

Report title	Local Election Fees and Charges 2021/2022	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Paula Brookfield Cabinet Member for Governance	
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Originating service	Electoral Services	
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Report has been considered by	Election Board	14 January 2021

Recommendation for decision:

The Governance Committee is recommended to:

1. To approve the proposed schedule of fees from now through to 31 March 2022, as shown in Appendix 1.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To outline the fees and charges relating to Local Elections, which must be set locally.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Representation of the People Act 1983 requires each Council to appoint an officer of the authority as Returning Officer to undertake various statutory duties in relation to election procedures. The Council's Returning Officer is the Chief Executive.
- 2.2 The Representation of the People Act 1983, 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 must not exceed. The costs of running an election result from having to meet a range of fees, charges and expenses incurred in paying council employees and non-council employees for undertaking election duties, expenses for printing notices, poll cards, ballot papers and postal packs and hiring polling station venues and conducting the count.
- 2.3 The Returning Officer is held personally responsible for the organisation and conduct of every election held within Wolverhampton. For national elections and referenda, the fee paid to the Returning Officer is set by statute and paid by central Government. For Police and Crime Commissioner Elections, the fee is also paid by Central Government (Electoral Claims Unit), and for Combined Authority Mayoral it is paid for by the Combined Authority. When the current Chief Executive was appointed as Returning Officer for local elections it was agreed that no fees should be paid for the oversight of local elections and such duties are considered part of the role of the Chief Executive and therefore covered by the associated salary. Other authorities do pay a Returning Officer fee for local elections.
- 2.4 Fees and charges have not been formally reviewed in Wolverhampton for a number of years. They are regularly reviewed across the West Midlands region to ensure consistency and are also reviewed annually in line with inflation. The scale of fees and charges is taken to Election Board for approval from the Returning Officer ahead of every election. It is good practice that these fees be approved by Governance Committee going forward.

3.0 Scale of fees

- 3.1 The fees payable to staff working in polling stations and on other electoral duties are broadly in line with assumptions laid down by the Cabinet Office as reasonable for that role and in line with the West Midlands region.
- 3.2 No pay rate equates to less than the National Living Wage.
- 3.3 It is proposed that the fees are rounded up to whole numbers and comparable with the regional election fees instead of the council pay grades.

3.4 It is proposed that the day and night payment rate for the count is abolished in favour of a standard hourly rate, as any difference in rate of pay for the same role may be challenged by the Election Claims Unit at the Cabinet Office. All other Councils in the West Midlands region pay a set hourly rate for the count, and the proposed fees are in line with the region.

4.0 Financial implications

4.1 The actual cost of the Combined Election in May 2021 will clearly not be established until later this year, but early preparatory work indicates that it will be in the region of £450,000. This estimate incorporates staffing costs based on the proposed scale of fees recommended in this report. The Council will meet the third of this total cost associated with local elections, with two thirds to be funded by the Government and the Combined Authority for the Police and Crime Commissioner and Mayoral elections respectively. The anticipated £150,000 cost to the Council will be funded from the £192,000 budget currently set aside for local elections.

4.2 Additional preparations are being made for the May 2021 elections due to the impact of Covid-19. This includes:

- the purchase of personal protective equipment
- planned use of Covid Marshals at polling stations.

4.3 The estimated costs of these are currently included in the forecasts identified above, though the possibility of reducing the overall election cost to the Council by funding these elements from additional Government Covid-19 grants is to be explored.
[GE/01052021/C]

5.0 Legal implications

5.1 The approach taken is lawful and in compliance with relevant election law. [DP/12012021/B]

6.0 All Other Implications

6.1 Typically 800 people are employed on election duties which is managed by Electoral Services Team. More roles are expected to be recruited to for the triple election and to ensure polling stations are covid-secure. An individual risk assessment will need to be completed for every person employed which will have resource implications on HR and Electoral Services Team.

7.0 Schedule of background papers

7.1 None.

8.0 Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1: Election Fees and Charges 2021/2022.