



# WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

An Extraordinary Meeting of the **COUNCIL** will be held in the Council Chamber - Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham RG40 1BN on **WEDNESDAY 22 JUNE 2022** AT **7.30 PM**



Susan Parsonage  
Chief Executive  
Published on 14 June 2022

**Note:** Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting or participate in the meeting virtually, in line with the Council's Constitution. If you wish to participate either in person or virtually via Microsoft Teams please contact Democratic Services. The meeting can also be watched live using the following link: <https://youtu.be/PVgXO7br4eg>

This meeting will be filmed for inclusion on the Council's website.

Please note that other people may film, record, tweet or blog from this meeting. The use of these images or recordings is not under the Council's control.



# WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

## Our Vision

*A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business*

### Enriching Lives

- Champion outstanding education and enable our children and young people to achieve their full potential, regardless of their background.
- Support our residents to lead happy, healthy lives and provide access to good leisure facilities to complement an active lifestyle.
- Engage and involve our communities through arts and culture and create a sense of identity which people feel part of.
- Support growth in our local economy and help to build business.

### Safe, Strong, Communities

- Protect and safeguard our children, young and vulnerable people.
- Offer quality care and support, at the right time, to prevent the need for long term care.
- Nurture communities and help them to thrive.
- Ensure our borough and communities remain safe for all.

### A Clean and Green Borough

- Do all we can to become carbon neutral and sustainable for the future.
- Protect our borough, keep it clean and enhance our green areas.
- Reduce our waste, improve biodiversity and increase recycling.
- Connect our parks and open spaces with green cycleways.

### Right Homes, Right Places

- Offer quality, affordable, sustainable homes fit for the future.
- Build our fair share of housing with the right infrastructure to support and enable our borough to grow.
- Protect our unique places and preserve our natural environment.
- Help with your housing needs and support people to live independently in their own homes.

### Keeping the Borough Moving

- Maintain and improve our roads, footpaths and cycleways.
- Tackle traffic congestion, minimise delays and disruptions.
- Enable safe and sustainable travel around the borough with good transport infrastructure.
- Promote healthy alternative travel options and support our partners to offer affordable, accessible public transport with good network links.

### Changing the Way We Work for You

- Be relentlessly customer focussed.
- Work with our partners to provide efficient, effective, joined up services which are focussed around you.
- Communicate better with you, owning issues, updating on progress and responding appropriately as well as promoting what is happening in our Borough.
- Drive innovative digital ways of working that will connect our communities, businesses and customers to our services in a way that suits their needs.

To: The Members of Wokingham Borough Council

ITEM NO.	WARD	SUBJECT	PAGE NO.
17.		<b>APOLOGIES</b> To receive any apologies for absence	
18.		<b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b> To receive any declarations of interest	
19.		<b>PUBLIC QUESTION TIME</b> To answer any public questions  A period of 30 minutes will be allowed for members of the public to ask questions submitted under notice.  The Council welcomes questions from members of the public about the item on this Agenda only.  Subject to meeting certain timescales, questions can only relate to the item which is on the Agenda for this meeting. For full details of the procedure for submitting questions please contact the Democratic Services Section on the numbers given below or go to <a href="http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/publicquestions">www.wokingham.gov.uk/publicquestions</a>	
20.	None Specific	<b>ELECTORAL CYCLE DECISION</b> To receive a report on potential changes to the Electoral Cycle.  <b>RECOMMENDATION:</b> The Council is recommended to change the electoral cycle to all out elections every four years from 2024.  Please note that in order for the recommendation to be agreed, it requires two thirds of those Members present at the meeting, to vote in favour.	5 - 12
<b>CONTACT OFFICER</b>			
<b>Madeleine Shopland</b> <b>Tel</b> <b>Email</b> <b>Postal Address</b>		Democratic and Electoral Services Lead Specialist 0118 9746319 anne.hunter@wokingham.gov.uk Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN	

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<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Electoral Cycle Decision</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Extraordinary Council on 22 June 2022
<b>WARD</b>	(All Wards);
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Monitoring Officer - Andrew Moulton

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

The purpose of the report is to enable the Council to consider the outcome of the public consultation on the electoral cycle and decide on the future electoral cycle for the Borough Council.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Council is recommended to change the electoral cycle to all out elections every four years from 2024.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

At its meeting of 17<sup>th</sup> February 2022, Council resolved to undertake a consultation with stakeholders on moving to a whole council (all-out) electoral cycle. This report presents the consultation results and sets out the case for changing the electoral cycle. There were 3,067 responses with 54% in favour of a move to whole council (all-out) elections and 46% in favour of retaining the current arrangements.

