

To register a question for Public Question Time please email your question to [democracy@rossendalebc.gov.uk](mailto:democracy@rossendalebc.gov.uk) before 9am Monday 18<sup>th</sup> March.

**Special Meeting and Ordinary Meeting of:** The Council

**A special meeting has been convened specifically for Item A3 and will be followed by an ordinary meeting which will commence immediately following the conclusion of A3.**

**Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2024 at 6.30pm** or at the conclusion of Question Time and Public Engagement whichever is the later.

**Venue:** Council Chamber, The Business Centre, Futures Park, Bacup. OL13 0BB



**The meeting will also be live streamed at the following link:**

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrLsMDOP7AYxik5pNP0gTIA/streams>

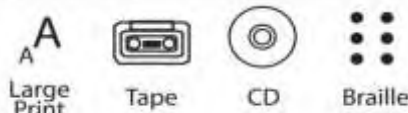
**Supported by:** Carolyn Sharples, Committee and Member Services Manager Tel: 01706 252422

Email: [democracy@rossendalebc.gov.uk](mailto:democracy@rossendalebc.gov.uk)

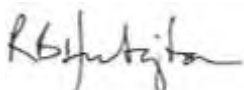
ITEM		Lead Member/Contact Officer
<b>A.</b>	<b>SPECIAL MEETING</b>	
<b>A1.</b>	<b>Apologies for Absence</b>	Clare Birtwistle, Head of Legal/ Monitoring Officer (01706) 252438 <a href="mailto:clarebirtwistle@rossendalebc.gov.uk">clarebirtwistle@rossendalebc.gov.uk</a>
<b>A2.</b>	<b>Declarations of Interest</b> <i>Members are advised to contact the Monitoring Officer in advance of the meeting to seek advice on interest issues if necessary.</i>  Members are requested to indicate at this stage, any items on the agenda in which they intend to declare an interest. Members are reminded that, in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000 and the Council's Code of Conduct, they must declare the nature of any personal interest and, if the interest is prejudicial, withdraw from the meeting during consideration of the item.	
<b>A3.</b>	<b>Whole-Council Elections</b> To consider the Whole-Council Elections report.	Councillor Lythgoe/ Rob Huntington, Chief Executive 01706 252447 <a href="mailto:robhuntington@rossendalebc.gov.uk">robhuntington@rossendalebc.gov.uk</a>
<b>B.</b>	<b>ORDINARY MEETING</b>	
<b>B1.</b>	To approve and sign as a correct record the minutes of the meeting on 28 <sup>th</sup> February 2024	Clare Birtwistle, Head of Legal/ Monitoring Officer (01706) 252438 <a href="mailto:clarebirtwistle@rossendalebc.gov.uk">clarebirtwistle@rossendalebc.gov.uk</a>
<b>B2.</b>	<b>Urgent Items of Business</b> To note any items which the Chair has agreed to add to the Agenda on the grounds of urgency.	
<b>B3.</b>	<b>Communications from the Mayor, the Leader or Head of Paid Service</b> To receive any communications from the Mayor, the Leader, or the Head of the Paid Service that they may wish to lay before the Council.	The Mayor, Councillor Walmsley, The Leader, Councillor A.Barnes and Rob Huntington, Chief Executive 01706 252447 <a href="mailto:robhuntingdon@rossendalebc.gov.uk">robhuntingdon@rossendalebc.gov.uk</a>

The agenda and reports are also available for inspection on the Council's website <https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/>. Other formats are available on request. Tel 01706 217777 or contact Rossendale Borough Council, Futures Park, Bacup, OL13 0BB

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<b>C.</b>	<b>ORDINARY ITEMS</b>	
<b>C1.</b>	<b>Statement of Community Involvement</b> To consider the Statement of Community Involvement	Councillor McInnes/ David Smurthwaite, Director of Economic Development 01706 252429 <a href="mailto:davidsmurthwaite@rossendalebc.gov.uk">davidsmurthwaite@rossendalebc.gov.uk</a>
<b>C2.</b>	<b>Urgent decisions</b> To note any urgent key decisions that have been taken by the Cabinet since the last meeting of the Council:  Special Urgency Decision taken 8 <sup>th</sup> March 2024 regarding the acceptance of additional Local Authority Housing Fund grant funding.  <a href="https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/downloads/file/18371/special-urgency-decision-local-authority-housing-fund-grant">https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/downloads/file/18371/special-urgency-decision-local-authority-housing-fund-grant</a>	Clare Birtwistle, Head of Legal/ Monitoring Officer (01706) 252438 <a href="mailto:clarebirtwistle@rossendalebc.gov.uk">clarebirtwistle@rossendalebc.gov.uk</a>
<b>D.</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET AND OTHER COMMITTEES</b>	
<b>D1.</b>	<b>Recommendation of the Governance Working Group</b> Committee Review	Councillor Lythgoe/ Clare Birtwistle, Head of Legal/ Monitoring Officer 01706 252438 <a href="mailto:clarebirtwistle@rossendalebc.gov.uk">clarebirtwistle@rossendalebc.gov.uk</a>



**Rob Huntington**  
Chief Executive

**Date Published:** 12<sup>th</sup> March 2024

<b>Subject:</b>	Whole-Council Elections	<b>Status:</b>	For Publication
<b>Report to:</b>	Full Council	<b>Date:</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> March 2024
<b>Report of:</b>	Chief Executive	<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Environment and Corporate Services
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	General Exception <input type="checkbox"/>	Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Equality Impact Assessment:</b>	Required:	No	Attached: N/A
<b>Biodiversity Impact Assessment</b>	Required:	No	Attached: N/A
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Clare Birtwistle	<b>Telephone:</b>	01706 252438
<b>Email:</b>	clarebirtwistle@rossendalebc.gov.uk		

- 1. RECOMMENDATIONS**
- 1.1 That Council agrees to adopt a scheme of whole council elections, meaning an electoral cycle of one election every four years with all councillors being elected, with the first such election being held in May 2024.**
- 1.2 That Council agrees to make an order to alter the years of the ordinary elections of the Whitworth Town Council so that they coincide with the date of whole-council elections.**
- 1.3 In the event that Council elects to move to whole council elections, the Constitution will be amended to reflect the required changes.**

**2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- This report seeks a resolution that the Council should change its electoral cycle to 'whole-council' elections commencing May 2024.
- Councils with whole-council elections elect their members once every four years.
- To move to whole-council elections the Council must first consult such persons as it thinks appropriate on the proposed change. This has now been completed.
- Following the Local Government Boundary Commission for England Ward Boundary Review, the Council is subject to all-out election in May 2024 along with the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections. This presents a timely opportunity to move to whole-council elections with minimal disruption.
- In changing to whole-council elections, in order to avoid incurring the cost of standalone town council elections, it is recommended that Council seeks an order that aligns the Whitworth Town Council election with the whole-election date.
- The Government's current policy is to encourage all councils still not holding "all out" elections to consider using the powers that Parliament has given to switch to such elections to bring stability to councils' decision making and help incentivise long-term planning.
- This is not a referendum. The results of the consultation are advisory in nature and

provide evidence of the public views.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Legislation enables the Council to change its electoral cycle at certain fixed periods of time. The Council presently elects its councillors by thirds, meaning a third of the councillors are elected every year for three years, with no elections in the fourth year.
- 3.2 Councils that presently elect by thirds can move to whole-council elections and, if at a later date it is considered necessary to do so, can revert back to elections by thirds but not until five years has passed since the resolution was made to change.
- 3.3 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).
- 3.4 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.
- 3.5 In the event that 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.
- 3.6 On 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024, Council resolved to undertake a 6 weeks consultation process to obtain the views of residents and numerous stakeholders. The link to this report can be found here <https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/1449/council> . The results of consultation have been evaluated and are detailed below and in Appendix 1 attached.

### **4. CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 As mentioned above, prior to passing the resolution to convert to whole-council elections, the Council must have taken the decision to consult with such persons as it thinks appropriate. This consultation took place between 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2024 and 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024.
- 4.2 The legislation does not specify the nature of that consultation but in order to comply with the Act, the Council has provided sufficient publicity and engagement with members of the public and stakeholders for comments and representations to be made, with councillors and MPs being consulted in their own right. The information provided clearly set out the different regimes to give consultees an understanding of the same prior to their response.
- 4.3 The consultation has been carried out by contacting the following stakeholders by providing an off and on line questionnaire, word version paper copy and QR code. Regular reminders have been made particularly on the social media platforms. Posters were put up and distributed to raise awareness. All were encouraged to respond and share to bring it to the attention of others.

- Residents
- Councillors
- Officers
- One Stop Shop
- MPs
- Whitworth Town Council
- Lancashire County Council
- The Police and Crime Commissioner
- The Electoral Commission
- Rossendale Connected to include GPs
- Rossendale Leisure Trust
- The Council Website and Social Media platforms
- Business Leaders
- Bacup Business Association
- Valley at Work
- Community Partnerships and Communities newsletter
- Free Press

4.4 In total, 155 people responded as outlined in Appendix 1. In summary, 52.3% indicated a preference to move to whole-council elections, 43.9% chose to remain in thirds and 3.9% said that they had no preference. Of these responses, 133 or 85.8% were from residents with the remainder being made up of officers, members, community groups, businesses and people working in the borough. Of those residents that responded, 49% were in favour of moving to whole council elections, 47% were in favour of retaining by thirds and 4% showed no preference.

4.5 For those that responded with a desire to move to whole-council elections, the comments made were varied but mainly focused on:

- Greater ability to carry out long term strategic plans and focus on constituents.
- Less confusing to members of the public to elect all in one go.
- Significant cost savings, using constituents' money more effectively and efficiently.
- The savings could go to more beneficial projects in the borough.
- Increase residents' engagement in the election process and result in higher turnout.
- Being focused on improvements instead of re-election.
- Focus on Council Leadership.
- Less impact on others in our community eg schools that are polling stations.
- Leads to more stability and decision making for the council and its investors allowing long term planning.

4.6 For those that responded with a desire to remain in thirds, the comments were again varied but mainly focused on:

- Experienced councillors passing on knowledge to new councillors.
- Avoids huge influx of new councillors.
- People have to compromise and collaborate.
- "By thirds" elections offer a regular chance to feed back to all levels of government any displeasure felt by the electorate.
- Keeps councillors accountable to their communities.
- Chance to assess the Council every year.

- 4.7 Little comment was provided by those with no preference. There did seem to be some misunderstanding with a number of responses which suggested a belief that individual councillors would be voted for each year and not stand for a 4 years term as would be the case in either regime.
- 4.8 It is imperative to note that the responses to the consultation are advisory in nature and are there to give members an understanding of the views of the consultees. These must be taken into account and considered but the process should not to be mistaken for a referendum and members must make a decision which is in the best interest of the Council.

## 5. THE RATIONALE FOR CHANGE

- 5.1 There is limited formal or recent research on the subject of different electoral cycles and their benefits, however in 2004 the Electoral Commission published its research on the subject of local government electoral cycles (attached at Appendix 2) which concluded that whole-council elections would provide clearer and more equitable system of voting for electors in the area. The research focussed primarily on promotion a consistent national pattern of local elections, which it concluded would help to focus national attention on local government issues.
- 5.2 Often because there are a number of other factors affecting turnout in any given year, such as combined local and parliamentary elections, it is difficult to draw conclusive evidence however the Electoral Commission shows that turnout is marginally greater among councils who conduct all out elections than among those who elect by thirds, based on a comparison between districts, London Boroughs and metropolitan districts. Members will note at Appendix 3 the Election Timetable in England clearly showing a majority of councils following a whole-council election regime and it is understood that more have moved to whole-council since this was last updated in January 2023.
- 5.3 Research conducted by MORI highlighted the level of misunderstanding amongst electors regarding who they are voting for, or how often they are expected to vote. The confusion increases amongst younger voters or those from black or minority ethnic groups which suggested there are equality issues to recognise when considering an appropriate electoral system. In contrast, holding elections every four years can facilitate stable, strategic place leadership, with the ability to deliver a clear programme for the electorate and the time to tackle some of the longer-term issues communities might face.
- 5.4 It is widely understood that those councils facing External Assurance Reviews commissioned by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities are formally being asked to consider the option of moving to a whole-council electoral cycle as an alternative to their current system of thirds. The former Secretary of State the Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP in a written ministerial statement to Parliament on 10th June 2021 also stated that such a move could provide for stable strategic leadership, greater accountability and better value for money for taxpayers. He further states *“The absence of such elections is often a consistent feature of under-performing councils and a common thread through many council interventions. I of course recognise that there are many excellent councillors up and down the country performing their duties effectively with elections by thirds or other patterns. But holding elections three years out of four, or every other year, risks creating a culture of perpetual electioneering in a council where there is little focus on the strategic, an inability to address longer term challenges and leadership which can lack the stability needed for a high performing authority.”*

5.5 It has further been said that councils' "short-termism" due to the electoral cycle was one of the factors which had led to the need for an external assurance review as councils need continuity in its vision and leadership with the ability to see plans through and deliver objectives in order to be successful.

5.6 It is worth reminding here of the advantages of 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.
- avoiding 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 better with whole-council elections as they are considered to provide a clearer and more equitable system of voting.
- lower cost for the Council and political parties in running less elections together with ancillary favourable considerations such as the reduction in the cost of member induction training and development. It would also be less disruptive to public buildings used as polling stations.
- greater confidence for businesses and investors in the borough who may be deterred by prospects of political instability.
- enhances the possibility of all political groups working together to build political consensus on strategies which may require radical remodelling of services and finances which could otherwise create a barrier to continued improvement.

5.7 Currently the cost of local elections is incurred every 3 out of 4 years and are in the region of £90,000 per annum. Where the local elections coincide with other elections, any fixed costs incurred would be reduced by the level of contributions from external parties such as Central Government. In recent years, this has seen the Council only paying half of the main costs i.e. for staffing, polling stations, postal vote packs and poll cards. The potential saving from moving to whole-council elections exceeds the contributions from combined elections.

5.8 In contrast the advantages of election cycle in thirds are:

- allowing continuity of councillors by potentially avoiding a large number of new inexperienced councillors at one election.
- encouraging people into the habit of voting and voting for one person is well understood by voters. Voting for three councillors under whole-council elections will need to be explained well to voters to avoid confusion.
- allowing 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.

## **6. MATTERS ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROPOSED CHANGE**

- 6.1 Part of the consideration of moving to whole-council elections is to determine the date on which this would come into effect. Whilst the legislation does not allow the Council to align the date with the County Council elections, it would be prudent to plan for a time that takes advantage of and aligns with another election to maximise the level of contribution to be made to the Council.
- 6.2 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England Ward Boundary Review has now been completed and as a result the Council is subject to all-out election in May 2024 along with the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections. This presents a timely opportunity to move to whole-council elections with minimal disruption as the Council is already preparing for an all-out election and would see the cycle fall in line with future PCC elections therefore maximising the financial advantages of a combined election. 2025 is County Council elections so this year is not an option. The Council is required to ensure that the date set for change is not too far in the future as otherwise there would be the risk that it could be considered to be unlawfully undermining the intention to provide stability.
- 6.3 By-elections are more likely to occur under a whole-election system because vacancies would need to be filled at the time they occur, rather than where, for example, a resignation is generally dealt with in the more frequent May local elections. The estimated cost for a standalone by-election could be up to £15,000. This has been provided for in terms of the predicted savings.
- 6.4 A change to whole-council elections would see the Council secure significant savings over a four-year period and assist in the delivery of the medium term financial strategy. While arguments exist in favour and against such a change, better value for money is obtained from whole-council elections.

## **7. NEXT STEPS**

- 7.1 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. If members are minded to vote in favour of the recommendations, consideration must be given to resolve that it shall by order amend the scheme for town council elections within Rossendale and that from May 2024 the election of all Whitworth Town councillors will take place on the same day as elections for borough councillors. The order can make transitional provision for the retirement of town and parish councillors at different times than would have otherwise applied during that transitional period.
- 7.2 In the event that members resolve to move to whole- council 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.

## **8. 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. This is underway presently in readiness for the May 2024 elections following the boundary review.

- 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. This already in motion due to the requirements on the May 2024 elections.

## **9. FINANCE**

9.1 Currently a Local election costs the Council c£90,000. It is estimated that a whole-council election would cost around £92,000. Therefore a four year cycle is currently estimated to cost c£270,000 for three years of elections. Moving to whole-council elections would therefore produce a potential saving of £178,000 over the four year cycle, subject to the potential costs of any by-elections (circa £15k each).

9.2 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. A move to whole-council elections would provide greater accountability and better value for money for the residents of Rossendale.

## **10. LEGAL**

10.1 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (2007) provides the legal basis for the Council to change the electoral cycle.

10.2 Section 33 of the Act outlines the process the Council must follow. There is a need for a resolution for whole-council elections and this requires:

- (1) A council must comply with this section in passing a resolution for whole-council elections.
- (2) 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.
- (3) The resolution must be passed—
  - (a) at a meeting which is specially convened for the purpose of deciding the resolution with notice of the object, and
  - (b) by a majority of at least two thirds of the members voting on it.
- (3A) The resolution must specify the year for the first ordinary elections of the council at which all councillors are to be elected.
- (3B) In the case of a district council for a district in a county for which there is a county council, the year specified under subsection (3A) may not be a county-council-elections year; and here "county-council-elections year" means 2013 and every fourth year afterwards.

- 10.3 Any changes to town council elections would form part of this resolution.
- 10.4 Should the Council not agree to move to a scheme of whole-council elections, the Secretary of State holds the power to require a change by Order laid in Parliament, as provided for under section 86(A1) of the Local Government Act 2000, as amended.

## 11. POLICY AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

The consultation process has been undertaken in line with the legislation and as outlined in the body of the report. The Electoral Commission report from 2004 references research which suggests that both younger age groups and those with an ethnicity other than white were less likely to know when local elections were taking place, and that moving to a nationwide pattern of whole-council elections would improve enfranchisement for these groups compared with those who do not share it. Moving to whole-council elections may provide an opportunity for the Council to positively impact on the opportunities of these groups to participate and vote in elections.

## 12. REASONS FOR THE DECISION

To move to whole-council elections commencing May 2024 and make an order to ensure that Whitworth Town Council elections coincide with the elections of Rossendale Borough Council.

<b>Background Papers</b>	
Document	Place of Inspection
Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (2007)	<a href="https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/28/part/2/chapter/1/crossheading/power-of-district-councils-to-change-to-wholecouncil-elections">https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/28/part/2/chapter/1/crossheading/power-of-district-councils-to-change-to-wholecouncil-elections</a>
Appendix 1 – Consultation response	Attached
Appendix 2 - The Electoral Commission - The cycle of local government elections in England Report and recommendations	Attached
Appendix 3 – Election timetable in England	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/election-timetable-in-england/election-timetable-in-england">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/election-timetable-in-england/election-timetable-in-england</a>

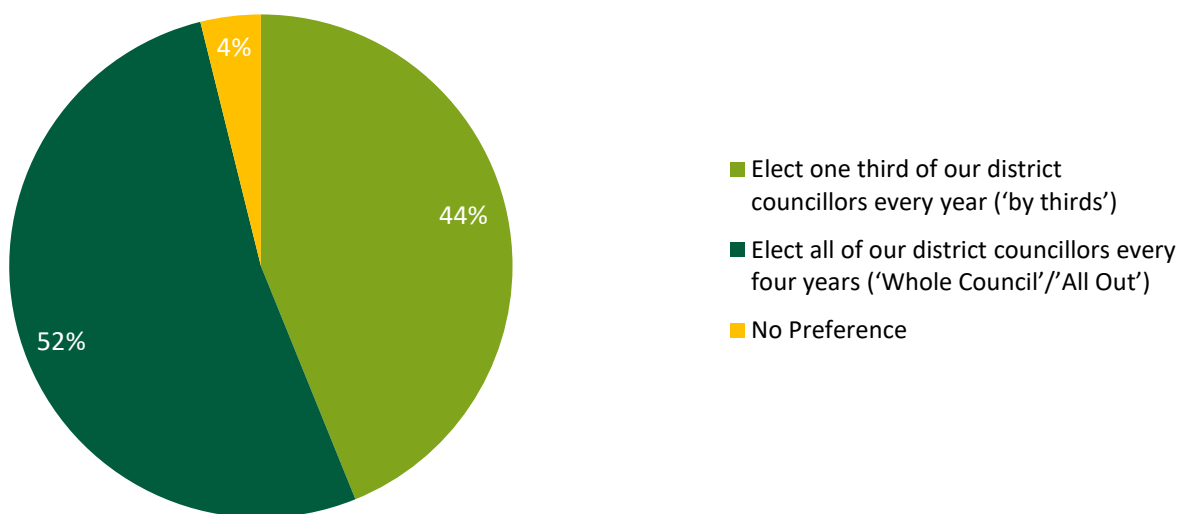


# Elections Consultation 2024 Summary Report

1. Having read the information provided by the Council, do you think we should:
  - i) Elect one third of our district councillors every year ('by thirds')
  - ii) Elect all of our district councillors every four years ('Whole Council'/'All Out')
  - iii) No Preference

**Having read the information provided by the Council, do you think we should:**

Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Elect one third of our district councillors every year ('by thirds')	43.9%	68
2	Elect all of our district councillors every four years ('Whole Council'/'All Out')	52.3%	81
3	No Preference	3.9%	6
<i>answered</i>			<b>155</b>



2. We would like to understand why people have chosen a particular option, so please tell us why you feel that way? Expressing a reason for a preference is beneficial as it will be considered by Council.

