

# Council report



Report of Mark Stone, Returning Officer

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## Elections - scales of fees, charges

### Recommendations

Council is asked to

1. agree the scales of fees for district and parish council elections, parish polls and neighbourhood planning referendums as set out in the Appendix to this report;
2. agree that the scales of fees for staffing positions are amended to reflect those adopted by Oxfordshire County Council and authorise the returning officer to make such changes;
3. agree to continue to charge parish and town councils for running elections on their behalf.

### Purpose of Report

1. This report recommends the adoption of scales of fees payable to the returning officer (RO) in connection with district and parish council elections, parish polls and neighbourhood planning referendums and that council continues to charge parish and town councils for running elections on their behalf.

### Strategic Objectives

2. The setting of transparent fees contributes to the corporate objective of effective management of resources.

### Background

3. The Representation of the People Act 1983 (the 1983 Act), Section 36 (4) requires the council to cover all expenditure incurred by the returning officer in the holding of an election for all or any seats on it. The council may set scales of expenditure which the returning officer (RO) must not exceed. The fees for conducting Parliamentary and Police and Crime Commissioner elections are regulated by the Returning Officers' Fees and Charges Orders made by the Government.

## Scale of fees

4. The primary purpose of setting a scheme for such fees and charges is to enable a budget for these elections to be worked up and fees to be paid to the RO, presiding officer, poll clerks and other individuals involved in running the election plus to cover the expenses around the nomination process, printing notices and (for contested elections), ballot papers, postal voting packs etc hiring polling stations and conducting the counts. Officers have reviewed the fees and charges structure with election specialist colleagues from within Oxfordshire who assist their returning officers in running elections. The fees and structure set out in the appendix to this report reflect those paid across Oxfordshire and specifically set by Oxfordshire County Council. Officers propose that the staffing fees are automatically amended to reflect changes agreed by Oxfordshire County Council to ensure a continued consistent approach across the county.
5. A number of fees for the RO are shown. The RO uses these fees to pay key staff for undertaking roles on their behalf as deputies.
6. The council has a statutory obligation to provide the RO such resources necessary to run effective elections. The adoption of a scale of fees and charges achieves this and provides transparency. In addition, the scale provides some indication to parish and town councils of the likely costs they will be liable to incur if there are contested elections in their area.

## Charging parish and town councils for the costs of holding elections

7. Any expenditure incurred in the election of a parish councillor is rechargeable only on the parish or town for which the election was held. The 1983 Act makes provision for district councils to re-charge the relevant parish council for running elections on their behalf. Previously the council has levied such a charge. The RO recommends that a charge is levied and that where there is a combined district and parish election, this should be on the basis of equal apportionment of shared costs.

## Climate and ecological impact implications

8. There are no direct climate or ecological implications arising from this report.

## Financial Implications

9. If the council discontinues its current practice of recharging parish and town councils for the costs of running their elections, this will create a significant additional budget pressure. The council would have to meet any costs that it could not contain within the overall budget from the contingency fund.

## Legal Implications

10. There is a requirement for the council to agree the scales of fees for district and parish council elections, neighbourhood planning referendums and parish polls; and to make a decision on recharging parish and town councils for the running of elections on their behalf.

## Other implications

11. None.

## Conclusion

12. This report asks council to agree scales of fees for district and parish council elections, neighbourhood planning referendums and parish polls; and to agree to charge parish councils for running their elections.

**Background Papers**

None.