

Online voting cost alarms councillors

Council could be billed \$75,000 for trial

By John Maslin

john.maslin@wanganuichronicle.co.nz

Wanganui district councillors have agreed to try and be among local authorities trialling online voting next year but not without expressing concerns about the cost involved.

The Government wants to trial online voting as an option in the 2016 local body elections and councils wanting to be the guinea pigs have been asked to indicate their interest.

Noeline Moosman, the Wanganui electoral officer, said the council had platforms in place to handle the online voting. And she said the district's high voter turnout could be another plus.

Ms Moosman said the electronic voting process would not replace postal voting yet.

Voting packs would still go out and voters would have the choice of using them or voting via a computer.

But the council could be up for a \$75,000 bill to trial the system. Ms Moosman said that in 2013 the elections cost \$134,000 to run but that included handling the voting for the Whanganui District Health Board and a portion of Horizons Regional Council. Those two bodies paid about half of the total cost.

Councillor Rob Vinsen said other councils could be part of the trial but not Wanganui. "It could almost double the cost of the election for the ratepayers. You don't put in a formal expression of

"It's unfair to load this cost on to local authorities."

Mayor Annette Main

interest unless you're prepared to carry it out. If we then say 'no', we're going to look very silly," he said.

Councillors Jenny Duncan, Sue Westwood, Philippa Baker-Hogan and Mr Vinsen voted against the trial.

Mayor Annette Main said there was a strong case to be made to have the Government foot the bill for the trials at least and she had spoken to ministers about it. "It's unfair to load this cost on to local authorities and I'm not the only mayor to express concerns about councils carrying the cost.

"But only last week we decided to go with this and put funds into our 10-Year Plan. We're only looking at an expression of interest at this stage and there's no guarantees it will actually go ahead. This is about living what we're saying about Wanganui being a leading-edge community," she said.

Councillor Jack Bullock said he supported the trial because it reinforced Wanganui as one of the Smart 21 communities promoting new technologies on the back of ultrafast broadband.