Elect one third of our district councillors every year ('by thirds') – word cloud:

accountability **accountable** achieve **annual** avoids candidate case **chance** community **con**  
**tinuity** costs **council councillors** cycle decisions democratic  
 disruption **elected** electing **election elections electorate** expensive  
 experience experienced feel governance government lack leads **local** majority nation

al opinion opportunity **option party people** political preferable regularly represents residents retention sho

rt stability stay term **thirds** toes understand **vote** voted **voters** voting westminster work **ye**

**ar** yearly **years**

### Elect one third of our district councillors every year ('by thirds') Full Response

1	People are more likely to vote
2	It prevents seismic, disruptive changes. As a result, people have to look to collaboration and compromise.
3	Fairer process
4	There are pros and cons to both proposals however electing a smaller number allows for a more seamless transition / less disruption. At the end of the day people want politicians to work together for the betterment of the community .
5	Potentially changing the entire council at the same time would give no continuity and potentially hinder any ongoing projects
6	More control for voters
7	This ensures a consistency of approach - parties geared to constituents regularly not just once every four years. This permits continuity of policies not a sudden change. A better chance for long-term commitments.
8	I think there would be more continuity if only a third was elected each year. Also political changes can be reacted to more quickly.
9	The 3 (out of 4) year cycle, enables feedback - a democratic update and punishment for a party's egregious behaviour. It gives a straightforward choice about who the councillor should be. To elect all at once has a number of disadvantages:- The quality of candidate is poor at times (including elected ones) and is likely to be further diluted in all out elections. Decent candidates sometimes lose out, it would be a shame that they and the public have to wait another 4 years before another election. Electing more than one councillor per ward in an all out election can be less than straightforward - with more mixed messages and tactics like one party with only one candidate suggesting voting just once for them (which is logical but anti-democratic etc). Every 4 years would make Rossendale Council even more remote for the voters than it already is (especially in Whitworth). I am concerned that there would be a tendency to take/game decisions that have an adverse effect just after a 4 year election, hoping people will have short memories; and delaying more beneficial decisions until nearer (but before) and election. The council have failed to provide robust analyses showing the pros and cons of their preferred option of all out elections every 4 years. There has been no case made for a significant improvement except for reducing cost. It is unclear what effect this consultation is intended to have and how the council intend to use it. What level of response is being looked for? If a majority say they want to keep the existing system - would the councillors just ignore it i.e. is it virtually a fait accompli?
10	At each local elections it maintains a 66% element of experienced councillors, and avoids the possibility of a huge influx of new inexperienced councillors.
11	More experienced councillors pass knowledge and expertise to newer councillors. Under an 'all out' election this could not be carried on if experienced councillors are not voted for.
12	Although a more expensive option it allows continuity and for a an experienced core of councillors. In addition, the four year option would mean that the electorate would only have a chance to vote for their preferred candidate once every four years which makes for a less democratic system.
13	The council estimates that up to £178,000 can be saved for council funds. I applaud the council's concern, but this is a tiny amount compared with a) the amount that has been taken from council budgets over the last 14 years, and b) the amount that the Westminster government has felt able to write off following its mismanagement. To change from a fair system to an unfair one in order to save such a paltry amount will only encourage Westminster to cut more from local councils' budgets.
14	I feel the "by thirds" elections offer a regular chance to feed back to all levels of government any displeasure felt by the electorate. "All out" elections are more likely to fall into line with voters' leanings for Westminster elections. As such they would seriously disadvantage smaller parties, resulting in an even more iniquitous distribution of votes and therefore of councillors. This clearly disadvantages voters who will feel less able to vote with their conscience.
15	By thirds allows the public like myself to vote and change councillors that are not providing what we want and need.
16	Annual accountability. 4 years is too long. You only need to see the overall dissatisfaction with the current national government and the lack of a timely election to understand that. Annual elections also provide greater retention of experience overall
17	'By thirds' elections offer the better governance model, helping to moderate the political spectrum and temper extremism. Important, particularly in today's polarised political climate. The move to 'whole council' elections serves only to strengthen a 'two party' system whilst diluting electoral accountability; in effect a 4 year dictatorship and most likely the underlying driver for the change particularly as there has been no demand from the electorate itself. Given the

	lack of any other persuading arguments; the costs are negligible either way and 'voter fatigue' - really! The status quo is the safest option.
18	need experienced councillors to help new ones with ongoing concerns, a council should be accountable to its voters and give them a chance to respond more frequently than every 4 years, and cost should definitely not be the governing factor in democracy!
19	We feel that it is preferable to have the opportunity to bring in new Councillors more frequently as circumstances can change over a four year period. Not everybody is happy with the outcome of an election of councillors and in order to maintain voters interest and focus on local politics we consider it important to give voters hope for change over the current three year cycle rather than extend their disappointment, angst and frustration.
20	1. More capability to achieve long-term goals. 2. More incentive to compromise. 3. More opportunity to out-vote poor councillors. 4. Increased fluidity of change.
21	I think it is a fairer reflection of how the electorate feels. Waiting for 4 years would leave voters waiting a long time before they could make a change.
22	Elections by thirds means residents get a say every year about who represents them and cast opinion on how the council is being run. Removing people's annual vote does not make for better or clearer governance. We understand all of our neighbouring councils in East Lancashire, West Yorkshire and Greater Manchester all continue to elect their council by thirds so I think we should just be left alone to stay as we are and people should stop fiddling with our established and easy to understand voting system.
23	Current councillors not listening to their constituents, paying expensive road tax, council tax and not receiving what we deserve. Road are dangerous
24	This would retain experience of existing councillors and enable residents to stay engaged in the democratic process
25	Avoiding having a lack of experience as well as the electorate being able to have an annual option of voting will retain experience in the council as well as making the electorate not feel powerless like we often do in the Westminster elections due to the long time between elections.
26	Because I think people would get complacent otherwise.
27	To maintain experience
28	I think every 4 years is too long. It means if a council is not responding to the needs of the electorate then we can vote new councillors in every year.
29	Since living in Bacup I have been very disappointed with local councillors, over all it seems very corrupt and also appears that time is wasted pursuing personal grudges or supporting self serving projects as opposed to actually helping and improving our community. More frequent elections means that we have more power of the people elected to act in the public's interests.
30	we've got to keep the councillors on their toes! If we let them stay in for four years they'll never do what we need them to do.
31	More accountable on what Rossendale needs in their constituency
32	To keep councillors accountable to their constituency.
33	If you're doing a job the electorate appreciate, then you'll be re-elected. Whilst four year terms may provide stability from the council's point of view, it can also lead to complacency and quiescence. A constantly flowing stream avoids stagnancy.
34	The councillors need to be more accountable
35	I think that voters should have the opportunity to reassess the council's performance annually and vote to reflect this, rather than being stuck long term with a council that isn't moving in the wanted direction.
36	1. The current system enhances democratic accountability at a local level. 2. Local decisions often require speedy resolutions. Annual elections facilitate the electorate's verdict on those decisions which should focus councillors into making them in a timely manner. 3. Local elections are often influenced by national events. A fixed four year system means being left with a dominant party elected because the govt was unpopular without the means to adjust over time. 4. A fixed cycle is only fair if a proportional representation system was also adopted.
37	The case for 'all out' local elections is not made. Preserving the present system allows for some retention of learning and avoids dramatic policy swings.
38	In my limited experience I believe that change isn't always for the good. I favour the 'by thirds' system. The reasoning behind it seems easier. We just need to get people motivated to vote. Three strikes and you are out. It really annoys me that people don't vote because 'they are all the same'. No they are not and anyone who complains about local or national governance gets short shrift from me if (when I ask) they have voted or not and the answer is no!
39	Election of a third of councillors each year leads to better continuity and less disruption May be more expensive, but more preferable in my opinion.
40	Achieve continuity, no chance there would be a majority of greenhorn members having to learn the role
41	I support the idea of electing our council by thirds every year. I think this method offers more stability in how we manage local issues. It gives us a chance to assess the council's work every year. This way, we can respond quickly to local needs and changes. Having yearly elections keeps the council accountable. It means they have to stay focused on what residents want all the time. They can't just make promises every four years. They have to keep proving themselves. Even if it costs more to have elections every year, I don't mind. I believe it's worth it for better local governance. It's important to have a council that knows it must listen to us regularly, not just once in a while. In short, yearly elections

keep our council on their toes. They ensure our voices are heard more often. This leads to a council that better represents our community's needs and desires.
--

Elect all of our district councillors every four years ('Whole Council/All Out') – word cloud:

bigger borough cheaper concentrate consistency constituents continuity **cost** costs **council**  
**councillors** cycle decision decisions effective elected electi  
 on elections enable feel financial good higher issues it's lead local longer making  
**money** number opportunity **people** period plan planning policies polling public redu  
 ce residents resources rossendale **save** saved saves saving savings sense stabilit  
 y strategic **term** thirds turnout **vote** votes voting work year years

Elect all of our district councillors every four years ('Whole Council'/'All Out') Full Response	
1	The cost savings are huge when we are all trying to tighten our belts but it would mean that councillors would be able to concentrate on long-term plans rather than wasting half the year electioneering and not wanting to make tough decisions in case it loses votes.
2	Better decision making
3	Financial saving. An annual election turns into a mini opinion poll on the government at the time. Every four years allows the governing party greater opportunities to implement any policies and to plan for the longer term rather than always having to think about the next election cycle in 12 months. Sometimes politicians will need to make unpopular decisions.
4	Cost savings and also allows councillors to concentrate on serving their constituents
5	Cost implications, saved money could go to other more beneficial projects in the valley
6	It's a drag to vote every year. I've better things to do with my time. Sometimes it's good to have a whole new council of fresh faces and fresh ideas instead of being stuck with the same old dinosaurs who gave little forward thinking
7	Keep cost of elections down
8	Voter engagement - more at stake would hopefully bring a higher turnout which recently, has been dreadful in local council elections.
9	Makes economic sense.
10	Financially better value. Enables better political strategic decision making provided by a four year window.
11	More cost effective, enables longer term decisions to be made.
12	Cost! It would hopefully remove the stagnation of having two thirds of councillors who dominate the new intake. We might end up with keen new councillors who aren't stuck in a rut (or pothole)!
13	Every year is time consuming and expensive. Better value to residents appears to be 4 yearly and also more consistency in who is in charge.
14	It will save money which the council can spend on other things
15	Cheaper for the council Easier for voters to understand Provides stability for whichever party is in control
16	It will save the council money which can be spent instead on public services. It also gives stability and certainty to the Council to enable them to plan over a longer period.
17	Will make it cheaper which should save money and lead to cheaper council tax
18	Better decision making
19	Cheaper, clearer, allows for more strategic long term work
20	save money on elections
21	Support the financial savings the Council need to make.
22	We might get better service if we can vote the useless ones out all at once
23	Save money and also lead to more stability and better planning of policies
24	It seems to be the most cost effective solution whilst causing the minimum distribution.
25	Gives time for decisions to be implemented. Saves money.
26	Saved cost and time. I'd rather a council focus on improvements to the area than constant reelection.
27	Save money and give more time for policies to work

28	I work in a local authority and I am aware of the cost of holding elections. It makes sense to move to every 4 years. In addition it may lead to increased turnout.
29	Saves money, gives councillors more time to concentrate on important issues rather than worrying about being reelected
30	Because it is cost effective and give councillors the time and space to do what is needed.
31	Save money. And a more challenging vote
32	Seems logical for consistency and means we don't have to impact schools etc to close for polling day as many times.
33	Saves money
34	Its hard enough to get people to vote once in 4 years
35	Unsure of how long the "thirds" system has been in place. Maybe it's time for a change? What happens on the 4th year of "thirds" system? As Boundary Review has declared a reduction in councillors and wards and therefore dictates an 'all out' election, it would seem that should be the starting point for an improved system. Is there a date set yet for this particular election? Despite both options having advantages and disadvantages, a financial saving may just tip the balance towards "Whole council/all out" in the long term of a cash-strapped council.
36	Cost and stability. Main reason for this decision is due to the cost of the elections every year, the money saved could be used for other things.
37	My reason is that with elections every 4-years there would be a stronger and more consistent relationship between elected members and officers who run the council. It is my opinion that this would then create a stronger delivery of the councils medium and long term objectives. This in turn will have a greater impact and benefit for the residents of Rossendale, businesses in Rossendale and will improve the quality for visitors to the Rossendale Valley
38	Provided continuity to enable elected councillors the opportunity to try to get things right and be more effective. Economically more viable
39	I feel it is a more cost effective and efficient way for the our elected representatives to utilise their constituents money and resources.
40	More cost effective Allows for a period of stability
41	Feel an all out election every four years will allow better long term strategic planning. There will be savings which could be put to good use. I think it could increase resident engagement in the election process.
42	The advantages of "Whole Council/All Out" elections outweigh elections "by thirds".
43	It's self explanatory, it's cost effective, reduces time, win win situation
44	Because firstly more cost effective and also less confusing doing the whole election in one go.
45	Less complex voting system for people may result in a higher turn out of voters and may result in the All out proposal being cheaper which this incompetent Labour- run council certainly needs . The current system is simply outdated .
46	The strategic aims would be longer term. Less mature councillors could be voted for in total every four years which is a risk, but I'd suspect that each time, a good number of experienced councillors would be re elected.
47	As we have whole government elections why should the local system differ? Currently it is possible for an unpopular council with a majority to retain power where only a third of the seats are to be contested so it can be very difficult for the electorate to actually get a council that it wants
48	Money saving and a clear message
49	The cost savings are essential but more importantly it allows focus on Council Leadership.
50	Cost effective
51	once every 4 years works , give opportunity for councillors' to find there feet / passions and to be known locally
52	Cost saving could be used for other needs.
53	So people have the opportunity to either re-elect a councillor who does a good job for the community and vote for new
54	The cost is one consideration, it also means that the Council can make longer term decisions. The implementation of this proposal would I feel be beneficial for the whole of Rossendale.
55	Makes more sense to elect all at same time - know where you are with all councillors chosen together
56	Anything that saves RBC money. Politically it's a good thing. I think this is likely to go nationwide, so let's get in fairly early.....so.....if things do go wrong....we can change back to the old system....Make sure that's in the legislation.
57	It will streamline the process and become more cost effective. A lot of people don't know who is their councilor or how long they have been in term or what they are working towards. Electing all councilors every 4 years will slow consistency for the councilors and transparency for constituents.
58	every four years makes more sense and would help the public who do become fed up with too many elections and sometimes decide, "What's the point"
59	Cost saving. Long term stability to plan and see out the plan.
60	Seems to be the most cost effective and simplest ways to do the election
61	It would be far more cost effective for charge payers to hold all out elections every four years, we should also place all voting age residents on postal votes, this would also make far more sense from a cost saving for our Council tax payers, given personal I've never understood people/staff being on polling stations for sixteen hours on polling day, that system is now outdated and should be consigned to history.
62	It saves the council money which can be spent more appropriately in other areas. It encourages better planning and has a bigger chance of a higher vote turnout.

63	Mainly to save the borough council money, and enable committees to have a defined membership and plan over the four years that councillors are members for. A downside would be that there could be a large number of new councillors who may take some time to understand the roles and responsibilities of both the council and the various committees but this could also be the case in the "thirds" type option too, just to a lesser extent. Residents sometimes also suffer from election fatigue, just thinking back to the well know news clip of a lady stating "you're joking, not another one!" and switching to the whole council election system may help to alleviate this.
64	It makes sense to go for the cheapest option.
65	The pre-election period hinders Council policy development and adoption. Removing this period every year can reduce the time it takes for the Council to adopt important policy documents. Having to vote every year can lead to voter fatigue and confusion as to why people are having to vote so frequently.
66	Moving to all-out elections will save the Council money, which is important given the financial situation. It will provide stability for the Council to make longer-term decisions and see them implemented.
67	This would allow more longer term planning and delivery
68	Allows continuity
69	Cost effective
70	It makes sense to put all elections at same time and save money that the council could use for more important issues within the Borough. I also believe that you would get a bigger turnout , People get fed up with having to keep voting each year.
71	Agree that it will save precious resources and allow the council to concentrate on getting things done. Will allow continuity and reflects the election cycle of many other public bodies. I think this would be in the interests of all Rossendale residents.
72	Reduce costs Enhance the stability of the Council
73	I feel it will lead to more stability and decision making for the council and its investors allowing long term planning.
74	Stability of the work programme, long term planning and committee cycle rather than having to break off each year for the pre election period. Cost saving.
75	much better to be able to plan and would be more stable and save money
76	Not only to save costs but also disruption in places where the votes take place. They should also take place at weekends when people have more time on their hands to vote so would increase the number of people currently bothering to vote from the current average of 30% to something more like 60%

No preference

No preference Full Response	
1	I don't know what is best
2	What will the difference make. When It is the Councillors who choose the Candidate and not the local residents. Fed up of close shop politics and Cliché.

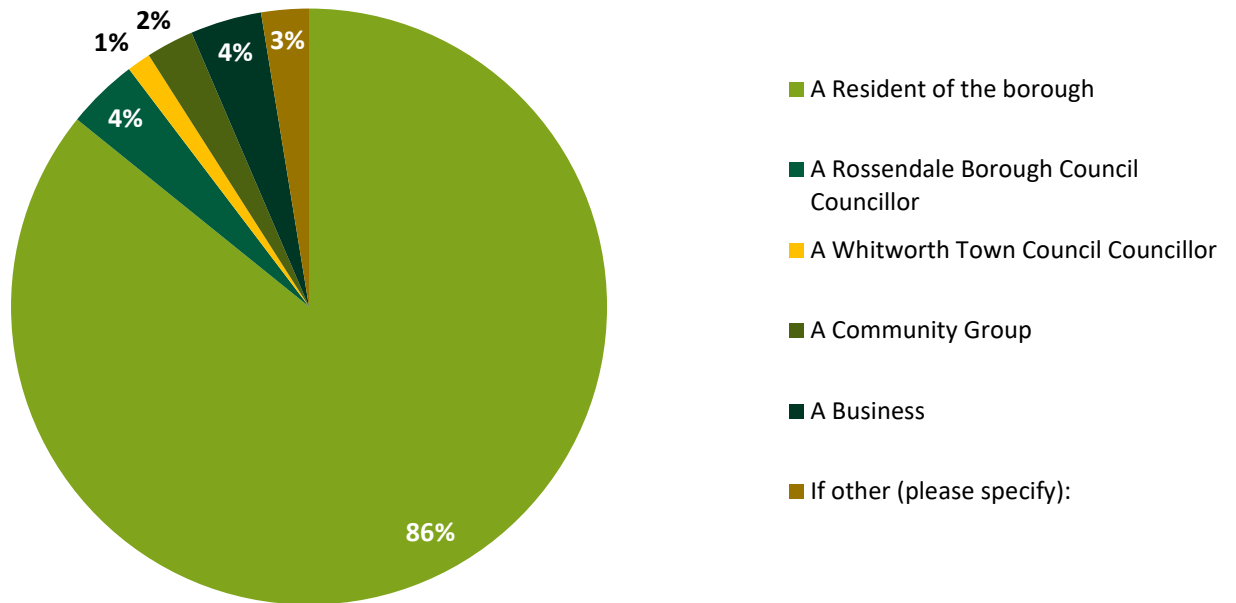
3. We want to hear from as many people and stakeholders in Rossendale as we can. Please select which relates to you:
- i) A Resident of the borough
  - ii) A Rossendale Borough Council Councillor
  - iii) A Whitworth Town Council Councillor
  - iv) A Community Group
  - v) A Business
  - vi) If other (please specify)

We want to hear from as many people and stakeholders in Rossendale as we can. Please select which relates to you:			
Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	A Resident of the borough	85.8%	133
2	A Rossendale Borough Council Councillor	3.9%	6
3	A Whitworth Town Council Councillor	1.3%	2
4	A Community Group	2.6%	4



5	A Business	3.9%	6
6	If other (please specify):	2.6%	4
<b>answered</b>			<b>155</b>

If other (please specify)	
1	RBC Employee
2	Council Worker
3	I work in Rossendale
4	An officer at Rossendale Borough Council



January 2004

A photograph of a woman with blonde hair, wearing a red shirt, looking down at a white envelope she is holding. The background is a blurred indoor setting. In the foreground, a dark surface with the word 'BALLOT' printed on it is visible.

