

**Teignbridge District Council
Full Council
23 October 2025
Part i**

Update to Election Fees and Charges

Purpose of Report

To seek Full Council agreement to the updated Scale of Costs.

Recommendation(s)

The Council RESOLVES to:

- (1) Apply the updated Scale of Costs (Appendix A) to District and Parish Council elections within the Teignbridge local authority area; and
- (2) Agree to amend the Council's Constitution to delegate approval of future changes to uplift fees in line with government guidance and national pay agreements to the Section 151 Officer.

Financial Implications

The financial implications are detailed in section 3.1
Gordon Bryant, Head of Financial Services and Audit, Acting Section 151 Officer
Email: gordon.bryant@teignbridge.gov.uk

Legal Implications

The legal implications are detailed in section 3.2
Charlie Fisher, Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Email: charlie.fisher@teignbridge.gov.uk

Risk Assessment

The risk implications are detailed in section 3.3
Cathy Ruelens, Electoral Services Manager & Deputy Returning Officer
Email: cathy.ruelens@teignbridge.gov.uk

Environmental/ Climate Change Implications

There are no environmental/climate change considerations or implications.

Report Author

Electoral Services Manager
cathy.ruelens@teignbridge.gov.uk

Executive Member

Councillor Richard Keeling

Appendices/Background Papers

Appendix A - Updated Scale of Costs for District and Parish elections

Appendix B – Copy of DCC Scale of Costs as set for May 2025 elections (for comparison purposes)

Appendix C – Copy of MHCLG pay bandings that apply for national elections

1. Introduction/Background

The local authority is required to appoint a Returning Officer to oversee and manage elections on its behalf. This officer holds personal responsibility for conducting elections and must be an employee of the council at the time of an election. Their duties related to elections are distinct from their responsibilities within the local authority, and they may be held personally liable by the courts for any shortcomings or delivery failures. The Returning Officer for Teignbridge is the Managing Director (Head of Paid Service), as specified in the Council's Constitution.

Returning Officers are tasked with conducting fair and transparent elections that produce accurate and unchallenged results. To facilitate an election, the Returning Officer must hire and remunerate over 500 election staff who hold varying levels of responsibility. All verification, checking, and payment calculations are managed by the Returning Officer and the Electoral Services Manager. Once this process is complete a payment file is sent to the Payroll Manager for upload and remuneration via BACS, and staff are paid through a distinct section of the iTrent system. Employees engaged in the election process are legally recognised as employees of the Returning Officer rather than the local authority; therefore, the Returning Officer is responsible for fulfilling all employment obligations and requirements, such as verifying the right to work, providing holiday pay entitlements, and ensuring access to a pension scheme. Consequently, the Returning Officer is entitled to receive a fee that reflects the level of responsibility and the independent nature of the role, so it is important for this to be conducted fairly and transparently.

The last review of fees was presented to Council in November 2022. In the process of determining the fees, attempts were made to obtain comparisons from neighbouring local authorities; however, there was reluctance to disclose fee structures with us, resulting in no Devon district council being willing to share this information. As a result, the most recent fee scale established by Devon County Council for their elections in 2021 was used as the reference for the Teignbridge 2022 review. Aside from fees associated with national elections, the only relevant fee scale available to us is that set by Devon County Council and the fees paid by them to the Returning Officers of the Devon District Councils for conducting elections on their behalf, and for the remuneration of staff they employ to do this.

Since the 2022 review, the government has helpfully established pay bands for all election roles at national elections, providing a national scale for comparison. The latest fee scale set by Devon County Council aligns with these pay bands and, in the future, these pay bands will be automatically adjusted according to annual pay awards. The Teignbridge fee scale differs slightly from the Devon County scale because Teignbridge also conducts elections on behalf of its towns and parishes, necessitating the recovery of costs associated with running these elections, whether they are contested or uncontested.

