

**ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION ACT 2006
RELEASE OF FUNDING**

(Report by Head of Administration)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Electoral Administration Act came into force at the end of last year, introducing changes to various electoral processes which must be in place for the elections to be held in May 2007. The Act is intended to prevent electoral fraud and malpractice after a number of high profile incidents in recent elections involving voter personation and postal voting.
- 1.2 This provides an extremely short preparatory stage and action has to be taken with immediate effect to comply with the legislation. This will involve the purchase of computer hardware and software as a matter of urgency.

2. The Changes

- 2.1 The Act requires all persons who have registered as postal voters to provide their dates of birth and signatures. The only practical way for the information to be held by the Council is electronically. When voting by post in future, a voter must supply this information again with their ballot paper which then must be verified against the record held by the Council. With 15,000 persons currently registered with the Council to receive a postal vote, this is a significant logistical exercise which can only be undertaken with the use of an extension to the Council's existing elections software programme.
- 2.2 Coincidentally, this is also likely to result in changes to the way in which the Council has conducted counts at the close of poll on the day of election at separate venues in the past.

3. Costs

- 3.1 As a Bill was already before Parliament when the MTP bids for 2007/08 were being prepared, an estimate was made of the likely cost of the additional hardware and software required and the additional work that would be required in capturing the data and verifying returns at the time of future elections. A bid has been included in the draft programme that will be considered by the Council at their meeting to be held on 21st February. Regrettably, the hardware and software needs to be ordered prior to that time if the necessary work is to be completed in time for the May election.

3.2 The original MTP bid considered by the Council on 6th December 2006 was drafted before detailed costs could be obtained from software suppliers. This envisaged expenditure in the current year of £10,000 plus £2,000 in subsequent years. The costs are now forecast to be £22,000 in the current year and £10,000 in subsequent years, the increases being wholly due to the higher than anticipated cost of software maintenance. A start up grant of £12,000 from the Department for Constitutional Affairs has been promised in the initial year which will reduce expenditure to the originally forecast amount of £10,000 but without grant in future years from the DCA which is not anticipated, the cost will remain at £10,000 per annum.

	2006/07	2007/08 and subsequent years
	£000	£000
MTP Bid	10	2
Updated estimate (net of grant)	10	10
Shortfall assuming bid approved	0	8

3.3 Assuming Council approve the MTP bid on the 21 February then a supplementary estimate in 2007/08 and subsequent years of £8k per year will be required.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Orders need to be placed as a matter of urgency if the necessary work is to be completed to comply with the Act in time for the May elections. The costs involved are unavoidable.

5. Recommendation

5.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

- stress to Council the unavoidable nature of the MTP bid, and
- approve a budget transfer for the additional costs in 2007/08 and subsequent years.

Background Papers:

DCA elections Policy Division Update dated 19/12/06
Northgate estimates of software costs

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