# The cycle of local government elections in England

Report and recommendations

## The Electoral Commission

We are an independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. We aim to gain public confidence and encourage people to take part in the democratic process within the UK by modernising the electoral process, promoting public awareness of electoral matters, and regulating political parties.

On 1 April 2002, The Boundary Committee for England (formerly the Local Government Commission for England) became a statutory committee of The Electoral Commission. Its duties include reviewing local electoral boundaries.

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# Contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>3</b>		
Simplification and change	3	<b>Appendix 1: Secretary of State's request to The Electoral Commission</b>	<b>28</b>
Recommendations for the local electoral cycle in England	4	<b>Appendix 2: Respondents to the consultation paper and consultation meetings</b>	<b>30</b>
Implementation	4		
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>		
Background	6		
Request	6		
Scope and terms of reference	7		
The Electoral Commission	7		
<b>2 Review process</b>	<b>8</b>		
Evidence	8		
Consultation	9		
Responses to consultation	9		
Next steps	9		
<b>3 Simplification and change</b>	<b>11</b>		
Current arrangements	11		
Issues	12		
Change and local diversity	13		
The need for clarity	14		
The need for consistency	15		
Recommendation	15		
<b>4 Recommendations for the local electoral cycle in England</b>	<b>17</b>		
Priorities	17		
Democratic legitimacy and local accountability	18		
Awareness and understanding of elections	19		
Participation and turnout	19		
Management and performance	20		
Other issues	21		
Recommendation	21		
<b>5 Implementation</b>	<b>23</b>		
Implementation issues	23		
Options for implementation	25		
Recommendation	26		



# Executive summary

Following a request made under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA) in January 2003, this report to the Deputy Prime Minister contains the findings of The Electoral Commission's review of the cycle of local government elections in England, and its recommendations for change to simplify the current cycle.

On 28 January 2003, The Electoral Commission received a formal request from the Deputy Prime Minister to 'review and submit a report to him on the cycle of local government elections in England, identifying options for change that would simplify the current cycle'. The Commission was also required to assess the desirability and practicality of any options for change, and make recommendations for the implementation of those options.

We published an evidence and consultation paper in July 2003, summarising the findings of research on public attitudes and awareness, electoral turnout and local authority performance, and seeking views on a range of questions. We received a total of 269 submissions to our consultation paper and attended a number of meetings to discuss issues in more detail.

## Simplification and change

The current pattern of local electoral cycles in England is unclear and inconsistent, both between and within local authority types. There are wide variations in the opportunities available to electors to participate in local elections, depending on the area in which they live. This disjointed and inconsistent pattern of local electoral cycles has come about as a result of historical accident, and the piecemeal approach to structural change in local government during the past 30 years.

The apparent disparities and contradictions of the current pattern of electoral cycles are not, in themselves, of particular concern to us. However, our research has found significant evidence of confusion and misunderstanding which suggests that many electors simply do not know when or why local elections are held in their area. We are concerned that the complex current pattern of different local electoral cycles across England does not help electors to understand the opportunities open to them for participation in the democratic process.

We are also concerned that opportunities for access to the local democratic process should be equitable. It is fundamentally unfair and, in our view, unacceptable that within an individual local authority some electors may

have fewer opportunities to vote and influence the political composition of the authority than their neighbours in a different ward. It is clear that the current pattern of local government elections in England does not provide equal access to the democratic process for all electors, particularly in areas with partial council elections.

We consider that the pattern of local electoral cycles in England is unnecessarily complex and confusing, and that there is a strong case for simplification of the current arrangements. We note the important debate on the merits of diversity of practice in local government. However, we can see no good reason why one of the fundamental elements of local democracy should vary from area to area.

The Commission recommends that the cycle of local and sub-national government elections in England should follow a clear and consistent pattern, within and across local authorities. Individual authorities should not be permitted to 'opt out' of this pattern, and any newly created authorities should also follow the same pattern.

## Recommendations for the local electoral cycle in England

Responses to our consultation underlined many of the arguments surrounding the debate for and against either whole council or partial elections. However, we received little new information or evidence to support respondents' positions. While we have sympathy with many of these arguments, the balance of evidence that we have considered suggests that whole council elections are more likely to provide clarity for electors and a degree of stability for local authorities.

We also consider that a key principle for the electoral cycle of local authorities should be to ensure that all electors are given the same opportunities for participation in the local democratic process. A more equitable pattern of electoral arrangements under elections by thirds would require a uniform pattern of three-member wards across authorities, or a uniform pattern of two-member wards with biennial elections.

Whole council elections would require no change to local authorities' current electoral arrangements.

However, The Boundary Committee for England has noted that the requirement to recommend a uniform pattern of three-member wards in metropolitan borough areas has caused specific difficulties when attempting to reflect community identities in some authorities. The Committee notes that the flexibility to recommend single-, two- or three-member wards enables it to more easily reflect local communities while continuing to provide good levels of electoral equality. Under a pattern of whole council elections, authorities would not be restricted to any particular ward size, since the entire electorate would be eligible to vote together once every four years.

Having taken into account the evidence and arguments presented during our consultation process, we have concluded that a pattern of whole council elections for all local authorities in England would provide a clear, equitable and easy to understand electoral process that would best serve the interests of local government electors.

The Commission recommends that each local authority in England should hold whole council elections, with all councillors elected simultaneously, once every four years.

## Implementation

Our proposals for the implementation of our recommendations attempt to balance the need for a pragmatic approach to change with our desire to see timely reform of the local electoral cycle in England.

We considered several options for the implementation of our recommendations for change, and rejected an option under which all local government elections would take place in the same year. We considered that this proposal would diminish the important distinction between different local government elections taking place in the same area, and between the roles and responsibilities of local and sub-national government where it exists.

Our preferred approach to the implementation of our recommendation would balance simplicity and a

national focus on local government issues, with a clear distinction between different tiers of local or sub-national government. Under our recommendation all local government electors in England would have the opportunity to vote for their district, metropolitan borough, London borough or unitary council in the first year of the electoral cycle. Those electors in areas with other local or sub-national authorities would vote again two years later.

The Commission recommends that all local government electors in England should elect members of their district, metropolitan borough, London borough or unitary council simultaneously once every four years. Two years later, in the mid-point of the electoral cycle, electors in areas with county councils, city-wide authorities or any future sub-national government should elect representatives to those bodies.

If the recommendations of this review are accepted by Government and Parliament, we will work with central and local government partners to identify the most appropriate approach to timely implementation.



# 1 Introduction

Following a request made under section 6(2) of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA) in January 2003, this report to the Deputy Prime Minister contains the findings of The Electoral Commission's review of the cycle of local government elections in England, and its recommendations for change to simplify the current cycle.

## Background

1.1 In its white paper *Strong local leadership – quality public services*,<sup>1</sup> published in December 2001, the Government noted that:

The current cycle of local government elections is confusing. Some councils have elections once every four years while others have elections in three years out of four. It is too easy for electors to lose track of when elections are to be held or how many votes they have on any particular election day. And this arrangement can lessen the immediate impact of voters' behaviour on council control.

1.2 The Government went on to indicate in the white paper that it proposed to invite The Electoral Commission to review and recommend options to simplify the current cycle of local elections.

## Request

1.3 Under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA), which established The Electoral Commission, the Secretary of State may request the Commission to review and report on any matter specified by him.<sup>2</sup> On 28 January 2003, the Commission received a formal request from the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to section 6(2) of PERPA, to:

review and submit a report to him on the cycle of local government elections in England, identifying options for change that would simplify the current cycle.

Under the terms of the request, the Commission has also been required to assess the desirability and practicality of any options for change, and make recommendations for the implementation of these options.

1.4 The request specified that the Commission's report must be submitted to the Deputy Prime Minister no later than 12 months after the date of the request. It also outlined the scope and terms of reference to be considered by the Commission in its review. The full text of the request is included in Appendix 1 to this paper.

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<sup>1</sup> Cm 5237.

<sup>2</sup> Section 6(2) Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.

## Scope and terms of reference

1.5 In undertaking this review, The Electoral Commission has carefully considered the scope and terms of reference that were outlined in the request submitted by the Deputy Prime Minister. Under the terms of the request, the Commission's report on the cycle of local government elections in England must include consideration of the normal elections for:

- principal authorities – districts (including unitary authorities and metropolitan boroughs), London boroughs and counties;
- the Greater London Authority (GLA);
- elected mayors; and
- parish councils.

1.6 While the terms of the request specify elections to the GLA, we have also considered it appropriate to take into account elections to potential future levels of sub-national government as well as any existing bodies.

1.7 In considering any options for change to the current cycle of local government elections, the Commission's recommendations might involve changes to:

- councillors' terms of office; or
- local authorities' electoral arrangements in England, including:
  - the number of councillors for the local authority area;
  - the boundaries of wards or divisions for the area; or
  - the number of wards or divisions for the area.

1.8 The Government's request also specified a range of matters to which the Commission must have regard in carrying out this review. These included, but were not limited to, consideration of the extent to which any options for change would:

- improve the democratic legitimacy and local accountability of councils;
- enable greater understanding of when elections are to be held and their purpose;

- be likely to improve participation in the electoral process;
- help facilitate the effective management of local authorities; and
- be facilitated by new ways of voting, including increased postal voting, electronic counting or multi-channel e-voting.

1.9 The Commission was also required to consider the relationship between different local government elections in related areas, and between local government elections and other elections in England (i.e., elections to the Westminster and European parliaments).

## The Electoral Commission

1.10 This review has been carried out under the guidance of a project board including Sam Younger, Chairman of The Electoral Commission, Pamela Gordon, Commissioner and Chair of The Boundary Committee for England, and two Deputy Electoral Commissioners, Joan Jones CBE and Professor Michael Clarke CBE. However, the views presented in this report are those of The Electoral Commission alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of project board members or others who have contributed to the review process.

# 2 Review process

From the outset of this review we have recognised that it was likely to provoke both interest and controversy, among the local government community in particular. We also acknowledged that there might be no straightforward 'right' answer to the issues involved. We have been especially keen to ensure that our recommendations are based on objective evidence, and that we have consulted widely.

## Evidence

**2.1** We noted at the outset of this review the importance of gathering objective evidence to complement the valuable views of stakeholders and consultation respondents. In particular, we were eager to gauge the views of the electorate, including both voters and non-voters. We asked MORI to undertake public survey research that would not simply explore electors' views and attitudes on the frequency of local elections in England, but would also explore in some depth their understanding and awareness of opportunities to vote in their local area.

**2.2** The initial survey results provided a broad impression of perceptions of local government electoral arrangements. However, at the analysis stage, the answers given by respondents about their perceptions of local government elections were compared with details of the electoral cycle and arrangements in their area, to give a measure of levels of actual understanding and awareness. We summarised the key findings of this public perceptions study in our consultation paper, and the full text of the report from MORI has been made available to download on our website. The results of the study are discussed in more detail in chapter 3 of this report.

**2.3** We also asked the Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre, University of Plymouth, to undertake a statistical analysis of the relationship between local government electoral cycles and turnout. Drawing on data from their historical database of local election results from the past 30 years, the Elections Centre was able to provide an assessment of the specific impact of the cycle or frequency of elections on turnout at local government elections. Again, the full text of the Elections Centre's report was made available to download on our website.

**2.4** Finally, we undertook our own consideration of the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) outcomes, to ascertain whether there were any discernible links between performance and different forms of electoral cycles. Our conclusions were included in the consultation paper published in July 2003.

## Consultation

**2.5** At the beginning of July 2003, we issued a consultation paper that brought together evidence on a range of issues, as detailed above, and sought views and comments on a number of questions. The paper was sent to the Chief Executives and Leaders of all local authorities in England, and to all local authority electoral services managers. It was also sent to a range of relevant local government stakeholders, including local authority members and officers, political parties and representative organisations including the Local Government Association (LGA), the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE), the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) and the National Association of Local Councils (NALC). The paper was also available to download on our website. We sought comments on the questions and issues raised in the consultation paper by the beginning of October 2003.

**2.6** In our consultation paper we also issued an open invitation to individuals or groups to contact us and arrange to meet the project team to discuss issues relating to the review. During the consultation period, we held or attended 17 such meetings, detailed in Appendix 2.

## Responses to consultation

**2.7** During the consultation period we received a total of 269 responses by post or email, from a wide range of organisations and individuals, primarily within the local government community. A total of 143 local authorities and 16 local parish or town councils responded, and we also received individual responses from 20 local councillors and eight local authority officers. Nine registered political parties submitted responses, and we also received comments from seven MPs, three members of the House of Lords and 34 local political groups. We received further comments from 11 individual respondents, two academics and a total of 16 other organisations or groups. A full list of respondents is included in Appendix 2 of this report. Copies of all non-confidential responses can be viewed at our office.

**2.8** Responses ranged in depth from detailed consideration of each of the questions and issues raised in the consultation paper, to a broad outline of respondents' positions. We greatly appreciate the input of those who took part in our consultation exercise, and we value the experience and expertise that respondents have been able to bring to this review. We have also found it particularly useful to meet interested groups in person during the consultation period, to gauge the strength of feeling on the issues involved and discuss them in more detail.

## Next steps

**2.9** This report sets out The Electoral Commission's recommendations to the Deputy Prime Minister for changes to the local government electoral cycle in England, as required by his request. The Commission recognises that its role in relation to electoral law is advisory, and it is not for the Commission to make the final determination as to how local government electoral cycles might be changed. It is for the Government to initiate, and ultimately for Parliament to decide on any proposals for legislative change.

**2.10** Nevertheless, we feel strongly that reform to simplify the local electoral cycle in England is overdue, and we would urge the Government to take forward the recommendations contained in this report at the earliest opportunity. Chapter 5 of this report outlines some suggested options for the implementation of our recommendations, and we will continue to work with the Government to ensure that timely progress towards reform is made.



# 3 Simplification and change

In looking at the cycle of local government elections in England we have been asked to identify options for change that would simplify the current cycle. Our priority has been to identify a pattern of local elections that best serves the democratic and community interests of electors.

## Current arrangements

**3.1** In our consultation paper, we examined in detail the current cycle of local government elections in England. We found the current pattern to be unclear and inconsistent, both within and between local authority types, and noted that there are wide variations in the range of opportunities available to electors to participate in local elections, depending on the area in which they live.

**3.2** As shown in Table 1 below, a total of 137 authorities currently elect by thirds, with one-third of members retiring each year and their seats up for fresh election. Seven authorities elect by halves, while 243 hold whole council elections once every four years. All metropolitan boroughs currently have a uniform pattern of three-member wards, while district, unitary and London councils may have between one and three members per ward. County councils may have either one or two members per division, but the large majority of divisions are represented by only one councillor.

**Table 1: summary of local government electoral cycle in England, by authority type**

Authority type	Thirds	Halves	Whole	Total
County council	-	-	34	34
District/borough council	82	7	149	238
Unitary council	19	-	27	46
London borough	-	-	33	33
Metropolitan borough	36	-	-	36
Parish and town councils	-	-	8,700	8,700

**3.3** At present there is no clear pattern of electoral cycle for local authorities in England, and the frequency with which authorities elect their members varies considerably from one area to another. In practice, this also means that the frequency with which electors are given the opportunity to vote varies from area to area, depending on the number and type of local authorities in each area. Electors in London may vote twice in each four-year electoral cycle (in borough and Greater London Authority elections), while those living in metropolitan borough areas can vote three times during the same period.

All electors in two-tier areas can vote in county council elections once every four years, but elections to shire districts may take place in each of the three years in-between county elections.

**3.4** Moreover, this disparity is also repeated within many local authority areas, where electors may be offered fewer or greater opportunities to vote for the same authority depending on the size of the individual ward in which they live. In unitary authorities that hold whole council elections every four years, all electors will be given the opportunity to vote once in each four-year electoral cycle. However, in those unitary authorities where members are elected by thirds, electors in single-member wards may vote only once in a four-year cycle, those in two-member wards may vote twice, and those in three-member wards may vote three times, with one year fallow.

**3.5** In two-tier shire areas, all electors can vote in county council elections once every four years. Electors in districts that hold whole council elections can also vote in the third year of the electoral cycle. However, in districts where members are elected by thirds, electors in single-member wards may vote twice in each four-year cycle (once for their district or borough ward and once for their county division), while their neighbours in two-member wards may vote three times, and those in three-member wards may vote in all four years of the cycle. In the small number of districts that elect by halves, all electors will be able to vote in three out of four years.

**3.6** One of the overall effects of these disparities in electoral cycle is that there is no consistent pattern to the scale of local elections from year to year. The number of authorities holding elections, wards or seats to be elected and electors eligible to vote changes each year, and in recent elections, the proportion of the total local government electorate eligible to vote has varied significantly. In 1999 and 2003, when elections were held in all metropolitan boroughs and shire districts, around 80% of the total local government electorate were eligible to vote. In local elections in 1996 and 2000, however, less than half of the total electorate were eligible to vote.

While there were no borough elections in London in 2000, more than five million electors were able to vote in elections to the GLA.

**3.7** This disjointed and inconsistent pattern of local electoral cycles has come about as a result of historical accident and the piecemeal approach to structural change in local government during the past 30 years. Where such change has taken place, from the large-scale reorganisation in the early 1970s to more recent structural reviews in the mid 1990s, it appears that little consideration has been given to the overall national impact of decisions on individual local authority electoral cycles. Government has continued to emphasise the importance of local choice of electoral cycle for non-metropolitan districts, and in particular rejected the recommendation of the 1986 Widdicombe Committee report on the conduct of local government for a uniform system of local government elections.<sup>3</sup> This emphasis on local choice has led to a patchwork pattern of electoral cycles across England, and each new phase of reorganisation has not only left these discrepancies unaddressed, but in many cases has added to the overall picture of inconsistency.

## Issues

**3.8** The apparent disparities and contradictions of the current pattern of electoral cycles are not, in themselves, of particular concern to us. This review was not intended to be an exercise in electoral tidiness. Rather, we have considered the problems and difficulties for electors that may be a direct consequence of this complexity and inconsistency. The evidence we have gathered suggests that the majority of electors simply do not know when, why or for which authority local elections are held in their area, and we are concerned that the complex current pattern of local electoral cycles may not encourage understanding of democratic opportunities across England.

<sup>3</sup> *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Conduct of Local Authority Business* (1986) Cmnd 9797.

**3.9** The study of public awareness that MORI carried out for us revealed a mixed picture of levels of understanding of the local electoral cycle among electors. Overall, a total of 77% of respondents knew whether or not there were local elections taking place in their area in May 2003. However, while some 84% of respondents in areas where elections were due to take place knew that they would have the opportunity to vote, one-sixth of the electorate were potentially disenfranchised – whether they wanted to vote or not – simply by being ill-informed or unaware of the elections taking place. In a similar study from 2002, MORI found that nearly a quarter of those in areas with elections were unaware that elections were taking place.<sup>4</sup> Younger respondents were significantly more likely to say they didn't know whether local elections would be held in their area (34% of respondents aged 15 to 24 compared with only 10% of those aged 25 plus). Respondents from black and minority ethnic communities were three times less likely than white respondents to be able to give an answer (12% compared with 39%).

**3.10** Many respondents who thought there were local elections in their area actually had little understanding of which authority the elections were actually for. Nearly one in five respondents overall (19%) did not know which authority they would be voting for in May 2003. Although county council elections were not held in May, 15% of respondents in shire district areas thought elections would be held for the county council. Some 12% of respondents in metropolitan borough areas and 21% in unitary authority areas, where there is no second tier of local government, were under the impression that elections were for county councils, although this may also demonstrate some lack of understanding of local government terminology. More positively, two-thirds of respondents in shire district areas (66%) correctly identified that the forthcoming elections were for their district or borough council.

**3.11** There was also widespread confusion and a lack of understanding about exactly how often electors have the

opportunity to vote in different areas of England. Nearly one-third of all respondents (30%) conceded that they did not know how often elections were held in their area, and only 16% overall were able to correctly identify the actual cycle of local elections. When other responses were compared with the actual frequency of elections at a ward level, it appears that the varied pattern of electoral cycle across England may have a particular effect on levels of awareness and understanding. Respondents in wards where elections were held either annually or only once every four years were most likely to answer correctly (34% and 30% respectively). However, only 5% of respondents in areas with elections in three years out of four answered correctly, and they were actually more likely to think that elections are held every year (37%). Respondents in areas with elections in two out of four years were also more likely to think that elections were held only once every four years.

**3.12** Attitudes towards change to the electoral cycle were mixed – perhaps unsurprisingly, given the generally poor level of awareness of the local government electoral cycle. Seventy-one per cent of respondents felt that the frequency of local elections in their area was 'about right', although one in five (19%) were unable to express a view. MORI found slightly more support among respondents for proposals to hold all local elections at the same time (53%) than for allowing the frequency of elections to vary locally (45%).

### Change and local diversity

**3.13** Respondents to our consultation paper were divided in their views as to the merits or desirability of a more uniform pattern of local electoral cycle. While many accepted the potential benefits to voter awareness and understanding of simplifications to the current cycle, others resented perceived interference from the centre in what they view as a matter for local choice.

