

DECISION-MAKER:	COUNCIL		
SUBJECT:	ELECTORAL CYCLE		
DATE OF DECISION:	17 SEPTEMBER 2014		
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES		
<u>CONTACT DETAILS</u>			
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STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY
N/A

BRIEF SUMMARY

The Council has the choice of moving from elections by thirds to whole Council elections. If the Council wishes to change its election cycle, it must consult. This report therefore looks at the consultation arrangements that should be undertaken prior to the Council deciding which options should be approved.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (i) That the Director of Corporate Services be authorised to consult on the principal of changing the Council's electoral cycle from elections by thirds to whole-Council elections every four years;
- (ii) That the consultation process set out in this report be approved;
- (iii) That a Special meeting of the Council be convened before the 19th November 2014 meeting in order for Council to consider the results of the consultation and determine proposals for any change in its electoral governance arrangements; and
- (iv) That a cross-party working group be established to consider the results of the consultation and make a recommendation to be considered by Full Council.

REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Council needs to consult on the proposal for changing the electoral cycle from elections by thirds to whole-Council elections before making a decision.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

2. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act received Royal Assent in December 2007. The Council is required to follow the process prescribed within the Act. The option not to consult is, therefore, not available.

DETAIL (Including consultation carried out)

Electoral Arrangements

3. The Council has undertaken elections by thirds since 1980. However, legislative change introduced under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 enables the Council to resolve to change its electoral cycle and move to whole-council elections which would take place every four years.
4. Reasons to change to whole-Council elections:
 - A clear mandate from the electorate once every four years would enable the Council to adopt a more strategic, long-term approach to policy and decision-making and focus less on yearly election campaigning;
 - The results from whole-Council elections are simpler and more easily understood by the electorate. This may increase turn-out at local elections;
 - There would be a clearer opportunity for the electorate to change the political composition of the council once every four years;
 - Holding whole-Council elections once every four years rather than smaller elections every three years out of four would cost less and would be less disruptive for public buildings used as polling stations, for example, schools.
5. Reasons to keep elections by thirds:
 - Elections in three years out of every four provide more frequent opportunity for electors to vote and to influence the political make-up of the Council. This may, therefore, provide more immediate political accountability and provide a more up-to-date reflection of the views of local people.
 - Electing by thirds means there is more continuity of councillors without any chance of them all being replaced in a single election.
 - Voting for one councillor at a time under “elections by thirds” is well understood by voters in Southampton. Voting for more than one councillor at the same time under “whole council elections” could cause confusion.
 - An election by thirds provides a regular influx of newly elected councillors who can bring new ideas and fresh approaches to the Council.
 - Elections by thirds is the system that electors in the City are used to and the withdrawal of the opportunity to vote more frequently may disengage some of the City’s electors if they only vote once every four years, as opposed to elections by thirds.

The Electoral Commission

6. The Electoral Commission undertook a review of electoral cycles in 2003 in a report entitled *The Cycle of Local Government Elections in England*.
7. The Electoral Commission, having taken into account the evidence and arguments presented during the consultation process concluded that a pattern of whole-Council elections for all local authorities in England would provide a clear, equitable and easy to understand electoral process that would best serve the interests of local government electors. The Electoral Commission, therefore, recommended that each local authority should hold whole-Council elections, with all councillors elected simultaneously, once every four years. However, this is currently a matter for local choice.

