

**BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**FROM:** Head of Corporate Services

**REPORT NUMBER**    **F122**

**TO:**     STRATEGY COMMITTEE

**DATE OF MEETING:** 16 November 2006

**DISTRICT AND PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL ELECTIONS: SCALE OF FEES**

1.    **SUMMARY**

1.1 This report seeks to establish a revised scale of fees for local government elections in view of the higher rates applied at the combined Parliamentary and County Council election in May 2005, the decision to harmonise the hours of poll at national and local elections and other changes effected by the Electoral Administration Act 2006. The Service and Financial Planning Group has considered the additional costs of running the District and Parish Council elections in 2007.

2.    **RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 That with effect from 2 January 2007, the scale of election fees at District Council and Parish Council elections in the Babergh area be as indicated in the Appendix to this report.

2.2 That the fees for polling station staff be updated in line with increases in the rates at national elections.

2.3 That in the periods between national elections the level of all fees included in the scale be updated in line with the annual salary awards.

The Committee is able to resolve this matter.

3.    **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

3.1 Based on a similar number of contested wards and parishes as in 2003, the additional cost in 2007 of implementing the revised scale of fees is estimated to be: -

- For polling station staff -            £6,000
- For postal voting assistants -        £1,000
- For additional clerical duties -       £500
- Returning Officer's fees -            £150

The actual cost, however, depends upon the numbers of contested wards, postal votes, required counters, poll cards etc. No provision has been made to increase fees in this financial year but elections are precluded to fill any casual vacancy occurring within 6 months of the ordinary date of elections for the Authority.

4.    **KEY INFORMATION**

4.1 By law the Council appoints a Returning Officer who has a distinct legal role in relation to elections that is separate from his or her position in the local authority. The distinction is important as it helps preserve the Returning Officer's independence in the organisation and conduct of elections.

- 4.2 The Representation of the People Act 1983 provides for all expenditure properly incurred by the Returning Officer for a District Council election to be paid by that Council. There is similar provision regarding the election of parish councillors, although a district council has discretion as to whether the costs should be reclaimed from the parishes concerned. In Babergh, as in most authorities, a scale of election expenses has been fixed to contain and regulate the cost of undertaking specific functions. It has also been the practice to recharge Parish Councils the cost of their elections.
- 4.3 Babergh's scale of election fees was last reviewed in July 1990. The reason for that review was that rates of pay for polling station staff had fallen behind those at national (as well as at county council) elections. It was resolved that the fees for presiding officers and poll clerks at district and parish council elections should be set at  $\frac{13}{15}$  of the rate applicable at national elections on the basis that the poll was taken over thirteen hours at local elections and fifteen hours at national elections. It was also agreed that these rates should –
- be increased by 20% where polls were combined (and where the electorate was over 500)
  - be updated at  $\frac{13}{15}$  of the national rate each time fees for national elections were altered, and
  - in intervening periods, be updated in line with the annual salary award.
- 4.4 At the most recent General Election in 2005, fees for presiding officers and poll clerks were significantly increased to £175 and £105 respectively, with additional, respective payments of £40 and £25 where the poll was combined with that for another election. The Council's scale of fees then stood at £127.40 (or £152.88 where combined) for presiding officers and £80.54 (or £96.68) for poll clerks. Moreover, since May 2006 polling hours have been the same for both local government and national elections, which calls into question how appropriate the  $\frac{13}{15}$  formula now is. Most neighbouring Districts have since agreed, or are being recommended to agree, to adopt the national fees for polling station staff. It is therefore imperative that this Council's fees are revised to ensure the employment of sufficient people to run elections efficiently throughout the district. However, as turnouts at local government elections are generally lower than at national elections, it may be appropriate to retain the restriction on the payment of the additional fee for combined polls to staff responsible for over 500 electors and to apply a lower rate for staff at polling stations with 500 or fewer electors at single elections.
- 4.5 In addition to these considerations, the Electoral Administration Act 2006 ("the Act") has placed new responsibilities on the Returning Officer and her staff, most particularly in relation to checking postal voters' personal identifiers (i.e. signatures and dates of birth) but also –
- providing pre-poll information to all electors, including those registered to vote by post
  - producing a marked register of postal votes received
  - requiring voters to sign for their ballot paper
  - conducting reviews of polling places every 4 years

The duty to authenticate personal identifiers will require additional staff.

