

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Election Frequency
Meeting/Date: Standards Committee – 3rd December 2015
Executive Portfolio: Executive Leader
Report by: Managing Director
Ward(s) affected: All

Executive Summary:

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is reviewing Huntingdonshire District Council's electoral arrangements. At the meeting in September, the Council approved a submission in which it recommended the retention of 52 Councillors based on variable numbers of Members per ward, rather than a fixed number.

A consequence of retaining this flexibility is that it will not be possible to hold elections in all wards every year. This means that unless the Council decides to move to whole Council elections, the LGBCE is highly unlikely to accept the proposal on the number of Councillors. A consultation has, therefore, been held on how often elections should be held to appoint District Councillors.

The outcome of the consultation is reported here to enable the Committee to make a recommendation to the Council. The Council is required to hold a special meeting and this will take place on 16th December 2015. Any resolution to change the Council's election cycle will require the support of two thirds of those Members present and voting.

It is recommended that after reviewing the consultation responses, the Committee should decide whether to:

(a) Recommend to Council that it should resolve to move from elections by thirds to all-out elections with effect from the ordinary day of elections in May 2018.

OR

(b) Recommend to Council that it should not resolve to move to all-out elections, thus retaining a pattern of electing by thirds.

AND

(c) Recommend to Council that it makes an order to change the ordinary day of elections for parishes in the district so that they all elect councillors in 2018 and every four years thereafter.

1. WHAT IS THIS REPORT ABOUT/PURPOSE?

- 1.1 This report provides the Committee with an opportunity to consider the responses received during consultation of whether to change the Council's electoral frequency and to make a recommendation to the Council on whether to change to all-out elections from 2018.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND

- 2.1 To help inform the Council decision on whether to resolve to move to all-out elections.

3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED/ANALYSIS

- 3.1 The Council may make a resolution to move to all-out elections at any point, but the issue has been raised now because of the boundary review. If the Council retains elections by thirds then the LGBCE will look to adopt a pattern of three member wards across the district. If the Council resolves to move to all-out elections then the LGBCE may adopt a more mixed warding pattern with one, two and three member wards being proposed as appropriate.
- 3.2 All-out elections will be held in 2018 irrespective of whether a resolution is made by Council, as this is standard practice in areas that have new warding arrangements. If the Council does not resolve to move to all-out elections, then after the 2018 polls the Council will revert back to holding elections by thirds, with a third of its seats being contested again in 2019. If it does make a resolution to move to all-out elections from 2018, then all seats would next be contested in 2022.
- 3.3 If an authority wants to move to all-out or whole council elections it first needs to have carried out appropriate consultation with stakeholders. Any resolution must then be made by a specially convened meeting of the Council and requires the support of two thirds of voting members. If the Council does make such a resolution, it must publish an explanatory document and give notice to the Electoral Commission. If the Council makes a resolution, it may not pass another resolution within the next five years.
- 3.4 All Parish Councils in Huntingdonshire currently hold their elections in a year in which a corresponding district seat is contested. This helps to improve turnout in parish elections and minimises the likelihood of a standalone parish council election, which would be likely to cost the parish council considerably more money.
- 3.5 If the Council does make a resolution to move to all-out elections, it also has the power to make an order to change the year of election for parishes in the District to bring them in line with elections to the District Council. Any order made by the Council may make transitional provision to allow for the retirement of existing parish councillors at times different from those that would otherwise apply.
- 3.6 The LGBCE has recently commenced an electoral review of Huntingdonshire District Council. The first phase of the review was for the Council to produce a submission to the LGBCE, which provides a rationale, backed up with evidence, for a proposed Council size. The submission was approved on 30th September 2015 and duly forwarded to the LGBCE.

