

Review of Returning Officer Remuneration for Local Elections

Meeting:	Personnel Committee
Date:	20th July 2025
Cabinet Member (if applicable)	Not applicable
Key Decision Eligible for Call In	No No
Purpose of Report This report seeks to review the Council's approach to the remuneration of the Returning Officer (in Kirklees this is designated as the Chief Executive) for local elections to recognise the personal responsibility attached to this function.	
Recommendations Personnel Committee are recommended to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve payment of a fee to the Returning Officer for the delivery of local elections. This report recommends a fee per 10,000 electorate (the government approach to national elections). The fee would be at 53.5% of the value in line with the current locally agreed approach for national and regional elections Reasons for Recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In considering recommendations Personnel Committee are asked to recognise the lack of consistent approach across local authorities to remuneration for Returning Officers for local elections • The recommended approach utilises calculations set out by the government for national elections • The recommended approach ensures that the personal responsibility of the Returning Officer, as a statutory officer responsible to the courts, is recognised and remunerated 	
Resource Implications: Based on current electorate size the financial implication of the recommended option is £8,114.34	
Date signed off by <u>Executive Director</u> & name	Give name and date for Cabinet / Scrutiny reports This must be the Executive Director(s) responsible for the report and the topic(s) involved
Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance?	Kevin Mulvaney 11/7/25

Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning (Monitoring Officer)?

Samantha Lawton 11/7/25

Electoral wards affected:

Ward councillors consulted: N/A

Public or private: Public with Private Appendix – Exempt information in accordance with Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 namely it contains information relating to the financial and business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information). It is considered that the disclosure of the information would adversely affect those third parties including the Authority and therefore the public interest in maintaining the exemption, which would protect the rights of an individual or the Authority, outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information and providing greater openness and transparency in relation to public expenditure in the Authority's decision making.)

Has GDPR been considered? Yes.

- 1. Executive Summary**
- 2. Information required to take a decision**

Background

Every Council is required to appoint an officer of the Council to be the Returning Officer for the election of Councillors to their local authority. This Officer is usually the Chief Executive and their role as the Returning Officer is separate to their role as the Chief Executive for the Authority. The Chief Executive is the Returning Officer for Kirklees.

The Returning Officer and their appointed deputies are personally responsible for the conduct of the election. Returning Officers are not responsible to the council but are directly accountable to the courts as an independent statutory office holder.

Returning Officers can receive fees paid by the Council to cover the additional responsibility and personal risk of undertaking this role. Section 36(4) and (5) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 permits a scale of fixed expenditure to be determined for election and Returning Officer payments.

Historically, the Returning Officer for Kirklees has not received a fee for their duties as Returning Officer for the delivery of local elections, prior to 2017 there was no fee paid for any elections and was deemed part of the Chief Executive's responsibilities, this was corrected via a report to Personnel Committee which is linked in the background paper at paragraph 9 ([Cabinet and Date of Meeting \(kirklees.gov.uk\)](https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/cabinet-and-date-of-meeting)) which separated out the payment for national and regional elections from the Chief Executive's remuneration.

Current arrangements

The Returning Officer for Kirklees currently receives a fee for elections that are regional or national and that fee is determined by the authority they are acting on behalf of. For example, for Combined Authority Mayoral elections, the fee is determined by the West Yorkshire Combined Authority and for UK Parliamentary elections the fee is set out in legislation prior to the poll and is funded by the Government's consolidated fund. There is no funding for Local Elections fees, any changes would therefore need to be absorbed in the elections budget.

At Kirklees the arrangement is that the Returning Officer for Kirklees receives 53.5% of those fees as specified by WYCA and Central Government directly, the remaining amount is paid into the elections budget for planned polls within an electoral cycle to contribute to the overall costs of running the poll.

3. Implications for the Council

3.1 Council Plan

Implications for the Council Plan reflect the role of Returning Officer in the democratic process

3.2 Financial Implications

The cost of the recommended option (£8,114.34) will be reflected in future budgets as the Council reprofiles the Elections budgets over the next 5 years to reflect the fallow year of Local Elections in 2026.

3.3 Legal Implications

Section 36(4) and (5) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 enables the payment of expenditure in relation to the holding of an election of a councillor in its area. This is as long as that payment does not exceed a fixed scale that may have been set by the authority. Section 36(5) provides the same provision in relation to parish council elections. This report sets out the proposed basis for such payment.

3.4 Climate Change and Air Quality

No implications

3.5 Other (eg Risk, Integrated Impact Assessment or Human Resources)

No risks other than identified in the body of this report.

4. Consultation

Consultation has taken place with leaders of all parties. The Electoral Services Manager has been fully engaged and consulted on the options and recommendations within this report.

5. Engagement

The Electoral Services Manager has been fully engaged in and supported development of options within this report.

6. Options

6.1 Options considered

- A. Agree a fee locally per ward. Research with other authorities (private appendix) suggests setting a benchmark figure per ward is a common approach. These range between £350 - £572 per ward, however there is no clear rationale for the value of these fees. Should this option be considered, 53.5% of the total fees would be recommended.
- B. Agree a fee locally as option A with the addition of an uplifted fee (with the same application of 53.5% of the total) for combined local elections such as a district and parish poll where they increase the ward benchmark figure by £100 or by a percentage such as 20%. In Kirklees, as the Parish/Town Councils pay for their own elections adopting this approach would increase the cost to the Parish/Town Council for the delivery of their polls. This option is not recommended.
- C. Adopt the central government calculation (explained below) used for national elections and apply to local elections. Application of the current 53.5% would be recommended with this option

The fee for Returning Officer's services for national elections is calculated at a rate of £475 per 10,000 electors. Where this amount would be less than £2,500, a 'floor' of £2,500 has been set to recognise that some level of work is required, regardless of the size of the electorate. If we were to apply the same methodology for Local Elections at Kirklees the fee would be:

Total electorate 319,308 divided by 10,000 = 31.93

31.93 multiplied by £475 = £15,167.13

Adopting the same approach as national elections (53.5%) would equate to £8,114.34.

This fee would slightly change year on year as the electorate increases/decreases, however it would be an accurate representation of the electorate and level of responsibility/risk year on year

- D. Retain the current approach of no fees for local elections.

6.2 Reasons for recommended option

Option C is recommended. Option C presents an option ensuring Kirklees is not an outlier in approach. Utilising government guidance on the approach, alongside the 53.5% locally agreed level, provides a rationale for the approach. With the lack of consistency of approach for local elections this is considered a viable option which can be justified as a government set methodology albeit for national elections. The level of remuneration recommended recognises the personal responsibility of the Chief Executive as Returning Officer, as an independent statutory officer responsible directly to the courts.

7. Next steps and timelines

Should Personnel Committee agree to the recommendation, the approach will be implemented for any future local elections and the terms and conditions of the contract for the acting returning officer updated accordingly. Any decision on this recommendation related to local elections has no impact on the existing approach for regional and national

elections. Should the committee agree to the recommended option the pay policy statement for 2026/2027 will be updated by the Head of People Services in accordance with current governance arrangements.

8. Contact officer

Shauna Coyle
Head of People Services

9. Background Papers and History of Decisions

Personnel Committee 25 January 2017 - [Cabinet and Date of Meeting](#)

10. Appendices

Private appendix attached

11. Service Director responsible

Shauna Coyle
Head of People Services