

Bath & North East Somerset Council		
MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Cllr Mark Elliott – Cabinet Member for Resources	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	Not before 20th December 2025	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 3599
TITLE:	Parish and Town Council Election Recharges	
WARD:	All Parish and Town Councils in Bath and North East Somerset	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report:		
Appendix A – Estimate of costs of Parish and Town Council Elections and By-Elections		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 Bath & North East Somerset Council currently covers the full costs incurred by the Returning Officer for all scheduled Parish and Town Council elections. At unscheduled elections (“by-elections”), the Council recovers 50% of the cost for the first by-election, and 100% of the cost if any additional by-elections take place in the same Parish or Town Council before the next scheduled elections.
- 1.2 This report invites the Cabinet Member to introduce recharges to Parish and Town Councils in Bath and North East Somerset for the costs incurred by the Returning Officer for all Parish and Town Council elections and by-elections, with effect from 1 April 2026.
- 1.3 This approach will generate savings of an estimated £40,000 at the next scheduled Parish and Town Council elections, which will take place on Thursday 6 May 2027, in combination with Bath & North East Somerset Council election. The budget set aside by the Council to cover the costs of all elections taking place on that date is £400,000.
- 1.4 The recharges to Parish and Town Councils are on a cost recovery basis only, and no income will be generated by the Council as a profit.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member is asked to:

- 2.1 Introduce recharges to Parish and Town Councils for all their election and by-election costs with effect from 1 April 2026.
- 2.2 Approve the methodology for calculating the Parish and Town Council recharges as set out under paragraphs 3.8.1 to 3.8.4.

3 THE REPORT

- 3.1 The cost incurred by the Returning Officer to deliver the key processes of an election has more than doubled in the last 13 years. As an example, the budget allocated by the government to the Local Returning Officer of Bath and North East Somerset to deliver the Police and Crime Commissioner election in 2024 was £500,000 compared with a budget of £242,000 at the first Police and Crime Commissioner election in 2012.
- 3.2 This increase is the result of a number of significant changes to the legislation governing the administration and delivery of elections, including the introduction of individual electoral registration in 2014, the introduction of voter ID at polling stations in 2023 alongside the requirement to make the voting process more accessible to voters with a disability. Printing and postage costs have risen (Royal Mail services continue to rise notably on an annual basis) as well as the majority of polling station hire fees.
- 3.3 At parliamentary elections and police and crime commissioner elections all costs incurred by the Returning Officer are recoverable from central government, whilst the cost of West of England Combined Authority elections can be reclaimed from WECA funds. As a result, these elections have no direct impact on the Council budget.
- 3.4 This is different at local government elections. The Council at present bears the full cost of Bath & North East Somerset Council elections, which take place every four years, and the full cost of all Parish and Town Council elections, which take place on the same date. Furthermore, if there are any Parish and Town Council by-elections between one scheduled election and the next one, the Council covers 50% of the cost of the first by-election; the cost of any subsequent by-elections which are held before the next scheduled election in that same Parish or Town Council, are wholly met by the Parish or Town Council.
- 3.5 Under Section 36 of the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Council is entitled to require Parish and Town Councils to repay the costs incurred by the Returning Officer for the delivery of their scheduled elections and by-elections.
- 3.6 Parish and Town Councils receive a precept via the Local Authority Council Tax to run the parish; this includes services such as allotments, lighting, cemeteries, etc. Parish and Town Councils will need to factor the contingency cost of contested scheduled elections and by-elections into their budget setting activities and ensure that they have sufficient funds to cover that cost.
- 3.7 Without a recharge policy in place, **all** Bath and North East Somerset Council taxpayers would continue to bear the burden of the cost of Parish and Town Council elections, regardless of whether they reside in one of the areas where there is a contested election or whether they have a Parish or Town Council at all (residents of Bath don't, for example). Introducing a recharge policy will ensure the cost is met

by the local residents of the area where there is an election through the parish precept. Most councils across the country, including our neighbouring authorities (North Somerset Council, Somerset Council and South Gloucestershire Council) recharge Parish and Town Councils for their election and by-election costs, using a methodology which is similar to the one outlined in paragraphs 3.8.1 to 3.8.4.

