

Subject:	Whole-council elections	Status:	For Publication
Report to:	Full Council	Date:	18 th August 2022
Report of:	Head of Legal (Monitoring Officer)	Portfolio Holder:	Corporate Services
Key Decision:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input type="checkbox"/>	General Exception <input type="checkbox"/>	Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
Equality Impact Assessment:	Required:	No	Attached: N/A
Biodiversity Impact Assessment	Required:	No	Attached: N/A
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1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1. That Council considers the response to the consultation on whole-council elections and determine whether to adopt a scheme of whole-council elections with the first such election being held in 2024 or to continue to use an electoral system which is by thirds.
- 1.2. In the event that Council resolves to move to whole-council elections in 2024, Council resolves that it shall by order amend the scheme for town council elections within Rossendale and that from 2024 the election of all Whitworth Town councillors will take place on the same day as elections for borough councillors.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- On 20th May 2022, Council resolved to consult the public on whether the Council should change its electoral cycle to 'whole-council' elections or remain electing in thirds.
- In compliance with the legislation, a full consultation exercise has been carried out available to residents, members, MPs, community groups and other key stakeholders.
- The consultation went live on 26th May 2022 and closed at 12 noon on 11th July 2022.
- Council must pass a resolution which is supported by a two thirds majority of those voting on it to move to whole-council elections. Should this recommendation not be carried as a result of the discussion on whole-council elections then the Council will continue to use an electoral system which is by thirds.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. If the Council wishes to move from elections by thirds to whole-council elections, it must follow the process in accordance with s33 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (2007).

- 3.2. The Act states that 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 and that the resolution must be passed at a meeting which is specially convened for the purpose of deciding the resolution and by a majority of at least two thirds of the members voting on it. The resolution must specify the year for the first ordinary elections of the Council at which all councillors are to be elected, which may not be a county-council elections year.
- 3.3. In the event that a minimum of two thirds of members resolve to move to whole-elections the Council must then publish an explanatory document on the decision and make the same available for public inspection how it sees fit and give notice to the Electoral Commission. If the resolution is not carried, the Council will continue with its elections in thirds.
- 3.4. The Boundary Commission has started a boundary review and have sought a clear steer from the Council on any intention to change its electoral cycle.

4. SUMMARY OF THE CONSULTATION

- 4.1. In line with the resolution made by Full Council and relevant legislation, consultation commenced on 26th May 2022 and closed on 11th July 2022. The survey was distributed widely to encourage participation from residents, councillors and all relevant stakeholders. It was publicised in local newspapers, on the Council's website and social media channels. The borough's MPs were asked to contribute and confirmation was received that it would be shared on their media platforms also. The survey was sent to all councillors in their own right, the Whitworth Town Council, Lancashire County Council and the Office of Police & Crime Commissioner. It featured in the community groups' newsletter and was available for completion in the One Stop Shop.
- 4.2. A total of 105 responses were received from a variety of stakeholders. The survey results can be seen in full at Appendix 1.
- 4.3. In summary, 57% of those who responded indicated a preference to move to whole-council elections, 38% chose to remain in thirds and 5% said that they had no preference.
- 4.4. For those that responded with a desire to move to whole-council elections, the comments made were varied but mainly focused on:
- Less disruption to strategic plans
 - Less apathy and would encourage people to vote
 - Costs savings to the Council
 - Making sense to elect all councillors so people know where they stand
- 4.5. For those that responded with a desire to remain in thirds, the comments were again varied but mainly focused on:
- Continuity with residents understanding the current system
 - Enhances democracy and accountability
 - Electorate can make their feelings known quicker
 - No risk of large numbers of inexperienced councillors being elected

For ease of reference, it is worth repeating the rationale for each of the election cycles:

4.6. Reasons to change to 'whole-council elections'

- A 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 and the restrictions imposed by the pre-election period.
- It 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.
- Greater publicity of whole-council elections may generate higher turnout. The Electoral Commission suggest that electorates associate more clearly with whole-council elections.
- Lower cost for the Council and political parties in running less elections, as well as less disruptive to public buildings used as polling stations.

