

Joint Working Group

RMBC and Parish and Town Councils

15/05/08 Town Hall, Rotherham

Present:-

Cllr Mahroof Hussain (Chair)
Cllr Jane Austen (JA)
Pat Wade (PW)
Nosober Latif (NL)
Paul Griffiths (PG)
Peter Sludden (PL)
John Walker (JW)

AGENDA	ACTION
<p>1. Apologies</p> <p>David Morton (DM) Sue Kilcommons (SK)</p>	
<p>2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Matters Arising</p> <p>The group discussed how best to ensure that all members were able attend future meetings. It was agreed that a forward plan would be sent out to establish availability for meetings on a six week cycle.</p> <p>The group requested that the recent email from NL to Alan Pogorzelec regarding Licensing issues be resent and a response obtained for the next meeting.</p> <p>The Minutes of the previous meeting were approved by the Joint Working Group.</p>	<p>PG to forward suggested dates.</p> <p>NL to resend email.</p>
<p>3. Parish Council Election Costs.</p> <p>John Walker (Chief Elections and Electoral Registration Officer) had been asked to attend the meeting following an enquiry from the Joint Working group regarding the escalating cost of holding Parish Council elections.</p> <p>As part of an initial response JW had sent the group an estimated figure of £2 per elector. This figure was based on a stand alone election at Wales (and was therefore not influenced by running alongside a Borough council election).</p> <p>JW explained that recent legislation has resulted in the budget for holding local elections having risen threefold.</p>	

The biggest cost factor is the postal vote, in particular, costs relating to expensive anti-fraud measures such as electronic scanning. Information Technology, storage and training costs are all on the increase however none of these costs have been passed onto Parish Councils.

However due to Parish Councils being of different size it is difficult to generalise in terms of cost. In addition the number of candidates can be unpredictable as seen in the recent Maltby Parish election.

Rotherham voters seem to prefer postal voting. In the national elections just 13% voted by post however in Rotherham this increased to 25% and needs to be done in strict accordance with the legislation.

JW explained that the elections team have looked at reducing other associated costs. A quote was obtained from a private firm to run the election process however this came to five times the sum usually allocated.

JW advised the group that costs are likely to continue to rise in the future. A recent pilot in Sheffield of new electronic technology resulted in costs of fifteen pounds per elector.

PW asked if JW can inform Parish Councils of the likely projected cost so they can plan ahead when setting future precepts.

JW replied this is difficult to do at the present time with elections being four years apart.

JA responded that Parish Councils will want to be prepared and put funds aside but at the present time they are working in the dark. This could be addressed by regular updates that raise awareness around the likely costs. In addition to this 'snap' elections could take place prior to the next round of scheduled elections.

JW thought that the any seats are likely to be resolved through co-option. However with the raised profile of Parish Councils it is feasible that seats may well be contested.

MH requested that a briefing paper including estimated costings be produced and that the issue is explored at the next Parish Network meeting in September.

JW to produce briefing paper for the group. PG to forward dates of the Network meeting to JW.

<p>4. Update on the Parish Network Event 22/05/08</p> <p>PG advised the group that arrangements for the Parish Network were progressing well.</p> <p>MH requested that the new 'rotherhamparishcouncils' website be featured on the screen in the Chamber.</p> <p>The group agreed to ask for volunteers at the Network meeting to manage the proposed stall at the Rotherham show to promote joint working between RMBC and Parish and Town Councils.</p>	
<p>5. Feedback on the BIP proposals and the link with the Councillors Commission</p> <p>The group agreed that an Action Plan should be developed for the next 12 months based on the recommendations from the Councillors Commission and the priorities identified in the successful BIP. These include:-</p> <p>Promotion of Quality Status Training for RMBC staff on the role of Parish and Town Councils Publicity and Promotion of Parish Council activity Continued joint training opportunities</p>	<p>PG to produce draft action plan.</p>
<p>6. Any Other Business</p> <p>The group held a general discussion about the roles and responsibilities of 'twin hat' parish and borough councillors and the difficulties sometimes faced when a conflict of interest arises.</p> <p>It was agreed that this issue would be explored further at future meetings and that the group could initiate some form of training or briefing for Members.</p>	
<p>9. Date and time of next meeting</p> <p>9th July 2008 4pm, Room 1, Town Hall.</p>	