

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL

Governance and Ethics Committee

16 March 2023

Report title	Local Election Fees and Charges 2022-2023	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Paula Brookfield Cabinet member for Governance and Ethics	
Accountable director	David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer	
Originating service	Electoral Services	
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Report has been considered by	Election Board	16 January 2022

Recommendation for decision:

The Governance and Ethics Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the proposed schedule of fees for May 2023 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 fees 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 and is then brought to Governance and Ethics Committee for final approval.

3.0 Changes to scale of fees from 2021-2022

- 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 The majority of fees have been kept at the same rate as 2021-2022 for a standalone election, except for polling staff pay and training fees to reflect the additional responsibilities as a result of the Election Act.
- 3.3 Presiding Officer pay is proposed to increase by £20 and Polling Station Inspectors by £10 to reflect additional responsibilities of making an assessment on photo ID.
- 3.4 There will also be a £30 payment made to each count assistant for training due to the complexity of the multi-member count. Count assistants are not usually paid a training fee or required to attend a mock count.
- 3.5 There will be a £20 uplift for each Presiding Officer's pay due to a one off longer training session to cover all of the new measures.
- 3.6 Poll Clerk pay is proposed to be increased by £15 to £175 so that it is line with the National Living Wage of £10.42 an hour, as no pay rate equates to less than the National Living Wage.

4.0 Financial implications

- 4.1 The cost of running local elections to the Council in any year is dependent on whether they are standalone or combined with Parliamentary, Police and Crime Commissioner or Combined Authority Mayoral elections. Combined elections costs are effectively shared, part funded by Government or the Combined Authority.
- 4.2 The budget set aside to cover the cost of local elections each year has been £192,000. In the event of combined elections or fallow years significant underspends against the local elections budget have provided scope for contributions to the Elections Reserve. Standalone election costs have conversely exceeded the local elections budget and these additional costs have been funded from the Elections Reserve.
- 4.3 The budget and funding strategy outlined above have worked effectively over the last few years, but a combination of current and future cost pressures recently reviewed now indicate that a significant increase in the budget is required to fund elections moving forwards. These pressures include increased polling station costs due to greater use of private venues and temporary polling stations in place of schools, increases in polling station hire against a background of rising energy prices, Royal Mail postage charge increases, higher poll letter costs compared to poll cards and increases in staffing fees in line with national living wage rates.
- 4.4 The budget is set to increase to £277,000 in 2023-2024, subject to approval of the 2023-2024 Budget Report by Cabinet on 22 February and Council on 1 March. The funding strategy of combining the local elections budget with use of an Elections Reserve is set to continue. Additionally new burdens funding associated with the implementation of Election Act was announced in December 2022, with the Council awarded a total of just under £104,000 spanning the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 financial years. It is anticipated that the fees payable under the proposed schedule in this report will be met from the funding sources identified above. [GE/30012023/P]

5.0 Legal implications

- 5.1 The approach taken is lawful and in compliance with relevant election law.
[SZ/27012023/P]

6.0 Equalities implications

- 6.1 Whilst there are no direct equalities implications in this report there are a substantial number of equalities issues that are being addressed in relation to the elections and these are covered in other election reports.

7.0 All other Implications

- 7.1 There are no other implications arising from this report at the current time.

8.0 Schedule of background papers

8.1 None listed.

9.0 Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1: Election Fees and Charges 2022-2023