Reasons to keep elections 'by thirds'

- It allows continuity of councillors by potentially avoiding a large number of new inexperienced councillors at one election.
- It encourages people into the habit of voting and voting for one person is generally understood by voters. Voting for two or three councillors under whole-council elections may need to be explained to voters to avoid confusion.
- It 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.

Whitworth Town Council

4.7. In the event that the Council decides to move to whole-council elections, then in order to avoid incurring the cost of standalone town council elections, it is recommended that we seek an order that aligns the Whitworth Town Council election with the whole-election date. This may also improve the turnout for the town council election.

4.8 Senior officers of the Council met with members of the Town Council and the Town Clerk as part of the consultation process. When the matter was subsequently considered at their council meeting, whilst some benefits of whole-council elections were discussed, members collectively felt that the issues were finely balanced and indicated their preference to remain electing by thirds.

5. NEXT STEPS

5.1 Following consideration of this report and the consultation responses, Full Council must determine whether to pass a resolution which is supported by a two thirds majority of those members voting on it to move to whole-council elections or remain in thirds. If members are minded to move to whole-council elections, consideration must be given to resolve that it shall by order amend the scheme for town council elections within Rossendale and that from 2024 the election of all Whitworth Town councillors will take place on the same day as

elections for borough councillors

- 5.2. Should the Council continue to elect by thirds, it is worth noting that this will have a consequential effect on the current Electoral Review of the borough, as going forwards the Council will need to have a warding pattern of three member wards and a number of councillors divisible by three. The Electoral Commission recommends that each local authority in England should hold whole-council elections, with all councillors elected simultaneously, once every four years.

6. RISK

All the issues raised and the recommendations in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:

- Risk is associated with the holding of elections. There is less risk overall if the number of elections is reduced. Electoral risk is mitigated by having an experienced team that keeps up to date with training and legislation. The risk to the Council's reputation is substantial, so the professionalism and experience of staff in producing a transparent and accurate result is crucial. Staff training will need to be reviewed and resources increased to ensure the nomination process is managed effectively with the increase in candidate numbers and a change to ballot papers with voting for more than one candidate.
- Retention of some staff on local elections may be difficult to sustain with a four-year cycle. Currently the Council do not have an issue with recruitment to the elections and staff, including temporary staff, make themselves available as required.
- Publicity and resources will be required to highlight a change to the electoral cycle and voting process to mitigate confusion on polling day.

7. FINANCE

- 7.1. A move to whole-council elections would have a positive financial impact for the Council and members are required to consider and review the costs of services to ensure the taxpayer is receiving best value for money. A standalone election cost circa £78,000. It is estimated that a whole-council election would cost around £90,000 (dependant on print costs). It is therefore estimated that moving to whole-council elections would produce a potential saving of £144,000 subject to the potential costs of any by-elections (circa £15k each) over the four-year period.

- 7.2. Further, the cost of an election is met by the body or bodies whose representatives have been elected and therefore, any occasion where a local election is combined with another would see a reduction in costs to the council. It is therefore proposed that if the Council moves to whole-council elections it will do so in 2024 when it can share costs with the Police and Crime Commissioner elections.

8. LEGAL

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (2007) provides the legal basis for the Council to change the electoral cycle. The Council has carried out appropriate consultation with a wide variety of stakeholders which complies with the requirements of the Act. The legal implications are covered in the body of the report.

9. POLICY AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

A consultation process has been undertaken in line with the legislation and as outlined in the body of the report. Reasonable steps were carried out to ensure that the consultation

engaged with residents who are often harder to reach. The Council has consulted with Whitworth Town Council.

