

Gloucester City Council

Meeting:	Council	Date:	23rd January 2014
Subject:	Electoral Arrangements - Gloucester City Council		
Report Of:	Chief Executive		
Wards Affected:	All		
Key Decision:	Yes	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
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Appendices:	None		

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Council of the process the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is undertaking in its review of the electoral arrangements for Gloucester City Council.
- 1.2 To consider if consultation taken should be undertaken to review the cycle of elections for Gloucester City Council.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Council is asked to RESOLVE that

- (1) **The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) timetable be noted.**

And either

- (2) **That consultation on proposals to change the cycle of elections from thirds to whole council elections be commenced; or**
- (3) **That the current electoral cycle of elections by thirds be retained.**

3.0 Background and Key Issues

LGBCE Review

- 3.1 Since the first elections to the Council in 1973, elections have been held by thirds, with elections to Gloucestershire County Council being held in the fourth year. In year 1 of each three year cycle, elections are held for 15 Councillors; in year 2, elections are held for 11 Councillors; and in year 3, elections are held for 10 Councillors. This variation is due to the fact that the Council has 1, 2 and 3 Member Wards.

- 3.2 The LGBCE has determined that a review of the electoral arrangements for Gloucester City Council should take place. The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive met with LGBCE representatives in December 2013 to discuss the process and timetable for the review (which is detailed later in the report). Group Leaders have also been advised of the process and timetable that will be followed.
- 3.3 Briefly an electoral review is an examination of the Councils electoral arrangements. This means
- a. The total number of Members to be elected to the council;
 - b. The number and boundaries of electoral area for the purposes of the election of Councillors;
 - c. The number of Councillors for any electoral area of a local authority; and
 - d. The name of any electoral area.
- 3.4 The aim of the review will be to deliver good electoral equality across the area, ensuring that the ration of Councillors to electors is a nearly the same as possible. The LGBCE will balance the need for electoral equality with the need to reflect local community identities and interests and provide for efficient and convenient local government. In a two tier county council area the LGBCE must have regard to the desirability in aligning county electoral divisions with city ward boundaries.
- 3.5 As an authority that elects by thirds, the LGBCE will ask that warding proposals be based on a uniform pattern of three member wards as things stand, although as detailed later in the report, the Council may wish to consider changing its electoral cycle to whole council elections prior to the electoral review.
- 3.6 In advance of the formal commencement of the review, the LGBCE has a preliminary period of about six months to assist the Council, Members and officers with their preparations.
- 3.7 The Council and its stakeholders will each have the opportunity to contribute to the proposals and assist the LGBCE with its deliberations. The LGBCE will have regards to such contributions before they publish any draft recommendations and those draft recommendations will be subject to formal public consultation. Final recommendations will form the basis of an order laid in draft before Parliament, leading to whole Council elections in May 2016.

Electoral Arrangements

- 3.8 As a result of the electoral review being conducted by LGBCE, there will be whole Council elections in May 2016.
- 3.9 The LGBCE review gives an opportunity for the Council to review its electoral arrangements. Under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, the Council can resolve to move from the present arrangements of elections by thirds to whole council elections. The Council may not resolve to move from elections by thirds to elections by halves.
- 3.10 The Council's decision about its electoral arrangements is relevant to the review being carried out by LGBCE. The LGBCE must, by law, take into account several

statutory criteria when taking decisions on an electoral review and they need to ensure that the electoral arrangements of a local authority reflect its electoral cycle.

- 3.11 The electoral cycle has an impact on the shape of the LGBCE's recommendations and therefore the Council's decision on the future electoral arrangements will influence the shape of the Commission's review in terms of the pattern of wards and the number of Councillors each ward has, and may also impact on the number of Councillors in total.
- 3.12 Under the legislation, the Council must not pass a resolution to change its electoral arrangements unless it has taken reasonable steps to consult such persons it thinks appropriate on the proposed change and the resolution must be passed at a meeting which is specially convened for the purpose of deciding the resolution, and by a majority of at least two thirds of the members voting on it.
- 3.13 The resolution must specify the year for the first ordinary elections of the Council at which all Councillors are to be elected and the year specified must not be a County Council elections year.
- 3.14 The Act does not state what steps are considered to be reasonable or the form of consultation required. However, it would be reasonable to take out a one page article in the Gloucester Citizen summarising the advantages and disadvantages, and encouraging responses by way of email (a special email address would be set up) and a Freepost address could be used. Information would also be available on the Council's website detailing the advantages and disadvantages together with a link to an online survey.
- 3.15 Should the Council wish to begin consultation on proposals to change to whole Council elections, the consultation period would run from 10th February until 7th March with a report to a specially convened meeting of Council on 27th March 2014.

