

COUNCIL –SPECIAL MEETING

2 April 2014

OPTIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S ELECTORAL CYCLE – FINAL RESULTS OF  
PUBLIC CONSULTATION EXERCISE

REPORT OF ELECTORAL REVIEW MANAGER

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RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB2567 – Options for the Council's Electoral Cycle – 19 March 2014

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

1. At its meeting held on 8 January 2014, the Council agreed to commence statutory consultation on a possible change to whole Council elections for implementation in 2016, and resolved:

“That in undertaking the consultation it be made clear that the Council has not at this stage expressed a preference as to whether to make a change to whole Council elections every four years or to retain the existing system of elections by thirds”

2. The reason for undertaking the consultation at this stage was to give the Council the opportunity to decide whether it wished to make a change from its current electoral cycle of elections by thirds, before the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBC) undertakes its warding review of the Council later in the year. The Council's decision on the electoral cycle will affect the way in which the future warding arrangements are implemented.

3. If the Council does not make any decision upon its electoral cycle, the existing election by thirds system will continue.
4. The public consultation exercise closed on 14 March 2014 and the final results are set out in Appendix A.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

That Council notes the final results of the public consultation exercise.

**OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:**

All as set out in Report CAB2567

**APPENDICES:**

Appendix A - Outcome of Public Consultation exercise

**Frequency of City Council Elections – Outcome of Public Consultation Exercise**

**Public Consultation Results**

Retention of one third system - 83 (51.6%)

Change to whole Council (all out) - 78 (48.4%)

**Parish Council responses**

Retention of one third system - 13

Change to whole Council (all out) - 3

**Other organisations responses**

Retention of one third system - 3

Change to whole Council (all out) - 1

## **SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION FROM PARISH COUNCILS AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS**

### **PARISH COUNCILS**

#### **Owslebury PC**

The Parish Council considered the issues raised in the Consultation Paper issued by Winchester City Council. The Parish Council determined it would **recommend the retention of the 'one third' electoral system**. The Council viewed this as a fairer basis for representation, notwithstanding the small additional cost involved when compared with the 'all-out' system. The Parish Council is also concerned that any change to the established electoral system would have unintended consequences, and that it would be best to keep to a tried and tested process for representation.

#### **Otterbourne PC**

The vote was in favour of **retaining the current system**.

The main reasons behind this decision were:

- that the present system would help to better retain the ongoing base of knowledge and experience which was important in an ever increasing world of information and regulations
- that more regular local elections were less likely to be politically aligned to central government and the effect of support/confidence in any one national party at a particular point in time.

#### **Whiteley PC**

**Supports the current system** of election by thirds.

#### **Denmead Parish Council**

Denmead Parish Council understood the advantages of both the one third system and the all-out system. At the conclusion of their discussions, they asked me to convey to you their **preference for the one third system**. They agreed that the continuity afforded by this system outweighed any cost saving that would be made from an all-out system

#### **Upham PC**

Upham Parish Council discussed this Consultation last evening at our Parish Council Meeting and it was agreed that we would like to **continue with a one third system**. It was felt that this gives better continuity and works well at present.

#### **Headbourne Worthy PC**

**Retain one third system** as it is.

## **Durley PC**

**Continue with present system**, as it works well. There is some continuity in two thirds of the Council and it allows one third which has been elected to get settled in if it is their first time as a Councillor.

## **Bishops Waltham PC**

**One third system** should be retained.

## **Colden Common PC**

Favours retention of the **one third system**.

## **Swanmore PC**

The **system of thirds should be retained**. The continuity that this current system provides outweighs any cost saving of introducing any other method.

## **Wickham PC**

**Prefer election by thirds** to maintain Council continuity and expertise whilst also ensuring accountability.

## **Kings Worthy PC**

**Satisfied with one third frequency** of elections as they currently are.

## **Sparsholt PC**

**Favours the current one third system** as it made councillors more accountable and was more democratic.

## **Bramdean and Hinton Ampner PC**

The one third system has the advantage of retaining some Councillors with experience. However, as **the all-out system** would probably achieve the same outcome with experienced Councillors being re-elected for a second term (or more), it would seem sensible to consider this option which also has the advantage of a potential budget saving.

