

NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE SHADOW AUTHORITY

SHADOW EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

Thursday 24th September

Report Title	Parish Election Costs, Parishes in Kettering Borough
Report Author	Martin Hammond, Executive Director, Kettering Borough Council

List of Appendices

None

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To seek the views of the Executive as to the treatment of election costs as they apply to the town and parish councils in the Kettering Borough area, from April 2021 onwards.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 Kettering Borough Council has historically paid for the election and bye-election costs arising from elections to town and parish councils whereas in the rest of the North Northamptonshire area, the relevant town or parish council has paid for the costs of its own elections. This report seems to address that anomaly before April 2021, to ensure equity across the area of North Northamptonshire.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Shadow Executive advises the town and parish councils in Kettering Borough that they should precept for the possibility of election costs arising in May 2021, and that future bye-elections costs will also be borne by them where these are triggered after 1 April 2021.

(Reason for Recommendations – To provide consistency in charging to parish councils for their election costs across the North Northamptonshire area.)

4. Report Background

- 4.1 Kettering Borough Council, uniquely in North Northamptonshire, has historically paid for the election and bye-election costs arising from elections to town and parish councils. In the rest of the North Northamptonshire area, the relevant parish or town council has paid for the costs of its own elections. It is usual throughout the UK for the relevant organisation to pay for its own

election costs, irrespective of where responsibility for organising that election falls.

- 4.2 This anomaly will need to be addressed before April 2021, to ensure equity across the area of North Northamptonshire.
- 4.3 The elections in May 2021 will be a combined election for the new unitary councillors, the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner and for all parish and town councils in the area. This means that for those parishes where an election is contested, they will be asked to bear a third of the cost of the election expenses applying to their parish.
- 4.4 Not all parish councils have contested elections, because of the shortage of candidates in some areas, and indeed, in Kettering Borough, the average number of parishes seeing an election each cycle over the last twenty years has usually been about a third of the total number of parishes.
- 4.5 Nevertheless, for parishes in Kettering, if a change is to apply, then the parish councils will need to have sufficient notice to precept to cover the costs of potential elections, as parishes throughout the rest of North Northamptonshire do already.
- 4.6 Within Kettering Borough area, a new Town Council for Kettering itself is likely to be established from April 2021, and the assumption made within the preparation of its budget, is that it will meet its share of election costs in May 2021.
- 4.7 Officers at KBC can provide advice to each parish council as to the potential costs of an election in their area, to assist them in making the right budgetary provision for the coming financial year.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1 The alternative option would be for the unitary authority to bear the cost of all parish council elections taking place throughout the North Northamptonshire area in future, including bye-elections.
- 5.2 Whilst it is impossible to predict what the actual cost will be until nominations have closed, the total cost of elections throughout the unitary authority area in May 2021 are estimated to be approximately £0.5m, and the parish council share of that will probably fall somewhere between £50,000 and £125,000 assuming a similar proportion of parish councils have elections as experienced them in 2015 and 2011.
- 5.3 However, this calculation excludes the new costs of electing Town Councillors in Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough, which will significantly increase that cost, by approximately £60,000 in total. Clearly, no provision has been made in the unitary council's emerging budget for such a cost.
- 5.4 The final option is to leave the arrangements in the Kettering Borough area unchanged, but this would not be equitable across North Northamptonshire, and require a budgetary provision of about £50,000 (including meeting the costs of a Kettering Town Council election).

6. Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Resources and Financial

6.1.1 Depending on the options presented in section 5, above, the additional costs to North Northamptonshire Council arising from this report are estimated to be:-

- £0 (parish and town councils in Kettering Borough to in future bear their own election costs);
- £50,000 (meeting the costs of parish and town council elections in Kettering Borough, i.e. the status quo); or
- £185,000 (meeting the costs of parish and town council elections across North Northamptonshire.

6.1.2 The fiduciary response of the Shadow Authority, acting in the interests of North Northamptonshire Council, would be to request that all town and parish councils, as sovereign pre-cepting authorities, bear their own election costs.

6.1.3 In practice, as the elections will be conducted by North Northamptonshire Council, the costs will initially be borne by the Council and then calculated and re-charged back to the parish and town councils after completion of the May 2021 election cycle.

6.1.4 The Interim Section 151 Officer has been consulted on the financial implications within this report.

6.2 Legal

6.2.1 There are no legal implications arising from the proposals. As sovereign pre-cepting bodies, it is usual for parish and town councils to bear the cost of their elections.

6.3 Risk

6.3.1 The risk of doing nothing is to affect public confidence in the Shadow Authority and succeeding North Northamptonshire Council, with one area of the unitary area seen to have been treated more favourably than others.

6.3.2 The risk of not taking a decision at this juncture, is that parish and town councils do not have sufficient time to plan their budgets and precepts in readiness for their 2021/22 budget setting process.

6.3.3 There are no other significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report.

6.4 Consultation

6.4.1 None.

6.5 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny

6.5.1 None.

6.6 Environmental Impact

6.6.1 There are no environmental impacts arising from the contents of this report.

6.7 Community Impact

6.7.1 A slight increase in budget and therefore precepts to individual households from town and parish councils affected by the recommended course of action in this report in Kettering. However, this should be seen in balance to the cost already borne to residents of other town and parish councils of Corby, East Northamptonshire and Wellingborough.

7. Background Papers

7.1 None.