**3.14** Many responses dealt in limited terms with the benefits or disadvantages of individual local electoral cycles, and did not take into account the wider picture of a nationwide pattern of elections. These respondents disagreed that confusion and low public awareness of

<sup>4</sup> MORI Social Research Institute survey for Green Issues Communications (2002), *Many Councillors 'Divorced' from the Electorate*.



local elections is a particular problem in their own area, if not nationally. While they maintained that local electors did understand when elections were held, the evidence of consistently low electoral turnouts across local government and the results of our opinion research work suggest that this view may be somewhat optimistic. Other respondents saw benefit in a more consistent pattern of local electoral cycles, but felt that the cycle in their own areas should be retained, and that other authorities should follow their example.

**3.15** A majority of respondents, however, accepted that a more uniform pattern of local electoral cycles would be beneficial, even if it would involve change to their own local arrangements. Many agreed that a clearer and more predictable local election cycle would help electors to understand when elections take place. Others noted the importance of consistency, both within and across local authorities, in ensuring that all electors have the same rights and opportunities to vote. Respondents also placed great value on the potential of a consistent local election pattern across England to help develop a 'national voting habit', which would promote local democratic renewal and civic responsibility by highlighting opportunities for democratic input. Certainly, it was noted that a nationally applicable pattern of local elections, whether every year, every other year or every four years, would enable a greater collective national focus on local government issues.

**3.16** We recognise that there is some opposition among local government stakeholders to the imposition of change, and in particular the imposition of uniformity, from above. Some respondents to our consultation paper argued that local choice of electoral cycle is both important and useful, and that what works well in some areas may work less well in others. These respondents reject the notion that a single electoral cycle would be suitable for all local authorities, and argue that flexibility of choice at a local level is necessary to respond to diverse local needs and circumstances. They also suggest that local elected representatives are best placed to decide which pattern is most suitable for their area.

**3.17** One respondent noted that 'uniformity involves change in at least some local authorities, and the costs of change have to be balanced against any assumed benefits', and argued that change 'should only be undertaken for strong reasons and not because uniformity is seen as inherently desirable.' As we have discussed earlier, we do not see a consistent pattern of local electoral cycles as necessarily desirable in its own right. Rather, we recognise the significant benefits to wider public understanding and awareness of democratic rights that a more consistent pattern would bring.

### The need for clarity

**3.18** It is of fundamental importance to the future health and relevance of local government, especially in the context of continued low turnout at local elections, that the electoral system is clear and easily understood by the public. Well-informed electors who understand how and when to vote are better placed to hold their local representatives to account, while confusion about when and why elections take place can only serve to further distance electors from local democracy. We would echo the conclusion of the Widdicombe Committee report that 'a system which is as complex and inconsistent as the present one is hardly calculated to encourage electoral participation'.

**3.19** The current pattern of local government electoral cycles in England, with considerable diversity between and within local authorities, appears to be well supported by many of those within local government. Locally determined arrangements suit those with established interests who may have worked with particular arrangements for a considerable length of time, and understand how best to work within local political processes. It is clear, however, that these arrangements work less well for voters, who do not understand how and when they are entitled to take part in the democratic process. As we have noted above, there is widespread confusion and misunderstanding among electors about when and why local elections are held in their own immediate area.

## The need for consistency

**3.20** In its report, the Widdicombe Committee suggested that citizens had a reasonable expectation that when they moved from one area to another electoral arrangements should be the same, unless there was a clear case to the contrary. We would add that a more consistent pattern of local electoral cycles in England would also help to encourage the development of a broader, deeper collective understanding of local elections as an event across the country. It would enable a clearer national focus on the wider roles and responsibilities of local government, while also highlighting the particular issues at stake at a local level. While greater consistency would enable nationwide voter awareness campaigns to the benefit of all electors, it would also provide an opportunity for targeted campaigns to address more effectively particular groups who may be less likely to participate.

**3.21** A further strong theme among responses to our consultation has been a recognition of the importance of ensuring fairness and equity in electoral arrangements. In addition to greater national consistency of electoral cycle, opportunities for access to the democratic process locally should be consistent and equitable – that is, all electors within each individual authority should have the same opportunities to influence the outcome of local elections and the policies of the authority. It is clear that the current pattern of local government elections in England does not provide equal access to the democratic process for electors at the local level.

**3.22** As we have noted earlier in this chapter, many authorities that elect by thirds, outside the metropolitan borough areas, do not have a uniform pattern of three-member wards. In these areas electors may be offered fewer or greater opportunities to vote for the same authority depending on the size of the individual ward in which they live. Some electors may have three opportunities to vote in elections to their local authority within a four-year period, while others can vote only once in the same period. It is fundamentally unfair and, in our view, unacceptable that within an individual local authority some electors should have fewer opportunities

to vote and influence the political composition of the authority than their neighbours in a different ward.

**3.23** A more consistent and clearly understandable pattern of local electoral cycles across England should also seek to ensure greater equity in access to the democratic process at a local level. Equality of opportunity to vote within local authorities under current warding arrangements could be achieved if all electors were to vote at the same time, once every four years. Correspondingly, a consistent pattern of elections by thirds or halves would require a move to a uniform pattern of three- or two-member wards respectively, involving significant changes to local electoral arrangements across England.

## Recommendation

**3.24** We have outlined above our concern that the current mixed pattern of local electoral cycles in England provides an unclear and inconsistent picture to voters which, at the very least, does not help to encourage participation in the democratic process at a local level. We have also noted that some electors within individual authorities may have fewer opportunities to vote and influence the political composition of the authority than their neighbours in a different ward. We have highlighted the benefits that greater clarity and consistency could bring in both these areas. In our view, this review presents an opportunity to think strategically about a future pattern of local electoral cycles which will better serve the interests and needs of electors across England.

**3.25** If we were starting afresh in planning a pattern of electoral cycles for local government in England, we would not wish to replicate existing arrangements. We must, of course, accept that we are not starting from scratch in this instance, and we have considered the most appropriate way forward in light of existing circumstances. Nevertheless, we consider that the current pattern of local electoral cycles in England is unnecessarily complex and confusing, and that there is a strong case for simplification of the current arrangements.

**3.26** We note the important debate on the merits of diversity of practice in local government. While we accept that local choice and diversity of practice may be valuable in many areas of local government, we do not believe that the case for local choice has been made in relation to local authorities' electoral cycles. Local authorities may choose to deliver their services or scrutinise decisions in a variety of ways, and electors will pass judgment on their achievements through the democratic process. However, we can see no good reason why one of the fundamental elements of local democracy should vary from area to area. It would not be acceptable, for example, to have a locally determined and varying franchise or terms of office for councillors. Moreover, we note that local government elections in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and in the majority of comparable Western democracies follow nationally consistent patterns in electing their members, and diversity in local practice has not extended to choice of electoral cycle.<sup>5</sup>

**3.27** On balance, and most importantly when viewed against the substantial evidence of confusion and misunderstanding among electors, we consider that the democratic needs of electors across England would be better met by a clearer and more consistent pattern of local electoral cycles.

The Commission recommends that the cycle of local and sub-national government elections in England should follow a clear and consistent pattern, within and across local authorities. Individual authorities should not be permitted to 'opt out' of this pattern, and any newly created authorities should also follow the same pattern.

**3.28** Our recommendation for the pattern of local electoral cycles in England follows in chapter 4.

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<sup>5</sup> New Zealand, Australia, Canada, the Republic of Ireland, France, Spain, Denmark and the Netherlands, for example, all have consistent patterns of local electoral cycles. For more information, see *The constitutional status of local government in other countries* prepared for the Commission on Local Government and the Scottish Parliament in 1998.

# 4 Recommendations for the cycle of local authorities in England

We have recommended that the cycle of local government elections in England should follow a clearer and more consistent pattern, within and across local authorities. However, we recognise that there is considerable disagreement about the relative benefits of the various local electoral cycles currently adopted by local authorities.

**4.1** In our consultation paper we outlined in some detail the range of arguments surrounding the debate for and against either whole council or partial elections. Responses to our consultation echoed and underlined many of these arguments, but we received little new information or evidence to support respondents' positions. Many responses drew heavily on evidence of local experiences, and often reflected individual preferences for retaining existing local electoral cycles.

**4.2** Following our recommendation for a consistent pattern of local electoral cycles in England, we have also considered options for the most appropriate cycle. We have carefully considered the arguments and evidence submitted to us during the consultation period. The range of matters to which we have been required to have regard in making this recommendation are outlined in the introduction of this report and reproduced in full in Appendix 1.

## Priorities

**4.3** In previous work The Electoral Commission has outlined its priorities in relation to the reform of electoral procedures and law. It aims to place the voter at the centre of its concerns, but also recognises the need to encourage the participation of a wide range of candidates and political parties and to ensure that electoral arrangements can be effectively and efficiently administered.

**4.4** These priorities have remained highly relevant in our consideration of the local electoral cycle in England – above all, we have sought to ensure that the democratic needs of electors are addressed appropriately. However, we recognise that other individuals, groups and organisations are essential to the continued health of local democracy, and it is clear that other issues must also be considered. One respondent usefully summarised the need for a balanced view:

It is important to ensure that the frequency of elections does not adversely affect the ability of any local authority to effectively manage and deliver their responsibilities, whilst at the same time maintaining the ability of the electorate to have adequate opportunity to influence the political control of the authority.

**4.5** We have sought primarily to identify a pattern of local electoral cycles that is likely to be well understood by the public and encourage their participation in elections. However, our recommendations should also give elected members confidence that they have a legitimate democratic mandate to act on behalf of their communities, and assure these communities that they can effectively hold their representatives to account. Any proposals for change must also recognise the need to support local authorities in the effective and efficient management and delivery of services to local communities.

**4.6** As we noted in our consultation paper, we recognise that a single 'correct' solution, which satisfies all of the concerns raised by stakeholders, is unlikely to exist. We have given a balanced consideration to the merits of each pattern of electoral cycles, and have assessed the evidence available to us against the range of criteria specified by the Secretary of State.

## Democratic legitimacy and local accountability

**4.7** Local authorities in England derive democratic legitimacy from the regular election of their members by the communities that they serve. Once elected, local representatives are held to account for the decisions they have made on behalf of their communities through re-election.

**4.8** Supporters of partial elections argue that electing half or a third of an authority's members in rotation can help to ensure that the composition of the council better reflects the political complexion of the electorate, and that more frequent elections can provide sharper accountability by keeping representatives 'on their toes'. Whole council elections, on the other hand, ensure that all eligible electors in the authority area have the opportunity to influence the political composition and control of the authority at the same time.

**4.9** Supporters of whole council elections also note that, particularly in the case of elections by thirds, when fewer than half the seats are up for election, overall political control of the authority may not change, even if the ruling party loses all the seats contested at a particular election. Similarly, in areas with partial elections but no uniform pattern of members per ward, electors may be confused or disaffected if control of the council changes as the result of an election in which they were not able to participate.

**4.10** Opponents of whole council elections express concern that important but controversial decisions may be postponed for political reasons until after an election, giving electors no opportunity for democratic protest for three years. On the other hand, elections of the whole council can give the ruling group the opportunity of a clear four-year period within which it can fulfil its manifesto promises before being judged on its policies and performance, including the setting of council tax.

**4.11** Responses to our consultation paper underlined these arguments. Those who have experience of working with authorities that hold whole council elections value the clear mandate and legitimacy they provide. In contrast, other respondents from areas that elect by thirds placed particular emphasis on the importance of continued close contact and responsiveness to electors. However, respondents were largely unable to supplement their arguments with clear objective evidence of the practical benefits to electors of either system.

**4.12** The arguments for and against whole council or partial elections have been well rehearsed by local government stakeholders, and we accept that many of them have some apparent merit. However, as we have discussed previously, there is a clear need for more consistent and equitable opportunities for local democratic accountability within authorities. In particular, the cycle of local elections should allow all electors within each individual authority to vote at the same time. A more equitable pattern of electoral arrangements under elections by thirds would require a uniform pattern of three-member wards across England, or a uniform pattern of two-member wards with biennial elections. Whole council

elections would require no change to local authorities' current electoral arrangements.

**4.13** The Boundary Committee for England has noted that the requirement to recommend a number of councillors per ward divisible by three in metropolitan borough areas (in practice meaning three-member wards), has caused specific difficulties when attempting to reflect community identities in authorities such as Liverpool and Wakefield. As one respondent to our consultation also observed, 'enforced three-member wards necessarily involve uncomfortable marriages between unconnected areas and equally unsatisfactory division of communities'.

**4.14** The Boundary Committee notes that the flexibility to recommend single-, two- or three-member wards enables it to more easily reflect local communities while continuing to provide good levels of electoral equality.<sup>6</sup> Under a pattern of whole council elections, authorities would not be restricted to any particular ward size, since the entire electorate would be eligible to vote together once every four years.

### Awareness and understanding of elections

**4.15** As we have noted in the previous chapter, it is fundamentally important to ensure that electors understand when and why local elections are held. Electors with little understanding of the local electoral process will be less likely to participate in the democratic process, and less able to participate effectively. A clear and straight-forward pattern of local elections that electors understand will also contribute to increased transparency of the democratic process and local accountability.

**4.16** We have discussed in detail in chapter 3 the findings of public awareness research conducted by MORI in the weeks leading up to the May 2003 local elections in England. The evidence available to us indicates that electors are generally ill-informed and unaware of the current pattern of local elections, and we

have recommended that the local electoral cycle should follow a clearer and more consistent pattern across England. It is also clear that there is a need for greater consistency within local authorities. Although nearly one in three respondents overall said they didn't know how frequently local elections were held in their area, respondents in wards where elections were held either annually or only once every four years were most likely to answer correctly (34% and 30% respectively). Only 5% of respondents in areas with elections in three years out of four and 19% of those in areas with elections in two out of four years were able to correctly identify how often they were able to vote.

**4.17** The evidence available to us from the research carried out by MORI suggests that it is particularly important to ensure consistency not only nationally across England, but also internally within individual authorities. A deeper understanding of the local democratic process would be greatly aided by a more equitable pattern of local elections, as discussed above. Electors would be certain either that they will be able to vote every year or once every four years, and that their neighbours will do likewise.

### Participation and turnout

**4.18** Good levels of turnout, as well as participation more generally in the democratic process, are essential to the continued relevance and legitimacy of local government. Continued low turnout may undermine the authority of local government to speak and act on behalf of the communities it represents.

**4.19** Annual or biennial elections hold the potential for more frequent opportunities for participation by electors. However, there is also concern that more frequent elections may tend to dilute public interest in elections, and that in practice electors may tire of passing judgment on their representatives annually. As we have noted above, it can be difficult – and in certain circumstances impossible – for electors to change overall political control of an authority when fewer than half the seats are up for election, and it is clear that this can act as a major disincentive to vote.

<sup>6</sup> The Boundary Committee for England is the body charged with reviewing the internal warding arrangements of local authorities in England. It is required by statute to ensure electoral equality between wards within individual local authority areas, and to reflect local community identities and interests.

**4.20** Certainly poor awareness and understanding of the local electoral cycle can affect turnout and participation. Electors who do not understand when local elections are held will be less able to participate in the democratic process and less likely to vote. As we noted earlier in chapter 3, one-sixth of the respondents to the public attitudes survey carried out by MORI were potentially disenfranchised – whether they wanted to vote or not – simply by being ill-informed or unaware of the elections taking place.

**4.21** In our consultation paper we outlined the findings from a study of the relationship between the local electoral cycle and local election turnout, carried out by the Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre, University of Plymouth. Taking into account social, economic and political characteristics, the research sought to identify the particular contribution to overall local turnout made by the electoral cycle, and consider what effect changing electoral cycles might have on turnout in those authorities that currently have whole council elections or elections by thirds.

**4.22** The Elections Centre's evidence gives some weight to the suggestion that more frequent elections can tend to dilute public interest and reduce turnout. Over the last 30 years, they found that the four-yearly elected London boroughs generally have had a higher electoral turnout than the metropolitan boroughs, which elect by thirds. In all years when both types of authority have held elections, with the single exception of 2002, the turnout in London has been between two and ten percentage points higher than in the metropolitan authorities. Similar differences were measured between shire districts that hold either partial or whole council elections. In those years when both types of district hold elections, turnout has been lower in shire districts with elections by thirds.

**4.23** Analysing social, economic, structural and political variables, the Elections Centre sought to understand the key determinants of local participation and turnout, and also assessed the theoretical effect of applying the alternative electoral cycle to the authorities included in the study. Its findings suggested that turnout would decline in authorities that normally have whole council elections if

they held elections by thirds, and would rise slightly if authorities that normally have elections by thirds held whole council elections instead.

**4.24** Many respondents, particularly those from within local government itself, suggested that the true cause of low levels of turnout and engagement lay in the decreasing powers and relevance of local government, and poor perceptions among electors of local government's ability to effect change. In their view, changes to the electoral cycle were unlikely to help improve turnout or democratic participation. Several respondents from local authority areas that currently elect by thirds also suggested that turnout figures in their own areas did not concur with the overall findings of the Elections Centre. We recognise that many different factors may influence levels of turnout, but do not accept that individual exceptions to the Elections Centre's findings invalidate its conclusions. The balance of evidence suggests that local government electors are less likely to participate in the democratic process in areas that hold elections by thirds.

### Management and performance

**4.25** In addition to democratic considerations discussed above, the cycle or frequency of elections may also have some impact on the capacity of local authorities to manage effectively and deliver their responsibilities. It is clear from our consultation that local government stakeholders particularly value the role of stability and leadership in enabling effective management of local authorities.

**4.26** However, respondents viewed the idea of stability in different ways. For those supporting elections by thirds, stability meant less potential for abrupt changes of political control and switches of policy. Those who favour whole council elections every four years, on the other hand, emphasised the importance of consistency of policies and representatives through a defined period of office, without the interruption and diversion of intervening elections.

**4.27** In our consultation and evidence paper, we also examined the results of the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment inspections of county councils, London boroughs, metropolitan

boroughs and unitary councils. It was not clear to us that there was any direct link between the electoral cycle of individual authorities and their CPA inspection rating. Although some inspection reports noted issues such as relatively high levels of turnover of councillors, it is clear that other unrelated factors have far greater bearing on the performance of local authorities, in particular the need for strong political and officer leadership.

**4.28** It is clear that strong and otherwise well-managed authorities can perform well and deliver services effectively under either type of electoral cycle, and equally that either system can be problematic when things go wrong. However, such evidence as there is suggests that whole council elections every four years can provide a degree of inherent stability. Whole council elections give a clear mandate to representatives for a programme of policies during the following four years, and allow time for an administration to carry through its policies. At the end of the four-year period the administration is held to account by the electorate and can be judged by its record, its success or failure. We note that many authorities that elect by thirds, particularly metropolitan boroughs, have traditionally had strong single-party political control, a legacy of political stability rather than any inherent structural stability.

### Other issues

**4.29** We have also been asked to consider the extent to which any option for change to the electoral cycle might be facilitated by possible new ways of voting, including increased postal voting, electronic counting and multi-channel e-voting. We recognise that an option involving a significantly increased number of elections may present some administrative challenges, and that new ways of voting may be helpful for both electors and administrators. However, we do not view this as a significant factor to be taken into account in considering the most appropriate electoral cycle for local authorities in England. We also note that the frequency of opportunities to pilot new voting technologies in England may be affected by the recommendations of this review. Again, while this may be an important factor within the context of the overall electoral pilots programme, we have not considered it significant in this review.

### Recommendation

**4.30** We have carefully considered the range of arguments advanced by respondents in favour of either whole council or partial elections for local authorities in England. While we have sympathy with many of these arguments, the balance of evidence that we have considered suggests that whole council elections are more likely to provide clarity for electors and a degree of stability for local authorities. In particular, certain key principles have emerged that have guided our conclusions.

**4.31** We have recommended that the cycle of local government elections in England should follow a clear and consistent pattern, within and across local authorities. In our view, a key principle in considering the electoral cycle for local authorities should be to ensure that all electors are given the same opportunities for participation in the local democratic process. Having taken into account the evidence and arguments presented during our consultation process, we have concluded that a pattern of whole council elections for all local authorities in England would provide a clear, equitable and easy to understand electoral process that would best serve the interests of local government electors.

**4.32** In particular, a pattern of whole council elections would allow community identities to be more easily reflected in ward boundaries when reviewing local authorities' electoral arrangements. We also note that, under a consistent pattern of whole council elections across England, there would be no obvious reason why metropolitan boroughs should continue to be required to have three-member wards. The opportunity of this review might be taken to remove the current requirement that metropolitan borough wards must have a number of members divisible by three, although we recognise that this would require change to primary legislation.

**4.33** The Commission recommends that each local authority in England should hold whole council elections, with all councillors elected simultaneously, once every four years.