- 3.7 The submission recommended the retention of 52 Councillors based on variable numbers of Members per ward, rather than a fixed number. A consequence of retaining this flexibility is that it will not be possible to hold elections in all wards every year. This means that unless the Council decides to move to whole Council elections, the LGBCE is highly unlikely to accept the proposal on the number of Councillors.
- 3.8 A consultation has, therefore, been held on how often elections should be held to appoint District Councillors. Various interested parties have been contacted and invited to submit their views. The list includes:
- District Councillors;
 - County Councillors;
 - Town and Parish Councils;
 - Neighbouring District / City Councils;
 - Cambridgeshire County Council;
 - Local Members of Parliament;
 - Local Members of the European Parliament;
 - The Cambridgeshire Police and Crime Commissioner;
 - The Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations.
- 3.9 The consultation has been featured on the Council's website and responses can be submitted online. Printed copies of the consultation have been available from Pathfinder House. There also has been a press release.
- 3.10 Consultees have been asked to indicate whether they think the Council should hold elections by thirds or whole Council elections every four years. They have been able to submit comments as well if they wish. Responders were able to identify themselves but do not have to do so. Not all responders provided their names. Those who did included District Council Members, parish council representatives and members of the public.
- 3.11 The responses received appear in an Appendix hereto. At the time of writing 40 responses had been received. In summary, they reveal an equal split in opinion with 19 (47.5%) in favour of retaining elections by thirds while 21 (52.5%) preferring to move to all out elections every four years. Comments have been reproduced exactly as they were supplied.

4. KEY IMPACTS/RISKS? HOW WILL THEY BE ADDRESSED?

- 4.1 The risks are, firstly, that electoral equality will not exist and, secondly, that the LGBCE will reject the Council's proposals on Council size on the "technical" ground that the electoral cycle does not correspond with that recommended. The first risk is catered for by the purpose of the review itself. The second risk will be addressed at the full Council meeting in December.

5. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 5.1 The consultation commenced on 23rd October and will finish on 4th December 2015. Any responses received after the publication of the Agenda for the Standards Committee will be reported at the meeting. The Committee's recommendation together with the consultation outcome will be submitted to a special meeting of the Council on 16th December 2015. The LGBCE will then be informed of the Council's decision.

6. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN

6.1 Working with our communities - we want our communities to get involved with local decision making. In particular the objectives to:

- create stronger and more resilient communities, and
- empower local communities.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The primary legislation in this area is the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, which consolidates and amends legislation previously contained in the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1992 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. This legislation specifies the requirement to undertake electoral reviews and prescribes their procedures and parameters.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 A budget for elections already exists. Significant savings will be made if the Council does move to all-out elections.

9. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The review is required to have regard to:

- the need to secure equality of representation;
- the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
- the need to secure effective and convenient local government.

10 REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

10.1 To assist the Council to take a decision on whether to resolve to move to all-out elections.

10.2 The Committee is recommended to the Committee should decide whether to:

(a) Recommend to Council that it should resolve to move from elections by thirds to all-out elections with effect from the ordinary day of elections in May 2018.

OR

(b) Recommend to Council that it should not resolve to move to all-out elections, thus retaining a pattern of electing by thirds.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Local Government Boundary Commission for England – Technical Guidance

Local Government Boundary Commission for England – Taking part in the Electoral review of Huntingdonshire District Council – A guide for councillors

CONTACT OFFICER

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CONSULTATION ON MOVING TO ALL-OUT ELECTIONS

The consultation was open between 23rd October and 4th December 2015. Any further responses will be reported verbally to the Committee.

Do you think we should elect one third of our Councillors every year and have one year without an election or elect all of our Councillors every four years?

Answer Choices	Number	%
Elections by thirds	27	42.9
Whole council elections every four years	36	57.1

ALL RESPONSES

Comments are reported exactly as supplied.

Comments in favour of retaining elections by thirds

1	Elections by thirds	Elections by thirds provides a rolling renewal and reinvigoration of the council. Elections by thirds provides a frequent litmus test of the popularity of council policies, it would not be good to have a whole council elected in one go and in power for four years. Vital that wholesale disruption is avoided by regular refresh and introduction of new blood at frequent intervals. Bearing in mind the complexion of the council every effort should be made to facilitate the efforts of minor parties to gain seats. This occurs with election by thirds reducing the breadth of seats being fought at the same time. More balanced councils are better from a governance perspective and holding the executive to account. Large majorities are unhealthy.	Personal – Name Supplied
2	Elections by thirds	Better continuity	Personal – Name supplied
3	Elections by thirds	None	none
4	Elections by thirds	This would allow some continuity in councillors, of course some will fall by the wayside and those wards could elect for the nearest for usual election.	Personal – Name supplied
5	Elections by thirds	None	Personal – No name supplied
6	Elections by thirds	None	Cllr Robert H Brown, Ramsey