- 4.6 Postal votes have increased from around 1,200 in 2003 to over 5,500 at the 2005 General Election. Over 4,000 electors are now permanently registered to vote by post. This has implications for the number of clerks needed to prepare ballot paper packs for posting and to open and check the contents of returned packs. The current fee scale will not yield enough to pay for the extra staff required in future, particularly with the additional requirement for checking “identifiers.” One electoral pilot scheme in 2006 suggested it might take 50 staff one whole working day to check 5,000 records manually. In comparison, in Babergh in 2003, 18 people dispatched postal ballots in two hours and it took 20 people three hours to open those returned. There are now too many postal voters to compile the packs for dispatch in-house and, since their number continues to grow, the production of postal voter packs will inevitably have to be outsourced at future elections. However, it will still be necessary to employ staff to insert the correct ballot paper or papers. It is estimated that the revised cost of managing the postal vote processes will be £45 per 50 postal voters. This is the current rate approved by Suffolk County Council and is similar to the rate set by Waveney for its elections in 2006. As the postal voting requirements are new, only experience will reveal whether this fee will need to be revisited. The Department for Constitutional Affairs may provide additional funds for undertaking the extra responsibilities although this would be for one financial year only. If funds are forthcoming, it will be possible to reduce the claim under the scale of fees for the 2007 elections accordingly; the fees represent the maxima and it may not always be necessary to invoke the full allowance.
- 4.7 Other areas where the fees are low in comparison with other authorities include those for uncontested elections and for supervisory and clerical work. Notwithstanding that an election may be uncontested, the Returning Officer is still responsible for determining the validity of nomination papers and giving public notice of nominations and the election result. The current fee (£8.79 per uncontested ward or parish) does not adequately reflect this responsibility and a modest increase to £12 is suggested. The supervisory and clerical allowance is used to pay staff for general administrative tasks and for the supervision of staff at the count and during the preparation, dispatch and receipt of postal votes. Given the new requirements of the Act, there will be an additional need for supervisors to judge, for example, whether signatures on postal vote statements match those on the original applications. Most neighbouring authorities’ scales of election fees provide for a supervisory and clerical allowance on the basis of a lump sum per contested ward, supplemented according to the number of electors. At Suffolk Coastal District Council, however, the lump sum per ward is supplemented according to the number of candidates at the election and the number of polling stations and this seems to bear a far better relationship to the actual work involved in managing the election. It is suggested, therefore, that this method of calculating the clerical allowance be built into the scale.

5. **APPENDICES**

Proposed Scale of Returning Officer’s Fees and Expenses.

6. **BACKGROUND PAPERS REFERRED TO:**

None.

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BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCILSCALE OF RETURNING OFFICER'S FEES AND EXPENSES  
AT ELECTIONS OF DISTRICT AND/OR PARISH COUNCILLORS

