

<b>27 September 2017</b>		<b>ITEM: 3</b>
<b>Council</b>		
<b>Electoral Cycle</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Key	
<b>Report of:</b> Councillor Shane Hebb, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Finance		
<b>Accountable Head of Service:</b> David Lawson, Monitoring Officer		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive		
<b>This report is Public</b>		

### **Executive Summary**

The purpose of this report is to advise Council on the outcome of consultation on a possible move from elections by thirds to election of the whole-council once every four years from May 2018.

Council is also asked to note the preferred option recommended by General Services Committee, further to its work on agreeing the format and nature of the consultation and the Committee's terms of reference, "to make recommendations to the Council in respect of any change to the electoral arrangements of the authority."

The preferred option recommended by General Services Committee at its meeting held on 3 May 2017 was to move to whole-council elections from May 2018.

Council is therefore asked to decide if the electoral cycle for Thurrock Council should remain as elections by thirds or change to whole-council elections every four years from May 2018.

#### **1. Recommendation(s)**

- 1.1 That the Council notes the results of the consultation in relation to the election cycle.**
- 1.2 That the Council notes the preferred option recommended by General Services Committee is to move to whole-council elections with effect from May 2018.**
- 1.3 That the Council decides if the present process of elections by thirds should be changed to whole-council elections once every four years**

from May 2018.

- 1.4 If the Council chooses to change the electoral cycle to whole-council elections once every four years, the Council authorises the Director of Law and Governance to issue the necessary public information leaflet as required by the legislation and undertake any further actions necessary to give effect to the content of this report.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 On 27 July 2016, pursuant to a report to Full Council from the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Council resolved that a consultation should be undertaken to ascertain public preference for either continuing to elect councillors by thirds or move to whole-council elections in May 2018. A copy of that report is attached at **Appendix 1**.
- 2.2 On 7 December 2016, General Services Committee, in accord with its terms of reference, agreed the process, format and detail of a proposed public consultation on the principle of changing the Council's electoral cycle. A copy of that report to is attached at **Appendix 2**.
- 2.3 On the 3 May 2017 General Services Committee received a report providing an analysis as to the outcome of that public consultation to assist the Committee with its remit under paragraph 9 of its terms of reference, "to make recommendations to the Council in respect of any change to the electoral arrangements for the authority". A copy of that report and the minutes of the resolution and debate are attached at **Appendix 3**.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 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.

## Result of Consultation

2.6 Residents, businesses and organisations were asked whether they would like the current system of electing councillors to remain or if it should change to once every four years.

2.7 The consultation was open from Monday 9 January to Friday 31 March 2017 and was promoted in line with the communications plan as agreed at the General Services Committee meeting held in December 2016. This included:

- Printed posters in council buildings including libraries and hubs
- Social media posts, with video and link to consultation including Facebook advertising
- An advert each month in the Gazette newspaper
- Information on the front page of the leaflet included in council tax bills
- Press releases
- On the homepage of the council's website
- Stakeholder engagement – via community forums, CVS and their community contacts, CCG and Essex Police, Business Board etc
- Included in e-newsletter with 11,500 subscribers
- Email to all staff and councillors

2.8 After validation, the results of the consultation are as follows:

Total responses	466	
3 years out of 4	187	40.1%
Once every 4 years	279	59.9%

2.9 Respondents to the consultation were asked if they would like to offer any reasons for their preference. The most frequent reasons given are summarised below:

### **Elections to council for one third of councillors at a time, 3 years out of 4 (current system)**

- Experienced councillors can assist newly elected councillors
- Keeps politicians active
- No dramatic change in the council
- Prevents party with most money dominating
- Current system works well

### **Elections to council for all councillors at the same time, once every 4 years (proposed new system)**

- Allows for long-term planning and stability and a stable direction of travel
- More cost effective to the council

- Effective decision making, of which the Executive could be held to account after four years
- Maintains political balance through the period
- More public engagement and higher voter turnout

## **Timing**

- 2.10 The consultation lasted for a period of 12 weeks; the outcomes have been assessed and validated in line with standard procedures for such consultations and petitions. The consultation was open rather than using a methodology that would ensure the results are statistically representative of the Thurrock population. The response rate is therefore low compared to the population overall.
- 2.11 A report containing the Committee recommendations and the results of the consultation needed to be brought to a Special meeting of Full Council no later than November 2017 to allow sufficient time for any implementation before the May 2018 elections, should there be a recommendation in favour of change.

## **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

- 3.1 The Council has the option for deciding whether or not to change the electoral cycle having taken into account the consultation process followed.
- 3.2 The Council is required to follow the process prescribed within the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The option not to consult was, therefore, not available.
- 3.3 It is the role of the General Services Committee under Paragraph 9 of its terms of reference, “to make recommendations to the Council in respect of any change to the electoral arrangements for the authority.” It is the function of Full Council to decide on any change or otherwise at a Special meeting of Council, with any decision to change the election cycle requiring a two thirds majority.

## **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 4.1 Having consulted on the proposal for changing the electoral cycle, it is now a decision for Full Council as to whether or not the Council wishes to change the electoral cycle.

## **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**  
**Management Accountant**

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.

The average cost of an election by thirds, where the costs are not shared with any other election, is £180k and so £540k over a four year period. An all out election is estimated at £230k and so would recognise a cost reduction of £310k over the same period.

The above would be reduced if combined with any other election whilst it should be recognised that all out elections can increase the need for by-elections and associated costs.

### 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: **David Lawson**  
**Monitoring Officer**

None.

### 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 Report to Full Council held on 27 July 2016 Council

**Appendix 2** – Review of Electoral Arrangements Report to General Service Committee held on 7 December 2016

**Appendix 3** – Review of Electoral Arrangements – Outcome of Public Consultation Report to General Services Committee and relevant minutes held 3 May 2017

### **Report Author:**

David Lawson  
Monitoring Officer  
Law & Governance