## **Littleton & Harestock PC**

**Change to all whole Council elections** to increase competition and reduce election costs.

## **Compton & Shawford PC**

**Favour whole Council elections**, which should alleviate voter fatigue.

## OTHER CONSULTEES

### Winchester Conservative Association

Commented **not to change the present system** because:-

- 1/3 elections allow for continuity of experienced councillors to lead the Council, with only a maximum of 1/3 new councillors possible. Many new councillors tell me it is a year before they feel confident in knowing their way around the Council. This continuity must make life easier for the Council Officers.
- 1/3 elections give the voters an ongoing ability to let the Councillors/party leading the Council to know if they are doing a good job or not.
- Political parties would find it harder to maintain trained support team for the councillors/candidates if elections only occur once every 4 years.
- 1/3 elections allow (with the exception of the present one man wards) those constituents needing help continuity in following up their individual cases.
- With 1/3 elections, (again with the exception of the one man wards) there is always a councillor who is not up for election to concentrate on the constituents issues.

### University of Winchester

We recognise the advantages and disadvantages of both systems.

Certainly, the one-third, more frequent elections help our students engage in local politics. Most students only study for a three year period and less frequent elections would serve to disenfranchise some cohorts. Our journalism students also gain practical experience by covering the more frequent elections and their weekly on-line broadcasts are viewed by a large number of the student body. Also our politics students have found the election useful to engage in local democracy and one of them even stood for election as a city councillor. So there are clear advantages to the current system that we can endorse.

We also recognise the disadvantages of the current system, especially the potential for political uncertainty and, in times of public sector financial pressures, the additional cost implications.

In conclusion, **we marginally favour the one-third system**, but would not raise any major objection, and could certainly understand, the need to move to a more efficient voting mechanism in the current economic climate.

### Meon Valley Conservative Association

Having consulted widely with councillors and residents within the Meon Valley, the general consensus is the **wish to retain elections on an annual one-third basis**. Residents feel more involved in the political process if they have the opportunity to vote regularly. Once every four years distances the electorate from total involvement.

You will know that turnout in many of the Meon Valley wards is higher than average, thus highlighting a greater participation than might otherwise be expected. We recognise that all out elections would save the council money. However this is of secondary importance to the wishes of residents.

### **Chamber of Commerce – Winchester Area Committee**

The Winchester Area Committee of Hampshire Chamber of Commerce has discussed these options and both their importance and impact on local businesses, which is especially important given the vital role that the City Council can play in promoting and sustaining local economic development.

From the perspective of businesses the two key requirements of election frequency are cost-effectiveness and continuity of the Council's strategies.

Cost-effectiveness is important as any decision on the frequency of elections should be taken with a clear understanding of the cost of the two options, as improved cost-effectiveness will potentially allow the City Council to invest further in important local services and support. It appears from the consultation paper that the move to Whole Council elections would release a saving of £50,000 per year and therefore the recommendation of the Chamber of Commerce is that weight should be given to the option which is the most cost-effective- both in terms of money and the resources of Councillors and internal staff within the Council with responsibility for facilitating and administering the elections.

The continuity of the Council's strategy is very important to businesses since it is vital for local businesses to be able to plan ahead. If an election frequency gives rise to the possibility of large "shifts" in economic development policy then it will increase the uncertainty for local businesses, who may be less willing to invest. Businesses can grow and thrive much better with a clear understanding of the Council's strategy for economic development and business support. If an election frequency gives rise to a trend towards a sharp "reversal" of previous economic development policy for political reasons then it is also to be discouraged for a similar reason.

Although it is difficult to forecast the impact of a whole council election approach to the continuity of economic development policy, on the basis of the consultation paper the Chamber of Commerce would **support a move to a whole council system**, as it appears the system that is likely to prove most cost-effective option and therefore release funds to expand local services and the local economy.

### **Hampshire County Council**

No comment – it is a decision for Winchester City Council.

## Comments made by the public when voting

(these are listed in date order and have not been divided between the two options, but most preferences are self evident from the comments made)