The Scale of Costs presented to Council in November 2022 received approval. It was agreed that, going forward, the Returning Officer's fee would be increased according to the average annual pay award. Furthermore, all other election staff payments would be adjusted to align with those from the most recent national elections, as well as with any local government pay awards or increases to the national minimum wage that occurred since they were last adjusted. Although the annual uplifts were agreed, the requirement to seek approval from Council each time this happens remains in place. In cases where an election is held with little notice, it may be challenging to seek approval from Council before making arrangements for the election and employing staff. To simplify the process and eliminate the need to frequently present updated fees to Council for approval, it would therefore be helpful to delegate approval of annual reviews to the Section 151 Officer. Any changes beyond inflationary increases will still require Full Council approval.

2. Reason for this request

Teignbridge needs to maintain its fee structure in line with the most recent fees associated with national elections to attract and retain staff. Furthermore, Teignbridge organises elections for Devon County Council, which has a distinct fee scale and payment levels. Staff may be hesitant to work at a district election if it offers lower remuneration than they have recently earned for another election.

District council by-elections can be held with limited notice of just eight weeks, which complicates the process of securing Full Council approval for any adjustments to the Teignbridge fees.

3. Implications, Risk Management and Climate Change Impact

3.1 Financial

There is a financial implication for Teignbridge Council.

- i. Annual increases have budgetary implications for Teignbridge when holding district elections.
- ii. The legal requirement to pay holiday pay to election staff has already added 12.07% to staff payments.

- iii. Using recent comparisons, i.e. the 2024 Police and Crime Commissioner elections and the UK Parliamentary General election, the overall increase in election costs is in the region of 21%.

There is also a financial implication for Town and Parish Councils within Teignbridge.

- i. Town and Parish Councils are expected to experience a comparable overall percentage increase to that of the District Council, although the majority of parishes have uncontested elections and therefore will not face similar levels of charges. Additional costs will primarily be incurred by the larger Town Councils.

3.2 Legal

- i. Under the Representation of the People Act 1983 the Council has a duty to fund the costs of local elections from the Council's Budget. The decision relating to funding of elections is not an Executive function so is typically carried out by Full Council. Full Council can agree to delegate these decisions to another non-Executive Committee or to an Officer of the Council.
- ii. There is a legal risk to the Council if it does not have an appropriate scale of fees and costs in place. An agreed scale allows the election costs to be transparently monitored and provides those who are entitled to receive a fee or payment clarity on what they will receive.
- iii. Compliance with the national living wage is a legal requirement, and failure to implement annual increases may lead to a failure to keep up with it.

3.3 Risks

- i. Failing to comply with the national living wage risks breaching our legal obligation to do so.
- ii. Failing to keep up with the fees paid at the most recent national or Devon County Council elections may result in difficulty retaining and attracting enough staff to manage our own district elections.

3.4 Environmental/Climate Change Impact

There are no implications relating to the environment or climate change.

4. Alternative Options

Local authorities are reluctant to disclose information regarding the payments made to their Returning Officers and election staff during local elections. To date, no district council in Devon has agreed to provide information on the fees claimed by their Returning Officers. As a result, aside from fees associated with national elections, the only relevant data available is the cost scale established by Devon County Council and the fees they pay to the Returning Officers of the Devon District Councils and election staff, for conducting elections on their behalf.

5. Conclusion

Elections incur costs, and it is essential to compensate staff fairly. Therefore, it is important to evaluate the fee levels paid each year, in a similar way to other employment situations.

While presenting annual increases to Council for approval can be a lengthy and burdensome process, it is necessary to have measures in place to ensure that increases are implemented appropriately and in a balanced manner. Therefore, each annual assessment will continue to be aligned to the pay bands established by government for national elections and will reflect any relevant annual pay awards.

Delegating the responsibility for approving the annual inflation adjustments will enhance the efficiency of the process, but any substantial changes to the fee structure itself will still need to be approved by the Full Council.