**4.34** Our suggestions for the implementation of the recommendations of this review are outlined in the following chapter.





# 5 Implementation

We recognise that our recommendations to simplify the current cycle of local government elections in England would, if implemented, involve considerable change to existing arrangements. Our proposals therefore seek to balance the need for a pragmatic approach to change with our desire to see timely reform.

## Implementation issues

**5.1** Under our recommendations for change to the current local electoral cycle in England, outlined in the previous two chapters, each local authority would elect all of its members simultaneously, once every four years. Voters in London would continue to elect their mayor and members of the London Assembly every four years.

**5.2** However, several significant issues for the implementation of our recommendations remain, which we have not fully addressed in the preceding chapters. While we are content to recommend that individual local authorities should hold whole council elections once every four years, we are conscious that a national pattern of electoral cycles will be created by bringing these individual electoral cycles together. We have considered a number of issues relating to the national pattern of local electoral cycles below, and propose some options for implementation for further consideration by the Government and others.

## Councillors' terms of office

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**5.3** As we noted in our consultation paper, four-year terms of office have been the norm in local government in England since the reorganisation of local government in the early 1970s. However, we recognised that certain possible options for change to the local electoral cycle might require some change to the normal term of office for councillors. A three-year term, for example, would allow annual elections by thirds with no fallow year. During consultation, we asked respondents whether the four-year term of office for local councillors should be retained.

**5.4** The balance of views on the most appropriate term of office for councillors was strongly in support of retaining the current four-year term, with a significant majority opposing change. Respondents were in broad agreement that four years allow sufficient time for councillors to grow into their role and plan for the medium term, without sacrificing the advantages of regular electoral accountability. One respondent proposed a five-year term of office to allow coordination

with European parliamentary elections, while several others suggested that a three-year term for councillors would mean greater accountability.

**5.5** We have seen no significant evidence to suggest that the current four-year term is inappropriate, and there is certainly little support for change among respondents. However, it is likely that some changes to initial terms of office for councillors will be necessary during the transition between current arrangements and any future pattern. Issues relating to this transitional period are discussed in more detail below.

### Timing of elections

**5.6** Under current arrangements for elections in areas with two tiers of local government, elections to the different authorities are not held at the same time, although parish council elections are normally held in the same year as those of the principal authority. County council elections are held in the fallow fourth year of the electoral cycle for district authorities that elect by thirds, which is also the mid-point for districts that hold whole council elections. In considering the implementation of proposals for change to the local electoral cycle, we asked respondents whether it was appropriate to continue to stagger elections to different tiers of local government.

**5.7** There was broad support in response to our consultation paper for continuing to stagger elections in areas with two tiers of local government, with less than a quarter of respondents preferring to hold elections in the same year. Respondents particularly emphasised the importance of highlighting the distinction between the roles and responsibilities of different tiers of local government, in order to reduce confusion and ensure clear lines of accountability. One respondent noted that ‘it is not unusual for a member of a district authority to unfairly take the blame for poor service delivery from a county authority (and vice versa)’.

**5.8** Those who preferred not to stagger local elections suggested that combining elections in a single ‘local election day’ would clearly highlight the opportunity for

participation in the democratic process. They also suggested that combining elections could reduce costs, both for political parties and electoral administrators in relation to the running of elections. However, several respondents argued that combined local government elections would be more susceptible to being used as an informal referendum on national government.

**5.9** We recognise that respondents would largely prefer that elections continue to be staggered in two-tier areas. We have outlined two alternative patterns. Under the first of these, different types of authorities would hold elections in the same year, while, under the second, elections for district councils and county councils or city-wide authorities would be staggered. It does, however, seem sensible to us that parish councils should continue to be elected at the same time as the district or unitary council. Elected mayors, where they have been put in place under the Local Government Act 2000, should also be elected at the same time as the principal authority.

**5.10** A majority of respondents also preferred not to combine local elections with elections to the Westminster or European parliaments. While they acknowledged that local turnout may increase, they also expressed concern that local government issues were likely to be overshadowed by national concerns. Indeed, turnout at local elections in England does tend to increase when held at the same time as Westminster parliamentary general elections, and can also rise when held at the same time as European parliament elections. However, analysis of national and local media in Scotland in May 2003 suggested that the local elections were overshadowed by the Scottish Parliament contest, receiving little coverage or commentary.<sup>8</sup> We have some sympathy with this concern, and would ordinarily prefer Westminster or European parliament elections to take place in a different year to local government elections in England. However, we recognise that this is an unrealistic expectation at present, given the absence of a fixed term for the Westminster Parliament and the five-year term of the European Parliament.

<sup>8</sup> Institute of Governance, University of Edinburgh (2003) *Media Coverage of the Council Elections in Scotland, 2003*.

## Options for implementation

**5.11** We outline below two proposals for the implementation of our recommendations for change to the cycle of local government elections in England. Other options for implementation were considered but dismissed. We have included provisional suggestions for the cycle of elections to any future regional assemblies, in line with our recommendation that any future bodies should remain consistent with the pattern of local government electoral cycles. However, we recognise that the introduction of any regional assemblies is dependent on the result of future referendums in those areas. We have also included details of Westminster and European parliamentary election cycles in the summary tables. While European parliamentary elections take place every five years, Westminster parliamentary elections are not held on a fixed term, and we have assumed a full five-year term for Westminster in the models described below.

**5.12** We have not included specific dates for the implementation of the models discussed below. We have indicated the points during the four-year electoral cycle at which elections might take place, but the actual implementation of any model should be the subject of further discussion and debate.

### Option one

**5.13** Under the first of our suggested options for implementation, every local authority in England, including county councils, district councils, metropolitan borough councils, London borough councils, unitary councils and parish councils, would elect all of their members simultaneously once every four years. The Greater London Authority would also be elected at the same time, together with any future elected regional assemblies.

**Table 2: option one**

Year	Local authority elections	Other elections
1	Districts, metropolitan boroughs, London boroughs, unitary authorities, parishes Counties, GLA	EP (regional assemblies)
2	<i>No elections</i>	
3	Westminster?	
4	<i>No elections</i>	
1	Districts, metropolitan boroughs, London boroughs, unitary authorities, parishes Counties, GLA	(regional assemblies)
2	EP	
3	<i>No elections</i>	
4	Westminster?	
1	Districts, metropolitan boroughs, London boroughs, unitary authorities, parishes Counties, GLA	(regional assemblies)

**5.14** This option would have the advantage of providing a clear nationwide focus on local government elections in England. However, combining all local government elections might diminish the important distinction for electors between different local government elections taking place in the same area. It may also present significant difficulties in making clear distinctions between the roles and responsibilities of local and sub-national government in areas where regional assemblies or other strategic authorities may be established in future. Combination might also make it more likely that local government elections in England be considered as mid-term judgment on national issues when held between Westminster elections, or are entirely influenced and overshadowed by any general election held at the same time.

**5.15** From an administrative perspective, some election officials have indicated concerns about the practical difficulties of running multiple local elections simultaneously, although they acknowledge that

combined elections may result in some cost savings. It is also not clear at present how and when the Government intends to take forward our recommendation that all local government elections should be conducted by all-postal ballot.<sup>9</sup> Using different voting methods for different elections taking place simultaneously in particular areas, shire districts and county councils or London boroughs and the GLA, for example, would raise issues for both administrators and voters.

## Option two

**5.16** The second option for the implementation of our recommendations would see all local government electors in England electing members of their most immediate local council – district councils, metropolitan boroughs, London boroughs or unitary authorities – simultaneously once every four years. Two years later, in the mid-point of the electoral cycle, those electors in areas with county councils or strategic city-wide authorities (or future sub-national authorities including any regional assemblies) would elect representatives to these bodies.

**Table 3: option two**

Year	Local authority elections	Other elections
1	Districts, metropolitan boroughs, London boroughs, unitary authorities, parishes	EP
2	<i>No elections</i>	
3	Counties, GLA	Westminster? (regional assemblies)
4	<i>No elections</i>	
1	Districts, metropolitan boroughs, London boroughs, unitary authorities, parishes	EP
2	<i>No elections</i>	
3	Counties, GLA	(regional assemblies)
4	Westminster?	
1	Districts, metropolitan boroughs, London boroughs, unitary authorities, parishes	

**5.17** Under this second option for implementation, all local government electors would have the opportunity to vote in the first year of the electoral cycle, with the benefit of simplicity and a national focus on local issues. It would also make clear the important distinction for electors between different tiers of local and strategic city-wide or sub-national government in those areas where such arrangements exist.

## Recommendation

**5.18** Our preferred option for the implementation of our recommendations is the second of the two described above, which would see all local government electors in England voting at the same time once every four years for their most immediate local authority, whether that be district council, metropolitan or London borough or unitary council. Unitary county councils, such as the Isle of Wight, would also hold elections in the first year of the cycle, alongside other unitary councils. All those electors in areas with further local or city-wide strategic authorities

<sup>9</sup> The Electoral Commission (2003), *The shape of elections to come*.

(county councils or the Greater London Authority) would vote for those authorities two years later, in the mid-point of the four-year electoral cycle. We would envisage that elections to any future levels of sub-national government, including regional assemblies, would also take place in the third year of the cycle.

**5.19** While we recognise that the first option for implementation may have some merits, we consider that the second option would provide the best balance between administrative convenience and the need for clarity from the voter's perspective. In particular, we are concerned that option one would not provide sufficient clarity for electors regarding the timing and purpose of local government elections, and would be likely to diminish the important distinction between different authorities in areas with two tiers of local government. Greater clarity and consistency of the local election cycle should also give national political parties and media the opportunity to focus on local, rather than national, political issues at election time.

The Commission recommends that all local government electors in England should elect members of their district, metropolitan borough, London borough or unitary council simultaneously once every four years. Two years later, in the mid-point of the electoral cycle, electors in areas with county councils, city-wide authorities or any future sub-national government should elect representatives to those bodies.

### Transitional arrangements

**5.20** We have outlined in this and preceding chapters our recommendations for change to simplify the cycle of local government elections in England. Our findings highlight the need to establish a number of important principles for local electors, particularly the need for consistency and equity in opportunities to vote at local elections. We look forward to the response to this review, and hope that our conclusions will be welcomed. In the event that our recommendations are accepted by Government and Parliament, we would expect reasonably swift movement to ensure timely implementation.

**5.21** The move to a consistent pattern of whole council elections across England would have implications for a number of aspects of current electoral arrangements. In particular, there may be changes to the initial terms of office of some councillors during the transitional period before the full implementation of any recommendations. In those areas that currently elect by thirds or by halves, for example, the terms of office of some councillors may be reduced in the years before the first full council elections. Similarly, although all county councils and the Greater London Authority currently hold whole council elections, their elections take place in different years. Changes to the terms of office for some sitting councillors would be required in order to ensure that in future years those elections take place at the same time.

**5.22** We note that both five-year terms of office and consecutive election years are generally considered undesirable, and while variations to terms have been used in the past as part of transitional arrangements, there is no precedent for election to a five-year term of office. Arrangements for the implementation of these recommendations should involve as little disruption to current electoral arrangements as possible, without unnecessary delay.

If the recommendations of this review are accepted by Government and Parliament, we will work with central and local government partners to identify the most appropriate approach to timely implementation.

# Appendix 1

## Secretary of State's request to The Electoral Commission

### Request pursuant to Section 6(2) of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 and Terms of Reference

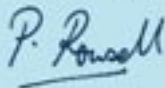
1. Section 6(2) of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPER Act) states:

*"At the request of the Secretary of State, and within such time as the Secretary of State may specify, the Commission shall-*

*(a) review, and  
(b) submit a report to the Secretary of State on,  
such matters or matters (whether or not falling within subsection (1)) as the Secretary of State may specify."*

2. Pursuant to the provisions of section 6(2) of the PPER Act, the Secretary of State hereby requests that the Electoral Commission review and submit a report to him on the cycle of local government elections in England<sup>1</sup>, identifying options for change that would simplify the current cycle. Such options may include, if appropriate, options involving changes to councillor's terms of office and to local authorities' electoral arrangements<sup>2</sup> in England.
3. The Electoral Commission is requested to include in its report an assessment of the desirability and practicality of any options for change it identifies and recommendations as to the implementation of such options.
4. In carrying out the review and making its report, the Commission is requested to have regard to the matters specified in the Annex and of all other matters that they consider relevant.
5. The report shall be prepared by the Commission and presented to the Secretary of State no later than 31 January 2004.

Signed for and on behalf of the Secretary of State



28 January 2003

<sup>1</sup> "local government elections" shall be the elections (other than those caused by vacancies) for principal authorities (including mayoral elections), parish councils and the Greater London Authority.

<sup>2</sup> the number and boundaries of wards and electoral divisions and the number of councillors (see s14 of the Local Government Act 1992).

## Annex

The matters to which the Commission are requested to have regard are:

1. The extent to which an option for change:
  - would improve councils' democratic legitimacy and local accountability;
  - would enable the electorate and public generally to easily understand when elections are to be held and their purpose;
  - would be likely to improve participation of the local electorate in the electoral process, including participation of specific groups – such as young people and ethnic minorities – where participation in the process is particularly low; and
  - would be likely to facilitate the effective management of local authorities and particularly performance improvements in the case of local authorities categorised as “poor performers” in the Comprehensive Performance Assessments.
  - Might be facilitated by possible new ways of polling, including increased postal voting, electronic counting and multi channel e-voting.
2. The relationship between local government elections and other elections in England, namely the elections to the Westminster and European Parliaments, including cases where elections currently fall in close proximity to each other, and the combination of polls at local government elections with such elections, or otherwise.
3. The relationship between different local government elections in related areas, and the combination (or otherwise) of polls at such elections.



# Appendix 2

## Respondents to the consultation paper and consultation meetings

Total respondents 269

### Local authorities

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Adur District Council  
 Arun District Council  
 Ashfield District Council  
 Babergh District Council  
 Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council  
 Bedfordshire County Council  
 Bexley Council  
 Birmingham City Council  
 Blyth Valley Borough Council  
 Bracknell Forest Borough Council  
 Breckland District Council  
 Brentwood Borough Council  
 Bristol City Council  
 Broadland District Council  
 Burnley Borough Council  
 Cambridge City Council  
 Cannock Chase Council  
 Canterbury City Council  
 Carlisle City Council  
 Chelmsford Borough Council  
 Cheshire County Council  
 Chester City Council  
 Copeland Borough Council  
 Coventry City Council  
 Darlington Borough Council  
 Daventry District Council  
 Derby City Council  
 Derbyshire Dales District Council  
 Derwentside District Council  
 Devon County Council  
 Dorset County Council  
 Durham County Council  
 East Dorset District Council  
 East Hampshire District Council  
 East Hertfordshire District Council  
 Eastbourne Borough Council  
 Eastleigh Borough Council  
 Epping Forest District Council  
 Exeter City Council  
 Fareham Borough Council  
 Gateshead Council

Gedling Borough Council  
 Gloucester City Council  
 Gloucestershire County Council  
 Halton Borough Council  
 Hampshire County Council  
 Harrogate Borough Council  
 Hart District Council  
 Hastings Borough Council  
 Havant Borough Council  
 Kent County Council  
 Kerrier District Council  
 Kettering Borough Council  
 King's Lynn & West Norfolk  
 Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council  
 Lancashire County Council  
 Lancaster City Council  
 Leicestershire County Council  
 Lewes District Council  
 London Borough of Barnet  
 London Borough of Camden  
 London Borough of Enfield  
 London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham  
 London Borough of Harrow  
 London Borough of Havering  
 Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea  
 Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames  
 London Borough of Lambeth  
 London Borough of Tower Hamlets  
 London Borough of Wandsworth  
 Luton Borough Council  
 Maidstone Borough Council  
 Maldon District Council  
 Manchester City Council  
 Medway Council  
 Mid Beds District Council  
 Mid Suffolk District Council  
 Mid Sussex District Council  
 Mole Valley District Council  
 New Forest District Council  
 Norfolk County Council  
 North Cornwall District Council  
 North Dorset District Council  
 North East Derbyshire District Council  
 North Lincolnshire Council

North Shropshire District Council  
 Northampton Borough Council  
 Northumberland District Council  
 Norwich City Council  
 Nuneaton & Bedworth  
 Borough of Oadby & Wigston  
 Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council  
 Oxfordshire County Council  
 Pendle Borough Council  
 Peterborough City Council  
 Borough of Poole  
 Preston City Council  
 Purbeck District Council  
 Ribble Valley Borough Council  
 Reigate and Banstead Borough Council  
 Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council  
 Rochford District Council  
 Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council  
 Rugby Borough Council  
 Rushcliffe Borough Council  
 Rushmoor Borough Council  
 Salford City Council  
 Shepway District Council  
 Slough Borough Council  
 South Bedfordshire District Council  
 South Bucks District Council  
 South Gloucestershire Council  
 South Ribble Borough Council  
 South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council  
 Southampton City Council  
 Southend-on-sea Borough Council  
 St. Edmundsbury District Council  
 Stafford Borough Council  
 Staffordshire County Council  
 Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council  
 Stratford on Avon District Council  
 Stroud District Council  
 Swale Borough Council  
 Swindon Borough Council  
 Tandridge District Council  
 Tauton Deane Electoral Services  
 Borough of Telford and Wrekin  
 Three Rivers District Council  
 Torbay Council

Uttlesford District Council  
 Warwick District Council  
 Waveney District Council executive  
 Waveney District Council cross-party working group  
 West Oxfordshire District Council  
 West Sussex County Council  
 Weymouth & Portland Borough Council  
 Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council  
 Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council  
 Wolverhampton City Council  
 City of Worcester  
 Worcester County Council  
 Wycombe District Council  
 Wyre Forest District Council

#### Local authority representatives

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Cllr Ray Auger, South Kesteven District Council  
 Cllr David Beechey, Bridgnorth District Council  
 Cllr Nick Brown, Portishead Town Council  
 Mayor Frank Branston, Bedford Borough Council  
 Cllr John Byrne, Bury Metropolitan Borough Council  
 Cllr Judith Cluff, Taunton Deane Borough Council  
 Cllr Carol Davis, Herne and Broomfield Parish Council  
 Cllr David Gardner, London Borough of Greenwich  
 Cllr John T Hall, Test Valley District Council  
 Cllr Colin Inglis, Kingston-upon-Hull Council  
 Cllr Geoff Knight, Lancaster City Council  
 Cllr David Nettleton, St. Edmundsbury Borough Council  
 Cllr Don Phillips, Chiltern District Council  
 Cllr Mary Smith, Gloucester City Council  
 Cllr G W Taylor, South Kesteven District Council  
 Cllr John Waters, London Borough of Bexley  
 Cllr Gavin Webb, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council  
 Cllr David White, Stockport Metropolitan Council  
 Cllr Janet Whitehouse, Essex County Council  
 Cllr John Wilks, South Kesteven District Council

#### Local government officers

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Sue Bonham-Lovett, Electoral Services Manager,  
 Weymouth & Portland Borough Council  
 Max Caller, Chief Executive, London Borough of Hackney  
 Liz Cloke, Senior Electoral Services Officer, Basingstoke

and Deane Borough Council  
 Geoff Knowles, Electoral Registration Manager, Newport City Council  
 David Holling, Returning Officer, West Berkshire Council  
 John Walker, Chief Elections and Electoral Registration Officer, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council  
 Darren Whitney, Principal Democratic Officer, Stratford on Avon District Council

#### Local councils

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Badsey & Aldington Parish Council  
 Combe Hay Parish Council  
 Faversham Town Council  
 Godalming Town Council  
 Hatfield Town Council  
 Holbrok Parish Council  
 Keynsham Town Council  
 Kingston Seymour Parish Council  
 Long Ashton Parish Council  
 Loughton Town Council  
 Southam Town Council  
 Stroud Town Council  
 Totnes Town Council  
 Ubley Parish Council  
 Ufton Parish Council  
 Upton-upon-Severn Town Council

#### Members of Parliament and Peers<sup>1</sup>

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Claire Curtis-Thomas MP (Crosby and Formby)  
 Valerie Davey MP (Bristol West)  
 David Drew MP (Stroud)  
 Lynne Jones MP (Birmingham Selly Oak)  
 Khalid Mahmood MP (Birmingham Perry Barr)  
 Andrew Turner MP (Isle of Wight)  
 Derek Wyatt MP (Sittingbourne and Sheppey)  
 The Lord Best OBE  
 The Rt Hon the Lord Renton  
 Lord Wolfson of Marylebone

#### Political parties

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Citizens Party of Halton  
 The Conservative Party  
 The Green Party of England and Wales  
 Molesey Residents Association  
 The Populist Party  
 Rainham Residents Association  
 Runnymede Independent Resident Group  
 Scottish Liberal Democrats  
 Upminster & Cranham Residents' Association

