

COUNCIL
29 JANUARY 2026

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: ELECTORAL SERVICES – SCALE OF FEES 2026/27

REPORT OF: Director - Resources

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Scale of Fees – Non-Executive function.
(Electoral Services: Governance)

COUNCIL PRIORITY: THRIVING COMMUNITIES / ACCESSIBLE SERVICES / RESPONSIBLE GROWTH

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. To agree the Scale of Fees for electoral events held during 2026/27.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That the Council agree the Scale of Fees for 2026/27 as set out in Appendix A.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1. To enable the Council to remunerate the Returning Officer and the staff employed to carry out tasks during electoral events and to be open and transparent regarding other payments.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. For the scales of fees to remain at the 2025/26 rates or to increase some areas for reasons explained within the report.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), formerly known as the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), is responsible for central government elections and with effect of April 2025 introduced indicative fees for all election roles at polls which they fund.
- 5.2. MHCLG's indicative fees for elections roles, which apply to any UK Parliamentary or Police and Crime Commission elections, provides the blueprint used for our overall scale of fees.
- 5.3. Following elections held in May 2025, staff surveys were undertaken to gauge feedback. The rates of pay for elections staff were not raised as a significant issue.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. Each Local Authority is required to appoint a Returning Officer (RO). The RO is appointed in an independent capacity by the Council to organise and run elections free from the political structure of the authority. Councils must provide their RO with the resources they need to run elections. This includes the cost of recruiting and paying staff to act as Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks, along with any other ancillary staff necessary for the success of a poll.

7.2. For national polls the government issues a Fees and Charges schedule which identifies for each authority a “maximum recoverable amount” along with a fee which may be claimed by the appointed RO for the rendering of their services. The RO will pay their appointed staff from the monies provided by government and will account for their expenditure by way of a return to the Election Claims Unit (ECU) at the Cabinet Office.

7.3. As explained in paragraph 5.1, MHCLG introduced indicative fees for all elections roles at polls which they fund. This sets pay bands of the amount that should be paid to elections staff at UK Parliamentary elections, Police and Crime Commissioner elections and national referenda.

7.4. For all such national elections, the RO will be expected to adhere to the range proposed for each role by the MHCLG. To pay outside of this range will require special agreement from the ECU or risk the ECU refusing to reimburse the difference where roles exceed their expected amounts.

7.5. No such formal structure exists for local elections, which is why a local scale of election fees is required to cover staff costs associated with the administration of elections and other electoral events, e.g., County Council elections, District Council elections, Town and Parish elections, Neighbourhood Planning Referendums or Town/Parish Poll.

7.6. Although local elections are not formally subject to the same fees as national elections, in practice the scale of fees should be uniform across all election types as having separate fees for local and national elections would cause confusion and major issues with staffing elections which pay different amounts to those held either at the same time or in other years.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 In the May 2025 elections, the RO appointed more than 300 temporary roles to deliver the polls for the Hertfordshire County Council elections. In May 2026, there will be considerably fewer staff required as the scheduled elections are parish polls for Codicote, Knebworth, Kimpton and Royston.
- 8.2 The proposed Scale of Fees has been influenced by the indicative fees by MHCLG. As explained, local elections are not formally subject to the same fees as national elections. However, providing uniformity across all election types will prevent confusion and major issues with staffing elections.
- 8.3 In addition to the scheduled local elections in May 2026, there is always the possibility of by-elections or other unscheduled polls being called for all election types in the life of this scale of fees. For instance, within the 2025/2026 scale of fees, there was the County Council elections, a Neighbourhood Planning Referendum and a Town Council by-election. In the event a by-election was triggered for a national election type, our fees would be subject to the indicative fees set by MHCLG. If the Council opted to pay staff more than the fees listed in Appendix A, the additional costs would likely be rejected by the ECU and the Council would be liable for the financial difference.
- 8.4 It is necessary to ensure that roles continue to be paid at least the National Living Wage. The government has announced that the National Living Wage for those over 21 will increase from £12.21 to £12.71 per hour as of 1 April 2026.
- 8.5 Some roles would be negatively affected by this increase in the National Living Wage if they were not uplifted. Namely, Poll Clerk, Count Assistant, Postal Vote Opening Assistant, Porter and Clerical Assistance roles. These rates have been uplifted in line with the table in Appendix A to reflect the National Living Wage.
- 8.6 The Scale of Fees already includes a fee for the option to pay for the hand delivery of poll cards and canvass forms. To allow maximum flexibility when considering delivery options, it is proposed to also include a fee for the option for the hand delivery of postal votes. Both poll card and postal vote fees accord to the indicative fees set by MHCLG. Note canvass forms are not noted within the MHCLG indicative fees as the cost of the canvass is borne by the respective local authorities.
- 8.7 The hand delivery of poll cards and canvass forms is to be increased from 20p to 30p per item. Postal votes will be 50p per delivery of each postal pack.
- 8.8 For the purposes of clarity, the following wording has been added to when mileage is payable to Canvassers (for the return of canvass forms) (at the door knocking stage of the canvass):

