

Meeting:	Special Council	Date:	27th March 2014
Subject:	The Council's Electoral Arrangements		
Report Of:	Chief Executive		
Wards Affected:	All		
Key Decision:	No	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
Contact Officer:	Sue Mullins, Head of Legal and Policy Development		
	Email: sue.mullins@gloucester.gov.uk	Tel: 39-6110	
Appendices:	1. Consultation information		

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To consider whether or not to change the election arrangements for Gloucester City Council.

2.0 Recommendations

Council is asked to RESOLVE:

EITHER

- 2.1 to implement whole council elections in May 2016 and every four years thereafter.**

OR

- 2.2 to retain the current arrangements of elections by thirds.**

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 Since the first elections to the Council in 1973, elections have been held by thirds, which means generally that elections are held for approximately a third of all seats in three successive years. In the fourth year, elections to Gloucestershire County Council are held.
- 3.2 As a result of the electoral review being conducted by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, there will be whole council elections in May 2016 to implement a new pattern of ward boundaries and any changes made to the number of Members elected to the Council.
- 3.3 The electoral review gives an opportunity for the Council to review its electoral arrangements. Under section 32 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, the Council can resolve to move from the present arrangements of election by thirds to whole council elections. There are some important statutory requirements about making such a decision which are set out in section 33 of the 2007 Act:

- 3.3.1 The Council must not pass the resolution unless it has taken reasonable steps to consult such persons as it thinks appropriate on the proposed change. A public consultation has been undertaken on this topic and the results are reported below;
- 3.3.2 The resolution must be passed at a meeting which is specially convened for the purpose of deciding the resolution with notice of the object, and by a majority of at least two thirds of the Members voting on it; and
- 3.3.3 The resolution must specify the year for the first ordinary elections of the council at which all councillors are to be elected, as set out in paragraph 2.1 above.
- 3.4 The Council's decision about its electoral arrangements is relevant to the electoral review being conducted by the Boundary Commission. The Commission must, by law, take into account several statutory criteria when taking decisions on an electoral review. They include the need to ensure that the electoral arrangements of a local authority reflect its electoral cycle and therefore the electoral cycle has an impact on the shape of the Commission's recommendations.
- 3.5 If the decision of the Council is that election by thirds continues, then the number of councillors to be elected to the Council is likely to be a multiple of three. The Commission will start from the presumption that its recommendations will be based on three member wards. It will depart from this approach only if there would be conflict with the statutory criteria for its reviews. It is not therefore guaranteed that, if the Council decides to continue elections by thirds, the present mixture of multi-member wards of 3 or, in some cases, 2 members and single member wards would continue.
- 3.6 If the outcome of this special meeting of the Council is that the Council resolves to move to whole council elections in 2016 and every four years thereafter, the Commission's decision on the number of councillors does not have to produce a number that is divisible by three. The Commission will start from the premise of single member wards. However it has flexibility and in practice it often makes recommendations that involve a mixture of single-member and multi-member wards.
- 3.7 The Council's decision on its future electoral arrangements will therefore influence the shape of the Commission's review in terms of the pattern of wards and the number of councillors that each ward has, and may also have an impact on the number of councillors elected to the Council.

4.0 Results of the public consultation

- 4.1 In compliance with the statutory requirement for consultation, the Council has conducted a public consultation on the electoral arrangements for the Council. This ran from 10th February to 7th March 2014. The consultation paper was published on the web site and made available at the City Libraries, and in the local press. Members of the public and other interested parties were able to take part in the consultation by completing a simple response form on the web site or by returning it in hard copy. The consultation information is contained at Appendix 1.

4.2 The results of the consultation were as follows:

Responses Received

Change to Whole Council elections = 33

Keep it as it is elections by thirds = 3

4.3 Whilst the level of response is low, the return rate is not dissimilar to those at other Councils.

4.4 As with any decision following consultation, the Council should carefully consider and have regard to the results of the public consultation. This does not mean it is bound to implement the most popular option, as there are a range of factors that the Council has to take into account.

5.0 Alternative Options Considered

5.1 The options are contained within the report.

6.0 Reasons for Recommendations

6.1 To enable the Council to consider what electoral arrangements it wishes to have in place from 2016 onwards, following the boundary review being conducted by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

7.0 Future Work and Conclusions

7.1 Subject to the decision of Council, the outcome will be communicated to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England so that they can use the outcome of the decision to shape their recommendations.

7.2 If the Council passes a resolution to implement whole council elections, the 2007 Act imposes duties on the Council to publish an explanatory document about the change for the benefit of the public, and to give notice to the Electoral Commission of the change. These steps will be put in hand depending on the outcome of the Council's consideration of this matter.

8.0 Financial Implications

8.1 The decision on electoral arrangements will have financial implications. Retaining elections by thirds results in no additional costs as the budget is already based on this pattern of elections. A decision to move to whole council elections could produce savings in the future, and could help the Council when setting a fully balanced budget.

8.2 The respective costs of the two options for the period from 2014 to 2020 are set out in the table below. Whole council elections cost more than elections by thirds as they involve elections across the whole City, whereas in each year of elections by thirds, elections are held over the majority of the City.

	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>)

(Financial Services have been consulted in the preparation this report.)

9.0 Legal Implications

- 9.1 The relevant provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 have been mentioned above.
- 9.2 For the avoidance of doubt, the legislative requirement for a two thirds majority of councillors present and voting for a resolution to implement whole council elections means that the number of councillors in support that is needed to pass the threshold can vary depending on how many members are present at the meeting.

10.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

- 10.1 Any decision of the Council is subject to the potential for judicial review and therefore the Council needs to take into account relevant considerations and information about the issue.
- 10.2 A move to whole Council elections could enable longer term approaches to be taken on matters such as Council strategy and Member development, and the Council's decision-making processes would only be affected by the reporting restrictions associated with the period before elections in every fourth year.

10.3 Retention of elections by thirds could mean greater stability and continuity for the Council approximately one third of the Councillor positions are affected by any election.

11.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA):

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

12.0 Other Corporate Implications

Community Safety

11.1 There are no implications.

Sustainability

11.2 There are no implications.

Staffing & Trade Union

11.3 There are no implications.

Background Documents: None.