

From: Ben Watts, County Returning Officer
To: Electoral & Boundary Review Committee, 27 March 2024
Subject: 2024/25 County Scale of Election Fees and Expenses
Status: Unrestricted

1. Introduction

- a) At its meeting on 8 March 2010, this Committee agreed that it would annually authorise and approve the County Scale of Fees and Expenses for Kent County Council elections (KCC Scale of Fees). This is consistent with the powers delegated to the Committee by County Council and recorded in the Appendix of the Constitution.
- b) In January 2022, KCC received a request from the Kent Association of Electoral Registration Officers and Staff (Kent AEROS) for the KCC Scale of Fees to be merged with the Kent AEROS Scale of Fees for District/Borough and Parish Council elections and Neighbourhood Referendum (Kent AEROS Scale of Fees). KCC responded to say this would be something that it would be happy to explore ahead of the 2025 KCC election but it was currently prioritising the review and settlement of the KCC 2021 election claims.
- c) In the intervening period, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has introduced a pay banding system for election staff at UK Parliamentary elections, Police and Crime Commissioner elections and national referenda. These are elections funded by the UK Government and claims relating to them are administered through the DLUHC's Elections Claims Unit.
- d) The Kent AEROS notified KCC in July 2023 that it was looking to update and align the Kent AEROS Scale of Fees with the new DLUHC banding to create consistency of election staff payments across the different type of elections. Following further conversations with the Kent AEROs, KCC has been asked to consider aligning its election staff costs with the new DLUHC banding rather than merging the KCC Scale of Fees with Kent AEROS Scale of Fees.
- e) A review of the KCC Scale of Fees has been undertaken and a draft proposal for 2024/25 Scale of Fees is set out in Appendix 1 using the new DLUHC banding for election staff costs. DLUHC will update the pay bands on an annual basis to reflect changes to national minimum wage and average public sector pay. All other costs listed are proposed to be reimbursed as actual costs or by a percentage increase relating to the Deputy Returning Officer costs. Historically, the KCC Scale of Fees has been uplifted annually using the average NJC pay award for local government. However, in 2021/22, 2022/23 & 2023/24 KCC Scale of Fees were uplifted using different methods due to an absence of an NJC pay award ahead of the Committee meeting to agree the KCC Scale of Fees. It is proposed that for the 2024/25 scale

of fees, the Deputy Returning Officer costs will be updated by the percentage increase awarded to KCC staff who receive a Total Contribution Pay rating of successful. This is expected to be 2.6%.

- f) The proposed 2024/25 KCC Scale of Fees also includes a delegation to enable additional expenses up to £1000 per single item, not covered by the Scale of Fees, to be approved by the County Returning Officer under delegation from the Electoral and Boundary Review Committee and reported back to the Committee at the appropriate time. A similar delegation to the County Returning Officer and Deputy County Returning Officer was granted by the Committee for the 2021/22 Scale of Fees as it was recognised that there may be costs related to COVID-19 and other matters and it would not be practical to call an additional meeting of the Committee to make any further adjustments.

2. 2021 Election Costs

- a) The Deputy Returning Officers in the 12 borough/city/district councils are able to claim back from KCC the costs of running the KCC election in their area in line with the KCC Scale of Fees.
- b) All 12 claims have now been reviewed and settled. The total amount claimed for the 2021 KCC Election was £1,475,992.28.
- c) In recognition of the additional costs associated with making the 2021 elections COVID-19 secure, additional funding via a Section 31 Grant was paid directly from the Government to the districts as they administered the local polls. KCC requested that its proportion of the funding should be deducted from the districts' claim to KCC. With the deduction of KCC's proportion of Section 31 Grant (£310,987.11) from the claims, the total cost of the 2021 election to KCC was £1,165,005.17.
- d) Whilst this is lower than the total cost of the 2017 KCC election (£1,950,000), it is important to note that the 2021 KCC election was held in conjunction with another Kent-wide election, the delayed Police & Crime Commissioner election which brought significant savings in terms of staffing, polling station and postage costs.

3. 2025 Election Costs

- a) Following the 2021 KCC election, four KCC by-elections have been held. The claims for these by-elections have been reviewed and settled. The net cost to KCC to date is £151,780.87.
- b) Since 2021, increased costs have been observed particularly in relation to postage, venue hire and staffing due to inflationary pressures, increased energy prices and the cost-of-living crisis. Insufficient funds in KCC's Election Reserve, has been added as a risk to Governance, Law & Democracy's Risk Register.
- c) On this basis, we are forecasting the 2025 KCC election, which is anticipated to be a standalone election, to cost in the region of £2,000,000 - £2,200,000.

4. Recommendation

The Electoral & Boundary Review Committee is asked to approve the proposed County Scale of Election Fees and Expenses for 2024/25.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Proposed KCC Scale of Election Fees and Expenses 2024-25

Background Documents

Electoral & Boundary Review Committee, 8 March 2010

<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=142&MId=3230&Ver=4>

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