

7 December 2016		ITEM: 5
General Services Committee		
Review of Electoral Arrangements		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: David Lawson, Monitoring Officer		
Accountable Head of Service: David Lawson, Monitoring Officer		
Accountable Director: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

On 27th July 2016, a report from Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee was considered by Council which provided advice on the Council's ability to opt for whole-council elections rather than by the current method of elections by thirds and recommended that a public consultation exercise be undertaken. A copy of that report is attached at **Appendix 1**.

Council noted its ability to alter the electoral pattern for this authority, and asked that a consultation be undertaken to ascertain public preference for either continuing to elect councillors by thirds or move to whole council elections every fourth year with effect from May 2018. This report provides background information to enable General Services Committee to exercise, within its terms of reference, the functions of Council in relation to elections and agree the format and detail of the proposed statutory consultation on behalf of Council.

- 1. Recommendation(s)**
 - 1.1 That the consultation process, timeline and format set out in this report and Appendix 2 be approved;**
 - 1.2 To note that a Special meeting of the Council will need to be convened by November 2017 in order for Council to consider the results of the consultation and determine proposals for any change in its electoral governance arrangements; and**
 - 1.3 That a report be brought to General Services Committee to consider the results of the consultation and make a recommendation to be considered by Full Council.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Under the provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, councils such as Thurrock that elect by thirds can move to whole-council elections by passing a resolution at a special meeting of the Full Council. The resolution will only be deemed carried if there are two-thirds majority of those voting vote in favour of a proposed change to the electoral cycle.
- 2.2 Therefore if an authority wishes to move from thirds to whole-council elections, it must:
- a) Consult such persons as it thinks appropriate on the proposed change;
 - b) Convene a special meeting of Council;
 - c) Pass a resolution to change by a two-thirds majority of those voting;
 - d) Publish an explanatory document on the decision and make this available for public inspection; and
 - e) Give notice to the Electoral Commission.

Proposed Methodology for Consultation

- 2.3 Councils undertaking such consultation must consult such persons as the Council thinks appropriate on the proposed change and have regard to the outcome of the consultation before making a decision at the special meeting of the Council. The consultation should last for a minimum period of 12 weeks.
- 2.4 It is recommended that the consultation exercise is designed so that the public and other stakeholders have a full opportunity to express their views on the options available.
- 2.5 It is proposed that this consultation is primarily undertaken by way of an on-line questionnaire with hard copies made available for anyone without internet access. The draft format is set out in **Appendix 2**.
- 2.6 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.

- 2.7 Questionnaires would also be available on request at Council venues such as the Civic Offices, leisure centres, community hubs and libraries.
- 2.8 Communication of the consultation will be primarily through the following targeted and public channels (a more detailed explanation of the suggested communications plan is at **Appendix 3**):
- Links to an on-line questionnaire would be sent to the business community via the Business Board and Chamber of Commerce, to community groups and tenants' and residents' groups through the Council's existing communications networks and CVS.
 - Links would also be sent to other stakeholders such as the MPs, MEPs, NHS, Essex Police and Thurrock Colleges.
 - Wider communication through press releases to be picked up and covered by local media outlets, social media promotion through various council-owned Twitter feeds and Facebook pages, pointing people to the online surveys.
 - A short explanation of the reasons for the consultation, how to complete the online questionnaire or obtain a hard copy could also be sent out with the annual Council Tax notification.
- 2.9 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.
- 2.10 It is also proposed that information is sought from councils who have changed their electoral cycle to whole-council elections.
- 2.11 An analysis of the results from the consultation would be included in a further report from the General Services Committee to a Special Council meeting to be held before the end of November 2017 to allow sufficient time for any implementation of a change before the May 2018 elections.

Timing

- 2.12 The consultation should last for a period of at least 12 weeks, factor in time for the outcomes to be assessed and for a further report to be brought to Full Council by November 2017 to allow time for implementation before the May 2018 elections, should there be a recommendation in favour of change. It is proposed that the consultation starts in January 2017.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 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.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 To progress the resolution of Council to consult on the proposal for changing the electoral cycle from elections by thirds to whole-Council elections before making a decision.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 As set out in the report.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 Becoming an excellent and high performing organisation.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Laura Last**
Senior Finance Officer

The cost of an election is met by the body or bodies whose representatives have been elected and therefore, any occasion where a local election is combined with another would see a reduction in costs to the council.

Any move to whole council elections would generate an estimated saving of £190,000 over the next 4 years.

Any savings that may be associated with a proposal to change the cycle of elections would be dependent upon the year in which the new cycle was to commence, as this would determine when local elections may be combined with others and therefore see a reduction in costs.

The savings achieved by the proposed changes to the electoral arrangements would contribute towards meeting the Council's budgetary challenges.

The estimated cost of the consultation and associated communications would be £3,000.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Deputy Monitoring Officer

The legal implications are addressed in the report as to the requirements of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (as amended).

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Community Development Manager

An equality impact assessment of the approach to the consultation and associated communication will be undertaken. The consultation is open to all residents, businesses and other stakeholders with provision made for those who are unable to access this online. This will allow all interested parties to have a say in how the council should run the electoral process going forward.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

None.

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- The Cycle of Local Government Elections in England – Consultation Paper – Electoral Commission (2003)
- The Cycle of Local Government Elections in England – Recommendations for change - Electoral Commission (2004)
- The Economic Development and Construction Act 2009
- Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007
- Localism Act 2011
- Local Government Boundary Commission for England – Electoral Reviews (2014)

9. Appendices to the report

Appendix 1 – Review of Electoral Arrangements Council July 2016

Appendix 2 - Proposed consultation

Appendix 3 – Proposed outline communication plan

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