

# TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

## PARISH PARTNERSHIP PANEL

5 September 2013

### Report of the Chief Executive and Director of Finance & Transformation

#### Part 1- Public

#### Matters for Information

#### 1 THE COST OF PARISH COUNCIL ELECTIONS

To respond to a request from KALC for details of the costs of parish council elections.

##### 1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 An agenda item has been requested by KALC for “A report on the increasing costs of parish elections to include a historic profile of costs over the last 10 years”.

1.1.2 Unfortunately, due to changes in our electoral management IT systems and changes in personnel, we are unable to provide the costs of parish elections over the past ten years. It is also difficult to compare costs at face value, as they will be dependent on a range of factors including the type of election and other local variables.

1.1.3 What follows is an explanation of the costs for parish elections, which sets out the possible variations and why there have been noticeable increases in some areas.

##### 1.2 Costs of Elections

1.2.1 During the last 10 years or so, there have been changes in the legislation concerning elections. This has led to postal voting on demand, with a sizeable increase in the number of postal votes issued, and an increased requirement on verifying postal votes returned to maintain integrity. This has led to a substantial increase in costs.

1.2.2 The cost of a **contested** Parish Election is based on the following factors:

- 1) The size of the electorate (so large increases in population result in increased costs);

- 2) The number of postal voters, noting that postal vote 'packs' are posted and returned via Royal Mail and so postage increases affect the overall cost of the election;
- 3) Whether the election is combined with other polls; for example a Borough Green parish by-election in 2009 was combined with the KCC and European elections resulting in lower costs to the Parish. All parish elections in May 2011 were combined with the Borough election and national Referendum, also reducing costs to parishes;
- 4) For by-elections, parish councils may choose whether poll cards are issued or not. The cost of issuing and delivering poll cards can be a significant part of the total cost to a parish;
- 5) The cost to hire venues varies by area;
- 6) In some cases, specific circumstances have led to a different cost; for example, a postal strike around the same time as a Ditton parish by-election in 2009 led to postal packs being hand-delivered by staff, and many returned by hand from electors – this reduced the cost associated with Royal Mail delivery;
- 7) Timing of the count. A count at night attracts additional staffing costs.

1.2.3 **Uncontested** parish elections, of course, attract a substantially reduced charge to cover the administrative and election management work undertaken. For example, there is no charge for venues, postal packs, count costs, ballot papers or polling station staff.

1.2.4 In all cases, neither TMBC nor the Returning Officer make a profit. All charges levied are in line with the Kent Scale of Fees & Charges (or the applicable national election if combined with a national poll) and cover the actual costs associated with the election, and a contribution towards the significant staff costs dedicated to running those elections.

1.2.5 It is worth noting that the fees paid to staff working at polling stations have not changed since 2009.

Background papers:

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Nil

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