

# TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

## PARISH PARTNERSHIP PANEL

05 September 2019

### Report of the Chief Executive

#### Part 1- Public

#### Matters for Information

#### **1 PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL ELECTION RECHARGE COSTS**

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

#### **1.1 Introduction**

1.1.1 An agenda item has been requested by KALC for “Elections cost charges to Parish and Town Councils to be fully explained. Also some District & Borough Councils in Kent do not charge Parish and Town Councils election costs, why do TMBC?”

1.1.2 What follows is an explanation of how the costs for parish/town elections are collated.

#### **1.2 Legal Implications**

1.2.1 Section 35 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 places a duty on the Borough Council to appoint a Returning Officer for the elections of Town / Parish councillors within its administrative area.

1.2.2 Section 36 of the 1983 Act provides that all expenses reasonably incurred by the Returning Officer (which may be capped by a scale fixed by the Borough Council) shall be paid to that returning officer by the Borough Council and that they, in turn, can then require the relevant local Parish/ Town Council(s) to repay such costs.

#### **1.3 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

1.3.1 There are a number of costs involved in the running of an election. These include:

- Clerical and Administrative Support
- Notices and Stationery – ballot papers, postal vote packs, poll cards
- Delivery Poll Cards (if applicable)
- Postal Vote postage costs

- Hire of Venues and supply of voting equipment (booths etc)
- Polling and Counting staff
- Returning Officer Fee

1.3.2 During the last 15 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.

1.3.3 The cost of a **contested** Parish/Town 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 Borough Elections combined with Parish Elections. The higher number of combinations the lower the cost to the Parishes, as it is divided between more elections.
- 4) The cost to hire venues varies by area and has increased. Most of the venues used are owned by Parish/Town Councils (so see note in 1.3.6 below)
- 5) In some cases, specific circumstances may lead to a different cost e.g. a postal strike or Brexit; so poll cards and Postal votes have to be hand delivered;
- 6) Timing of the count. A count at night attracts additional staffing costs.
- 7) The costs applied to Parish Councils are in accordance with the agreed Kent scale of fees (Annex 1)

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

1.3.5 In all cases, neither TMBC nor the Returning Officer make a 'surplus'. 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.

- 1.3.6 Parish Councils can make some local decisions that will limit the cost in standalone elections. The Parish Council can choose not to send Poll cards for Parish only elections (this is not an option in combined elections) and could, for example, offer the hire of an appropriate local venue free of charge in order to minimise overall costs.
- 1.3.7 Parish and Town Councils can (and do) include budgetary provision in their precept demands for the cost of local elections. Estimated costs are supplied by the Borough Council's Finance team in order to aid budgetary planning.

#### **1.4 Risk Assessment**

- 1.4.1 The Borough Council, along with most other Councils, takes the view that it is right, proper and equitable that the residents of any particular Parish should cover the costs of a Parish/Town Council election, not the residents of the whole Borough.
- 1.4.2 This principle mirrors that taken in the "Fairer Charging" review which led to the introduction of Special Expenses in order to provide a more equitable basis for recharging costs given that Tonbridge does not have a parish/town council.
- 1.4.3 Should TMBC decide not to recharge a Parish/Town Council, the cost of the parish/town election would have to be reflected in the Borough Council's revenue estimates and this cost would then add to the Borough Council's own savings target and would be at odds with the "Fairer Charging" principles.

Background papers:  
Annex 1 – Fees schedule

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