



## DECISION ITEM

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
RESOURCES DIRECTORATE	FINANCE AND DEMOCRACY COMMITTEE	25 <sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2019	5
<b>PARISH COUNCIL ELECTION RECHARGES / LOCAL ELECTION FEEDBACK</b>			

### PUBLIC ITEM

This item is for consideration in the public part of the meeting.

### SUMMARY

Local Elections were held on Thursday 2 May 2019.

Members are reminded that a new charging method for Town and Parish Councils was to be piloted, and the related decision from the Finance and Democracy Committee held on 26 November 2018 is set out below:

- 1. Replace the present methodology for calculating recharges for parish council elections with the methodology based on the size of the eligible electorate, divided into bands being for the £500 for the first 1,000 electors on the electoral roll for the parish or parish ward plus £250 for each subsequent 500 Electors (or part thereof).*
- 2. Increase the fee, where an election is uncontested, to cover the known cost of the administration of the election to £100;*
- 3. Agree that the recharge methodology and the amended fee arrangements are piloted for the May 2019 elections and thereafter reviewed by the Democratic Services team with a report to committee on the Effectiveness of the pilot being presented to a subsequent meeting of this Committee.*

Invoices have now been issued and paid and the District Parish Liaison Group, together with Town and Parish Councils, have been asked for feedback which has been favourable with all invoices duly settled.

Tracy Manning, Returning Officer has also collated the post-election review feedback from candidates, agents and staff.

The report below gives an outline of feedback received and proposed recommendations.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continue to use the new methodology for calculating recharges for parish council elections.
2. To recharge the cost of unscheduled Parish and Town Council By-elections in full.
3. To action proposed recommendations for improvement for the next scheduled local elections in 2023.

## SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS DECISIONS

Finance and Democracy Committee, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2018.

### CORPORATE PRIORITIES

Spending your money in the most efficient way to achieve excellent services ( <b>Value for Money</b> )	√
Delivering the services that customers expect of an excellent council ( <b>Clean and Green</b> )	
Working with all partners ( <b>Vibrant Economy</b> )	√
To make sure Fylde continues to be one of the most desirable places to live ( <b>A Great Place to Live</b> )	
Promoting Fylde as a great destination to visit ( <b>A Great Place to Visit</b> )	

## REPORT

### Parish Council Recharges

1. Members are reminded that a new charging method for Town and Parish Councils was to be piloted for the 2019 local elections, and the related decision from the Finance and Democracy Committee held on 26 November 2018 is set out below:

*Replace the present methodology for calculating recharges for parish council elections with the methodology based on the size of the eligible electorate, divided into bands being for the £500 for the first 1,000 electors on the electoral roll for the parish or parish ward plus £250 for each subsequent 500 Electors (or part thereof).*

*Increase the fee, where an election is uncontested, to cover the known cost of the administration of the election to £100;*

*Agree that the recharge methodology and the amended fee arrangements are piloted for the May 2019 elections and thereafter reviewed by the Democratic Services team with a report to committee on the Effectiveness of the pilot being presented to a subsequent meeting of this Committee.*

2. The District Parish Liaison Group, together with Town and Parish Councils, have been asked for feedback which has been favourable with all invoices duly settled. It is therefore felt that the new charging methodology offers a more harmonious solution to recharging for election expenses for both contested, and uncontested, local elections for Town and Parish Councils.
3. It was noted that the original report did not include a methodology for re-charging the cost of by-elections held between the scheduled elections. It is proposed that Town and Parish Councils continue to be fully re-charged the cost of such elections as there is no ability for subsidy of such electoral events when they do not coincide with Borough elections.

### Local Election Feedback

1. Members will appreciate that much of the work associated with managing elections must comply with statutory requirements for which we are accountable to the Electoral Commission. The role of the Returning Officer must be impartial and the role is to ensure that the conduct of the elections is in accordance with the law. The Returning Officer's responsibility is one of a personal nature distinct from the duties of an employee of the Council as a reflection of this.
2. However, where the Returning Officer is able to make adjustments and improvements, he/she does so year-on-year. With this in mind, feedback was invited from candidates, agents and staff on the

effectiveness of the arrangements for the 2019 local elections and any suggested improvements were invited.

3. Workshops were held with the core election staff following which the feedback was overall positive. The announcement of the unscheduled European Election put additional pressure on the team whilst for a period of time, two electoral processes were in train. But staff rose to the challenge and the elections were administered without event.
4. In addition, a questionnaire was sent to all candidates and agents. The questionnaire gave opportunity to feedback on all processes including nominations, postal voting, polling Stations and the count.
5. 30% of questionnaires were completed. A summary of all feedback together with proposed suggested improvement for the next local elections are set out in the below.

### **General feedback**

- The staff were a credit to the council during this busy period
- Transparent and efficiently run
- The count was well organised with no major issues arising
- Layout of the YMCA worked well
- Everything went extremely smoothly with knowledgeable and dedicated staff  
The polling station staff and the count personnel were professional and helpful and fair.
- The nomination forms were difficult to complete and confusing for candidates and agents particularly the new Home Address Form (statutory requirement)
- Expenses forms are confusing and difficult to complete (statutory requirement)
- Communication with agents once nominations were accepted as well as candidates would aid communication
- Postal votes were considered by some to be sent out too early (within statutory requirements)
- Turnout figures were given at some polling stations and not at others

### **Count**

- Speed up the process
- Better amplification of results
- Uniform methods across all count supervisors
- Provide refreshments
- Improve website results

### **Proposed Actions**

- Run a drop-in / surgery for nomination advice giving extra support on how to complete nomination forms including the Home Address Form
- Simplify nomination forms and create bespoke Fylde nomination forms as far as possible within statutory requirements
- Provide clear explanation as to why the elections office cannot advice on expense forms at the drop-in surgeries, briefings and in general communications.
- Keep agents informed at all stages.
- Communicate with candidates and agents regarding dispatch of postal votes.
- Train polling station staff to be consistent with the provision of turnout figures.

### **Count**

- Hire specialist microphone company to ensure better sound quality
- Arrange for an outside caterer if the venue café remains closed.
- Have a time schedule for counting the Town / Parish votes and / or look at alternative venue to concentrate on these counts.

- Keep layout under review to consider if any opportunities for additional count team
- Train staff to ensure counting methods are consistent.
- Review website result pages

6. To conclude, the local elections were an overall success, and the revised charging arranging for Town and Parish Councils has been well received. The feedback and suggested areas for improvements have been welcomed and improvements will be made for the next local elections to be held in 2023.

IMPLICATIONS	
Finance	This report presents the revised methodology for the recharging of election costs to parish councils. The overall cost of Borough and Parish elections for 2019 was contained within existing approved budgets. However, future costs will depend on the number of Parishes contested and Borough future warding arrangements.
Legal	The parish councils are obliged to pay the recharge decided by the council though there is no legal requirement to set a charge.
Community Safety	None arising from this report
Human Rights and Equalities	None arising from this report
Sustainability and Environmental Impact	None arising from this report
Health & Safety and Risk Management	None arising from this report

LEAD AUTHOR	CONTACT DETAILS	DATE
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