Under Section 33 (3) of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, if Council wishes to change the current electoral arrangements, a two-thirds majority of those present would need to vote in favour of the recommendation.

Members should note that, of the 52 English unitary authorities, Wokingham BC is one of only 16 councils that continues to elect by thirds. The recent Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge also recommended that the Council consider the case for moving to whole Council elections as part of its commentary on the governance of the Council. The Council's Corporate Leadership Team's views are aligned to the financial and business planning arguments put forward by the LGA.

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is currently undertaking an electoral review of the borough and will commence a consultation in July 2022 on the warding arrangements to come into effect in May 2024. If Council decides to change the electoral cycle, the LGBCE warding proposals may establish one, two, or three member wards. If the Council continues to elect in thirds, the LGBCE warding proposals will be based on the principle of three member wards.

It should be noted that, regardless of the Council's decision on all-out elections, there will be whole Council elections in 2024 following the LGBCE's electoral review. This decision will therefore clarify the post 2024 electoral arrangements of the Council.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 The legislation governing the move to whole council (all out) elections is contained within the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the Localism Act 2011. The Acts give councils the power to decide whether to move to whole council elections, or back to elections by thirds (if they have elected this way at some point since 1 April 1974).
- 1.2 The most recent Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) data shows that, amongst the 52 unitary English authorities, 36 elect on a whole council basis, and 16 elect by thirds.
- 1.3 Within Berkshire, three Councils elect by thirds (Wokingham BC, Reading BC, and Slough BC) although Slough BC is currently consulting with stakeholders on a proposed move to whole-council elections.
- 1.4 The LGBCE is due to commence a consultation in July 2022 on proposed changes to warding arrangements in the Borough. Whilst the decision on the electoral cycle is the Council's alone, there will be a direct impact on the LGBCE warding proposals.
- 1.5 If the Council decides to move to whole council elections, the LGBCE may establish one, two, and three-member warding arrangement as at present. If the Council retains election by thirds, the LGBCE will develop warding proposals based on the principle of three member wards. Regardless of the decision arising from this report, the work of the LGBCE will result in all-out elections in 2024.

## **2. Whole Council Elections**

- 2.1 There is a limited amount of research on the subject of different electoral cycles and their benefits. However, the Electoral Commission conducted research in 2003 on the subject of local government electoral cycles which concluded that whole council elections would provide a clearer and more equitable system of voting for electors in the area.
- 2.2 The research focusses primarily on promoting a consistent national pattern of local elections, which it claimed would help to focus national attention on local government issues.
- 2.3 The report goes on to discuss issues around clarity and understanding for electors, which it claims is reduced by a system that elects by thirds. Research conducted by MORI that forms part of the report highlights the level of misunderstanding amongst electors regarding who they are voting for, or how often they are expected to vote. This confusion increases amongst younger voters or those from black or minority ethnic groups which suggests there are equalities issues to consider when considering an appropriate electoral system.
- 2.4 Since 2003, there has been a notable shift by unitary councils from electing in thirds to whole council elections. The most frequently cited reasons for doing so are the financial benefits and the argument that whole council elections aid better longer term decision making.

