

Meeting	Finance & Policy Committee
Date	19 th September 2023
Report Title	SBC Election Cycle
Agenda Reference	12
Author	Elections Working Party Chair: Cllr V Manro

Working Party's Recommendation:

To note the report and consider the following submission is sent to SBC's Election Cycle consultation:

Haydon Wick Parish Council supports moving to a four-year as this brings the following benefits to the parish:

- 1. Council has a clear mandate for four years, allowing it to adopt a more strategic, long-term approach to policy and decision making – and focus less on yearly election campaigning.**
- 2. Avoids election fatigue and the results are simpler and more easily understood by the electorate. There would be a clear opportunity for the electorate to change the political composition of the Council once every four years.**
- 3. Greater publicity of whole council elections may generate higher turnout. The Electoral Commission suggests that electorates associate more clearly with whole Council elections.**
- 4. Better value for the Council and political parties as well as less disruptive to public buildings used as polling stations.**

Background

A small working party met recently to discuss the election cycles consultation. Members present: Cllr V Manro, R Worman, A John, S Heyes (teams), R Hailstone (teams)

Talking points raised were:

Cllr John

- SBC go to all outs
- Cost saving
- All outs brings scrutiny of all Cllrs rather than individual Cllrs when it comes to voting
- 4 years to deliver manifesto
- Syncing all parishes + SBC brings clarity to residents and avoids confusions

Cllr Worman

- Voting cycle change - party political lines
- Public expect best value
- Aligned voting cycle with SBC, Parishes, PCC
- Democracy comes at a cost but will save overall funding
- This should not be based on political will but business requirements and best value, service delivery
- Councillors when making the final decision should not think along Party lines BUT rather what is good long term for the electorate.



- The savings from a whole cycle are and will be significant.
 - The Electoral Commission recommends a four-year cycle.
 - Improve voting apathy and the electorate will find results simpler to understand and what they mean.
 - A four-year mandate would allow long term approach to policy and decision making.
 - Parish Councils will be able to work more closely with SBC and cement long term arrangements with Councillors and Officers.
 - SBC will be able to work through any year without regard to Purdah down time.
 - SBC will be able to continue non-stop with policy and decision rulings
 - The whole cycle will ensure better value for residents and further help with the financial problems that the Borough face.
 - Hopefully more cross-party cooperation could occur to agree rather than to oppose all the time.
 - Cheekily maybe the parishes could realise a modest increase in their Budget from the Borough each precept!
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- 333 councils in England vote by whole
 - 103 councils by thirds
 - 7 by halves.
 - There are 55 unitary authorities in England
 - 39 vote by whole
 - 16 vote by thirds.
 - Across the south west 29 local authorities
 - 26 vote by whole
 - 2 Vote by thirds
 - Vote by halves
 - I support a four-year cycle which I believe will enhance stronger local democracy, greater clarity, better understanding.
 - Parish Councillors will hopefully realise that the electorate will benefit when they make their decision.

Cllr Heyes

- Financially compelling
- Stops the 3 month purdah where everything essentially shuts down

Cllr Hailstone

- All outs can mean single party with little or no scrutiny from an opposition are its one party system
- 1/3s or every other year

Summary of discussion:

Benefits to the Parish:

1. Continuity of contacts - Councillors
2. SBC & Parishes are aligned to deliver Swindon-wide for 4 year period
 - example climate change - wildflowers
 - SBC set designation of x% of open space for wildflowers
 - This could be an easier roll out Swindon wide
3. Better comms to push better turnout if 4 yearly rather than voter fatigue.
4. Cost savings by reducing number of Ward Cllrs given devolution of services from SBC to parishes.

Reasons given in favour of changing to 'all-outs' were:



5. Council has a clear mandate for four years, allowing it to adopt a more strategic, long-term approach to policy and decision making – and focus less on yearly election campaigning.
6. Avoids election fatigue and the results are simpler and more easily understood by the electorate. There would be a clear opportunity for the electorate to change the political composition of the Council once every four years.
7. Greater publicity of whole council elections may generate higher turnout. The Electoral Commission suggests that electorates associate more clearly with whole Council elections.
8. Better value for the Council and political parties as well as less disruptive to public buildings used as polling stations.

Reasons given for keeping elections ‘by thirds’ were:

1. Avoids electing a complete change of councillors with no experience and allows continuity of councillors; avoids disruption to on-going policies.
2. More likely to be influenced by local rather than national politics, and this national influence will increase given the trend toward Parliamentary elections being held on the same day as local elections.
3. Encourages people into the habit of voting, and voting for one person is well understood by voters. Voting for two or three councillors under whole council elections could cause confusion.
4. Allows judgement of a council annually rather than every four years and allows the electorate to react sooner to local circumstances, thereby providing more immediate political accountability.

Final point

In 2020, the Electoral Commission published a report on the pros and cons of switching from elections in thirds to all out elections. The report found that there was no clear consensus on whether or not switching would be beneficial. However, the report did recommend that any decision to switch should be made on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the specific circumstances of each local authority.