

REPORT TO CABINET

Open		Would any decisions proposed :		
Any especially affected Wards	Mandatory/	Be entirely within Cabinet's powers to decide	NO	
	Discretionary /	Need to be recommendations to Council	YES	
	Operational	Is it a Key Decision	NO	
Lead Member: Brian Long E-mail: brian.long@west-norfolk.gov.uk		Other Cabinet Members consulted:		
		Other Members consulted:		
Lead Officer: Mary Colangelo E-mail: mary.colangelo@west-norfolk.gov.uk Direct Dial: 01553 616281		Other Officers consulted: Chief Executive, Exec Director – D Gates, Democratic Services Manager		
Financial Implications YES	Policy/Personnel Implications NO	Statutory Implications YES	Equal Impact Assessment NO If YES: Pre-screening/ Full Assessment	Risk Management Implications NO

Date of meeting: 29 May 2018

PARISH COUNCIL ELECTION COSTS – UNCONTESTED ELECTIONS

Summary

This report proposes to pass on the full costs of uncontested Parish Council Elections to the Parish Councils concerned, both at the four-yearly Parish Council Elections as well as any Casual Vacancies in between.

Recommendation

To confirm the proposal to charge Parish Councils for all their own uncontested elections.

Reason for Decision

To re-coup costs incurred by the Borough Council in the organisation of elections on behalf of Parishes.

1 Background

At its meeting on 16 November 2010, Cabinet agreed to:

- pass on the full cost of Parish Council Elections and Parish Polls to the Parish Councils concerned. This has applied to the Parish Council Elections in 2011 and 2015 so far, as well as casual vacancy elections.

The item was deferred from the 17 April Cabinet in order for a Panel to give it consideration. It was submitted to the Environment and Community Panel on 1 May 2018 and the recommendations were endorsed. The minute extract from the Panel is attached as an appendix.

2 Policy Implications

It is now proposed to re-charge Parishes for the cost of uncontested elections, both four yearly and casual vacancies in between in order to re-coup some of the costs associated with service provided.

3 Financial Implications

At the May 2015 Parish Council Elections, 12 Parish Councils had contested elections (13 wards). No charge was made for the other approximately 100 uncontested elections. When a Parish election is uncontested, there is a degree of administrative work required of the Borough Council elections team, as clearly it cannot be known at the outset whether a contested election will take place. This does of course have a real and measurable cost to the Borough.

It is estimated that costs for an uncontested election will be in the region of £200 per election; at this year's rate of uncontested elections this equates to approximately £20,000 cost to the Borough Council (every four years).

Charging for elections as a result of casual vacancies could also recover approximately £2,000 over a four year period, based on historic information available.

4 Personnel Implications

There are no personnel implications.

5 Statutory Considerations

The Borough Council has a statutory obligation to run Parish Council Elections. The proposal is to re-coup the costs of the service from its users.

6 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

There are no Equality Impact Assessment implications.

7 Risk Management Implications

There are no immediate risks identified in the proposal.

8 Declarations of Interest / Dispensations Granted

None identified.

Appendix

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET 29th MAY 2018 FROM THE ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY PANEL ON 1st MAY 2018

EC104: PARISH COUNCIL ELECTION COSTS – UNCONTESTED ELECTIONS

The Electoral Services Manager presented the Cabinet report which proposed to pass on the full costs of uncontested Parish Council Elections to the Parish Councils concerned, both at the four-yearly Parish Council Elections as well as any Casual Vacancies in between. The Electoral Services Manager confirmed that Legislation permitted any expenses incurred by the Borough to be passed on to the Parish.

The Electoral Services Manager reminded the Panel that previously the Council had agreed to charge Parish Councils for contested elections. Now the Council were looking at further savings and recouping costs. The Panel was informed that many other Councils already charged costs incurred for uncontested Elections and the amounts charged varied.

The Chairman thanked the Electoral Services Manager for her report and invited questions and comments from the Panel, as summarised below.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Long, explained to the Panel that this report had been presented to the Cabinet in April 2018. Councillor Moriarty had attended the Cabinet meeting under Standing Order 34 and had raised concerns that the item had not been scrutinised prior to its presentation to Cabinet. The item was therefore deferred by Cabinet so that it could be considered by the Environment and Community Panel.

Councillor Bubb commented that he did not think it was fair that all Parishes be charged the same amount for uncontested elections. He asked if it could be related to their precept or size and what would happen if the Parish did not have a precept. The Chief Executive commented that even though Parishes differed in size, the same amount of administrative work would have to be carried out by the Borough Council with regards to uncontested elections. He explained that Parishes set their own precepts and would need to have regard to potential charges for uncontested elections.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Long, commented that the size of the Parish may not necessarily be related to the amount of vacancies or elections. There were various reasons why there could be a Parish Council vacancy and an election required. He explained that the work carried out by Electoral Services up until the time that the election was uncontested was additional work and should be charged back to the Parish Council. He explained that in not all instances an Election would be required; Members could be co-opted onto the Council.

Councillor Hipperson queried how much the Council wanted to look after Parish Councils and he referred to Quality Parishes. The Leader of the Council explained that Parish Councils were standalone bodies in their own right and he felt that they should pay for their own democracy, which included uncontested elections.

Councillor Parish addressed the Panel under Standing Order 34. He explained that his Parish had a regular turnover of Councillors and often a by-election was not requested and Members were co-opted. It was clarified that there would be no charges introduced for the co-option process.

The Electoral Services Manager explained that at the last election 90 out of 102 Parishes were uncontested. The Electoral Services Team had to carry out a degree of work before they were uncontested and she confirmed that the proposal was that Parishes be charged for the work up to that point.

Councillor Smith explained that his Ward was within an unparished area, but his Council Tax payers still had to pay for the cost of uncontested Elections as it was a charge currently borne by the Borough. He supported the proposals to introduce charging for uncontested elections.

Councillor Moriarty addressed the Panel under Standing Order 34. He explained that some of the questions that he had wanted to ask had already been covered by others and thanked the Panel for bringing the item forward for Scrutiny. He asked for clarification that if ten people did not request an election and the vacancy was filled by co-option, would this incur a charge. The Electoral Services Manager confirmed that there would not be a charge for this.

RESOLVED: That the Environment and Community Panel supported the recommendation to Cabinet as follows:

To confirm the proposal to charge Parish Councils for their own uncontested elections.