#### Local political groups

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Amber Valley Borough Council Labour Group  
 Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council Conservative Group  
 Basingstoke and Deane Labour Group  
 Basingstoke and Deane Liberal Democrat Group  
 Birmingham Liberal Democrat Group  
 Blackburn Labour Party  
 Bristol Conservatives  
 Bristol City Council Liberal Democrats  
 Parks Branch of Chester Constituency Labour Party  
 Ealing Liberal Democrats  
 Eccles Constituency Labour Party  
 Exeter Conservative Association  
 Gillingham & Medway Liberal Democrats  
 Herefordshire County Council Conservative Group  
 Lancaster City Council – Conservative Group  
 Lancaster City Council – Liberal Democrat Group  
 Lancaster and Lancashire Councils Green Party Group  
 Lichfield, Burntwood and Tamworth Local Lib Dems  
 London Borough of Ealing Conservative Group  
 Merton Liberal Democrats  
 Mole Valley District Council Independent Group  
 North Lincolnshire Labour Group  
 Penwith District Council Conservative Group  
 Penwith District Council Independent Group  
 Penwith District Council Labour Group  
 Penwith District Council Liberal Democrat Group  
 Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council Labour Group  
 Suffolk County Council Conservative Group  
 Swale Labour Party  
 Tunbridge Wells Borough Council – Conservative Group

<sup>1</sup> Including one MP who did not identify him- or herself.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council – Liberal Democrat Group  
 Labour in Wandsworth  
 West Lewisham Green Party  
 Wimbledon Constituency Labour Party

### Academics

Professor Chris Skelcher, Institute of Local Government Studies, University of Birmingham  
 Professor John Stewart, Institute of Local Government Studies, University of Birmingham

### Other organisations

Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA)  
 Association of Electoral Administrators Scottish Branch  
 Association of London Government  
 The Audit Commission  
 Boundary Commission for England (confidentiality requested)  
 Essex Association of Local Councils  
 Equality Commission for Northern Ireland  
 Kent Association of Parish Councils  
 Local Government Information Unit  
 Local Government Association  
 National Association of Local Councils  
 National Union of Residents' Associations  
 OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights  
 Royal Mail Group PLC  
 Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE)  
 Welsh Assembly Government

### Individuals

Albert Broadbent  
 D. J. Close  
 Mary Crane  
 Roger Crudge  
 Peter Dunham  
 Angela Essex  
 John Hoare  
 John Kelly  
 Joe Otten

Nicky Rylance  
 E. R. Schrin

### Consultation meetings

Date	Meeting
10 July 2003	LGA North West regional group (Blackburn)
18 July 2003	LGA West Sussex sub-regional group (Chichester)
9 September 2003	Association of London Government
9 September 2003	Crawley Borough Council
11 September 2003	AEA South East branch (Crowborough)
11 September 2003	LGA Labour group (Local Government House, London)
11 September 2003	LGA Liberal Democrat group (Local Government House, London)
12 September 2003	AEA South branch (Andover)
12 September 2003	AEA London branch (City Hall)
12 September 2003	County Councils Network (Local Government House, London)
15 September 2003	AEA North East branch (Chester-le-Street)
19 September 2003	AEA West Midlands branch (Shrewsbury)
23 September 2003	AEA Eastern branch (Saffron Walden)
26 September 2003	LGA Southern Counties regional group (Isle of Wight)
2 October 2003	Discussion group on CPA, six authorities (Trevelyan House, London)
3 October 2003	LGA South West regional group (Taunton)
14 October 2003	LGA Conservative group (Local Government House, London)

# The Electoral Commission

We are an independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. We aim to gain public confidence and encourage people to take part in the democratic process within the UK by modernising the electoral process, promoting public awareness of electoral matters, and regulating political parties.

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**COUNCILLOR ANDREW WALMSLEY, MAYOR**

**MINUTES OF: THE COUNCIL OF THE BOROUGH OF ROSSENDALE**

**DATE OF MEETING: 28<sup>th</sup> February 2024**

**PRESENT:** The Mayor Councillor Walmsley (in the Chair)  
Councillors Adshead, B. Ashworth, D. Ashworth, S. Barnes, Cheetham, Coogan, Driver, Eaton, Gill, Johnson, Looker, McInnes, McMahon, MacNae, Marriott, Morris, Neal, Norton, Oakes, Powell, Rigby, Rooke, M. Smith, S. Smith, Snowden, Whitehead and Woods.

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Rob Huntington, Chief Executive / Head of Paid Service  
Clare Birtwistle, Head of Legal Services / Monitoring Officer  
Karen Spencer, Chief Finance Officer/ S151 Officer  
Kimberly Haworth, Head of Finance  
Darren Kershaw, Mayor's Attendant

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: 3 public**

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received for Councillors A Barnes, Foxcroft, Hodgkiss, Kenyon, Procter and Thompson.

**2. Minutes**

**Resolved:**

That the minutes of the meetings on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2023 and 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024 be signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

**3. Urgent Items of Business**

There was one urgent item of business regarding Hareholme Viaduct which would be taken at the end of the agenda.

**4. Declarations of Interest**

The following declarations of interest were made:

- Councillor Marriott was a director for a company with a trade waste contract with the Council (Item C1, minute 6).
- Councillor Adshead was a board member of Rossendale Valley Energy (Item D4, minute 12).

**5. Communications from the Mayor, the Deputy Leader or Head of Paid Service**

There were no communications from the Mayor, the Deputy Leader or Head of Paid Service.

**POLICY AND BUDGET FRAMEWORK ITEMS**

**6. 2024/25 Council Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy**

The Council considered the 2024/25 Council Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy.

In response to questions from members it was confirmed that:

- Provisional savings were included in the report but it was noted that this could change if certain decisions were not made.

- Pressures that the Council was under were widespread across the country.

A number of Point of Orders were raised due to inaccurate statements being made by certain members which were subsequently withdrawn and apologies given. Members were reminded to maintain a high standard of behaviour during the debate.

Thanks was given to officers for all their hard work.

Members voted on the recommendations of the report as follows:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Vote</b>
Cllr Adshead	For
Cllr B. Ashworth	For
Cllr D. Ashworth	For
Cllr S. Barnes	For
Cllr Cheetham	Against
Cllr Coogan	For
Cllr Driver	For
Cllr Eaton	For
Cllr Gill	For
Cllr Johnson	For
Cllr Looker	For
Cllr Lythgoe	For
Cllr McInnes	For
Cllr McMahon	For
Cllr MacNae	For
Cllr Marriott	For
Cllr Morris	Against
Cllr Neal	For
Cllr Norton	For
Cllr Oakes	For
Cllr Powell	For
Cllr Rigby	Against
Cllr Rooke	For
Cllr M. Smith	For
Cllr S. Smith	Against
Cllr Snowden	Against
Cllr Walmsley	For
Cllr Whitehead	For
Cllr Woods	Against
<b>For:</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Against:</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Abstentions:</b>	<b>0</b>

**Resolved:**

Council approved:

1. A revenue budget for 2024/25 of £10.599m, as detailed in the report.
2. A Council Tax increase of 2.99%, increasing the Council Tax rate for a Band D property from £299.49 to £308.44, an increase of £8.95 pa.
3. Use of £564k from the reserves to support the 2024/25 revenue budget.
4. The proposed fees and charges attached as Appendix 1.
5. The technical resolution necessary to give effect to these budget proposals attached as Appendix 3.

### **Reason for Decision**

The financial position for the council, like all local authorities, is challenging and subject to a high-level of risk regarding the current economic position. The council is proposing to set a revenue budget for 2024/25 of £10.599m. The Council must remain focused on identifying and delivering further savings and income in order to ensure annual balanced budgets over the immediate and medium term. It must also ensure that all its budget resource allocations are directed to the core functions of the council and that the use of its resources drives the delivery of the council's Corporate Plan priorities.

### **Alternative Options Considered**

None.

## **7. Capital Programme 2023/24 – 2027/28 and Capital Strategy 2024/25**

The Council considered the Capital Programme 2023/24 – 2027/28 and Capital Strategy 2024/25.

In response to questions from members it was confirmed that:

- Contributions to Whitworth Town Council relating to the pool had yet to be considered.

### **Resolved:**

Council approved:

1. The capital programme for 2023/24 – 2027/28 and associated capital expenditure of £11.409m in 2024/25.
2. The Capital Strategy 2024/25 attached at Appendix B.
3. Accept the Swimming Pool Support Fund capital grant of £290k.

### **Reason for Decision**

The proposed capital programme for 2023/24 and up to 2027/28 represents an affordable plan, as indicated by the prudential borrowing performance indicators the Capital Strategy (Appendix B).

### **Alternative Options Considered**

None.

## **8. Treasury Management Strategy & Treasury Management Practises**

The Council considered the Treasury Management Strategy & Treasury Management Practises report and thanks was given to the Finance Team.

### **Resolved:**

Council approved:

1. The Treasury Management Strategy Statement, including the borrowing strategy.
2. The Investment Strategy, including Investment Indicators.
3. The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement.
4. To delegate any further minor amendments to the Chief Finance Officer in consultation with the Lead Member for Resources.

### **Reason for Decision**

To approve the adoption of the updated Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Treasury Management Policy and Practises, which will ensure continued compliance with the Code and continue to manage the council's exposure to financial risk. In light of the current economic climate and potential resultant changing cash flow requirements, Members are asked to delegate any minor amendments required within year to the Chief Finance Officer in consultation with the Lead Member for Resources.



### **Alternative Options Considered**

None.

## **ORDINARY BUSINESS**

### **9. Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25**

The Council considered the Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25.

#### **Resolved:**

Full Council approve the Rossendale Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2024/25 as set out in the report.

#### **Reason for Decision**

Councils are required to set a Council Tax Support scheme annually, before the 11<sup>th</sup> March on the charge year, in this case 2024/25. No conclusive case for significant amendment to the scheme has been identified at this time.

### **Alternative Options Considered**

None.

### **10. Pay Policy Statement**

The Council considered the Pay Policy Statement report.

Thanks was given to the Head of People and Policy and the team.

#### **Resolved:**

Full Council approves the Pay Policy Statement.

#### **Reason for Decision**

The Pay Policy Statement meets the legal requirements as per the Localism Act 2011.

### **Alternative Options Considered**

None.

### **11. Lancashire County Council Weight Management Collaboration**

The Council considered the Weight Management report.

In response to questions from members it was confirmed that:

- Previous schemes had been funded for a year. The take up in past years had not determined the reduction in funding.

#### **Resolved:**

That Council authorises statutory officers to:

1. Accept the collaboration agreement between Lancashire County Council and Rossendale Borough Council for the delivery of the weight management programme (2024 – 2029).
2. Accept the associated grant funding of up to £392,016, (split between the years 2024/25 to 2031/32 at £49,002 per annum), subject to continued Government Public Health Grant funding.
3. Delegate authority to award the contract to the successful delivery partner to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Lead Member for Communities, Health & Wellbeing.

### **Reason for Decision**

To enable the Council to accept the grant funding and deliver the Healthy Weight Management Service in Rossendale through the appointment of a delivery partner.

### **Alternative Options Considered**

None.

## **12. Net Zero Terrace Streets Funding**

The Council considered the Net Zero Terrace Streets Funding report.

In response to questions from members it was confirmed that:

- The Council would ensure the liabilities stayed with the limited companies involved.
- It was an innovative scheme with Rossendale leading the way.
- The Council had the resources to deliver this as two officers were being appointed using the funding.
- Developers need to be encouraged to work towards such initiatives in their schemes being brought forward for planning permission.
- The individual organisations had liability for their elements of the scheme.
- In relation to the partner local authority, part of the funding required bringing other Councils on board.

### **Resolved:**

1. That Rossendale Borough Council to become the Lead Partner in the delivery of the Net Zero Terrace Street project.
2. That Council approves the acceptance of the grant funding from Innovate UK for £2,522,874 in order to deliver the Net Zero Terraced Street Project.
3. To delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the S151 Officer and the Lead Member for Environment and Corporate Services to make amendments to the grant offer letter and accept it on behalf of the Council.
4. To delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the S151 Officer and the Lead Member for Environment and Corporate Services to enter agreements with partner organisations to establish the terms of payments and related items between Rossendale Borough Council and project partners.

### **Reason for Decision**

For Rossendale Borough Council to take the project lead and accept the grant funding offer from Innovate UK.

### **Alternative Options Considered**

None.

## **13. Urgent Decisions**

Council noted the Special Urgency Decision taken 12<sup>th</sup> January 2024 regarding the acceptance of On-Street Residential Charge Point Scheme (ORCS) funding.

## **14. Hareholme Viaduct**

The Council considered the Hareholme Viaduct report.

In response to questions from members it was confirmed that:

- It had significant heritage importance.
- It brought health and wellbeing as a cycleway.

**Resolved:**

Full Council to approve the addition of a further £36,050 to the existing Hareholme Viaduct capital scheme to carry out additional necessary works as set out in the report, to be funded by borrowing or capital receipts.

**Reason for Decision**

To approve completion of the deck surface with 65mm bituminous macadam to ensure effective protection of the viaduct. To approve replacement of the remaining weathered pointing, whilst the scaffolding is in situ. To approve an unfunded budget increase of £36,050 to complete the required works. If the approach to LCC for a contribution is successful, the additional expenditure will be partially funded.

**Alternative Options Considered**

None.

**(The meeting commenced at 6.36pm and concluded at 8.20pm)**

Signed.....

(Chair)

Date .....

<b>Subject:</b>	Adoption of the revised Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) 2024	<b>Status:</b>	For Publication
<b>Report to:</b>	Council	<b>Date:</b>	20 March 2024
<b>Report of:</b>	Head of Planning	<b>Lead Member:</b>	Lead Member for Planning, Licensing and Enforcement
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	General Exception <input type="checkbox"/>	Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Equality Impact Assessment:</b>	Required: <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes/No	Attached: <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes/No</b>
<b>Biodiversity Impact Assessment:</b>	Required: <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes/No	Attached: <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes/No</b>
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Anne Storah	<b>Telephone:</b>	01706 252418
<b>Email:</b>	annestorah@rossendalebc.gov.uk;		

## 1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 To adopt the revised Statement of Community Involvement (2024).
- 1.2 Any minor modifications to be delegated to the Head of Planning and Lead Member for Planning, Licensing and Enforcement.

## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out how people can be involved in the planning process, both in preparing planning policies and in the determination of planning applications.
- 2.2 It is a legal requirement under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act of 2004 (as amended) to prepare an SCI and this now needs to be reviewed every five years. The last SCI was adopted in February 2019, and reviewed in light of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) (Coronavirus) (amendment) Regulation 2020, and so it is necessary to review this to ensure we still comply with the relevant legislation and planning guidance and continue to consult effectively.
- 2.3 It is not a requirement to consult on the Statement of Community Involvement. Given that we expect to update the SCI in due course to take account of further legislative changes to local plan-making and the planning application process, and possible improvements to digital consultation methods, it is suggested that no consultation be undertaken in regard to the changes proposed in the 2024 SCI.
- 2.4 This Report also discusses related proposals such as the expected imminent changes to the plan-making system and related proposals such as the update of the Local Development Scheme and the recent submission of the Neighbourhood Plan for Edenfield.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Statements of Community Involvement (SCIs) are statutory documents. Under [Regulation 10A of The Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2012 \(as amended\)](#) local planning authorities must review Statements of Community Involvement at

least once every 5 years from the date of adoption to ensure that policies remain relevant and effectively address the needs of the local community. The Council must legally comply with its adopted SCI.

- 3.2 The first SCI produced by Rossendale Borough Council was adopted in 2010, with the first review prepared in 2014. This was updated again in February 2019. A supplement to the 2019 SCI was published during the Examination of the Rossendale Local Plan in August 2020 to show compliance with the Coronavirus legislation in place at that time, which restricted in-person meetings. As a result of this communication by digital means increased and, although letters are still sent out where necessary to individuals who do not have access to the internet, the main means of communication is via email and the Council's website.

#### **4. DETAILS**

##### **The Statement of Community Involvement**

- 4.1 The current SCI, published in 2019, has been reviewed and a number of changes made.
- 4.2 The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act came into force in October 2023. This paves the way for a significant reform of the current planning system, particularly in respect of plan-making, and will require secondary legislation and to be accompanied with further updates to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG).
- 4.3 It is expected that Local Plans under the new system will focus on strategic policies and site allocations with set timescales to ensure quicker preparation of Local Plans, taking no longer than 30 months including the examination. Another change is that National Development Management Policies will be introduced and imported into Local Plans. Supplementary Planning Documents will be replaced by Supplementary Plans and will require independent examination.
- 4.4 Other relevant changes expected relate to the replacement of environmental impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment with the new Environmental Outcome Reports. Changes to infrastructure funding and contributions is also expected, so too will be the introduction of mandatory Borough-wide Design Codes.
- 4.5 The Council has been awarded £100,000 funding from DLUHC's Digital Planning Improvement to support the adoption of modern planning practices within planning data, digital capabilities and development management software. This may highlight opportunities to communicate better using digital means.
- 4.6 As a result it is possible that this SCI will need to be updated ahead of the 5-year review when there is a clearer understanding of how the community can and should be involved in planning matters.
- 4.7 The Council is currently updating the Local Development Scheme. It is a statutory requirement to consider whether a Local Plan is in need of review within five years of its adoption. As the current Local Plan was adopted in December 2026 it will, therefore, be necessary to consider by December 2026 whether it is in need of review. The Authority Monitoring Report for 2022/23 incorporates the Local Development Scheme, reporting on progress of the Supplementary Planning Documents.

- 4.8 There appears to still be no firm date for when the new system will commence, possibly late 2024, and we await further legislation and associated guidance. It is likely there will be transitional arrangements put in place and the requirement to start work on a new Local Plan within five years of adoption of the previous plan to remain. Once work starts on the new Local Plan it will need to be adopted within 30 months. Plans which are less than 5-years old when the new system goes live are unlikely to be in need of replacement until they are five years old. For Rossendale it is noted that “Authorities that have prepared a local plan... which is less than 5 years old when the new system goes live will not be required to begin preparing a new-style plan until their existing plan is 5 years old. So, for example, if an authority last adopted a local plan on 31 March 2022, the preparation of a new plan must start by 1 April 2027... Authorities can begin preparing a new plan sooner if they wish”<sup>1</sup>.
- 4.9 The Council received the formal submission of the Neighbourhood Plan for Edenfield on 15 February from the Edenfield Neighbourhood Community Form (ECNF). Responsibility now lies with the Council to check that the submitted plan and other required documents have followed the proper legal process, including appropriate designation and the legal requirements for consultation and publicity have been followed. We will then publicise the plan on the Council’s website for a period of 6-weeks and invite representations. Following this, the Neighbourhood Plan will be submitted to an agreed independent examiner to hold an examination as soon as possible, probably via written representations unless it thought necessary to hold a Hearing. The examiner will report with recommendations, the reasons for them, and a summary of findings. The Council must then decide if the Neighbourhood Plan should go to referendum, which it will have to organise in line with the legislation. If the referendum results in more than half of those voting (ie 50% plus one) being in favour the Council must make the Neighbourhood Development Plan as soon as practical. The Forward Planning team is currently considering the documents submitted and looking to arrange the appointment of an independent examiner in agreement with the Neighbourhood Forum. As the consultation needs to last for 6-weeks, it is considered that this should commence in May, immediately following the local elections.
- 4.10 The main changes to the amended SCI are shown in the attached track change version of the SCI and are outlined below:
- Update the section discussing changes to the planning system.
  - Explain that the SCI may need to be reviewed earlier than the statutory five years.
  - Emphasis placed on communicating digitally although, in line with legislation, we will ensure copies of all documents are available to view at the Council’s principal office – the Business Centre at Futures Park.
  - Planning policy documents will no longer be available for viewing at the Borough’s libraries.
  - Replace references to the Duty to Co-operate with maintaining effective co-operation, to take account of changes introduced by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act of 2023.
- 4.11 As discussed above, changes brought about through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) may necessitate amendments to how and when we consult with the public and other stakeholders on planning matters. Also the Council has just received an award of £100,000 funding from DLUHC’s Digital Planning Improvement Fund to support the adoption of modern planning practices within planning data, digital capabilities and development management software. This may highlight opportunities to communicate better using digital means.

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<sup>1</sup> [Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: consultation on implementation of plan-making reforms - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/levelling-up-and-regeneration-bill-consultation-on-implementation-of-plan-making-reforms)

## 5. RISK

- 5.1 Not adopting the Statement of Community Involvement means that the Statement of Community Involvement will not have been reviewed thoroughly within 5 years of adoption and so contrary to the legislation with potential implications for the LPA's performance.

## 6. FINANCE

- 6.1 Adoption of the SCI will not incur any additional financial pressures.

## 7. LEGAL

- 7.1 All legal implications are addressed in the Report.

## 8. POLICY AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Policy and equalities implications are included in the body of the report. An initial Equalities Impact Assessment is attached. It is not considered the updated SCI will disproportionately impact on any of the protected characteristics and so a full Equality Impact Assessment is not needed.

