

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

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Report Originator	M Hammond / I White	<i>Fwd Plan Ref No:</i>	
Wards Affected	All wards outside Kettering town	27 th October 2016	
Title	ELECTION COSTS FOR TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS		

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To seek the committee's views on whether or not to make changes to the current arrangements for funding town and parish councils.

2. INFORMATION

- 2.1 The costs of an election to an elected body in the UK are met by the body to which the election relates, so for example, the government pays for Parliamentary elections and bye-elections, the County Council for its elections and the Borough Council for its elections. The exception locally has been that the Borough Council pays for the election and bye-elections costs of town and parish councils, although the relevant town and parish council does meet the costs of a parish poll where these arise.
- 2.2 Historically, all the electors of the Borough paid for parish elections. Given it was previously the case that all parish costs were met by the Borough then there would, at that time, have been little point in the Borough recharging the parishes only for the Borough to then meet the costs itself. Of course, the funding situation has now changed. Perhaps it is time to make a conscious choice about this historic position which is now out of step with the funding model.
- 2.3 Few parish councils regularly have elections. In May 2015, there were only 9 contested polls from the 24 parishes in the Borough, involving 6 councils:-

- Ashley Parish Council
- Burton Latimer Town Council
- Cranford Parish Council
- Desborough Town Council Loatland Ward
- Desborough Town Council St Giles Ward
- Rothwell Town Council Tresham Ward*
- Rothwell Town Council Trinity Ward
- Rushton Parish Council Glendon Ward
- Rushton Parish Council Glendon Ward

All of the remaining Parish Councils either had exactly the correct number of candidates or had a deficient number of candidates. In each case the elections were uncontested.

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- 2.4 The cost of Parish/Town Council Elections and bye-elections will vary – in three years out of every four, there will only be bye-elections to cover. The last year in which all councils were up for re-election, in 2015, the cost to the Borough Council was in excess of £25,000. However, if all of the elections had been contested the cost would have been in the region of £45,000.
- 2.5 Bye-election costs vary a little according to the size of the parish, but as a guide, the last two bye-elections (both Burton Latimer Town Council) in October 2015 and September 2016, cost approximately £6500 each. There were three Town Council By Elections caused by vacancies/deaths in office during the period from 2011 to 2015, and there have been three in the period since 2015. . The total cost of these six had been about £40,000.
- 2.6 All other District Councils in Northamptonshire charge Parish/Town Councils for the administration of elections

3. OPTIONS FOR CHANGE

- 3.1 In view of the above, it would seem appropriate for consideration to be given to the costs of elections being met either fully or in part by the Parish/Town Councils themselves, by way of them building a fund, through appropriate precepting of their local Council Tax payers.
- 3.2. Members may also wish to consider a method and timetable for introducing any change to the existing policy so as to give Parish and Town Councils the time to adjust and be prepared by 2019.
- 3.3 There are various ways of meeting the costs of elections which members may wish to consider:-

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Option	Features
Charging the full cost of each election and bye-election to the relevant council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple and transparent • An additional strain on parish councils • A saving over every four year period for the Borough Council of potentially around £60 - 70,000 (based on the cost of the quadrennial elections in 2015 and the number of elections to fill vacancies during the four year period starting in 2015 through until 2019, based on the three that already have taken place and anticipating a further two or three before the period ends) • Difficult to predict whether the money raised will be needed every four years in smaller councils. • Bye-elections may create a sudden strain on a parish council.
Charging parish councils for the four yearly election costs but not for bye-elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieves majority of the saving for the borough Council • Will be more predictable and can be planned for, as only incurred once every four years.
Charging for bye-elections only and not the four yearly election.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieves only a small saving for the Borough Council • Is less predictable for the parish council • May discourage bye-elections from taking place
Charging for only some costs – e.g. direct costs of printing, postage, count staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will reduce the savings for the Borough Council and reduce the impact on Parish Councils • Reasonably predictable
Setting a fee for the cost of an election and bye-election related to the size of the parish council rather than the actual cost.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most predictable solution of all, and likely to favour smaller Councils with fewer resources, compared to the other charging options. • Less of a link between costs and expenditure
Introducing charging over a period of time, on a sliding scale, to allow councils to budget for the change in policy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This would reduce the impact on parish and town councils now and delay the benefit to the Borough Council. However, the next whole Council elections are 2.5 years away.
Continuing with the policy of not charging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No change.

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Charging Town and Parish Councils for all or some of the election costs could be a change of policy for the Council.

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5. CONSULTATION AND CUSTOMER IMPACT

- 5.1 If the committee were minded to consider a change in funding, then it would be necessary to consult the town and parish councils concerned, and probably also the NALC. This could be directly by writing to each council and through discussion at the A6 Town and Rural Forums this year. A report could then be submitted back to this committee and any recommended changes made to the Executive Committee before the end of the financial year.

6. FINANCE RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The cost profile is outlined in section 2 above, but could result in a saving to the Borough Council, and additional costs falling on Parish and Town Councils, depending on the options selected.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. Section 35(1) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 sets out the responsibility for the administration of Parish Council elections as follows:

‘In England every district council shall appoint an officer of the council to be the returning officer for the elections of councillors of the district and an officer of the council to be the returning officer for elections of councillors of parishes within the district.’

- 7.2. Section 36(5) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 sets out the position for re-charging Parish/Town Councils as follows:

‘All expenditure properly incurred by a returning officer in relation to the holding of an election of a parish councillor shall, in so far as it does not, in cases where there is a scale fixed for the purposes of this section by the council of the district in which the parish is situated, exceed that scale, be paid by the district council, but any expenditure so incurred shall, if the district council so require, be repaid to that council by the council of the parish for which the election is held.’

8. RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is asked to consider which of the options it wishes to consult Town and Parish Councils about.
