

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cabinet

23 October 2024

Report of the Chief Executive – Karen Jones

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected:

All Wards

Review of fees and charges paid at local government elections

Purpose of the Report

1. This report sets out for decision proposals relating to the review of fees and charges paid to staff appointed by the Returning Officer for Local Government elections.

Background

2. The current structure and scale of fees paid at local elections are originally based on those previously set by the former Neath, Lliw Valley and Port Talbot authorities. This Council adopted those scale of fees in 1996.
3. The fees were previously last fully reviewed prior to the 2017 local government elections and now need to be revisited once again to ensure they continue to reflect the fees paid at other election types.

4. The most recent national electoral events were the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections which took place on 2 May 2024, and the 'snap' UK Parliamentary General Election on 4 July 2024. It is proposed that the fees paid for these elections are used as a general benchmark for specific local election fees.
5. The updated fees and charges schedule will ensure that an accurate up to date structure is in place prior to the commencement of the election timetable and the appointment of appropriate staff for the Local Government Elections scheduled for 6 May, 2027.
6. In setting the fees and charges utilised by the Returning Officer for local government elections, a standing point of reference is now offered by the UK Government's Elections Claims Unit (ECU) in the form of set pay bands for national elections.
7. To develop the pay bands the ECU, located within the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, has worked closely with the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE), the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) and the Elections Funding Working Group (EFWG) to develop a structure that can apply to all national polls across Great Britain.
8. Going forward these national pay bands will be regularly revised and offer the most appropriate modelling to assist with the setting of local pay rates to ensure a consistent, fair and progressive approach to the payment of staff working at elections.

Financial Impact

9. The cost of the ordinary local elections is met from the Elections Equalisation Reserve Fund, to which annual contributions are made from the Electoral Services Office budget to support the Returning Officer in undertaking their independent statutory duties.
10. The cost of administering the 2027 elections for the County Borough Council is currently estimated at £310,000.

11. Where elections to the County Borough Council and community councils are combined, the costs of the elections, including fees paid, are shared equally (except those costs attributable to a particular election only) between the Council and the relevant community council. Community councils will be recharged for their share of the operational costs following the conclusion of the relevant elections.

Equality Impact Assessment

12. A screening assessment has been undertaken to assist the Council in discharging its Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010, after completing the Screening Assessment it has been determined that this Policy does not require a Full Equality Impact Assessment.

Workforce Impacts

13. In relation to the recruitment of staff working at specific election events it is important to point out that these appointments are made directly by the formally appointed Returning Officer and election staff are not employed by Neath Port Talbot Council.
14. The introduction of the UK Government's various electoral reforms via the Elections Act 2022 and the significant changes to UK Parliamentary constituency boundaries have made the recruitment and retention of staff willing to undertake election duties more challenging at national elections.
15. Similar staff recruitment issues have also now started to impact on the ability to recruit and retain staff willing to undertake election duties at local elections, which is proving more difficult year on year.
16. By basing the attached revised schedule of fees and charges for local government elections on modelled pay bands for national elections we will ensure that a consistent, fair and progressive approach to staff fees can be adopted for all election types going forward.
17. In addition, this will also aid in offering the supplementary benefit of helping to stabilise the recruitment and retention of staff willing to work at future local government electoral event within Neath Port Talbot.

Legal Powers

18. To support the discharge of the duty placed on the Returning Officer, as contained with the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) to make arrangement to adequately administer the Local Government Elections scheduled be held on 6 May, 2027.

Risk Management

19. Should the Council not maintain its fees at appropriate levels, there is a risk that the Returning Officer will be unable to recruit a sufficient workforce to safely administer electoral events.

Consultation

20. There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

Recommendation

21. That the amended fee structure, as contained in Appendix 1 attached hereto, for Local Government elections be approved.

Implementation of Decision

22. The decision is for immediate implementation.

Reason for Proposed Decision

23. To agree the amended fee structure prior to the appointment of appropriate staff.

Appendices

24. Appendix 1 - Local Government Elections 2027 proposed fees and charges structure.

List of Background Papers

25. None.

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