## 9. REASON FOR DECISION

- 9.1 To publish the Statement of Community Involvement Update as soon as possible on the Council's website and to keep a paper copy available for viewing at the Council's offices. This is to ensure compliance with the legislation, whilst agreeing that an early review may be needed to take account of expected forthcoming changes to plan-making and development management, and consider consultation with statutory consultees and other stakeholders.

Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
Draft Statement of Community Involvement 2024	attached
Equality Impact Assessment	attached
Statement of Community Involvement 2019	<a href="#">Statement of Community Involvement   More   Rossendale Borough Council</a>
Statement of Community Involvement 2019 and 2020 Update	<a href="#">Statement of Community Involvement   More   Rossendale Borough Council</a>
Authority Monitoring Report 2022/23 incorporating the Local Development Scheme	<a href="#">Authority Monitoring Reports   Rossendale Borough Council</a>



# **Statement of Community Involvement 2024**

## **Forward Planning Team**

February 2024





# Table of Contents

	<b>Page</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1 What is the Statement of Community Involvement?	5
1.2 Changes to the planning system	5
1.3 The Council's approach to community involvement	6
<b>2. The Local Plan and supporting documents</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 What are the Local Plan and supporting documents?	7
2.2 When can I get involved in the Local Plan and supporting documents?	9
2.3 Who will we consult?	10
2.4 How will we consult?	19
2.5 Feedback on your involvement	19
2.6 Further information on Rossendale's Local Plan and supporting documents	19
2.7 Neighbourhood Plans	20
2.8 Duty to Co-operate	22
<b>3. Consultations on planning applications</b>	<b>22</b>
3.1 Planning advice	22
3.2 Pre-application discussions and early community consultation	23
3.3 Validation process	25
3.4 Planning applications	25
3.5 Prior notification and prior approval applications	27
3.6 Permission in Principle	28
3.7 Planning decisions	29
3.8 Planning appeals	30
3.9 Enforcement	30
<b>4. Monitoring and reviewing the SCI</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix 1 – List of Local Plan Consultees	32
Appendix 2 – Glossary	33

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. What is the Statement of Community Involvement?

This Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out how you can get involved in the planning process including the preparation of local planning policies and decisions on planning applications.

The Council produced its first Statement of Community Involvement in 2010 and this was updated in 2014 and again in February 2019. A further document was issued in August 2020 during the examination of the Local Plan to take into account The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020. It was considered unnecessary to amend the 2019 SCI as the measures set out in the 2019 SCI meant that the community could still be involved and view key documents, including anyone without access to the internet, despite the restrictions in place and the closure of the libraries.

It is necessary to review the SCI every five years. This current review also reassesses our consultation practices to ensure we continue to consult effectively.

## 1.2. Changes to the planning system

The preparation of an SCI is a requirement of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended). An SCI must set out how the Council intends to achieve community involvement, public participation and cooperation in the preparation of their Local Plan, including any Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), as well as setting out how they intend to involve the public when consulting on planning applications. The Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017 also requires SCIs to be up to date and to set out how we will support groups undertaking neighbourhood planning.

This review is therefore vital to ensure that we continue to meet the latest statutory requirements and do all we reasonably can to encourage involvement in the planning process. Recent legislative changes include for example:

- Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017
- The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended)

A revised NPPF was published in December 2023. Planning Practice Guidance notes have also been added and updated. The NPPF encourages consultation at key stages as we prepare planning policy documents and before decisions are made on planning applications.

The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 as amended sets out how the Local Plan and other supporting documents must be prepared.

The introduction of Neighbourhood Planning through the Localism Act places a number of requirements on the Local Planning Authority which are set out in a range of Regulations, notably The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 and subsequent amendments.

The Government is committed to the simplification of the Planning system. Many changes have been introduced to the General Permitted Development Order to facilitate this. A number of types of properties are now able to change to an alternative use without first obtaining planning permission while in other cases, such as larger house extensions, a system of “prior notification” has been introduced.

The introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation<sup>1</sup> (GDPR) in May 2018 means that the Council has to get your permission to store your data.

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<sup>1</sup> General Data Protection Regulation (2016/679)

The update of the SCI reflects these legislative and policy changes.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) came into force in October 2023 and was followed in December with an update of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The LURA paves the way for a significant reform of the current planning system, particularly in respect of plan-making, which will require secondary legislation and will be accompanied with further updates to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG).

It is expected that Local Plans under the new system will focus on strategic policies and site allocations with set timescales to ensure quicker preparation of Local Plans, taking no longer than 30 months including the examination, and the introduction of three gateway assessments. Another change is that National Development Management Policies will be introduced and imported into Local Plans. Supplementary Planning Documents will be replaced by Supplementary Plans and will require independent examination.

Other changes expected relate to the replacement of environmental impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment with the new Environmental Outcome Reports. Changes to infrastructure funding and contributions is also expected, so too will be the introduction of mandatory Borough-wide Design Codes.

The Council has been awarded £100,000 funding from DLUHC's Digital Planning Improvement to support the adoption of modern planning practices within planning data, digital capabilities and development management software. This may highlight opportunities to communicate better using digital means.

As a result it is possible that this SCI will need to be updated ahead of the required 5-year review when there is a clearer understanding of how the community can and should be involved in planning matters.

### **1.3. The Council's approach to community involvement**

The SCI sits within the Council's existing approaches to community involvement. It sets out the Council's position on consultation with respect to planning documents and this is only one element of the Council's approach to consultation. Active partnership working exists on a range of related topics such as public health.

The Council works in partnership with Community Partnerships across the Borough covering the areas of Whitworth, Bacup, Rawtenstall and Haslingden. Membership of the partnerships is made up of representatives of the local community, ward councillors and partners such as the police, health service and Lancashire County Council. The role of the Community Partnerships is to work together to jointly address issues of concern to our communities and they are involved in the preparation of the Local Plan and other supporting documents.

## **2. The Local Plan and supporting documents**

### **2.1. What are the Local Plan and supporting documents?**

#### Local Plan documents

Rosendale's Local Plan sets out the spatial vision and planning policies for Rosendale. The Rosendale Local Plan 2019 to 2036 is the current Local Plan for the borough. All Local Plan documents go through consultation and, if found sound by an Independent Inspector after a public examination, are adopted by the Council. Local Plan documents therefore have statutory weight and are the principal consideration against which planning applications will be determined.

The Council's **Local Plan** was adopted on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021 and sets out the strategic priorities and development strategy for Rosendale for the next 15 years from adoption, up to 2036. The Local Plan identifies the general areas where development will take place, and how much there will be, as well as how Rosendale's built heritage and natural landscape will be protected and enhanced.

## Supporting documents

A **Sustainability Appraisal** was undertaken and was an integral part of preparing the Local Plan to assess the environmental, economic and social effects of proposals. Its preparation was iterative with the Local Plan and informed the policies as they were prepared.

As required by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2010/2017) the Council also commissioned a **Habitats Regulation Assessment** (HRA) of the Plan. The Sustainability Appraisal and the HRA form part of the supporting evidence for the Plan and were examined as part of the Examination in Public.

The preparation of the Local Plan was supported by a range of supporting “Evidence base” documents covering issues such as flood risk, highways and viability. These are all available on the Council’s website at [www.rossendale.gov.uk/local-plan/evidence-base](http://www.rossendale.gov.uk/local-plan/evidence-base).

Additional planning policy documents that we can prepare and which are subject to public consultation but are not publicly examined include Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). As these documents are not tested by an Independent Inspector they do not have the same statutory weight as the Local Plan and essentially provide additional advice or guidance to support the Local Plan, and the plan-making process. It is up to the Council whether it wishes to consult on the Statement of Community Involvement.

The **Authority Monitoring Report** (AMR) is produced annually and monitors the implementation of the adopted policies, reporting on the targets set, for example, in the adopted Local Plan.

The **Local Development Scheme** (LDS) sets out the timetable for preparing the Local Plan documents and identifying dates for key milestones. The current LDS is incorporated into the Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) for 2022/2023 and

shows progress being made on the Supplementary Planning Documents ([https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/downloads/download/10832/authority\\_monitoring\\_reports](https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/downloads/download/10832/authority_monitoring_reports)). Now that we have more certainty about the new Local Plan process this is under review and will be updated in due course and can be viewed at <https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/local-plan/emerging-local-plan/8>

The **Statement of Community Involvement** (SCI) sets out how we involve the community in the planning process including the preparation of local planning policies and decisions on planning applications.

**Supplementary Planning Documents** (SPDs) provide more detail about policies in the Local Plan and may take the form of design guides, development briefs or a master plan. We have produced SPDs on a range of topics such as Climate Change, the re-use and re-development of employment land and shop front design.

**Neighbourhood Plans** were introduced under the Localism Act of 2011 and are prepared by local communities for their neighbourhood area. The plans are taken forward by the neighbourhoods themselves although there are parts of the process where the Local Planning Authority provides assistance. Specific legislation<sup>2</sup> applies to the development of Neighbourhood Plans, including the composition and establishment of the Neighbourhood Forum (where there is no Parish) and designation of the area which the Plan will cover. Neighbourhood Plans are subject to an independent examination and referendum.

Under the Community Infrastructure Levy (Amendment) Regulations 2014, the Council may introduce a **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule** which is a funding mechanism for Local Authorities to help deliver infrastructure to support the development of their area, however no final decision has yet been made on this.

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<sup>2</sup> The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (2012 No. 637) and The Neighbourhood Planning (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 (2015 No. 20)

Other documents may be brought forward in time and will be identified in the Local Development Scheme as appropriate.

Further information on the Local Plan and other supporting documents is available on the Planning Policy pages of the Council's website at [www.rossendale.gov.uk](http://www.rossendale.gov.uk).

## **2.2. When can I get involved in the Local Plan and supporting documents?**

You can get involved in the preparation and development of each of the planning policy documents we produce.

Table A (page 11) sets out the different stages in preparing our Local Plan documents and the opportunities to get involved.

Table B (page 12) sets out the stages in preparing the Supplementary Planning Documents.

The Authority Monitoring Report and the Local Development Scheme are not subject to formal consultation but are published and available for the public to view, they are also reported to Members.

## **2.3. Who will we consult?**

We are committed to involving all stakeholders in developing planning policies for Rossendale. These groups include:

- statutory consultees including neighbouring authorities
- residents
- businesses
- developers, agents and landowners
- Community Partnerships
- Neighbourhood Forums
- Whitworth Town Council
- local interest groups
- local community and amenity groups



- 'hard-to-reach groups'
- central, and local government departments
- national and county bodies and organisations

Details of all the organisations and individuals that we consult are held in our consultation database which is kept up-to-date. Any individual or group can ask us to add their contact details to the database so they can be kept informed of progress and consulted on emerging documents. This is done through a form on the Council's website which requires anyone asking to be placed on the database to give their formal consent. This form can be found here: <https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/local-plan/emerging-local-plan/9>

By law, we must consult certain organisations through the Local Plan process. Appendix 1 sets out the list of organisations we are required to consult.

Alternative methods of communication may be required to engage with 'hard-to-reach' groups including elderly and young people, people with disabilities, rural and travelling communities and ethnic minority groups.

**Table A: Stages in the preparation of Local Plan documents and opportunities to get involved**

Stage	What is it?	Opportunities to get involved
<b>1. Evidence Gathering</b> (Regulation 18) <sup>3</sup>	This includes surveys, informal discussions with relevant bodies and researching Government policy and advice to ensure our evidence base is robust and up-to-date. This will enable issues and options to be identified to address needs.	Not normally at this stage. Any consultation will be targeted to obtain factual and / or scientific data about certain topics and / or issues, or to test assumptions. Typical evidence base documents include the Strategic Housing Market Area Assessment (SHMAA), Local Plan Viability work etc.
<b>2. Production</b> (Regulation 18)	This stage includes consultation on draft documents. We will invite comments during a specified time period. Once consultation is completed, responses will be analysed and amendments made as appropriate during this 'pre-submission' stage.	Yes, consultations on draft documents are the main opportunities to comment on and influence the content of the plan.
<b>3. Publication</b> (Regulation 19)	A 'pre-submission publication' version of the document will be prepared and this will be made available for public consultation for six weeks. Comments at this stage should relate to legal and procedural matters. All comments will be sent to PINS at the time of submission for examination. Responses will be recorded. This is the start of the formal statutory consultation process, and the Publication version represents the document that the Council would wish to adopt.	This stage is more concerned with how we have used the evidence to inform the options and conclusions made. It focusses on legal and procedural matters rather than the content of the document. General comments and representations should have been made during the production stage.
<b>4. Submission &amp; Independent Examination</b> (Regulation 22 & 24)	The 'Submission' version of the document will be sent to be independently examined by an appointed Independent Planning Inspector. At the Examination the Inspector will consider all representations received during the consultation stage. The Inspector will recommend changes to the document in a non-binding report issued to the Council. Only minor amendments, such as correcting typographical errors, can be made by the Council. If the Council proposes to make substantial changes which aren't in line with the Inspector's recommendations, further consultation will be required.	Yes. You can watch the Examination in Public and might be contacted by the Inspector to give evidence if you have previously made comments or asked to attend certain sessions to discuss your representation. No new / further representations can be made at this stage and the decision to discuss particular topics and call certain people to speak is up to the Inspector.
<b>5. Adoption</b> (Regulation 26)	We will take account of the recommendations in the Inspector's report, make the necessary amendments and adopt the document. The adopted document and the Inspector's report will be published and publicised.	No. All comments and representations will have already been received and taken into consideration.

<sup>3</sup> The 'Regulations' refer to the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. (2012 No. 767) as amended

**Table B: Stages in the preparation of other Planning Documents and opportunities to get involved**

Stage	What is it?	Opportunities to get involved
<b>1. Evidence Gathering</b>	This includes surveys, informal discussions with relevant bodies and researching Government policy and advice to ensure our evidence base is robust and up-to-date. This will enable issues and options to be identified to address needs.	Not normally at this stage. Any consultation will be targeted to obtain factual and / or scientific data about certain topics and / or issues, or to test assumptions.
<b>2. Production</b>	This stage includes consultation on draft documents. We will invite comments over a minimum period of four weeks, or as prescribed in the appropriate Regulations.	Yes, consultations on draft documents are the main opportunities to comment on and influence the content of the plan. Please note that not all documents will necessarily be consulted on, unless required by legislation or good practice.
<b>3. Adoption</b>	Responses will be analysed and amendments made. The final document will be published and publicised.	No. All comments and representations will have already been received and taken into consideration.

**Table C: Examples of methods to be used to consult on Local Plan documents**

Method	Why Use it?	Benefits	Weaknesses	Resource Implications	Documents that we expect to consult on using this technique
<b>Formal newspaper advertisement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good practice.</li> <li>• To publicise by formal notice that documents are available for inspection.</li> </ul>	To provide the public with formal notice of commencement of public participation.	May not be the most inclusive method for some hard to reach groups e.g. ethnic minorities. In addition a significant number of the population do not read papers.	Staff time and cost of placing the notices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Plan</li> <li>• Policies Map</li> <li>• Sustainability Appraisal</li> <li>• Supplementary Planning Documents</li> </ul>
<b>Letters or emails to statutory bodies and other general consultees</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulatory requirement.</li> <li>• Notify all relevant bodies and individuals on the consultation database.</li> </ul>	Good for targeting specific groups directly.	Implications on staff time.	Staff time and cost of postage for letters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Plan</li> <li>• Policies Map</li> <li>• Sustainability Appraisal</li> <li>• Statement of Community Involvement</li> <li>• Supplementary Planning Documents</li> <li>• Evidence base documents</li> </ul>
<b>Consultation documents available for inspection at LPA offices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulatory requirement.</li> <li>• Making documents available for inspection at the Council's One Stop Shop</li> </ul>	To meet the minimum requirements by ensuring that documents are available for inspection.	This method does not actively reach out to certain sections of the community i.e. the housebound.	Cost of printing documents for inspection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Plan</li> <li>• Policies Map</li> <li>• Sustainability Appraisal</li> <li>• Authority Monitoring Report</li> <li>• Local Development Scheme</li> <li>• Statement of Community Involvement</li> <li>• Supplementary Planning Documents</li> <li>• Evidence base documents</li> </ul>

Method	Why Use it?	Benefits	Weaknesses	Resource Implications	Documents that we expect to consult on using this technique
<b>Web Site</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regulatory requirement.</li> <li>The webpage will be used to advertise the consultation on the Local Plan, and the opportunity to comment online and download all documents relevant to the specific consultation and Local Plan in general.</li> </ul>	Meets regulatory requirements. An excellent source of information for access at home and other locations. It is the preferred media of younger people. Frees up staff time.	Not all stakeholders will have access to the internet.	Staff time in training and then uploading document and keeping the webpage up-to-date.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Plan</li> <li>Policies Map</li> <li>Sustainability Appraisal</li> <li>Authority Monitoring Report</li> <li>Local Development Scheme</li> <li>Statement of Community Involvement</li> <li>Supplementary Planning Documents</li> <li>Evidence base documents</li> </ul>
<b>Electronic survey forms on Website</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allows efficient processing of responses</li> </ul>	Very efficient for translating comments into Analysis forms without having to re-type the data	Not all stakeholders have access to the internet	Staff time to set up the survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Plan</li> <li>Policies Map</li> <li>Supplementary Planning Documents</li> </ul>
<b>Emails (including formal notification of consultations)</b>	Provides opportunity for people to be informed and signposted to further information.	Quick way of keeping people up-to-date. Reduces the cost of postage. Promotes a two way flow of information.	Not all stakeholders have access to email.	Staff time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Plan</li> <li>Policies Map</li> <li>Sustainability Appraisal</li> <li>Local Development Scheme</li> <li>Supplementary Planning Documents</li> <li>Authority Monitoring Report</li> <li>Statement of Community Involvement</li> <li>Evidence Base documents</li> </ul>

Method	Why Use it?	Benefits	Weaknesses	Resource Implications	Documents that we expect to consult on using this technique
<b>Other electronic media (e.g. X/Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn)</b>	Especially effective for engaging younger sectors of the population and those who don't engage in traditional consultations.	Can provide useful feedback and result in the discussion being passed onto wider contacts.	Can result in abusive tweets or comments and wider general criticisms of Council that are time consuming to answer. Potential for abusive / discriminatory language to be put in public domain, associated with the Council.	Needs staff time to post and monitor responses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Plan</li> <li>Policies Map</li> <li>Sustainability Appraisal</li> <li>Supplementary Planning Documents</li> </ul>
<b>Mapping</b>	It enables users to relate mapping to Policy content and is especially useful for younger sectors	It allows users to relate any plans / allocations to their local areas	Potential for people who are not familiar with IT and especially mapping elements	Staff time in producing high quality maps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Plan</li> <li>Supplementary Planning Documents</li> </ul>
<b>Local Media (i.e. newspaper articles, free papers and radio)</b>	Effective method of reaching a wider community audience.	Could help to raise awareness of local events and opportunities to become involved.	Again, local newspapers may not be accessed by many stakeholders, especially hard to reach groups. Local radio covers whole of Lancashire.	Staff time and cost of advertisement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Plan</li> <li>Policies Map</li> <li>Sustainability Appraisal</li> <li>Supplementary Planning Documents</li> </ul>
<b>Leaflets / Brochures</b>	Useful for targeting specific areas and groups with summarised information and signposting.	Effective way of summarising information in a concise 'reader friendly' manner.	Can only provide a limited amount of information.	Staff time in preparation and distribution plus printing costs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Plan</li> <li>Policies Map</li> <li>Sustainability Appraisal</li> </ul>

Method	Why Use it?	Benefits	Weaknesses	Resource Implications	Documents that we expect to consult on using this technique
<b>Notices of consultations on lamp-posts</b>	Useful for raising awareness in areas potentially impacted by development.	Is a useful supplementary method of raising awareness for interested members of the public.	Provides limited information. Can be damaged on site and only a limited number of people read such notices.	Staff time in putting up notices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Plan</li> <li>Supplementary Planning Documents</li> </ul>
<b>Public Exhibitions</b>	Provides further opportunity for targeting audiences with summarised information and signposting people to further information.	Provides a method of effectively out reaching to stakeholders.	Displays must be kept up to date in order to provide correct information. May be difficult to engage hard to reach groups. Staff time in preparing and presenting display. Need to identify appropriate space / location for exhibition.	Staff time and cost of exhibition material and potentially exhibition space.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Plan</li> <li>Policies Map</li> <li>Sustainability Appraisal</li> <li>Supplementary Planning Documents</li> <li>Evidence Base documents</li> </ul>
<b>Formal written consultation / community surveys</b>	Responses can help identify key interests and groups with consultation structured around key issues.	A good way to introduce the main issues. Surveys can be measured on a statistical basis to provide a more accurate summary of comments and feedback. Can be important for specific consultations on individual topics.	Surveys can be time consuming and require proper planning and analysis in order to be effective. Some stakeholders can be 'put off' by these more formal processes.	Staff time and cost of materials; computer resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Plan</li> <li>Policies Map</li> <li>Sustainability Appraisal</li> <li>Supplementary Planning Documents</li> </ul>

Method	Why Use it?	Benefits	Weaknesses	Resource Implications	Documents that we expect to consult on using this technique
<b>One-to-One meetings with individual stakeholders, statutory consultees, community group representatives, developers and consultants</b>	Provides opportunity for detailed discussions to be undertaken on general or specific issues.	Can help to clarify matters of concern or uncertainty and facilitate agreed consensus. More information can exchange between the Council and selected stakeholders and support obtained for delivery of key elements of the Plan.	Could be resource intensive in terms of staff time.	Staff time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Plan</li> <li>Policies Map</li> <li>Sustainability Appraisal</li> <li>Authority Monitoring Report</li> <li>Local Development Scheme</li> <li>Statement of Community Involvement</li> <li>Supplementary Planning Documents</li> <li>Evidence base documents</li> </ul>
<b>Public meetings</b>	Provides further opportunity for people to comment on issues that affect them.	Can help to clarify matters of concern or uncertainty in a direct way. More information can exchange between the Council and selected stakeholders.	Not all stakeholders will raise issues in a public forum. Vocal individuals can adversely dominate meetings. Generally need to identify local venues.	Staff time and cost of venue hire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Plan</li> <li>Policies Map</li> <li>Sustainability Appraisal</li> <li>Supplementary Planning Documents</li> <li>Evidence Base documents</li> </ul>
<b>Working groups/ Focus groups and seminars</b>	Effective way to involve community groups and other sectors such as elected members to become involved in the preparation of the Local Plan.	Can help to clarify matters of concern or uncertainty in a direct way. More information can exchange between the Council and selected stakeholders.	May need expert facilitation in order to obtain the best results. Can be difficult to recruit members as it requires time commitment.	Staff time and cost of venue hire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Plan</li> <li>Policies Map</li> <li>Sustainability Appraisal</li> <li>Supplementary Planning Documents</li> <li>Evidence base documents</li> </ul>
<b>Community Partnerships</b>	Specific groups for presenting and receiving feedback on local issues.	Allows more detailed discussion to take place with regard to specific local areas.	Potential to address importance of strategic themes that affect local areas as well as local issues.	Staff time and cost of venue hire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Plan</li> <li>Policies Map</li> <li>Sustainability Appraisal</li> </ul>



Method	Why Use it?	Benefits	Weaknesses	Resource Implications	Documents that we expect to consult on using this technique
<b>Planning Aid</b>	Planning Aid provides free, independent and professional help, advice and support on planning issues to people and communities who cannot afford to hire a planning consultant. Planning Aid complements the work of local authorities but is wholly independent of them.	Will help provide access to planning advice which will assist vulnerable/ hard to reach groups.	Could be resource-intensive for Planning Aid.	None.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Plan</li> <li>• Policies Map</li> <li>• Sustainability Appraisal</li> <li>• Supplementary Planning Documents</li> </ul>

## **2.4. How will we consult?**

A range of consultation methods will be used at different stages of the process. Some examples of how we will consult, the benefits and weaknesses of each method, the resource implications and the documents that we expect to consult on are set out in Table C (page 14). There may also be other methods that prove to be more appropriate over time for particular documents, or for particular sections of the community.

