



Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	CABINET – 6 DECEMBER 2021
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM 09
Subject	PARISH AND TOWN COUNCIL ELECTION COSTS
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	Councillor Mike Every Email: mike.every@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Robert Weaver, Returning Officer Email: robert.weaver@cotswold.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To consider the option of recharging the closets of elections to Town and Parish Councils
Annexes	None
Recommendation(s)	<i>(a) That the Council agrees to recharge Town and Parish Councils for contested 4-yearly elections with effect from the May 2023 elections.</i> <i>(b) That the Council agrees to recharge Town and Parish Councils for contested by-elections at all elections called on or after 1 April 2023</i>
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delivering our services to the highest standards
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	None



1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. Section 36(5) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 gives District Councils the discretion to either to charge each local Council in full for election costs or bear the costs itself.
- 1.2. The Returning Officer uses a County-wide agreed scale of fees and charges for all local elections. Cotswold District Council ("the Council") has previously endorsed this scale and agreed to its implementation for all local elections. The Returning Officer is given delegated authority to update the scale in line with the cost of living pay rise each year.
- 1.3. In 1996, the Council agreed to absorb the cost of all Town and Parish Council Elections except Parish Polls rather than recharging individual Councils for the costs.
- 1.4. Reserves are allocated each year to build up a fund for the 4-yearly District and Parish Elections. This fund also covers the cost of any By-elections which take place during the term. If the recommendation were to be agreed, the allocation could be reduced by the appropriate amount.
- 1.5. Parliamentary and Police & Crime Commissioner Elections are funded by Central Government and County Council Elections are funded by the County Council.
- 1.6. Neighbourhood Planning Referendum costs are not included in election costs and will continue to be funded by the Neighbourhood Planning Grant provided by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.
- 1.7. Where elections are combined, costs are split between the areas and charged back to the relevant Authority/Government.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1 District and Parish/Town elections take place every 4 years and consist of 32 District Wards (for 34 seats) and 97 separate Parish/Town elections.
- 2.2 In 2019, all the District wards were contested along with 18 Parish/Town councils. Of the remaining Parishes/Towns, 79 were quorate and co-opted the remaining seats and 2 did not have sufficient nominations to be quorate. Further elections were required for these two and resulted in uncontested elections.
- 2.3 In 2015, there were 17 contested Parish/Town Council elections along with the fully contested District wards.
- 2.4 When a casual vacancy occurs in a Parish/Town Council, a notice of vacancy is published. This gives electors an opportunity to request an election to fill the vacancy. If no request is received, the Parish/Town council can co-opt to fill the vacancy. If an election is requested it is conducted by the Electoral Services Team and the cost is absorbed by the District Council.



2.5 The following table shows the number of casual vacancies since the 2015 full elections:

	Number of notices of vacancy	Elections requested	Co-option
2015 - 2019	165	16 of which 11 were contested	149
2019 - 2021 (12.10.21)	131	15 of which 6 were contested	116

2.6 At present, the full cost of all elections is met by the District Council. The estimated cost across 4 years is £150,000 for the main elections plus approximately £50,000 for contested by-elections at either District and/or Parish/Town level. This is an estimated cost as it is dependent on the number of By-elections taking place during the term.

2.7 A request for information on election charging was made through the Association of Electoral Administrators to Local Authorities in the South West and the following replies were received. This shows that Cotswold District is outside of the norm for both similar local authorities and more urban areas.