4.0 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 There are no alternative options with regard to the LGBCE review and the Council must implement its recommendations.
- 4.2 Should Council choose not to consult on whole Council elections, then the LGBCE would be advised that the Council wished to continue to be elected by thirds and they would progress with their review accordingly.

5.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 5.1 The recommendations in the report are to ensure that Members have clarity around the process the LGBCE will follow and the need to consider whole Council elections as part of the review process.

6.0 Future Work and Conclusions

- 6.1 Once the LGBCE review commences there will be a series of activities that the Council will need to undertake to enable the Commission to make their recommendations. The timetable is detailed below.

6.2 Should the Council agree to commence consultation on whole council elections, additional work would need to take place. The schedule for the consultation will follow once finalised.

7.0 Financial Implications

7.1 Resources for supporting the LGBCE review will be found from within the Democratic and Elections Team and it is envisaged that there will be a project lead, although the resource for this is still to be decided. The costs of responding to the Commission's consultations during the electoral review will be met from existing budgets.

7.2 There are financial implications relating to the pattern of elections. Should the Council continue to elect in thirds there will not be additional costs. A decision to move to all out elections would save a significant amount of money and would impact on future budget planning.

7.3 The respective costs of the two options for the period 2014 to 2020 are set out in the table below. Whole Council elections do cost slightly more than elections by thirds as they involve elections across the whole of the City, however all the stations/staff etc costs would remain the same regardless.

	Elections by thirds <i>Estimated Costs</i>	Whole Council elections. <i>Estimated Costs</i>
May 2014	£70,000 (based on split with European Elections – All 15 Wards up for election)	
May 2015	£60,000 (based on split with Parliamentary Elections – only 11 Wards up for election)	
May 2016	£60,000 (based on split with PCC Elections – only 10 Wards up for election)	£125,000
May 2017 (County Council elections)	No City Council Elections	No City Council Elections if all out
May 2018	£125,000 – All 15 Wards, no combination)	No City Council Elections if all out
May 2019	£60,000 (based on split with Parliamentary Elections – only 11 Wards up for election)	No City Council Elections if all out
May 2020	£60,000 (based on split with PCC Elections – only 10 Wards up for election)	£125,000
Total 2014 - 2020	£445,000 (<i>estimate</i>)	£250,000 (<i>estimate</i>)
Saving compared to current budget		£195,000 (<i>estimate</i>)

Note: There will be elections for 15 Councillors in May 2014. There will be whole Council elections in May 2016 to implement the outcome of the Boundary Commission's review.

8.0 Legal Implications

- 8.1 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, states that a District Council that is subject to election by thirds or halves, may resolve that it be subject to whole Council elections under Section 34 of the Act. The Council may not resolve to move from elections by thirds to election by halves.
- 8.2 Section 24 of the Localism Act 2011 amends the timetable for changing English district councils' electoral schemes, enabling a Council to choose when their electoral cycle can change.

9.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

- 9.1 The LGBCE is responsible for some of the risks related to the completion of the review.
- 9.2 The Council is responsible for the risks surrounding will put in place steps to ensure that its submissions are completed in a timely way, including a decision on the size of the Council, a decision on whether to change the electoral cycle and responding to the Commission's proposals.

10.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA):

- 10.1 The PIA Screening Stage was completed and did not identify any potential or actual negative impact, therefore a full PIA was not required.

11.0 Other Corporate Implications

- 11.1 None specific to the report

12.0 Background Documents:

- 12.1 All background papers are available electronically.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/28/contents>

The provisions have been amended by Section 24 of the Localism Act 2011

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents/enacted>

The main change is to remove the designated period during which resolutions can be passed.

LGBCE on submissions about Council size.

<http://www.lgbce.org.uk/guidance-policy-and-publications/guidance>