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Borough Council of
**King's Lynn &
West Norfolk**



Chief Executive
Ray Harding

To all Parish Council Clerks

13 September 2010

Dear Colleague

Mini Service Review – Parish Council Elections

I am writing to you as part of our consultation relating to proposals I have made to our Cabinet that in future years the full cost of running Parish Council Elections and Parish Polls should be passed on to the Parish Council concerned.

This proposal forms part of the Borough Council's cost reduction programme. You will be aware that Government grant currently funds around 75% of our net budget of circa £20 million per annum. I am sure that you will also have seen the announcements made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer that public expenditure is to be reduced by 25% over the lifetime of this Parliament. In light of the fact that certain services are to be 'protected' (NHS, International Development etc.) and will either have no reduction or a reduction of less than 25%, other services, including all those provided by the Borough Council will be subject to a reduction of more than 25% and potentially up to 40%. This has been compounded for us by the government's decision to freeze Council Tax for up to two years.

The Borough Council has therefore immediately commenced work on a comprehensive and wide ranging cost reduction programme with the aim of reducing our net expenditure by some £5.9 million. Given the scale of the reductions a decision has been made to seek reductions in every aspect of our operation. It is in this context that I have reluctantly proposed to pass on the full cost of running Parish elections to the respective Parishes with effect from the beginning of the new financial year 2011/12. I have attached for your information a copy of the report which I presented to Cabinet on the 7th September. I realise that you will not welcome this change but I hope that you understand the rationale behind it. I propose to report back to Cabinet at their 16th November meeting on the responses received from Parish Councils. I would be grateful therefore if you could let me have the comments of your Parish Council by Monday, 1st November.

Yours sincerely

Ray Harding
Chief Executive



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Chief Executive – Ray Harding Deputy Chief Executive – David Thomason

REPORT TO CABINET

Open		Would any decisions proposed :	
Any especially affected Wards	Discretionary / Operational	(a) Within Cabinet's powers to decide NO (b) Recommendations to Council YES	
Lead Member: Cllr Nick Daubney E-mail: cllr.nick.daubney@west-norfolk.gov.uk		Other Cabinet Members consulted:	
		Other Members consulted:	
Lead Officer: Ray Harding E-mail: ray.harding@west-norfolk.gov.uk Direct Dial:		Other Officers consulted: Management Team	
Financial Implications YES	Policy Implications YES	Personnel Implications YES	Risk Management Implications YES

Date of meeting: 7 September 2010

6 MINI SERVICE REVIEW – PARISH COUNCIL ELECTIONS

Summary

This report debates the possibility of billing Parishes for costs incurred by Parish Council Elections.

It is submitted for consideration within the current round of fiscal and service reviews which look to balance the Council's mid to long term budgetary requirements.

Recommendation

1. That the Council indicates its in principle support for the proposal to pass on the full cost of Parish Council elections and Parish Polls to the Parish Councils concerned.
2. That the Council consults with Parishes on the proposal to replace the current policy with one that more accurately re-charges the costs incurred in running elections and parish polls on behalf of Parishes;
3. That a further report be submitted to Council with outcomes from the consultation exercise and recommendations for future policy in this respect.

Reason for Decision

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

1 Background

1.1 Current re-charging policy

This Council currently bears the full cost of any Parish Council election held with the Borough elections 4 yearly. At a by-election this Council also bears the full cost, unless the Parish requests poll cards in which case they are recharged for 100% of the cost of the cards. The Council additionally supports the balance of any Parish Poll costs by recharging at the rate of 50% of the costs.

1.2 Cost Reduction Programme

In light of the announcements by the Chancellor in the Emerging Budget the Council faces a very substantial reduction in government grant. The Council has therefore set out a programme of which this proposal forms a part to reduce its outgoings by £5.8m per annum.

1.3 Historic re-charging policy

1999 was the last time policy differed; the Council recharged Parishes at the rate of 100% of all pure Parish election related costs and 50% where the costs were shared with the Borough elections.

21 Parishes had elections along with the all out Borough elections at that time. The recharges made totalled £17,227.

2 Parish Elections / Polls

The numbers of elections and / or polls are not predictable. Furthermore, costs are relative to the size of the Parish and whether poll cards are issued or not.

Recent records show that there have been 14 Parish Council elections between January 2008 and July 2010, with 5 of these being uncontested.

For indicative purposes the actual costs attributable to Marshland St James (Feb 2009) and Pentney (May / July 2008) have been calculated. These amount to £1,445 and £1,776 respectively. Under current policy, no recharge has been made.

Some recent Parish Polls have been:

Parish	Date	Actual costs incurred	Recharges levied
Syderstone	Aug 2007	£580.85	£290.43
Marshland St James	Oct 2007	£820.76	£410.38
North Creake	July 2010	£821.31	£310.65

3 Benchmarking

A recent survey of some near neighbour authorities shows that 4 of the 5 surveyed recharge Parishes for all or most of Parish only elections but there is greater disparity on the recharges made where the election is combined with a district election. Full details of recharging approaches are shown at Appendix 1.

4 Proposal

It is suggested that a consultation exercise be carried out with parish councils on the issue of re-charging parishes for elections and parish polls run on their behalf by the Borough Council.

It is difficult to project how differing recharging regimes would affect individual Parishes and the Councils expenditure levels. However, it is reasonable to assume that the costs established as relevant to the Marshland St James and Pentney by-elections are indicative of an average year.

Additionally, the amount recharged in 1999 (£17,227) would be equivalent to £22,395 taking historic inflationary figures into account.

Thus by reverting the current recharge policy to that used previously a net reduction in Council expenditure totalling £31,395 could be achieved over a 4 year period.

5 Policy Implications

The Council has had two differing policies on this matter – prior to 1999 parishes paid for the costs of holding elections. Post 1999 the Council has paid for the costs of parish elections and half the cost of parish polls.

6 Access To Information

Information received from other District Councils

QUESTIONS ASKED:

Appendix 1

1. Where Parish Council elections are held within District/Borough Council election, do you pay all, part of, or most of the Parish Council election costs?

2. Where a Parish Council casual vacancy election occurs, do you pay any of the costs?

COUNCIL	COMBINED WITH DISTRICT	CASUAL VACANCY
BRECKLAND	Pay for all Parish Council costs.	Recharge Parish Councils for the full cost of elections.
BROADLAND	Charge Parish for printing of their ballot papers.	Do not pay for any, the Parish Council have to pay for all the costs involved.
GREAT YARMOUTH	Pay most of the costs, such as staff for the day (apart from the difference payable for joint elections which is charged to the parish) and polling station costs. The Parish are recharged actual costs incurred such as printing ballot papers and notices.	Recharge Parish Councils for the full cost of elections.
NORTH NORFOLK	The contribution for ordinary elections combined with District are calculated on the net cost of the Parish Election i.e. after the shared costs e.g. polling staff, polling station rent, have been deducted.	For Parishes with electorates of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • up to 100 the Council Pays 80% • from 101 – 200 the Council Pays 60% • from 201 – 300 the Council Pays 40% • from 301 – 400 the Council Pays 20% • Over 400 do not receive a contribution to election costs, except that the council pays for half the cost of any poll card deliveries regardless of parish size where these are requested at casual elections
SOUTH NORFOLK	Pays for everything	Parishes pay for all by elections