

# AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 15 JANUARY 2025

## Scale of Election Expenses 2025/26

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 2025/26**, 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, 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 the County Council Elections, which will be held on Thursday, 1 May 2025, as well as any by-elections which may need to be held within the 2025/26 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, including any by-elections held within the financial year 2025/26.
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 the County Council elections on its behalf.

### Levels for 2025-26

6. The proposed figures for 2025/26 are shown in bold alongside the amounts which were agreed for 2024/25.

The main changes

7. As in previous years, a cost of living award has been applied to fees. For 2025/26 an approximate 2.5% uplift has been applied to the flat-rate fees, which is the amount used to uplift all NJC Allowances for 2024.
8. This level of up-lift has been applied to the Uncontested Election Fees and Disbursements (Part I, Sections 1-6) and the Fees for Contested Elections for Returning Officer and Deputy Returning Officers (Part II, Sections 7-9), in line with the NJC pay award hourly rates, as the national pay award was of fixed amount rather than a percentage base increase. These fees are not covered by the Pay Bands for poll staff.
9. The Oxford Living Wage has been set at £13.16 per hour for 2025/26. The election specialists were also mindful of the Pay Bands which have been published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for any National Elections for the period 2025/26. The annexed table details which of the suggested fees have been increased in line with the pay award, meet the requirements of the Oxford Living Wage and/or also fall within the bands published by MHCLG.
10. The County Council's Scale of Fees is adopted by the City Council and some of the district councils, some of who will continue to have electoral wards with more than one elected member. The County Council will move to a system of single-member divisions with effect from May 2025. The need for a fee for 2-member divisions has therefore been removed and a single fee per vacancy provided, which meets the needs of County Council elections moving forwards.
11. The wording of the fee paid to the Returning Officer and Deputy Returning Officers (Parts IA, Sections 1 & 2 and Part IIA, Sections 7, 8 and 9), has been amended so that the fee is payable for "each vacancy in an electoral division", rather than for "each electoral division" to reflect this. The Disbursements payable at Part IB Sections 3 and 4, and Part IIA Sections 7 and 8, have also been amended to the same effect.
12. The election specialists noted that the existing fee paid to Presiding Officers (Part IIB, Section 10) was lower than the proposed Pay Band figures, and has been increased to £280.00, which breaks down to provide an hourly rate of £17.50, on the basis of 16 hours to staff polls.
13. The existing fee paid to Poll Clerks (Part IIB, Sections 11 and 12) was noted to be within the Pay Band, but at the lower end of the scale at £12.50 per hour and below the Oxford Working Wage. This has been increased to an hourly rate of £13.75, which will provide a fee of £220.00 and maintain a degree of parity to the fee of the Presiding Officers.
14. The fee payable at Part IIB, Section 14 for the training of presiding officers and poll clerks is viewed as being a combined fee for the training of staff and the collection of ballot boxes by poll staff. This has been increased in line with the pay award and is also within the combined banding of the MHCLG fee banding.
15. Fees payable to Count Staff (Part IIB, Sections 15-18) have been increased in line with the pay award and remain in line with the banding of fees supplied by

MHCLG. The overnight rates of pay also comply with advice from MHCLG with regards to weekend working.

16. The fee for the issue and receipt of postal ballot papers (Part IIB, Section 24) was raised to £0.90 per postal vote last year. . The districts and city councils manage this process using differing approaches, and have requested that the fee remain on a per-vote basis, rather than an hourly rate, which will allow greater flexibility for these processes to be carried out in a manner of their own choosing, and in turn set their own hourly fees to staff employed directly where appropriate.
17. 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**

18. 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 the County Council elections are scheduled, they are a standalone election which means the County Council must meet the full cost.

### **Legal Implications**

19. 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**

20. 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.

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Annex: Scale of Elections Fees 2025/2026  
Background papers: Nil

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