			Town Council
7	Elections by thirds	None	Personal – No name supplied
8	Elections by thirds	Evens out dramatic swings - no throw it all away and start again name	Personal – Name supplied
9	Elections by thirds	I see no reason to change the existing system	Personal – Name supplied
10	Elections by thirds	<p>I have lived in London, where the Councils have 4 yearly elections, and it has repeatedly led to complete Councils being elected almost as local popularity contests - based on the latest national political trends - rather than the work which is done locally.</p> <p>Four yearly elections also allows local Councillors to take their electorate for granted - whereby elected Councillors do very little for 3 years and then "work" for a year just to get re-elected. Yearly elections force the political parties to work better for their local people because their "party" is constantly under electoral review.</p> <p>We need to retain the Election by thirds principal.</p>	Personal – Name supplied
11	Elections by thirds	By thirds maintains some continuity of expertise and experience on the council	Personal – No name supplied
12	Elections by thirds	None	Personal – No name supplied
13	Elections by thirds	None	Personal – No name supplied
14	Elections by thirds	The elections by thirds provides for stability within the political leadership of the Council with the risk of majority swings being minimised. In addition elections by thirds allows for workloads to be managed across three years rather than a full all out election process	Personal – No name supplied
15	Elections by thirds	<p>My reasons are it gives continuity of Councillors and experience is much needed when assisting residents and parish councils - in a Ward with seven parishes rural areas rely very much on their Councillors for help and advice.</p> <p>Rural areas have different needs from that of urban areas. It is not the fact they do not wish to integrate but it is what it is, and they chose to live in a village and enjoy a rural lifestyle and their Councillors are part of this make up.</p>	Cllr Barbara Boddington
16	Elections by thirds	None	Personal – No name supplied
17	Elections by thirds	By continuing with the current system of elections by thirds, there is not a risk of	Carole Pollock, Parish Clerk, The

		losing all skilled and experienced Councillors in one go	Stukeleys Parish Council, The Stukeleys Parish
18	Elections by thirds	Councillors considered this matter at their meeting on 2nd November 2015 and unanimously agreed to support the present one third election process.	Diane Taylor (clerk), Great Gransden Parish Council
19	Elections by thirds	Waresley-cum-Tetworth Parish Council would prefer to retain the current system, which ensures a degree of continuity	Mrs Sylvia Sullivan (Acting Clerk), Waresley-cum-Tetworth Parish Council
20	Elections by thirds	<p>Warboys Parish Council support a continuation of the present system of elections by thirds by the District Council.</p> <p>There are a number of reasons for the Parish Council's decision.</p> <p>Members were of the opinion that full council elections can leave an authority hostage to the national picture prevailing at the time with an unpopular government heavily skewing a council election as this is used by the electorate as an opportunity for a protest vote. The potential result is swings in political control through no fault of a local council and the loss of experienced councillors. A large influx of new and inexperienced councillors takes time to function efficiently to the detriment of the local community.</p> <p>Furthermore, the cost savings of full council elections are not as great as may be first imagined. In the case of single member wards, there is no actual saving as an election for the district occurs only once every four years now. It has become the practice for joint elections to be held with national government, European Parliament or referenda. In the case of elections by thirds, there is a 3 in 4 chance of a joint election with the costs shared but in the case of a full council election, there is a possibility that the whole of the cost will fall on the district (in the case where there are no parish or town elections).</p> <p>If the Council moves to full council elections, all of the parish and town council elections will have to change to follow suit. With so many town and parish councils in Huntingdonshire, a joint national/European, district and town/parish election becomes difficult to administer. It brings the risk of town and parish council</p>	Roy Reeves, Clerk to Warboys Parish Council