3.8 The Cabinet Member is requested to approve the recharge to Parish and Town Councils for the costs for their scheduled elections and by-elections. This means:

3.8.1 At scheduled elections, which take place on the same day as Bath & North East Somerset Council elections, Parish and Town Councils will be each charged an initial flat fee of £100.00 for the setup and provision of statutory notices, nomination packs and administration of the nomination process. In the Parish and Town Councils where the election is contested (i.e. where there are more candidates standing for election than seats), the Parish or Town Council will be recharged the full cost of those elements which relate solely to the Parish or Town Council election (i.e. printing and postage costs of postal packs, printing of ballot papers, polling station stationery, staff costs for the preparation of postal votes, and for the verification and count of ballot papers, hire fee for the count venue). There will be other costs which will be shared with the Council, and these relate to those elements which are common to both elections (i.e. polling station staff fees and the polling stations hire fee). There will be no charge for poll cards.

3.8.2 For Parish and Town Council by-elections the charge will include an initial cost of £50 for the setup and provision of statutory notices, nomination packs and administration of the nomination process. If the election is contested, the charge will include the full cost incurred by the Returning Officer for the delivery of the election, also including the charge for poll cards if required.

3.8.3 The cost of parish elections and by-elections varies considerably from parish to parish, depending on the number of electors in that parish, the number of postal voters, the number of polling station and the turnout.

3.8.4 An estimate of the costs of Parish and Town Council elections in Bath and North East Somerset in May 2027 and of any by-elections from June 2027, is outlined in Appendix A. The appendix includes the following: -

- (a) A table with a summary of the estimated recharges to each Parish and Town Council, including separate columns each showing respectively (1) the recharge for uncontested scheduled elections, (2) the recharge for contested scheduled elections, (3) the recharge for uncontested by-elections and (4) the recharge for contested by-elections.
- (b) A table showing the dates of Parish and Town Council elections and by-elections in the last 10 years.
- (c) A section for each Parish and Town Council, with a breakdown of the election and by-election costs. The assumptions are based on 2025 costs of items and services, which are likely to see an approximate 10% increase in 2027.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 Under Section 36 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 the Council is entitled to require Parish and Town Councils to repay the costs incurred by the Returning Officer for the delivery of their scheduled elections and by-elections.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 5.1 If this recharge policy is introduced, the Council could achieve a potential saving of £40,000 at the May 2027 elections, if for example the same Parish and Town Council elections as 2023 were contested.
- 5.2 The decision to impose charges, if made now, will enable Parish and Town Councils to make adequate provision for the cost of elections and by-elections from their budget setting activities in February 2026 onwards.
- 5.3 The recharge policy will take effect from 1 April 2026 and it is unlikely to affect Parish and Town Councils until the scheduled elections in May 2027. This means that Parish and Town Councils have more than one financial year to plan for any increases in their precepts.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

7 EQUALITIES

- 7.1 No adverse impacts have been identified.

8 CLIMATE CHANGE

- 8.1 There are no climate change implications arising from this report.

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 9.1 The Council can continue to organise Parish and Town Council elections at no cost to the Parish and Town Councils. This is likely to have an adverse impact on the Council budget for the local government elections in May 2027.

10 CONSULTATION

- 10.1 The representative body for local Councils, Avon Local Councils Association (ALCA) has been notified and has been requested to update Parish and Town Councils. The Parish and Town Councils have been consulted directly via email on Monday 18 August 2025. This report was considered at the Corporate PDS Panel meeting on Tuesday 25 November 2025.

10.2 The S151 Officer and Monitoring Officer have also been consulted and have no further comments.

Contact person	Aurora Loi – Electoral Services Manager
Background papers	None
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	