10. REASONS FOR THE DECISION

To consider the responses received following the consultation and determine whether to change its electoral cycle to whole-council elections, the first of such election being 2024, or remain in thirds. In the event that Full Council resolves to move to whole-council elections in 2024, to resolve that it shall by order amend the scheme for town council elections within Rossendale and that from 2024 the election of all Whitworth Town councillors will take place on the same day as elections for borough councillors

Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
Appendix 1 – Consultation survey responses	Attached
Council report – 20 th May 2022	https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/1254/annual_council
Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (2007)	https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/28/part/2/chapter/1/crossheading/power-of-district-councils-to-change-to-wholecouncil-elections

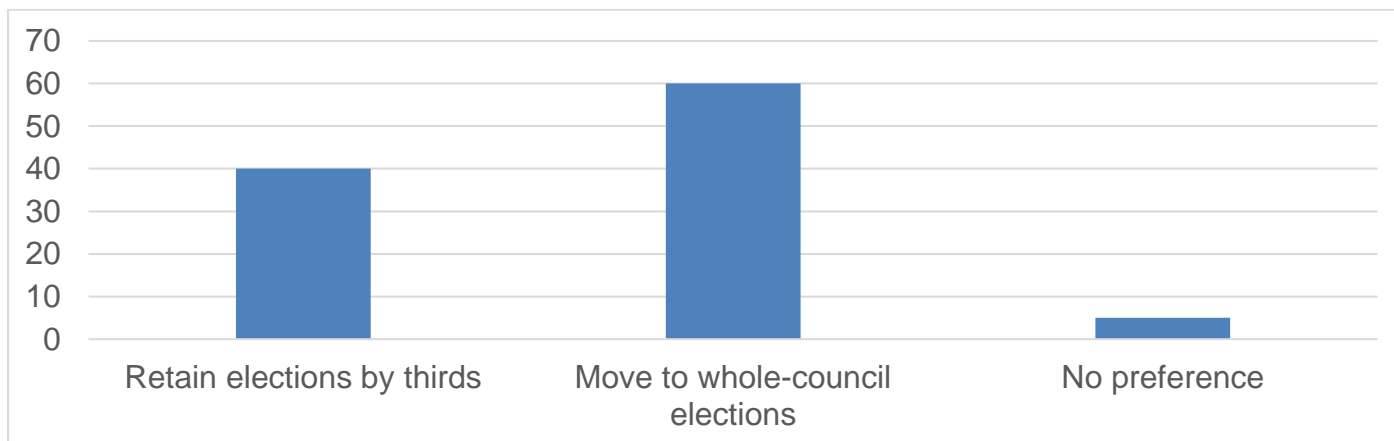
**Consultation on Rossendale Borough
Council's Election Cycle
July 2022**

Consultation on Rossendale Borough Council's Election Cycle

1. Should the Council

- Retain election by thirds
- Move to whole-council elections
- No preference

Answer choice	Percentage	Response
Retain elections by thirds	38%	40
Move to whole-council elections	57%	60
No preference	5%	5



Comments received

Retain Election by thirds

- Continuity, experience of councillors to assist in supporting newcomers
- This will mean that Council Officials will not have to spend valuable time and money explaining the rules and regulations to a potentially whole new set of Councillors
- There's an old saying, "if it ain't broke don't fix it" With the existing system there is some continuity which could be affected adversely with whole council elections.
- Less prone to knee jerk reactions from public reacting to current issues and electing a whole council that they might subsequently regret
- Elections by thirds enhance democracy. Where councillors and their parties know that the voters will have a say on a regular basis they are more likely to be focused on delivering appropriately/ effectively.
- New people and new ideas combined with people with more experience .
- It gives a great mix of experienced and new councillors.
- Leave it as it is
- Whilst there are additional costs by voting in thirds, voting for the whole council would reduce democratic accountability.
- Ideas the electorate has an opportunity to make their feelings known quicker.
- "Local Elections are often dominated by national political issues. Dependent on the timing a move to whole council elections would be more likely to reflect the 'honeymoon period' or 'mid-term blues' of a national administration than it would the policies of a local administration. I believe that it would not reflect local opinion as well as the current system.

I believe that it is a local strength that there is representation from both ends of the political spectrum and that the borough tends to avoid sudden and conclusive shifts to the left or right. "

- Leave as it is. Some promise the earth when in do nothing
- Although the cost would undoubtedly increase, I feel the less drastic change of councillors makes for a more stable council.
- Some members have experience of whole council elections at Rossendale Borough Council in the past and although it does have some benefits they felt the potential negatives outweigh this. It was resolved that Council believe that the current situation of election by thirds is better and they would prefer to see Rossendale Borough Council continue in this way.
- I have seen both types of elections -all out and thirds and believe that elections each year means that councillors keep in touch with their electorate better.
- I believe this gives a more stable system representing the people's view more of the time.
- Dislike whole-council elections - when they fall in the same year as a general election they're likely to be influenced by peoples' votes in the general election, and I'd prefer to minimise that effect. "
- "As a Councillor I feel it encourages Cllrs to keep a fluid contact with residents in their Wards. I believe it works well. "
- "Retaining elections by thirds maintains continuity on the Council - whole council elections risk large numbers of inexperienced councillors being elected, leading to problems for Council Officers and for the general public in terms of representation, continuity and competence.
- Rossendale people are used to elections in thirds and it seems counterintuitive to change this for no good reason. I'm not convinced that whole council elections will reduce voter fatigue - I too have seen this claim being made but can find no evidence to support it.
- Given that we will still have County Council, PCC and Parliamentary Elections there will probably still be elections outside of a four yearly cycle anyway and it makes sense to hold local elections at the same time as Parliamentary elections as this definitely does increase voter turnout. Sticking with thirds means that it is far more likely that Local elections will coincide with other elections. "
- All out elections encourage complacency.

Move to whole-council elections

- If it's going to save money that's a good thing.
- I've never understood the crazy system we currently have it makes much more sense to ask the electorate to vote every 4 years.
- Continuity is important
- Might as well be the same as a General Election, would also reduce any newbie pressure for new members.
- Likely to be less apathy amongst voters, anything to save money can only be good.
- Less disruption to strategic plans. More chance of councillors being able to follow through plans to fruition. Relationship development with council teams easier.
- The cost saving and strategic benefits far outweigh any of the other factors.
- This in my opinion makes the whole thing easier.
- It would make a lot more sense, save money and would encourage more people to vote than the current system.

- Whole party change would make the political group more accountable and get the lazy invisible ones out of the system
- Makes sense to elect all together then people know where they stand
- This will save public funds.
- "Cost saving. Election Fatigue. Clear Mandate"
- Seems more reasonable to have the whole council election at the same time.
- "Opportunity for longer term strategic approach by councillors. Cost savings an additional bonus."
- Consultation paper has outlined good strategic reasons for this change.
- Anything to save money & bureaucracy has to be a good thing
- More cost efficient and gives stability.
- Makes for a more sensible Council

No preference and General Comments

- As a local resident of Rossendale I feel the current system of members being elected for a four year fixed term of office, works well for both the residents and for a balanced approach for our local communities across Rossendale.
- I think councillors should be retained for their expertise and experience rather than their political preference. I would retain the useful and active and replace the less useful and active after three years
- A mixed result could make it impossible to pass policy for four years.
- "On the off chance that the council ever became Conservative led, the thought of them running it for 4 years full me with absolute dread. Rossendale doesn't deserve that. "
- Savings calculations look wrong, too low
- "Some are on and do very little except claim expenses. Their party may put pressure on them to be more active on local issues. It's currently and unaccountable club for political do nothings."
- Should be held annually so they can be held accountable for failures on a regular basis
- The bias and envy between parties is blatantly obvious and totally inappropriate. How can they work together for the good of the area/community when they have such one sided ideas, vision and incompetence. Its is supposed to be about democracy and debate for the good of the town. its residents and the area. It should not be about tongue sticking and name calling and vendettas which do occur on a regular basis. They are supposed to be grown ups for gods sake.
- no comments
- Residents should been given more say in changers that are being done in there town. And informed of things that are going to happen before they done!!
- "Would support election by halves to reduce frequency (and therefore cost).
- No comment
- Whatever is best for the residents of Rossendale not the council members.