		elections becoming similarly skewed if they are all held in a year when a government is at the depths of its unpopularity. The same is true of cost sharing with a smaller chance of costs being shared three ways as opposed to two.	
21	Elections by thirds	Alwalton Parish Council would prefer that HDC retain the current election process of "election by Thirds"	Mr Andy Golding - Clerk to Alwalton Parish Council
22	Elections by thirds		Emma Tajer, Farcet Parish Council
23	Elections by thirds	<p>We discussed the proposed change in HDC Elections practice at the last Godmanchester Town Council meeting 19/11/2015 and voted on which system people favoured.</p> <p>The vote was: 7 councillors for the whole council elections every 4 years 8 councillors for the elections by thirds</p>	Kath Spowart – Godmanchester Town Council
24	Elections by thirds		Personal – No name supplied
25	Elections by thirds	During my 12 years as a District Councillor most of the my elections were under "thirds" which was fine. Once, to balance things out, we were "all out" and I found that quite disturbing especially in a three seat Ward. My recommendation would be stay as is by thirds.	Personal – Name supplied
26	Elections by thirds	<p>Elections by thirds would keep the district in touch with the electors especially as there will also be town and parish elections taking place. I think that all-out elections are better for the larger party as they have the resources to cope with them. Also, all-out elections leave the possibility that unpopular or bad decisions will be forgotten by the time the next set of elections roll round. I feel that all out elections are also a snap shot in time and leave the possibility that in one bad year, dissatisfaction can lead to a result that is an anomaly and leave four years until it can be altered - as has happened with UKIP having undue influence at Shire Hall.</p> <p>I understand that the decision has already been made by the Cabinet to favour whole council elections, but I feel it is for the wrong reasons and one they may regret.</p>	Personal – No name supplied
27	Elections by thirds	I believe that it is much better to elect councillors by thirds as it makes our councillors more responsive to change. The public have a better opportunity to change their representatives voting annually rather than once every four years.	Personal – Name supplied

Comments in favour of moving to all out elections

1	Whole Council Elections	Appears a sensible solution	Cllr David Harty
2	Whole Council Elections	Reduce down the number of councillors as is happening with other councils throughout the Country	Personal – No name supplied
3	Whole Council Elections	In Ramsey we have an election every year as there are 3 district councillors and 1 County Councillor which I am sure is the same for most towns. This involves work and cost every year, not just for those standing, but for hiring of venues for the voting, the payments for the officers handing out voting slips, the venue and officers for the count. If HDC could match it's election with that of Cambs County Council, then there would only be one election every four years which would save money, in particular during these times when councils are looking for ways to economise. It would of course mean that you could have many councillors who have no experience of running a council but then they would have the officers supporting them.	Personal – No name supplied
4	Whole Council Elections	None	Personal – No name supplied
5	Whole Council Elections	I am just of the opinion that once every four years means less work and cost for everyone. Of course it would have to be well publicised to make people aware of what is happening and why.	Personal – Name supplied
6	Whole Council Elections	None	Personal – No name supplied
7	Whole Council Elections	Saves money and stops voter fatigue	Councillor Stephen Cawley
8	Whole Council Elections	The current 'thirds' method of elections appears nonsensical. It would not work, nor be acceptable, for a General Election, so why do local councils have this method? The principle of only one third of Councillors being up for election at any one time reduces, in my opinion at least, the possibility of the tax-payer being able to demonstrate their disappointment with the record of the council, as any change in numbers of councillors aligned to any particular political party, at that, is less likely to be able to influence the councils policy, behaviour, as those incumbent for another 1, 2 or 3 years are not likely to	Personal – Name supplied

		listen to any public opinion in the vote, as it does not directly effect them. A single 'Whole Council' election may just ensure that Councillors become more likely to listen to the public, and actually work for them, rather than for their own interests. In addition, surely a single 'whole council' election would be more cost effective to facilitate that three separate partial elections. In the current era of austerity this should also a be serious consideration for supporting a change.	
9	Whole Council Elections	None	Personal – Name supplied
10	Whole Council Elections	This is the cheapest option and would increase democratic accountability.	Personal – No name supplied
11	Whole Council Elections	Whole election arrangements are suitable for higher levels of government (county, central) and lower levels (parish, town) so there is no democratic reason why district councils should be different. Whole council elections would also save money.	Personal – Name supplied
12	Whole Council Elections	I believe that 3 member wards ie Eynesbury should have three councillors BUT each councillor to represent one third of this massive ward.	Derek Giles - Town, district and county councillor
13	Whole Council Elections	None	Personal – No name supplied
14	Whole Council Elections	None	Personal – No name supplied
15	Whole Council Elections	Much cleaner to elect all in one hit. I understand there is an additional benefit under this approach whereby we retain our existing Ward structure, which works well for us	Personal – Name supplied
16	Whole Council Elections	None	Personal – No name supplied
17	Whole Council Elections	this would save money also allow for a change in approach if the public wished the present system would allow any party with a significantly large majority still to be able to push ahead with unpopular actions regardless of public feeling.	Personal – No name supplied
18	Whole Council Elections	Whole Council elections every 4 years will reduce costs as well as giving more stability to the Council.	Personal – Name supplied
19	Whole Council Elections	None	Personal – Name supplied
20	Whole Council Elections	None	Houghton & Wyton Parish Council