Mileage payable to Canvassers (for the return of canvass forms) for the following journeys as part of their role:

- *Home to District Council offices for collection of canvass forms and equipment (& return)*
- *Within the specified canvass area.*

8.9 In August 2025, MHCLG announced that as part of the Government manifesto to encourage greater participation in democracy, it was exploring ways to make voting in person at polling stations more efficient, more convenient, and better aligned with the expectations of today's electors. As part of this work, MHCLG invited authorities to apply to pilot a range of flexible voting options at the local elections in May 2026 and 2027. These pilots could include, but were not limited to:

- Allowing electors to vote at any polling station within the local authority area, rather than being restricted to a designated station.
- Establishing centralised 'voting hubs' where any elector in the authority could cast their vote on polling day.
- Deploying mobile polling stations to bring voting facilities directly to communities.
- Offering advance in-person voting at designated hubs in the days leading up to polling day.

8.10 The Authority submitted a bid to take part in the pilots, at the time of writing an official announcement by Government is awaited.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Representation of The People Act 1983 (RPA) s.35(1) requires a district council to appoint a RO to conduct elections on its behalf.

9.2 RPA ss31(1) and (1a) provide that every district council must appoint an officer of the council to be the RO for any parish council elections within its area. This can be the same person as the RO for district council elections, though it does not have to be. In accordance with the statutory provisions referred to above and as per section 14.6.13 of the Constitution, the Democratic Services Manager has been appointed as RO for District Council and Parish Council elections.

9.3 RPA s.36(4) provides that the cost of local elections is met from a local authority's budget. As referred to in paragraph 7.5 above the Council needs to agree the fees paid to the RO to conduct local elections by establishing a scale of fees. There is no specific delegation to set fees for elections. The RO has responsibility for elections, although setting their own fees is not recommended. An officer may under s.14.6.2(e) of the Constitution "*...always refer a delegated decision to the Cabinet or Council or any of their respective Committees rather than make the decision*"; s.14.5.1 further provides "*All those functions relating to elections*" falls to the Council as an effective default.

9.4 With regard to the RO's expenses RPA s.36(5) provides that all expenditure properly incurred by the RO in relation to the holding of a parish council election shall be paid by the district council in which the parish is located, providing that such expenditure does not exceed a fixed scale. Any expenditure incurred shall be repaid by the parish council to the district council if required. RPA s.36(6) provides that before an election of a district or parish councillor, the council shall at the request of the RO advance any reasonable sum in respect of expenses as may be required.

9.5 The canvass, along with other statutory functions including maintaining the Register of Electors is the responsibility of the Electoral Registration Officer and is contained within RPA sections 52 – 54.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. The fees for elections are considered in the budget setting process. The scheduled elections in May 2026 are for parish elections, who are recharged for the costs of running these elections either in full or in part depending on if the election is shared with another election. Any additional costs as a result of the flexible voting pilots will not be recharged to the respective parish, but to MHCLG.
- 10.2. The same applies to elections administered on behalf of the County Council who are also recharged for the costs of running these elections either in full or in part depending on if the election is shared.
- 10.3. The Electoral Commission recommends ratios when allocating electors and staff to Polling Stations which dictates that each Polling Station requires a Presiding Officer and between 1 and 3 Poll Clerks. For the county council election in May 2025, there were 83 Polling Stations across North Hertfordshire with a total of 134 Poll Clerks.
- 10.4. The increase in Poll Clerk fees would equate to an extra £4.32 for each staff member, therefore across 83 Polling Stations would mean an additional £578.88 to the total cost compared to the previous rates.
- 10.5. In 2024, Postal Vote Openers worked a collective 342 hours. As such, the increase to the hourly rate would equate to an additional cost of £92.34 overall. The number of hours in 2026 will be less due to there being fewer elections taking place.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.
- 11.2. The Council needs to ensure it complies with statutory requirements. One element of this is to ensure that it has sufficient staff required to operate an election. Staffing of polling station roles continues to present one of the biggest challenges in the running of elections. If the Council does not pay a competitive rate, it will become increasingly difficult to staff elections because of fees.
- 11.3. The impact of the Elections Act has also increased the complexity in the administration for polling station staff (Presiding Officers, Poll Clerks and Polling Station Inspectors), who are now expected to, amongst other reforms, verify the identity of every voter before a ballot paper is issued. The variety of valid identity documents continues to evolve.
- 11.4. Furthermore, the Electoral Registration Officer has a statutory duty to maintain the Electoral Register, which includes conducting an annual canvass. The recruitment of efficient Canvassers is difficult and if they are not paid a competitive rate, it will become increasingly difficult to conduct an annual canvass.
- 11.5. The Scale of Fees must be balanced against setting a rate that is fair, to ensure that suitable staff are able to be recruited and does not risk any rate falling below the National Living Wage.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. There are no equalities implications - in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There are no human resource implications, other than those set out.

15.2 Recruiting staff is highly resource intensive and is organised solely by the Electoral Services Team who contact individuals for their availability to work informing them of the fees the role will incur.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A Electoral Services Scale of Fees 2026/27.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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