Methodology for Consultation

8. If an authority wishes to move from thirds to whole- Council elections, it must consult. Councils undertaking such consultation must:
 - Consult such persons as the Council thinks appropriate on the proposed change;
 - Have regard to the outcome of the consultation before making its decision;
 - Convene a special meeting of the Council;
 - Pass a resolution to change by a two thirds majority of those voting;
 - Publish an explanatory document on the decision and make this available for public inspection; and
 - Give notice to the Electoral Commission on any changes to the electoral arrangements.
9. It is, therefore, recommended that the Council undertakes a consultation exercise which includes an opportunity for the public and other stakeholders, to express their views on the options available.
10. It is proposed that this consultation is primarily undertaken by way of an on-line questionnaire. The proposed arrangements are set out in the Appendix. An equality impact assessment of this approach has been undertaken.
11. The on-line questionnaire would include:
 - Information on the current electoral governance arrangements;
 - Information on the proposed changes together with an explanation of the impact of change;
 - Arguments for and against the changes;
 - The choice of 'tick' boxes for the respondent to indicate their preferred options;
 - A question to indicate if they are completing the questionnaire in the capacity of a local resident, local business or as a representative of a group or organisation;
 - Basic demographic information such as gender and age;
 - Deadline for completion.

12. Questionnaires would also be available at Council venues such as leisure centres, reception areas and libraries.
13. Links to an on-line questionnaire would be sent to the business community via the Chamber of Commerce, to community groups and tenants' and residents' groups through the Council's existing communications networks. Similarly, links would also be sent to other stakeholders such as the MP's, MEP's, and Southampton Universities.
14. Feedback would be provided at the end of the consultation via the Council's website, and by using the Council's existing communication networks for other community and interest groups.
15. It is also proposed that information is sought from councils who have changed their electoral cycle to whole-council elections.
16. An analysis of the results from the consultation would be included in a report submitted to the Special Council meeting to be held prior to the November Council meeting.

Programme of forthcoming elections

17. The current electoral cycle is as follows:
 - European Parliamentary elections – every five years
 - UK Parliamentary elections – every five years
 - Police and Crime Commissioner elections – every four years
 - Southampton City Council elections – every three out of four years
18. In addition, the Localism Act 2011 allows for local referenda to be held and there is always the possibility of national referenda.
19. The current electoral timetable is as follows:

2015	Southampton City Council Elections & UK Parliamentary General Election
2016	Southampton City Council Elections & Police and Crime Commissioner Elections
2017	None
2018	Southampton City Council Elections
2019	Southampton City Council Elections & European Parliamentary Elections
2020	Southampton City Council Elections & UK Parliamentary Elections
20. If in November Council resolves to move to whole-council elections, it is a decision for the Councillors at that Special Meeting as to when they wish to implement this.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Capital/Revenue

21. There are no capital resource implications.

- 22. There are minimal revenue resource implications. Additional revenue costs of carrying out this activity will be met from within existing budgets.
- 23. In terms of the costs of elections, these are generally met by the body or bodies whose representatives have been elected. For example, the UK Government (through the Consolidated Fund) pays for European Elections and UK Parliamentary elections. Southampton City Council pays for the cost of local elections to the City Council. Where elections are combined, for example, a local election and a General Election, the costs are shared (although not equally) between central Government and the Council.
- 24. The cost of a whole City Council election is around £170,000. A move to whole Council elections would see two fewer City Council elections being held over a four year period. The cost of any election that would otherwise be combined would be met, for example in the case of the Police and Crime Commissioner elections, by the Home Office (central Government).
- 25. There would, therefore, be savings to the Council from moving to a whole Council electoral cycle once every four years. The precise size of the saving would depend upon whether any elections were combined, and also the formulation of the Fees and Charges Order for any elections paid for by central Government as that varies from election to election.

Property/Other

- 26. None.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:

- 27. Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (as amended).

Other Legal Implications:

- 28. None.

POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS

- 29. None.

KEY DECISION? ~~Yes~~/No

WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:	All
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SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices

1.	Proposed consultation arrangements.
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Documents In Members' Rooms

1.	None
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Equality Impact Assessment

Do the implications/subject of the report require an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) to be carried out.	Yes/No
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Other Background Documents

Equality Impact Assessment and Other Background documents available for inspection at:

Title of Background Paper(s)

Relevant Paragraph of the Access to Information Procedure Rules / Schedule 12A allowing document to be Exempt/Confidential (if applicable)

1.	None	
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