

3 May 2017		ITEM: 7
General Services Committee		
Review of Electoral Arrangements – Outcome of Public Consultation		
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 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 principal of changing the Council’s electoral cycle. A reference link to that earlier report to the Committee is contained in the background papers. This was pursuant to an earlier resolution of Full Council on 27 July 2016 requesting that such 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.

This report provides 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.”

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That General Services Committee note the result of the public consultation and make a recommendation to a Special meeting of Full Council on whether to continue to elect councillors by thirds or move to whole Council elections in May 2018;**
- 1.2 To note that a Special meeting of Full Council will need to be convened in the next few months and no later than November 2017 to consider the Committee’ recommendations and the results of the consultation for Full Council to determine any change in its electoral governance arrangements.**

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.

Result of Consultation

- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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
- 2.5 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%

2.6 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
- More cost effective to the council
- Effective decision making
- Maintains political balance
- More public engagement and turnout

Timing

2.7 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.

2.8 A report containing the Committee recommendations and the results of the consultation now needs to be brought to a Special meeting of Full Council in the next few months and 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 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 was, therefore, not available. It is the role of the 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. Such a Special meeting could be held immediately before an Ordinary meeting of Full Council with the Ordinary meeting being expressed to, “commence at 7 pm or on the rising of the Special Meeting of the same date” if this is thought convenient.

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**
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)

Report to General Services Committee – 7 December 2016 – Web link:

<http://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/documents/s10691/Review%20of%20Electoral%20Arrangements.pdf>

9. **Appendices to the report**

None

Report Author:

David Lawson
Monitoring Officer
Law & Governance