election of County Councillors and any other local referendums.**

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Background papers: Nil

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