21	Whole Council Elections	<p>Both the current and the proposed systems are inherently undemocratic as they fail to represent the votes of the many pair who do not vote for the winner in their ward or the controlling group in the council. The proposal to move to whole council elections is, on balance, slightly preferable as it offers the opportunity to remove the controlling group should that be the wish of electors while the current system would allow that group to remain in office even if it won no seats in one or two years of the electoral cycle.</p> <p>Really, we need a more democratic electoral system which reflects both majority and minority opinion and votes. Unless the council can offer that change, I hope it will engage not just on the frequency of elections but also on the visibility and accountability of its members.</p> <p>In addition, there should be regulations governing the change of political allegiance of elected members requiring them to seek re-election in these circumstances. I respect those who are open to new opinions but believe that as representatives such changes should be endorsed or rejected by their electorate as we saw recently in parliamentary by elections. Local councillors demonstrate no such honourable behaviour it seems.</p>	Personal – Name supplied
22	Whole Council Elections	None	Helen Taylor, Clerk to Yaxley Parish Council
23		Whilst Great Paxton Parish Council acknowledged the importance of continuity in terms of their local District Council representation, Parish Councillors recognised that 'whole council elections' represented better value for money at a time when local authorities needed to reduce services and was a cost saving which could be achieved without impacting on other 'essential' services.	Great Paxton Parish Council
24	Whole Council Elections	Members consider that should this happen the Town Council elections should also take place in the same year.	Alison Melnyczuk, St Ives Town Council
25	Whole Council Elections	This will be more efficient and could save costs	Jane Bowd, Holywell-cum-Needlingworth Parish Council
26	Whole Council Elections	I am writing on behalf of Great Staughton Parish Council to make our representations to the boundary review being undertaken by Huntingdonshire District Council.	Dianne Palmer, Clerk - Great Staughton Parish Council

		<p>The Parish Council believes that a District Councillor should be as accessible to the electorate as possible. In a relatively sparsely populated rural area we appreciate this means joining together a few similar villages into a single ward. If however every ward would need to be a minimum 3 Councillor ward, as we understand would be required to sustain annual elections, this would mean rural wards such as ours would be very geographically large. As a consequence the likelihood of having a relative local Councillor is significantly reduced.</p> <p>The Parish Council would therefore like to add its voice to a 4 yearly all out election and the retention of single member wards.</p>	
27	Whole Council Elections	Makes sense to be like CCC	Personal – No name supplied
28	Whole Council Elections	None	Personal – Name supplied
29	Whole Council Elections	None	Personal – Name supplied
30	Whole Council Elections	None	Personal – No name supplied
31	Whole Council Elections	I would like to see additional information on the relative cost of 'hosting' the two options. Are three smaller elections more or less cost effective than 1 whole election?	Personal – No name supplied
32	Whole Council Elections	Makes the whole process easier to understand	Personal – No name supplied
33	Whole Council Elections	With the budget cuts necessary over the coming years I would rather Huntingdonshire District Council held elections once every 4 years in line with County Council and Parish Councils.	Personal – Name supplied
34	Whole Council Elections	Would save money	Personal – No name supplied
35	Whole Council Elections	None	Personal – No name supplied
36	Whole Council Elections	Electors can concentrate their minds on local representation by whole council elections every four years. This is to be preferred to elections by thirds when local representation is generally overshadowed by the different national or regional polls that local polls are combined with.	Personal – Name supplied