

# WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE SHADOW AUTHORITY

## SHADOW EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

26<sup>th</sup> January 2021

Report Title	Elections- Scale of Fees and Charges
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### List of Appendices

#### Appendix A – Scale of Fees

##### 1. Purpose of Report

1. To seek agreement for a scale of fees for the Returning Officer and note fees and charges in connection with unitary, town and parish elections, parish polls and neighbourhood planning referendums.

##### 2. Executive Summary

1. The Representation of the People Act 1983 requires the council to appoint an officer of the council to be the Returning Officer in local elections; for West Northamptonshire the Chief Executive is the appointed Returning Officer. For all other elections, the appointment is by legislation.

2. The role of the Returning Officer is to prepare, plan and manage elections. It should be noted that it is distinct and separate from the substantive Chief Executive role and therefore when acting as Returning Officer, s/he is directly accountable to the courts as an independent statutory officer rather than accountable to the council. A natural consequence of this is that should legal action be commenced due to actions taken in respect of the election, it shall be taken against her/him personally.

3. It is a legislative requirement that the Returning Officer's expenditure in delivering an election is met by the council. Expenditure includes staff payments and any necessary disbursements.

4. Although the Returning Officer may determine a scale of fees and charges which will enable her/him to deliver a successful election, it is considered prudent that the council note the proposed scales of expenditure to ensure that they are aware of the financial envelope that the Returning Officer will work within.

5. A Northamptonshire wide Scale of Fees is proposed to ensure that there is consistency across the whole of Northamptonshire and that staff know that there is no difference in remuneration between the electoral areas. There are similar

arrangements throughout the country. It should be noted that proposed staff fees are not less than they have been in the predecessor Councils

6. The proposed Scale of Fees at Appendix A has been drafted following consultation with colleagues within Northamptonshire and an examination of best practice from around the country. Further, the scale was submitted to the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) which is the body that represents election professionals in the UK for comment, and the AEA agreed that they were fair and reasonable in comparison to other scales adopted by other Councils.

7. Members previously agreed that Town and Parish Councils will be recharged for the cost of administering elections on their behalf and the proposed scale also helps to provide some indication to parish and town councils of the likely costs they will be liable to incur.

8. Returning Officer fees vary throughout the country and there is not a standard approach or formula to determining them. The proposed fees are set out within the Scale of Fees at Appendix A. They were reached by consulting with the district councils within Northamptonshire, councils throughout the East Midlands and other councils of a similar electorate size to the new council.

9. In relation to the proposed Returning Officer fees for administering the election of members of West Northamptonshire, they are based upon the agreed fee of £490 per ward for the 2017 Northampton County Council elections but with a small uplift of £60 based upon the complexity of delivering elections based on a 3 member electoral ward.

10. In some instances, the proposed Returning Officer fees would mean that they would be lower than that payable for a three member ward for an existing Council, which would be for example £650 for Kettering Borough and around £850 for East Northants. In the other two areas, the fee would be largely the same.

11. The proposed fees are considered to be reasonable and proportionate considering the geographical size of the area, electorate number and complexity of three member wards.

12. The fees for conducting Parliamentary and Police and Crime Commissioner elections are regulated by the Returning Officers' Fees and Charges Orders made by Government.

### **3. Recommendations**

1. It is recommended that the Shadow Executive Committee;

1. approves the Returning Officer fees contained within Appendix A
2. Notes all other fees and charges within the Scale of Fees at Appendix A

2. Reason for Recommendations

- a. To ensure that there is a consistent and transparent approach to payments for administering elections within West Northamptonshire

### **4. Report Background**

#### **Resources and Financial**

1. As there are 31 electoral wards in the new authority, the cost of the Returning Officer's fee would be £17,050.
2. Town and Parish Councils would be recharged for the administration of elections on their behalf.

### **Consultation**

3. As outlined in the report, consultation has been undertaken with elections teams within the District Councils. The AEA was also consulted on the proposed staff fees.

### **Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

**None**

### **Climate Impact**

4. None

### **Community Impact**

5. The successful administration of elections is essential to ensuring democracy for electors within West Northamptonshire.

### **5. Conclusions**

1. The proposals contained in this report seek to ensure that elections within West Northamptonshire are conducted in an efficient and transparent way.

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### **6. Background Papers**

None