- |    |  |                       |
|----|--|-----------------------|
| 1  | Success of administration's programme can be easily evaluated. Continuity is unnecessary as paid officers are responsible for delivery   | Mar 12, 2014 4:38 PM  |
| 2  | Allows for more decisive local decision-making with less short-termism. Saves money and voter fatigue.   | Mar 12, 2014 12:18 PM |
| 3  | I'm for 'all out' the current system prevents decision making and progress on an annual basis as the margin between libs and conservatives is so small.  | Mar 12, 2014 10:54 AM |
| 4  | I prefer election by thirds because it makes the Councillors more accountable to the electorate.   | Mar 12, 2014 12:00 AM |
| 5  | whilst I understand the principle of voter engagement with regard to thirds, I really do feel that an element of certainty is a better way forward as otherwise the council lurches from one thing to another.   | Mar 11, 2014 5:45 PM  |
| 6  | This will save additional cost to the community  | Mar 11, 2014 10:03 AM |
| 7  | Pros and cons for both systems BUT the current election by thirds seem to confuse the public so the simpler system (to some extent in line with the way national govt is elected) is preferable on balance.  | Mar 10, 2014 4:21 PM  |
| 8  | Enables continuity of experience and knowledge of current issues to be maintained.   | Mar 10, 2014 3:23 PM  |
| 9  | Periodic distractions and a revolving door on working relationships hinder focus and progress. Much like a high employee turnover organisation, they are less effective.   | Mar 7, 2014 5:03 PM   |
| 10 | It does seem efficient longterm to have local elections, European elections and parliamentary elections on same day from an administrative and financial point of view. However, some of the money saved through whole elections could be spent on better training for local councillors and parish councillors. For example, being briefed on council policy and protocol. Also, training in dealing with the media and in dealing with the electorate where sensitive and confidential matters are being dealt with. The electorate are at the end of day people who have a wealth of knowledge and experience themselves in different walks of life but not everyone can stand and only one can be chosen to be an MP. It is important to have the correct people with the right skills and training who can engage with the electorate and gain their trust! | Mar 7, 2014 2:03 PM   |
| 11 | Retention of experienced Councillors is useful and also this system is probably less aligned to national parties than an "all out" system is likely to be.   | Mar 6, 2014 12:18 PM  |
| 12 | There is no need to have so many city councillors. 3 per ward in Winchester Town is too many. It could be reduced to 1 per ward.   | Mar 5, 2014 3:45 PM   |
| 13 | Ideally it'd be 'Election by thirds with recall', but I prefer more democracy than less.   | Mar 4, 2014 8:11 PM   |
| 14 | While engagement with electorate technically happens more often, system is confusing so in actual fact voter numbers should increase with all out election   | Mar 4, 2014 7:06 PM   |
| 15 | At the same time increase number of wards slightly to leave a council of say 25 members. Thereby achieving a significant saving in councillor expenses   | Mar 3, 2014 2:51 PM   |



etc

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|----|---|-----------------------|
| 16 | Sustains the vibrancy of local democracy and avoids potentially costly policy shifts after 4 yearly changes in administration.  | Feb 27, 2014 9:51 AM  |
| 17 | The councillors being held to account more frequently is a good thing. Also the potential loss of experienced councillors may be crippling to the effectiveness of the council.             | Feb 26, 2014 9:11 PM  |
| 18 | The current system is very unfair to 3 member wards where the strongest party gets all of the seats. One election every 4 years would increase turnout.                                     | Feb 26, 2014 9:06 PM  |
| 19 | The present system ensure councillors are kept aware of current issues. They are more responsive to changing circumstances. Rupert Pitt, Stoney Lane.                                       | Feb 26, 2014 5:08 PM  |
| 20 | The whole system gives those elected time to carry out policies. I do think more should be done to engage voters generally such as online voting.   | Feb 26, 2014 1:58 PM  |
| 21 | Whole council elections will result in less accountability to voters. Current system means that just about every year the councillors have to come out have to come out and talk to voters. | Feb 25, 2014 9:00 PM  |
| 22 | Reduced cost and possible benefits with delivering programme  | Feb 25, 2014 6:21 PM  |
| 23 | If a council is ineffective you can get rid of them sooner  | Feb 25, 2014 1:57 PM  |
| 24 | If a council is ineffective you can get rid of them sooner  | Feb 25, 2014 1:57 PM  |
| 25 | Increased accountability and engagement with the electorate, and the retention of some experienced councillors are benefits which are worth the extra cost.                                 | Feb 25, 2014 11:48 AM |
| 26 | A WHOLE NEW COUNCIL COULD BRING ABOUT A COMPLETE STANDSTILL.  | Feb 24, 2014 11:11 AM |
| 27 | I think it would be preferable to have infrequent but wholesale elections to the local council as with the national government.   | Feb 24, 2014 10:07 AM |
| 28 | Not many of the voters vote now, if it was every 4 years, they would not vote at all.   | Feb 24, 2014 8:01 AM  |
| 29 | Election by thirds puts all party activists on a continual treadmill. It is no longer practicable.  | Feb 23, 2014 2:02 PM  |
| 30 | I prefer "Whole Council (All Out)" because it's easier to explain to the public, and that's vital in trying to get the public more interested in local democracy.                           | Feb 23, 2014 11:27 AM |
| 31 | 'A week is a long time in politics' and 4 years is far too long. The electorate needs the existing system to be able to react to changing circumstances and new information.                | Feb 23, 2014 11:09 AM |
| 32 | This provides a degree of continuity where as the Whole Council system encourages short termism and stop-start policies.  | Feb 23, 2014 9:51 AM  |
| 33 | retaining some continuity is desirable and so is giving the ruling party a wake up call if necessary!   | Feb 22, 2014 2:28 PM  |