2. Do you have any further comments?

- I'm old enough to remember a previous all out elections in the late 1990s and early 2000 the additional cost of those all out elections far out weight any savings, if the government and local authorities are serious about making savings and reducing costs for all local elections across Rossendale, the most cost effective way would

<p>be to have postal voting only, this would then increase those taking part in the voting process, and inturn would reduce cost of all elections given there would be no need for polling stations across the whole of Rossendale.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The only eye in the ointment, is that the councillor that's voted in, is quite happy to be a councillor for 4yrs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Operating on a parliamentary model is wasteful of talent and effectiveness. Having served briefly as a borough councillor I found the level of political discourse pathetic and the opportunity for genuine debate totally absent. The predominantly 2 party structure is wasteful of ability and fails the communities it claims to serve.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most people I speak to don't understand why they are voting for different people each year they find the current system confusing. A once every 4 yrs system is much more straight forward and cost effective fot everyone.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I think that a simplified system would be beneficial to all parties and as stated, it is cost effective too.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cost matters, but so does protecting the council from inexperience and the current system allows voters the ability to change the trajectory of the Council every year if needs be . The other method would leave us stuck for 4 years maybe with a council not working for us, as has happened in Westminster this time !
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Only - It should have been done years ago - No Brainer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stop being anti Business!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I like the idea that we won't get stuck with an incompetent council who were elected on an issue of the moment (can you imagine four years with a UKIP council for example?).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Less prone to knee jerk reactions from public reacting to current issues and electing a whole council that they might subsequently regret
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is well known that council election results are often shaped by central government popularity levels. If there is a 4 yearly whole council election it may result in a total imbalance in the political representation because we use multi-member wards. It will create unrepresentative and democratically unhealthy majorities which will last too long. To mitigate this you would have to go to smaller single member wards or introduce a system of proportional representation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I wouldnt want a council running for 4 years . Thats more than enough time to make a mess , I've seen it under my previous council .
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The sooner the better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Move the boundary of Whitworth to Greater Manchester. We would pay less and get more. Lancashire and Rossendale have no interest in Whitworth apart from cash generated by our inflated Council tax rates. Council members put their own interests first when we had opportunity to join GMC. Fearful of the gravy train drying up for their do little club for low flying politicians. Let's join GGC and move forward!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More accountability is needed . A disgrace to the County
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All council positions should be elected for including the mayor, the system of who is mayor should be a people vote not it's your turn next year.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Any savings would just be wasted