- 2.5 More recently in April 2021, a Best Value Report on Liverpool City Council by the Government Appointed Lead Inspector, Max Caller CBE, recommended that the City Council move from a thirds electoral system to a whole-council electoral system, noting that, “LCC being in election mode every year provides less opportunity to scrutinise the Mayor’s actions...” and that a whole-council electoral system would provide LCC a better ability to have a “longer-term focus.”
- 2.6 It is also notable that Slough BC commenced a public consultation in December 2021 with a view to moving to whole council elections as part of its response to addressing its governance and financial difficulties.
- 2.7 In November 2021, the Local Government Association undertook a corporate peer challenge review that included consideration of the Council’s governance arrangements. The Executive received the report of the LGA and an associated action plan at its meeting of 7 March 2022. The LGA reported that “the current electoral cycle of elections in thirds can contribute towards a short-term focus” and recommended that the Council consider how a change to the electoral cycle “might help to foster a more collaborative culture.”

### **3. Election by Thirds**

- 3.1 The current system of electing by thirds means that 18 seats are elected every year in three out of four years.
- 3.2 The benefits of this system have been stated as providing greater stability for the Council in terms of its membership. Electing by thirds reduces the risk of wholesale change within the Council (although for some this may be desirable and so not a risk but an opportunity) and allows for succession planning because there is always a mixture of new and experienced councillors on the Council.
- 3.3 Additionally, electing by thirds provides the electorate a greater opportunity to be involved in decision-making at the Council, and arguments have been put forward that this makes councillors more democratically accountable.
- 3.4 Lastly, it has been stated that some smaller political parties would find it difficult to field enough candidates to contest all seats at an all-out election. However, electing by thirds does not, in and of itself, create a greater availability of candidates for any party, but those candidates who are willing to stand have more frequent opportunities to do so.
- 3.5 It has been suggested that electing by thirds ensures that knowledge on delivering elections is retained and maintained within the Electoral Services team. However, as there are a wide variety of electoral events that take place across the cycle (which use similar procedures and legislation) this would not have a significant impact on the training and/or expertise of the team.
- 3.6 Retaining election-by-thirds will require all wards to be three member wards. This will have a significant impact on the size of wards that are currently one and two Member wards and result in larger wards that will include communities that have previously had separate representation.

## 4. **Costs and Savings**

- 4.1 As a Best Value authority, Members are required to consider the costs of services, and from time to time review those costs to ensure that the taxpayer is receiving best value for money.
- 4.2 It is the case that whole Council elections cost less to run than electing by thirds, in particular where those whole Council elections can be combined with other significant elections such as the Police and Crime Commissioner elections (as the costs for fixed entities such as polling stations, staff on polling stations, and sundries, are shared).
- 4.3 An example of the savings that could be achieved over a four-year period is set out at Appendix A. This shows that over the four-year cycle from 2024 to 2027 the authority would save over £316,000 by not holding Borough elections in 2026 or 2027.

## 5. **Consultation Results**

- 5.1 The Council consulted with stakeholders for six weeks from 7 March until 15 April 2022. The consultation was online and supported by a letter to every household in the borough. There were 3,067 responses. The overall results of the consultation showed that 54% of respondents were in favour of the move to all out elections and 46% were in favour of retaining election by thirds.
- 5.2 The most common reasons for supporting the change were:-
- Cost savings (about 200 responses in favour of all-out elections referenced this as a reason)
  - Clearer / easier to understand (about 50 responses)
  - Would enable better long-term planning (about 35 responses)
  - Greater participation (about 30)
  - Continuity / less disruption (about 30)
  - Fairer / more democratic (30)
- 5.3 The most common reasons against the change were:
- Loss of accountability with fewer elections (about 80 responses referenced this as a reason)
  - Continuity / stability (about 65 responses)
  - By thirds system more democratic / fairer (about 30)
- 5.4 The consultation provided a large number of responses with a small majority of respondents favouring a move to all out elections. The full results are available as part of the background papers.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

***The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	Revenue

### **Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision**

The £316k tangible savings associated with moving to whole council elections referred to in the report will commence from 2027.

The Chief Financial Officer has quantified additional, less tangible benefits in excess of £4m over the 4-year period, arrived at following consultation with the Council's senior leadership team. This is not intended to be a calculation of precision but is intended to provide an indication of the hidden costs of disruption associated with an annual elections cycle.