- 34 The election by thirds means that representatives are encouraged to maintain good contact with their electors. Whole council system can easily lose contact with electors, and also make voters feel even less important and even more disillusioned with their representatives than they are now. Definitely a worse system. Feb 20, 2014 10:37 PM
- 35 Better use of resources and enables an election free window of opportunity to get things done Feb 20, 2014 5:59 PM
- 36 I would prefer to have decentralised representation as I fear once a vote has taken place the electors lose all influence as with Police and Crime Commissioners who refuse to accept input that does not accord with their preconceptions. When I asked what I could do if dissatisfied as I most certainly am the answer Simon Hayes gave was 'wait for the election' If that is democracy it surprises me not at all. That is the same as absolute power which corrupts absolutely. Those who are voted into office often sub allocate their responsibilities to non elected civil servants who then raise taxes as they decide which means we are paying for the privilege of being abused. It is madness! Section 106 notices for instance impose arbitrary taxes on those who who apply for planning permission but those who defy planning laws and build without permission are granted retrospective authority so evade the tax. If powers were more widely spread in the localisation spoken about as 'localism', perhaps the 'locals' would take an interest and speak up? It seems to me much could be saved by using volunteers with an interest no salary but receiving a subsistence allowance. Too many it seems draw an income from being on committees but not actually doing anything for the benefit of the community. Feb 20, 2014 1:37 PM
- 37 preference for simpler system Feb 20, 2014 12:04 PM
- 38 Anything that avoids voter-fatigue and encourages local people to feel they have a voice Feb 20, 2014 11:11 AM
- 39 I believe "Election by thirds" reduces interest and participation in local politics, because the likelihood of change of control at any single election is reduced. It is also confusing for voters - and multi-tier local government is already confusing enough. Feb 20, 2014 10:20 AM
- 40 I feel that this method provides greater continuity Feb 20, 2014 10:08 AM
- 41 It allows for reaction to change Feb 20, 2014 8:08 AM
- 42 Ashcroft is doing a fine job! Feb 19, 2014 8:28 PM
- 43 This gives more continuity, existing councillors being aware of issues 'in the pipeline' and knowledge of previous decisions. Feb 19, 2014 8:00 PM
- 44 Why not election by half, with election every 2 years? Having some carry over experience is a good idea. Feb 19, 2014 7:40 PM
- 45 The current system puts Councillors closer to their electors. The all-out system promotes blocs, including politicised parties: which is inappropriate for the subject matter of Councils. Feb 19, 2014 6:25 PM
- 46 because it will save costs and is unlikely to diminish the quality of the council Feb 19, 2014 6:11 PM
- 47 The most important thing is to have frequent opportunity to censure the party in power. Feb 19, 2014 5:38 PM

48	Keep costs down and give councils a mandate for 4 years, a bit like Parliament.	Feb 19, 2014 5:04 PM
49	a whole system has a lack of continuity that the thirds system benefits from and ensures the potential for 'new blood' more frequently.	Feb 19, 2014 4:48 PM
50	It makes sense if it saves money, and any money saved can be used for public services. Three councillors are far too many, two should be enough, and once every four years for the whole council is more than enough, like any other election. And people are more likely to vote if they only have to do it every four years.	Feb 19, 2014 4:29 PM
51	It makes sense if it saves money, and any money saved can be used for public services. Three councillors are far too many, two should be enough, and once every four years for the whole council is more than enough, like any other election. And people are more likely to vote if they only have to do it every four years.	Feb 19, 2014 4:29 PM
52	Sufficient councillors would be re-elected so that continuity and experience would not be lost.	Feb 19, 2014 4:22 PM
53	I am voting for this option because it is cost saving.	Feb 19, 2014 4:07 PM
54	Elections by Thirds makes the Council more frequently accountable to the electorate.	Feb 19, 2014 12:22 AM
55	Even better would be to reorganise so that we didn't have two councils each quick to shift responsibility on the other. This would provide more transparency for council tax payers and avoid duplication.	Feb 17, 2014 5:48 PM
56	It will give the Council the stability of a 4 year term to govern without the distraction of elections in 3 out of 4 years. This leads to better government. It will also save time and money	Feb 17, 2014 9:52 AM
57	Having worked for various councils (though not WCC), all out elections every 4 years allow the administration to focus on actually delivering real change which can be strategic, whereas annual elections tend to lead to short-term thinking and reactive approaches to everything so that it looks good by May. So with 4 year elections, the electorate can actually judge whether the current administration/councillors have made a difference.	Feb 13, 2014 5:00 PM
58	Whilst election by thirds does risk 'voter fatigue', it is better to have a more frequently accountable Council. All-out elections will allow and unpopular/ineffective group to maintain control of the City for too long - just look at Gordon Brown.....	Feb 11, 2014 4:59 PM
59	Why not a good old-fashioned compromise - elections by halves. M. Bennett	Feb 11, 2014 10:56 AM
60	too many changes at one election would not be good for the community	Feb 11, 2014 10:55 AM
61	This is the view of Badger Farm Parish Council inserted by the Clerk	Feb 11, 2014 9:22 AM
62	Reduce the number of city and county councillors. That quantity not needed or justifiable.	Feb 10, 2014 10:58 PM
63	Would prefer a total reform, so that the number of seats per party was more closely related to the overall number of votes each party receives.	Feb 7, 2014 12:14 PM