Authority	4-yearly elections	By-elections	Comments
Cheltenham	Yes	Yes	County scale of fees
Cornwall	Yes	Yes	
Cotswold	No	No	
Forest of Dean	Yes	Yes	There is a threshold for charging based on the precept of the Parish
Gloucester	Yes	Yes	
Mid Devon	Yes	Yes	
North Devon	Yes	Yes	
North Somerset	Yes	Yes	20% added to By-election cost for administration
Sedgemoor	Yes	Yes	
Stroud	Yes	Yes	
Tewkesbury	No	Yes	
Torridge	Yes	Yes	



3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1** Election costs are calculated according to the scale of fees along with actual costs for poll cards, ballot papers, postal vote packs, venues etc.
- 3.2** The cost therefore varies according to the size of the Parish/Town, the number of electors and whether the election is held on its own or combined with another type of election e.g. Parish and District election on the same day.
- 3.3** As an example, the election held on 7 October 2021 for Stow-on-the-Wold Town Council cost in the region of £4,000 for 1613 electors.
- 3.4** At combined elections, costs will be split between elections - some costs will be split 50/50 e.g. polling station hire, whilst other costs such as ballot papers will be charged in full to each election type.
- 3.5** At the 2019 elections, the total cost of all District and Parish elections was £125,000. The table below shows the approximate costs for each District Ward where there was also a contested election along with an estimate of what could have been charged to the Parish/Town councils with contested elections.
- 3.6** These estimates are based on the number of electors, postal votes, polling stations and staff. They also include an amount per elector for printing and stationery.

Parish/Town Council	Number of electors	Full cost of District and Parish election £	Potential recharge cost to Parish/Town Council £
Beverston Parish	112	1,044.00	468.00
Bibury Parish	499	2,393.00	947.00
Cirencester Town, Abbey Ward	1899	8,393.00	3,184.00
Cirencester Town, Four Acres Ward	1556	7,039.00	2,694.00
Cirencester Town, Stratton Ward	2070	8,673.00	3,282.00
Cirencester Town, Watermoor Ward	2081	8,836.00	3,355.00
Driffield Parish	119	1,192.00	536.00
Hatherop Parish	137	1,175.00	518.00



Longborough Parish	383	1,996.00	801.00
Maugersbury Parish	115	1,004.00	442.00
Moreton-in-Marsh Town	3691	14,440.00	5,405.00
Rendcomb Parish	183	1,177.00	494.00
Shipton Moyne Parish	224	1,350.00	563.00
Somerford Keynes Parish	404	1,993.00	789.00
Southrop Parish	210	1,272.00	526.00
Stow-on-the-Wold Town	1644	7,194.00	2,747.00
Tetbury Town	4659	19,386.00	7,316.00
Upper Rissington Parish	1404	5,744.00	2,200.00
		94,301.00	36,267.00

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1** Other than the legal issues referred to there are no other legal implications arising directly from this Report.

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 5.1** There is a risk that the Parish/Town Councils would be unable to meet the cost of elections. However, they are able to precept for these costs. Giving as much notice as possible to the Parish/Town Councils will help alleviate this risk.
- 5.2** There is also a need to reduce reputational risk by making sure that the proposal and consequent decision is communicated effectively and in a timely manner to the Parish/Town Councils.



6. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 6.1 There are four options to consider and the table below shows the implications for each. The estimated costs are based on a full district election with 18 contested Parishes/Towns being £150,000 plus £50,000 for By-elections across the 4-year term.

Option		Split of costs	Cost to District Councils (across 4 years)	Cost to Parish/Town Councils
1	No change to current arrangements	District Council absorbs all costs	£200,000	
2	Recharge Parish/Town Councils for contested 4-yearly elections but not by-elections	District Council splits costs for 4-yearly elections with contested parish/towns. District Council meets cost of any Parish/Town By-elections	Approximately £160,000	Approximately, £40,000 (based on estimates given above)
3	Recharge Parish/Town Councils for by-elections but not 4-yearly elections	District Council absorbs the cost of 4-yearly elections. Costs for By-elections are met by relevant Parish/Town Council	£150,000	£50,000
4	Recharge Parish/Town Councils for all elections with combined elections split across election types	4-yearly election costs split between District and Parish/Town. By-election costs met by relevant Parish/Town Council	£110,000	£90,000

(END)



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL