

<u>REPORT TITLE</u>	Proposed Changes to Electoral Arrangements
<u>Submitted by:</u>	Chief Executive – John Sellgren
<u>Portfolio:</u>	Communications, Policy and Partnerships Finance and Resources
<u>Ward(s) affected:</u>	All Wards

Purpose of the Report

To advise the council of the proposals regarding changes to the election cycle for Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council and to outline the steps that need to be taken should the Council choose to amend this cycle..

Recommendations

- a) **That consultation on proposals to change the election cycle from thirds to whole council elections is commenced.**
- b) **That subject to agreement to (a), the consultation runs from the start of July 2014 until the end of August 2014.**
- c) **That a report on the outcome of the consultation be brought back to a special meeting of the Council in October 2014.**
- d) **That the Council determines at that special meeting whether to move to whole council elections or whether to retain the current cycle of elections by thirds.**

1. **Background**

Newcastle Borough Council currently elects members by thirds which means that there are elections every three years out of four involving NBC seats. The Council currently has 60 elected members representing 24 wards and each Councillor is elected for a term of four years.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 allows each Council the opportunity to consider passing a resolution to change to whole Council elections. Section 33 of the Act outlines the steps that must be taken. The Act states that a Council must not pass the resolution unless it “has taken reasonable steps to consult such persons as it thinks appropriate on the proposed change”. The resolution must then be passed:

- a) At a meeting which is specially convened for the purpose of deciding the resolution; and
- b) By a majority of at least two thirds of the elected Members voting on it.

If the resolution is passed then the Council must produce an explanatory document available for public inspection and give the Electoral Commission notice that it has passed the resolution.

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. Therefore the first year for whole council elections must be specified.

2. Issues

Moving to all out elections could provide the following benefits:

- Greater political stability and ability to take a longer term view of policy implementation and decision making;
- Financial savings;
- More effective political management without the need for an annual election campaign;
- Improved corporate and strategic planning over a four year period;
- Better planning and delivery of member development programmes;
- Greater likelihood of contested elections and reduced likelihood of voter fatigue;
- Less confusion resulting from 'combinations' of elections for different organisations (e.g. Parliament; European Parliament; County Council; Borough Council and town/parish councils) and also the election for the Police & Crime Commissioner
- Potentially higher electoral turnout due to the more decisive nature of all out elections

Potential advantages of electing by thirds include:

- More opportunity for electors to vote and participate in local democracy;
- Greater consistency of councillors by reducing the potential for large scale change at the same time;
- A potentially greater mix of new and experienced councillors;
- Fewer candidates required for nominations, thereby reducing the chance of non-contested seats;
- Political make-up of the council is potentially more reflective of the changing views of the electorate;
- More opportunities for people to stand for election;
- Greater accountability as councillors are required to engage and defend decisions on a more regular basis; and
- Continuing to employ a method more familiar to voters

In terms of potential disadvantages, each approach may result in:

- Whole Council elections may be more complex to administer;
- The count for whole council elections would probably take longer and additional staff time may be required to deal with the likely increase in nomination papers;
- Additional postal votes and postal vote applications and filling of ballot boxes
- There may also be additional cost due to extra polling stations and staff being required.

Having set out these factors, however, these additional costs would however be outweighed by the fact that elections would only be taking place every four years (with the resulting cost savings that that will bring).

As said, should a resolution introducing whole council elections pass, then the year for whole council elections must be specified – this need not be the year after the resolution

is passed and consideration should be given to other elections happening that might coincide with a move to whole council elections.

3. **Options Considered**

Option A - that Council agrees to consult on whole council elections and also agrees to receive a further detailed report following this consultation in October 2014 (Recommended)

Option B - that the Council chooses not to consult and the current cycle of elections is retained (Not Recommended)

4. **Proposal**

That consultation on proposals to change the election cycle from thirds to whole council elections commences.

That this consultation runs from the beginning of July 2014 until the end of August 2014.

That the consultation process includes the following:

- A3 posters in 15 community centres, Jubilee 2, The Civic Offices, The Guildhall, Kidsgrove Leisure Centre and Kidsgrove Customer Service Centre.
- Article in the August edition of the Reporter Magazine
- Officer visits to Parish Council meetings, Town Council meetings and LAP meetings in July 2014.
- Gazebo at the Farmers Market in Newcastle Town Centre and Kidsgrove Town Centre.
- Publicity event in Kidsgrove library
- Extensive use of the Council website including an online consultation form
- Leaflets
- Facebook and Twitter

5. **Reasons for Preferred Solution**

The preferred solution is in line with the requirements of The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the Localism Act 2011 and potentially offers the advantages set out in this report.

6. **Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

- Creating a Borough of opportunity
- A co-operative council delivering high quality, community driven services

7. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, states that a district council currently subject to election by thirds or halves may resolve to change to whole Council elections under section 34 of the Act. Under the same Act, the Council may not resolve to move from elections by thirds to elections by halves.

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.

8. **Financial and Resource Implications**

The respective costs of the two electoral options for the period 2014 to 2020 are set out in the table below. Each whole council election will cost slightly more than each election by thirds as they involve elections across the whole Borough, but the overall saving stands at £330,000 during the stated period.

	Elections By Thirds	Whole Council Elections
May 2015	Costs split with Parliamentary (parliamentary only covers 17 Wards) £100,000	Costs split with Parliamentary (parliamentary only covers 17 Wards) £105,000
May 2016	Split with PCC Elections £80,000	
May 2017	County Council Elections All monies reimbursed	
May 2018	£160,000 Borough only Elections in 20 Wards	
May 2019	Cost split with European Elections £80,000	Cost split with European Elections £85,000
May 2020	Costs split with Parliamentary (parliamentary only covers 17 Wards) £100,000	
TOTALS	£520,000	£190,000
Saving of £330,000 over the period 2015 to 2020		

9. **Background Papers**

- The local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007
- Section 24 of the Localism Act 2011