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|----|---|-----------------------|
| 64 | Save money with less work for Council Officers and for local parties.   | Feb 7, 2014 9:30 AM   |
| 65 | Not only should it 'provide a four year term of office for an Administration to deliver its programme', it should also allow time for political parties to focus on something other than winning the next election. Re. possible voter fatigue, presumably four-yearly elections won't be aligned with EU or any other variety, so the visit to the polling station won't be so infrequent people forget. That said, decreased frequency may make it more novel and significant and even increase turn-out. | Feb 3, 2014 12:45 PM  |
| 66 | Having worked under both systems, a whole Council approach is much more effective. With election by thirds, Councils become over party politicised with Councillors having their eye to the next election, rather than the good of the local area. The whole council grinds to a halt for 3 months each year in the build up to elections. With whole party, members have to learn to work together for the good of the local community and usually achieve a much better outcome.                          | Feb 2, 2014 6:43 PM   |
| 67 | People get fed up of going to the polls just about every year which in turn, creates apathy.  | Jan 31, 2014 12:44 PM |
| 68 | Given the recent examples of non-consultation over building on green spaces and the apparent lack of knowledge as to how such space is used by the local communities, it is vital that Councillors are 'held to account' regularly. Four years between consultations is far too long.   | Jan 31, 2014 12:42 PM |
| 69 | It is important to have elections by thirds to keep the council responsive and accountable to the community.  | Jan 31, 2014 11:39 AM |
| 70 | An all out system is much better value for money for tax payers and for the council's budget. Also, it would create greater stability for the administration to deliver its manifesto effectively.  | Jan 31, 2014 10:54 AM |
| 71 | It is cheaper and avoids political paralysis or electioneering in the run up to elections 3 years out of every 4.   | Jan 30, 2014 2:21 PM  |
| 72 | There will still be experienced councillors left on Council using this method, plus more people are likely to vote in a larger campaign and it will cost considerably less.   | Jan 30, 2014 8:46 AM  |
| 73 | There are far too many councillors in each ward making each of them less accountable.   | Jan 29, 2014 11:02 AM |
| 74 | At present I never know when who is up for election, whether it affects me or not, and why I should care. All out system would improve all of this.   | Jan 29, 2014 10:50 AM |
| 75 | I think frequent engagement and the ability to hold the Council regularly to account are worth £50,000 a year.  | Jan 29, 2014 10:50 AM |
| 76 | I'd rather have one member wards.   | Jan 29, 2014 10:48 AM |
| 77 | This allows for continuity, which I think is important. In four years a lot of damage can be done by bad decisions, and the electorate have no way of showing their feelings.   | Jan 29, 2014 8:38 AM  |
| 78 | Changes (because of our silly political party system) are more gradual than the usually opposite changes often experienced by the "all out" election system.  | Jan 28, 2014 2:52 PM  |

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- 79 Hopefully, democratic accountability can be improved by reducing voter fatigue and improving turnout numbers, with the longer cycle making the vote 'more important' to not miss. I'd expect a significant number of councillors would normally be re-elected and so whilst there would be some change, not all institutional knowledge would be lost at once (unless the the public had a complete loss of confidence, in which case there are potentially bigger problems!) Jan 28, 2014 1:49 PM
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- 80 Cheaper and most sensible option. Makes complete sense to move to an 'all out' system. Jan 28, 2014 1:23 PM
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- 81 Does not mean one party can rule for four years, without a challenge Jan 27, 2014 10:44 AM
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