

Council report

Report of the 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 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 European 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. At its meeting on 10 December 2014 Council agreed scales of fees for elections and parish polls in accordance with provisions in the Representation of the People
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Act 1983 and the Local Government Act 1972. Council now needs to approve a scale of fees and charges for 2019/20. In accordance with the report to Council in December 2014 officers have reviewed the fees and charges structure with colleagues from within Oxfordshire and examined best practise from around the country with the aim of further simplifying the process. The fees and structure set out in the appendix to this report reflect those paid across Oxfordshire. The fees structure has also been simplified with fees combined into a smaller number of headings and those for neighbourhood plan referendums and parish polls incorporated into the main fee structure.

5. A number of fees for the returning officer are shown. The RO uses these fees to pay both herself and key staff. After the 2019 elections, the returning officer will report actual expenditure to the Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee. This will set out the cost of the elections and detail the total amount of fees paid to the RO and each of her deputies.
6. If Council does not adopt a scale, then the council will be obliged to pay the returning officer's expenses without setting what it considers a reasonable scale of expenses applicable to district, town and parish elections. 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 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.

Financial Implications

8. 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

9. There is a requirement for the council to agree the scales of fees for district and parish council elections, referendums and parish polls and to make a decision on recharging parish councils for the running 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, referendums and parish polls and to agree to charge parish councils for running their elections.

Background Papers

Representation of the People Act 1983
Existing Scales of Expenditure for Elections.