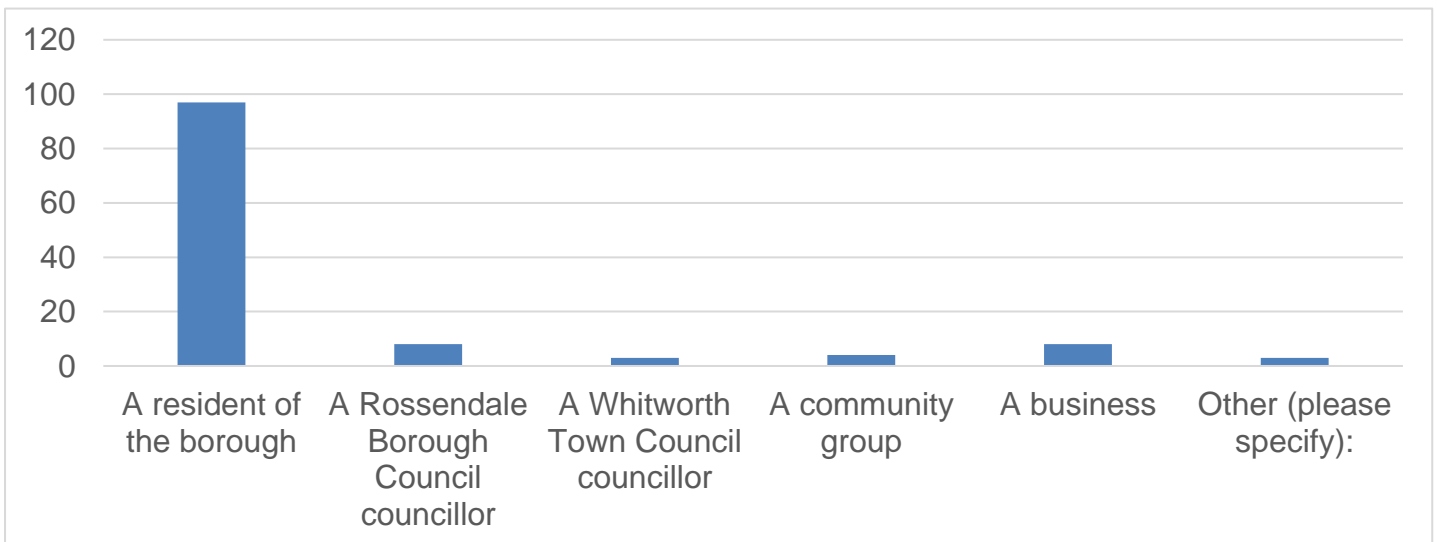
- Better not to swap from 4 year plan to completely different 4 year plan. Continuity sounds a better system.
- The current system is outdated & brings "apathy" amongst voters resulting in only 30% of the local population to express their votes.
- The whole system is dysfunctional. The two tier councils do not work. You are forever being signposted and have to make another or several more calls. Nobody takes responsibility or cares. This would not happen in a private organisation.
- Silly to elect thirds as confuses people who is voting when
- Changing bit at a time means continued policy that could be very unpopular and unwanted can be pushed through if the area that is up for election has no councillors opposed to said policy.
- The potential cost saving and removal of the annual pre-election period are the main reasons for me voting for full council elections.
- samara for president.
- Some of the savings could be used to improve communication with residents.
- Makes more sense due to the cost savings
- I think consideration should also be given to reducing the number of councillors.
- Leave as is now. Some people promise to do things and do nothing.
- No preference.
- It's a bit much the way it is now, I think it makes people less likely to take an interest and vote
- Stop the corruption
- I think moving to whole council elections would be confusing for residents as they will have more than one vote and many will not understand this
- They needs to be a lot more done on marl Pitt's it's a wait on ground doing nothing!! Also things organised for children to do during the holidays
- Councillors will be able to focus on the work of the Council instead of having to campaign
- The regularity with which we hold elections is really quite irrelevant compared to the method of voting. First past the post almost always ensures that large numbers of people who turn out to vote are ignored. If we're going to be making any changes to how we vote we should be switching to use Single Transferable Vote to actually give local people what they vote for. First past the post is a plague on the whole UK.
- Looking at the number of meetings the number of elected should be reduced to 24 - or two per ward
- It is a way to save money.
- I'm not convinced that moving to whole council elections will save very much money. With a four yearly cycle we will probably have more by-elections due to changes in elected members' circumstances which will eat up some of the suggested savings. I'm not convinced by the argument that a four yearly cycle will allow for longer term planning and big decisions. I think one of the strengths of a successful local strategy is that it can transcend political changes. What is being suggested will create a four yearly patchwork of political changes instead of the continuity which our residents need and deserve.

- The cost saving element and mandate to give the council a 4 year strategic plan for implementation makes more sense.
- A higher cost can be justified if it brings the right results

3. Are you

- **A resident of the borough**
- **A Rossendale Borough Council councillor**
- **A Whitworth Town Council councillor**
- **A community group**
- **A business**
- **Other**

Answer Choice	Response Percent	Response Total
1 A resident of the borough	92%	97
2 A Rossendale Borough Council councillor	8%	8
3 A Whitworth Town Council councillor	3%	3
4 A community group	4%	4
5 A business	8%	8
6 Other (please specify):	3%	3



Other:

- A Council Tax payer
- Whitworth Town Council
- Employee