

# WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL DEMOCRACY AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

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Report Title Elections – Scale of Fees and Charges

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## Contributors/Checkers/Approvers

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## List of Appendices

Appendix A – Current Scale of Fees

Appendix B – Proposed Scale of Fees

Appendix C – DLUHC approved Scale of Fees

### 1. Purpose of Report

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- 1.1 To seek agreement for an update to the scale of fees for the Returning Officer and their staff and note fees and charges in connection with West Northamptonshire Council, town and parish elections, parish polls and neighbourhood planning referendums.

### 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1 A revised West Northamptonshire Scale of Fees for staff working at elections and referenda is proposed. The principal reason for the revision is to ensure the Council's scale of fees is aligned with the limits placed on staff fees by the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLHUC).
- 2.2 When determining the scale of revised fees, it is in the Council's interests to ensure there are only very minor differences in remuneration across the North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire electoral areas. There are similar arrangements throughout the country. This benefits both authorities by helping to ensure staff are rewarded equally by either authority and not incentivised to work for one rather than the other.
- 2.3 The original Scale of Fees at Appendix A was approved at Committee on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021 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.

### **3. Recommendations**

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It is recommended that the Committee:

- a) approve all the changes to the fees and charges within the Scale of Fees at Appendix B.

### **4. Reason for Recommendations (NOTE: this section is mandatory and must be completed)**

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- To ensure that there is a consistent and transparent approach to payments for administering elections within West Northamptonshire.
- To ensure that elections staff are remunerated in line with the changes to their role following the implementation of the Elections Integrity Bill.
- To ensure we are in line with the limits placed on election staff fees by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

### **5. Report Background**

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- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 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.
- 5.3 It is a legislative requirement that the Returning Officer's expenditure in delivering local elections is met by the council. Expenditure includes staff payments and any necessary disbursements.

- 5.4 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.

## **6. Issues and Choices**

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- 6.1 The elections for the newly formed West and North Northamptonshire Councils were held in May 2021 and the pay scale were then updated in April 2022 to take into account the Election Act changes. The current scale of fees can be seen in Appendix A was used for these elections.
- 6.2 Since then, other Neighbourhood Plans and By-elections have been held within Northamptonshire using the same scale.
- 6.3 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. These costs are available for parishes to see on our website and we would also notify them of the increase in staff fees.
- 6.4 Recently the Department for Housing Levelling Up and Housing and Communities (DLUHC) have set up a pay scale for election staff for UK Parliamentary elections and for the Police Crime & Commissioner Elections. This has meant that some of the fees have had to change. The proposed fees are set out within the Scale of Fees at Appendix B. All the fees set out are within the pay scales that DLUHC set.
- 6.5 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. North Northamptonshire have also changed their fees to those reflected in Appendix B.
- 6.6 The fees for Returning Officers conducting Parliamentary and Police and Crime Commissioner elections along with other national elections and referenda are regulated by the Returning Officers' Fees and Charges Orders made by Government. These fees are recharged back to central Government by submitting accounts within six months of the election taking place. Where a national election is combined with a local election, the costs are shared equally except for certain items such as ballot papers that are specific to one election.
- 6.7 It should also be considered to increase the polling station Presiding Officer, Poll Clerk and Polling Station Inspector fees in the light of the Election Integrity Programme. The Programme will give these members of staff more responsibility once the implementation of Voter ID comes in which is planned for elections from 2023 onwards along with other responsibilities later on such as new rules on handing postal votes in at polling stations. Presiding Officers will also be required to collect additional equipment and so we have increased the fee again. The increase in fees are reflected in Appendix B.

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **7.1 Resources and Financial**

- 7.1.1 Following the Boundary review there are now 35 electoral wards in the new authority, the cost of the Returning Officer's fee would be £19635.
- 7.1.2 Town and Parish Councils would be recharged for the administration of elections on their behalf.
- 7.1.3 Costs will be covered by existing budgets or funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

### **7.2 Legal**

There are no legal implications arising from the proposals.

### **7.3 Risk**

There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report.

### **7.4 Consultation**

- 7.4.1 As outlined in the report, consultation for the original set of fees was undertaken with elections teams within the District Councils. The DLUHC was also consulted on the proposed staff fees.

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

- 7.5.1 None.

### **7.6 Climate Impact**

- 7.6.1 None.

### **7.7 Community Impact**

- 7.7.1 The successful administration of elections is essential to ensuring electors within West Northamptonshire are able to exercise their democratic rights. It is considered a 'no fail' service by the Government.

### **7.8 Communications**

- 7.8.1 None

## **8. Background Papers**

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- 8.1 Link - [Elections Bill \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/elections-bill) – Most up to date version as amended.
- 8.2 Link - [Elections Bill \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/elections-bill) – explanatory notes.

