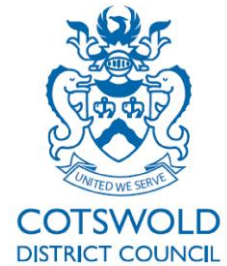


Ward Councillor Briefing

For Town and Parish Councils

CLlr Richard Keeling
Bourton Vale Ward



February 2022

The following is a digest of recent Council meetings and decisions:

COUNCIL MEETING - 19 January

Agenda and webcast can be found here:

<https://meetings.cotswold.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MIId=1776&x=1>

I was delighted to second a Motion presented by Cllr Stephen Andrews Armed Forces Covenant Re-Endorsement which was given unanimous support.

CABINET - 10 January

1. Parish Election Charges

The Cabinet voted through the decision to charge out Parish election charges

(a) That the Cabinet agrees to recharge Town and Parish Councils for contested 4-yearly elections at a rate of 50% of their share of the cost in 2023 and 100% of their share in 2027 and thereafter

(b) That the Cabinet agrees to recharge Town and Parish Councils for contested by-elections taking place on or after the dates shown at the rates indicated:

(i) from 01/04/2024 - 50% of the cost

(ii) from 01/04/2025 - 75% of the cost

(iii) from 01/04/2026 - 100% of the cost

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The breakdown of costs by council is in the annexes of the cabinet report

<https://meetings.cotswold.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=1136&MIId=1789&Ver=4> .

When I enquired why these were not worked out for all parishes, I was told that there was not enough time to calculate the costs for each local council, so examples would be better instead.

The impact of the decision made by Cabinet on 10 January 2022 to charge Local Councils for contested elections and by-elections by raising the precept, has been underestimated. Owing to the revised phasing, there is time to revisit the proposal and I would welcome your feedback on the below:

· Across the district the extra funds raised to be held by Parish Councils, on deposit, represents a huge sum of money, in most cases to be held 'just in case'. This is not prudent accounting.

- It is unfair on our residents to pay upfront if they don't need to. People are suffering from financial pressures elsewhere and it is our duty to support our communities, not punish them. One election is worth approximately a 70% increase of our current precept.
- Contested elections are rare in our parishes.
- Parish councils and Parish Councillors will be unfairly blamed by the community for the sharp rise in the precept. Not all residents are not informed or interested in local community governance, but they do care about their Council Tax bills. They will expect to see a benefit if they have to pay more, but there will be nothing to show for it, other than a credit balance for something that might never happen.
- Conversely, what if a series of contested local elections are triggered? Local discontent cannot be predicted; Local Councils cannot be expected to budget for multiple unexpected elections and will not be able to afford multiple contested elections. It should not be forgotten that local councils are not allowed to go into arrears.
- Local democracy is undermined, residents will be punished financially for doing the right thing, i.e. holding a contested election. This is why these costs were adopted by CDC in the first place.
- Local Councils wisely plan to hold their elections at the same time as the scheduled four-yearly district elections, to save expense. The cost for this will now be shared between the District Council and the Local Council if the Local Council is holding an election.
- Option 1 - CDC continue to fund local election costs
- Option 2 - CDC pays for the first contested election cost. If there is a need for subsequent local elections in that year, then these are paid for by CDC and repaid when Parish can raise the funds from the forthcoming precept.
- Option 3 - CDC 'loan' the costs of all local elections until such time as the Parish can raise the funds to repay CDC from the forthcoming precept.

Which Option do you or the Parish Council support? Parishes will need adequate time to raise the funds from the following precept for Options 2 and 3. This will also give local councils time and opportunity to inform and explain the circumstances to their community. The Council might consider that Parishes could refuse to pay so that may not be an option at all. We are looking into this.

2. Further increase in car park charges

Cabinet approved an increase in car park charges (which were increased by 30% in 2019). Those approved include (not exclusively):

- Removing the 'free after 3 pm' concession from six car parks;
- Increase in charges in Church Street and West Street in Tetbury to improve availability
- Increased car park charges by 5% (rounded up to nearest 10p).
- Increased fee for season tickets, a higher than inflationary increase

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3. Empty Properties - Review of Council Tax discounts

From 1 April 2022, domestic properties that are empty and unfurnished, will no longer benefit from the same level of Council Tax discounts.

Class C properties - Property which is unoccupied and unfurnished, will now get a 25% Council Tax discount for the first six months. (They did get a 100% discount for the first month and a 25% discount for the second month).

Class A properties - (unoccupied and unfurnished property where major repair work is required to make it habitable or structural alterations are happening) - still benefit from a 100% Council Tax discount for the first 6 months.

In practice, the majority of discounts are applied during the first 2 months of a property becoming empty and unfurnished. Changing the Class C discount to 25% for a maximum of six months therefore increases Council Tax income by £289,254.

VODAFONE SWITCHING OFF 3G

Vodafone have announced plans to switch off its 3G network by the end of 2023, the change will have a big impact on hundreds of thousands of primarily older people and those living in rural areas, forcing them to upgrade their mobile phones.

Better plan ahead.

<https://www.vodafone.co.uk/help-and.../3g-switch-off>

PLANNING DEPARTMENT

The CDC Planning Department is still experiencing very heavy caseloads which is leading to significant delays in applications being determined. The only reasonable way of dealing with the volume is to determine them in the order of the date that they were received. This is resulting in delayed decision making and I ask applicants to show patience and understanding. I will help if I can, please liaise with me. Recruitment is ongoing but finding new planning officers is proving difficult.

Forthcoming Meetings

1 February Overview & Scrutiny

7 February Cabinet

9 February Planning & Licensing

16 February Council - Budget Meeting