### **Cross-Council Implications**

The Council's electoral arrangements are a key part of its governance and democratic arrangements, and as such, impact all aspects of the Council's priorities and services.

### **Public Sector Equality Duty**

Due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken evidence through the completion of an equalities assessment.

### **Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030***

Whilst there are no direct or immediate impacts on the Council's climate emergency targets, administering elections and their associated processes can incur carbon costs for the Council and residents.

### **Reasons for considering the report in Part 2**

Not applicable.

### **List of Background Papers**

Electoral Commission research paper 2003  
LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report – November 2021  
Consultation detailed feedback

**Contact** Andrew Moulton

**Telephone No** Tel: 07747 777298

**Service** Governance

**Email**

andrew.moulton@wokingham.gov.uk

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<b>COSTS FOR RUNNING ELECTIONS - BY THIRDS V FOUR YEARLY</b>						
<b>Task</b>	<b>Elections by thirds (per election)</b>	<b>Four yearly elections</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Elections by 3rds over 4 years</b>	<b>Elections 4 Yearly</b>	<b>Additional cost of Annual Elections</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>		<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Hire of venues	16,506	17,807		49,518	17,807	31,711
Printing and posting poll cards	37,934	53,000	Includes postage	113,802	53,000	60,802
Printing ballot papers	3,770	5,468	This does not take account of the fact that if the council holds all out elections there would be an additional charge for the larger ballot papers required	11,310	5,468	5,842
Production and postage of Postal Vote packs	19,450	22,832	Includes postage	58,350	22,832	35,518
Postage for return of postal votes	10,200	14,273		30,600	14,273	16,327
Delivery of polling booths/collection of polling booths and collection of equipment etc from the count	3,558	4,680		10,674	4,680	5,994
Stationery and sundry costs	2,000	2,300		6,000	2,300	3,700
Training of Polling Station Staff	1,524	1,800		4,572	1,800	2,772
Employing Polling Station Staff	49,749	57,723		149,247	57,723	91,524
Postal Vote opening and checking staff	3,500	4,297		10,500	4,297	6,203
Count staffing	14,750	19,320	All out election would take longer to count because of the need to use the multi-ward counting methodology	44,250	19,320	24,930
Returning Officer fee	10,271	13,500		30,813	13,500	17,313
Election staff overtime	5,600	9,000	Overtime would be higher as there would be more work to do eg nominations, ballot box preparation etc within the same timescales	16,800	9,000	7,800
				0	0	0
<b>Other Costs</b>				0	0	0
Cost of hiring count venue and loss of income for count venue	3,400	3,800	As part of the contract with Loddon Valley they do not charge for hiring the venue for the count nor the hire in of equipment eg tables and chairs	10,200	3,800	6,400
Confidential disposal of used ballot papers			This is carried out a year after an election. Awaiting cost from Rodney	0	0	0
<b>Total Direct</b>	<b>182,212</b>	<b>229,800</b>		<b>546,636</b>	<b>229,800</b>	<b>316,836</b>

<b>Indirect</b>						
Polling Stn WBC Staff (lost day)	16,625	16,625	This cost will be higher as will have to man more polling stations therefore likely to have to use more staff	49,875	16,625	33,250
Postal Vt WBC Staff (lost 1/2 day)	11,560	11,560	This cost will be marginally higher as will have more postal votes to	34,680	11,560	23,120
Count WBC Staff (lost day)	15,000	15,000	This cost will be higher as due to the complexity of count will take longer	45,000	15,000	30,000
				0	0	0
Disruption (2 mths before +2 mths after)	2,032,800	2,032,800	Pre-election work & post election work of Democratic services, Elections Team and supporting staff. Impact on strategy & delivery slow down prior to Elections and reworking post elections. <b>This cost will be higher as there will be more work to be undertaken by Election and Dem Svcs staff both pre and post election - see D17</b>	6,098,400	2,032,800	4,065,600
<b>Total Direct &amp; Indirect</b>	<b>2,258,197</b>	<b>2,305,785</b>		<b>6,774,591</b>	<b>2,305,785</b>	<b>4,468,806</b>