	<u>FEES</u> <u>Existing</u>	<u>Proposed</u> (w.e.f. 02/01/07)
1. <u>FEES</u>		
(i) (a) Presiding Officer's fee for a 15 hour day (13 hour poll)	£127.40	
(a) Presiding Officer's fee (15 hour poll) where the electorate exceeds 500		<b>£175.00</b>
(b) Presiding Officer's fee for combined District and Parish Election where the electorate exceeds 500	£152.88	<b>£215.00</b>
(c) Presiding Officer's fee where the electorate does not exceed 500		<b>£157.50</b>
(ii) (a) Poll Clerk's fee for 15 hour day (13 hour poll)	£80.54	
(a) Poll Clerk's fee (15 hour poll)		<b>£105.00</b>
(b) Poll Clerk's fee for combined District and Parish Election where the electorate exceeds 500	£96.68	<b>£130.00</b>
(c) Poll Clerk's fee where the electorate does not exceed 500		<b>£94.50</b>
(iii) Assistance in counting the votes: -		
Each Counting Assistant for the first hour or part thereof	£11.51	<b>£12.00</b>
For each additional period of 30 minutes or part thereof	£5.70	<b>£6.00</b>
(iv) Postal Ballot Papers: -		
(a) Fee for remuneration of persons employed in issuing postal ballot papers - for each 50 ballot papers or part thereof	£12.06	
(b) Fee for the remuneration of persons employed in the receipt of postal ballot papers - for each 50 ballot papers or part thereof	£6.04	
(a) Fee for the remuneration of persons employed in both the issue and receipt of Postal Ballot papers in each ward or parish, per 50 electors (or part thereof) entitled to vote by post		<b>£45.00</b>
(v) Supervisory and Clerical Assistance		
(a) For each uncontested Ward/Parish	£28.80	<b>£28.80</b>
(b) For the first contested Ward/Parish	£115.23	
(c) For each subsequent contested Ward/Parish	£57.47	

		<b>FEES</b>	
		<u>Existing</u>	<u>Proposed</u> (w.e.f. 02/01/07)
	(b) For each separate contested election held on the same day		<b>£45.00</b>
	(c) For each candidate at a contested election		<b>£3.00</b>
	(d) For each candidate at an uncontested election		<b>£1.00</b>
	(e) For each polling station		<b>£12.00</b>
(vi)	Where a Presiding Officer or other person is the Deputy Returning Officer at a place of count, additional fee for supervising the counting of votes, declaring the result and making the Return	£15.63	<b>£15.63</b>
(vii)	Computer produced poll cards <b>and pre-poll information cards for postal voters:</b> -		
	Checking, sorting and arranging to meet Royal Mail requirements - per 100 cards	£1.67	<b>£1.67</b>
2.	<u>RETURNING OFFICER'S FEES</u>		
	District or Parish, or a combination of District and Parish Council elections -		
	<u>Contested Elections</u>		
	First 15 Wards and/or Parishes - each Ward/Parish	£155.02	<b>£155.02</b>
	Each additional Ward and/or Parish	£13.20	<b>£13.20</b>
	<u>Uncontested Elections</u>		
	Each Ward and/or Parish	£8.79	<b>£12.00</b>
3.	<u>TRAVELLING EXPENSES</u>		
	The casual user rate payable under the national scheme of conditions of service for Local Authorities (APT&C Services).		<b>Private car - 40p per mile Motorcycle – 24p per mile Bicycle – 20p per mile</b>
4.	The Returning Officer shall be entitled to appoint a second poll clerk at a station if the net number of electors assigned to vote thereat exceeds 750 ( <b>1,000</b> ).		
5.	<u>MISCELLANEOUS EXPENSES</u>		
	<u>The actual and necessary costs of:-</u>		
	Printing and providing ballot papers;		
	Printing and providing notices and other documents required in and about the election or poll and the costs of publishing same;		
	Renting of any building or room for the purpose of the election and for the expense of heating, lighting and cleaning any building or room for such purpose;		

Adapting and fitting up any building or room for the purpose of the election (including the provision of voting compartments and any necessary furniture) and restoring it to fit condition for its normal use;

Providing ballot boxes (including any repairs);

The conveyance of ballot boxes from the store to the place from which distributed and back to the store;

Stamping instruments required to be purchased, hired, altered or repaired;

Copies of the register of electors; and

General stationery and postages, telegrams, telephone calls, bank charges and insurance premiums.

NOTE: Every reference to a parish in these scales relates to a single parish or group of parishes which have a joint parish council or a ward of a parish for which a separate election of parish councillors is held.