## **2.5. Feedback on your involvement**

For Local Plan documents including the Policies Map and the Sustainability Appraisal, after each stage of consultation, we will produce a report, summarising the comments made, the Council's response and whether this has led to changes in the document. These reports will be made available on the Planning Policy pages of the Council's website at [www.rossendale.gov.uk/LocalPlan](http://www.rossendale.gov.uk/LocalPlan) and at the Council's main offices (the One Stop Shop at The Business Centre, Futures Park, Bacup).

For Supplementary Planning Documents, we will prepare a Consultation Document as set out above and copies of the document will be available on the Planning Policy pages of the Council's website [www.rossendale.gov.uk](http://www.rossendale.gov.uk) and at the Council's main offices (the One Stop Shop at The Business Centre, Futures Park, Bacup).

## **2.6. Further information on Rossendale's Local Plan and supporting documents**

For further information on planning policy in Rossendale, including the Local Plan, please visit the Planning Policy pages of the Council's website at [www.rossendale.gov.uk](http://www.rossendale.gov.uk). Alternatively please email us at [forwardplanning@rossendalebc.gov.uk](mailto:forwardplanning@rossendalebc.gov.uk) or contact the Council on 01706 217777 and ask to speak to a member of the Forward Planning Team.

## 2.7. Neighbourhood Plans

Neighbourhood Plans form part of the Development Plan for the area in question and are able to allocate land and set policies. They must be in general conformity with the adopted Local Plan for the area. Production of Neighbourhood plans is optional and can be undertaken by a Parish/Town Council or by a Community group which meets regulatory requirements to become a Neighbourhood Forum. More information can be found at: [www.rossendale.gov.uk/local-plan/neighbourhood-plan](http://www.rossendale.gov.uk/local-plan/neighbourhood-plan)

Neighbourhood Development Orders can also be proposed by Neighbourhood Forums/Town Councils. The same consultation process will be used for these as for Neighbourhood Plans.

The Council has a statutory responsibility to support Neighbourhood Planning. We will seek to do so in the following ways:

- Providing advice on the legal and administrative requirements of producing a Neighbourhood Plan
- Provide feedback on the appropriateness of proposed Neighbourhood Areas and the setting up of a Forum
- Highlight how the Neighbourhood Plan should relate to the Local Plan and national policy
- Directing groups to relevant sources of information; where to seek professional support and how to obtain Government funding
- Providing any clarifications needed on the Council's own evidence base
- Giving comments on draft Neighbourhood Plans
- Assessing submitted Plans for compliance with statutory requirements
- Consulting for a minimum of six weeks on the submitted Neighbourhood Plan
- Arranging for the appointment of a Neighbourhood Plan Examiner
- Making arrangements for the referendum and, if approved, subsequent approval of the Plan
- Developing appropriate internal procedures for processing Neighbourhood Plans.

Much of the consultation on Neighbourhood Plans is undertaken by the Neighbourhood Forum themselves. However there are a number of key stages where we will be involved. The Council will liaise with the relevant Group prior to submission to advise on whether the documentation is likely to meet legal requirements. The following Table illustrates how we will seek to engage with communities at each stage.

<b>Neighbourhood Planning Stage</b>	<b>What is involved</b>	<b>Method of Consultation</b>
Neighbourhood Area and/or Neighbourhood Forum designation	A minimum of a six week consultation is required We will consult on the proposed Area boundary and the make-up and Constitution of the Forum	Website Emails Letters Social media Press releases
Submission	A minimum of 6 weeks consultation is required. We will consult on the draft Neighbourhood Plan	Website Emails Letters Social media Press releases
Independent Examination	Appointment of the Independent Examiner and publication of their report	Website Emails Letters Social media Press releases
Referendum	The Council will organise a public ballot on the Plan and publish the result of the ballot	Ballot Website
Plan comes into force	Following formal adoption at Council the Plan will be made available	Website Emails Letters

## **2.8. Maintaining effective cooperation**

The Council recognises the legal and practical importance of working together with partners to ensure effective delivery of housing and employment while addressing concerns about infrastructure and the natural environment. We will work with Statutory Consultees, neighbouring Local Authorities, and interested parties via a range of methods including emails; letters; phone calls; group discussions and individual meetings. The list of organisations that we will liaise with is listed in Appendix 1. The ultimate intention of the consultation will be to produce a Statement of Common Ground.

### 3. Consultations on Planning Applications

As well as being involved in preparing the Local Plan and other planning policies, you can also get involved in the planning applications we receive. This section briefly explains the consultation procedures that we follow for planning applications.

#### 3.1. Pre-Application Planning Advice

If you're thinking about undertaking development and are unsure about whether you need planning permission and / or would like planning advice, information is available on the Planning pages of the Council's website at [www.rossendale.gov.uk](http://www.rossendale.gov.uk). It is possible to view and comment on planning applications, apply for pre-application advice and find out more about applying for planning permission on the Council's website.

We run a duty officer system for general planning queries. The duty officer will aim to answer general enquires relating to the planning process, although they are not able to offer advice on the acceptability of a proposed scheme, or to confirm whether or not planning permission is required. To contact the duty officer please ring 01706 217777 or email us at [planning@rossendalebc.gov.uk](mailto:planning@rossendalebc.gov.uk).

#### Other sources of planning advice

The Planning Portal ([www.planningportal.co.uk](http://www.planningportal.co.uk)), which is the Government's online planning and building regulations resource for England and Wales, provides an excellent starting point to understanding planning requirements. It provides information on the types of development that require planning permission and how to apply for planning permission. Planning applications can be submitted online via the planning portal.

Assistance with planning issues is also available from Planning Aid. It provides free, independent and professional help, advice and support on planning issues to people

and communities who cannot afford to hire a planning consultant. Planning Aid complements the work of local authorities but is wholly independent of them. The website address is [www.rtpi.org.uk/planning-aid](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/planning-aid) or you can email the Planning Advisor for North West Planning Aid [northwest@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:northwest@rtpi.org.uk) or visit the RTPI North West website at <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/the-rtpi-near-you/rtpi-north-west/>.

### **3.2. Pre-application advice service and early community consultation**

#### Pre-application Advice Service

To obtain formal planning advice on whether a development is likely to be acceptable in planning terms, we recommend that applicants take advantage of the Council's pre-application advice service. The aim of this process is to:

- identify key issues and planning policies that need to be taken into account;
- identify likely issues at an early stage, enabling amendments to be made to a scheme prior to submitting a planning application;
- enable us to process applications in a more timely way; and
- to help ensure that development is of a high quality.

Pre-application advice is issued on a confidential basis and any views or opinions given are informal and are not binding on any future decision we make. We would encourage you to prepare as much information as possible before applying for pre-application advice to allow officers to prepare appropriately and provide useful and relevant advice. More information on the pre-application advice service can be found here: [Pre-Application Advice \(https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/planning-building-control/planning/4\)](https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/planning-building-control/planning/4).

We have a schedule of charges for pre-application advice available on the Council's website here: [Fees and charges \(https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/budgets-finance/addtional-financial-information\)](https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/budgets-finance/addtional-financial-information).

#### Early community consultations

In addition to applying for pre-application advice, developers are encouraged to contact the owners and occupiers of neighbouring land and properties with draft plans and invite comments within a specified time period, prior to submitting any formal applications to the Council. This is the best time to discuss potential development ideas, and for those who live nearby to consider whether they might be affected by a proposal and to make their views known.

There is a regulatory requirement for applicants for larger or potentially contentious developments such as major housing sites or wind turbines of a certain scale to carry out their own pre-application consultation. This consultation should bring draft proposals to the attention of the public, Town Council and other affected parties and provide an opportunity for them to make comments on the proposals. This consultation will allow information about the proposal to be presented to the community, enable potential issues to be addressed and amendments to be made before an application is submitted.

Depending on the scale and likely interest in the proposals, such consultation may take a number of forms including:

- Circulation of leaflets with draft proposals;
- On-line and / or on-site information on draft proposals;
- Arranging public meetings or exhibitions; and
- Requesting feedback within a specified time-scale to allow changes to be made.

Those submitting major applications<sup>4</sup> are expected to submit a Consultation Statement with their planning application, which describes the community consultation that has been undertaken, sets out the comments received and whether / how they have been taken on board.

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<sup>4</sup> Defined as schemes involving: residential development comprising the erection of 10 or more houses or development on a site of 0.5 hectares or more and non-residential development exceeding 1,000 square metres of floor space or on sites of 1 hectare or more or all onshore wind development of more than two turbines or where the hub height of any turbine exceeds 15 metres ("the PAC threshold").



Developers should also contact statutory undertakers and non-statutory bodies for technical advice where relevant.

### **3.3. Validation process**

Submitted planning applications will be issued with an acknowledgement receipt. Applications will be checked to ensure we have received the necessary information and fee and we will send an acknowledgement letter with details of the relevant Planning Officer and the time limit by which the Council will aim to determine the application. If the application is not considered valid, we will issue a letter to the applicant or agent with a request for further information / details required. Further information on the Council's validation checklist are available on the Planning pages of the Council's website ([www.rossendale.gov.uk](http://www.rossendale.gov.uk)).

The Validation process involves national requirements and in addition the Council can also set local requirements. It is expected that consultation will be taking place soon on an amended local list. Applicants should be aware that the introduction of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain will have implications for the validation requirements of major applications currently and minor applications as of 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2024.

### **3.4. Planning applications**

#### Publishing planning applications

Once a valid planning application is received, we follow statutory requirements to publish and consult as set out below:

It is possible to view planning applications and decisions and comment on current planning applications on the Council's website ([www.rossendale.gov.uk](http://www.rossendale.gov.uk)). We also publish a weekly list of planning applications validated each week. The weekly list is published on the Council's website and distributed to Elected Members and local interest groups.

We either write to all neighbours adjoining a proposal site (or who we consider may be materially affected by a development), and / or post a notice in the vicinity of the site. The notice or letter contains a description of the development, where the plans can be viewed and how to make comments on the application.

Where statutory regulations require it, a newspaper notice will also appear in a local newspaper.

We consult with internal officers within the Council and various statutory and non-statutory bodies and interest groups for specialist advice.

### Commenting on applications

Anyone can comment on a planning application whether they have been notified directly or not. When determining planning applications, the Council can only have regard to planning matters (material planning considerations). Representations can be made by letter or e-mail. Alternatively, they may be sent electronically through the on-line comments form on the Council's website. All comments made will be public and the contents of representations are summarised in the Planning Officer's report. In respect of those applications to be reported to and determined by the Development Control Committee, both the applicant and the public have rights to speak before the Committee, as do Ward Councillors.

### Revised planning applications

Sometimes we need to recommend alterations to planning applications to make the proposal acceptable. Often, the amendments are minor and we do not need to re-consult people about them. For major amendments however, we normally consult all parties who were originally consulted and those that have commented with details of the amendments.

## **3.5. Prior notification and prior approval applications**

The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) enables certain types of development subject to various

conditions. For some types of development one of these conditions may be to submit a Prior Notification / Prior Approval application to the Local Planning Authority.

Under prior notification, applicants must provide the Council with advance notification of the proposals. The Council then has a statutory duty to notify adjoining neighbours or to post a site notice (depending on the type of prior notification). There are several possible outcomes of prior notifications:

- prior approval is not required (and the development can therefore go ahead in accordance with the legislative requirements);
- prior approval is required; an assessment then takes place as to whether the submitted details are acceptable, and the application is either approved or refused.
- In relation only to prior notifications under Class A, Part 1 of Schedule 2 (enlargement, improvement or other alteration of a dwelling house), where any owner or occupier of any adjoining premises objects to a proposed development, the prior approval of the Council is required as to the impact of the proposed development on the amenity of any adjoining premises. An assessment is made, and the application either approved or refused accordingly.

For prior approval applications, we will carry out notification/ consultation as required within legislation. More information on what forms of development require Prior Approval can be found here: [Prior Notification / Prior Approval \(https://www.planningportal.co.uk/planning/planning-applications/consent-types/prior-approval\)](https://www.planningportal.co.uk/planning/planning-applications/consent-types/prior-approval).

### **3.6. Permission in Principle**

The permission in principle consent route is an alternative way of obtaining planning permission for housing-led development which separates the consideration of matters of principle for proposed development from the technical detail of the development. The permission in principle consent route has 2 stages: the first stage (or permission in principle / PiP stage) establishes whether a site is suitable in-principle and the

second (technical details consent / TDC) stage is when the detailed development proposals are assessed.

Local planning authorities can grant permission in principle to a site upon receipt of a valid application or by entering a site in Part 2 of its brownfield land register which will trigger a grant of permission in principle for that land providing the statutory requirements set out in Town and Country Planning (Permission in Principle) Order 2017 (as amended) and the Town and Country Planning (Brownfield Land Register) Regulations 2017 are met.

### **3.7. Planning decisions**

Most planning applications are assessed by a designated Planning Officer and 'signed off' by a Principal Officer or the Planning Manager. When a decision has been made, we notify the applicant, or, if they have one, their Agent, in writing. The decision will also be posted on our website.

Where applications have a wider public interest and meet certain tests as set out in the Council's Constitution, for example, with respect to the number of objections received, applications will be decided at Development Control Committee meetings. The timetable for committee meetings is available on the Council's website here: [https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/downloads/download/10721/committee\\_schedule](https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/downloads/download/10721/committee_schedule).

Should an application need to go to committee, details of the procedure are set out in the initial neighbour notification letter.

The committee meetings are held in public at our offices at The Business Centre, Futures Park, Bacup, so that interested parties can hear the discussions on planning applications. It is also possible to register to speak at a meeting by contacting our Democratic Services team on 01706 217777.

Once the Development Control Committee has determined a planning application, a decision notice will be issued and the decision can be viewed on the Council's website.

### **3.8. Planning appeals**

Applicants have the right to appeal against the Council's non-determination or refusal of planning permission. Appeals can be submitted via the Planning Portal ([www.planningportal.co.uk](http://www.planningportal.co.uk)). When an appeal is submitted, the Council will notify all those who were consulted originally or who made representations to the application. The Planning Inspectorate determines appeals and representations are normally sent to them directly. The decision will be published on the Council's website.

### **3.9. Enforcement**

Where alleged breaches of planning control have taken place, please contact the Planning Enforcement Officer for advice. Complaints must be made in writing. Further details can be found on the [Planning Enforcement pages of the Council's website](https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/planning-building-control/planning-enforcement) (<https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/planning-building-control/planning-enforcement>) and in the document 'Planning Enforcement Policy'.

## **4. Monitoring and reviewing the SCI**

Changing regulations, changing customer expectations and developments in technology mean that the effectiveness of consultation techniques need to be kept under review. Monitoring will help us to consider both the outcomes of consultation and the effectiveness of the process. A formal review of the SCI could be triggered if:

- Monitoring of consultation arrangements suggest the need for significant change;
- The number of responses to a consultation exercise is significantly below expectations, particularly from hard to reach groups; or if there are
- Significant relevant legislative changes.

It is expected that the government will make changes to how Local Plans are prepared. If a new Local Plan system is implemented before the review of this SCI is scheduled

to take place then the Council may need to amend the SCI to reflect any new Local Plan system. Further changes are also expected to the planning application system, for example, relating to permitted development. Where consultation is required the Council will consider the most appropriate mechanisms, subject to legislation. Technological improvements and new legal requirements may also have an impact on how we consult.

# Appendix 1 – List of Local Plan Consultees

Government guidance sets out the consultees we must contact when preparing a Local Plan document. A full list of the consultees is held in the Council’s Local Plan consultation database. Please note, this list is not exhaustive and also relates to successor bodies where re-organisations occur.

## Statutory Consultees

- Government Departments
- Neighbouring Local Planning Authorities
- The Environment Agency
- Natural England
- Office of Road and Rail Regulation
- Network Rail
- East Lancashire Clinical Commissioning Group
- relevant Integrated Transport Authority(s)
- relevant Highway authority
- National Highways
- relevant telecommunications companies
- relevant electricity and gas companies
- relevant sewerage undertaker
- relevant water undertaker
- Neighbouring Parish Councils
- Whitworth Town Council
- Designated Neighbourhood Forums
- The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (known as Historic England)
- Local Policing Body (Police and Crime Commissioner)
- The Coal Authority
- Civil Aviation Authority
- Homes England
- Active Travel England

## General Consultees

General consultation bodies include voluntary groups and those which represent the interest of different racial, ethnic or national groups; disabled persons; different religious groups; and persons carrying on business in the Rossendale area.

## Appendix 2: Glossary

**Adopted Policies Map:** this is a map of the Borough (on a registered scale) illustrating the policies and proposals in Local Plan Documents. The Adopted Policies Map must be revised as each new Local Plan Document is adopted.

**Authority Monitoring Report (AMR):** is produced annually and the policies in the adopted Local Plan.

**Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL):** is a planning charge, introduced by the Planning Act 2008 as a tool for local authorities in England and Wales to help deliver infrastructure to support the development of their area.

**Community Partnership:** is made up of representatives of the local community who work together to jointly address issues of concern.

**Development Control Charter:** sets out a Local Authority's current practice on dealing with planning applications.

**Duty to Co-operate:** introduced under the Localism Act 2011 which requires planning authorities to work with neighbouring authorities and bodies on strategic issues and empowers communities to have greater influence on how plans for their area are drawn up

**Examination:** the independent examination conducted by a Planning Inspector to test the soundness of a Local Plan Document or Sustainability Appraisal.

**Local Development Scheme (LDS):** sets out the 3-year programme for preparing Local Development Documents.

**Localism Act 2011:** is legislation covering a range of matters intended to shift power from Government back into the hands of individuals, communities and councils. The



planning provisions of the Act seek to make the planning system clearer, more democratic and more effective.

**Local Plans:** these are documents that set out the development requirements for the Borough for a 15 year period. This includes sites for housing and employment as well as policies setting out how planning applications will be considered.

**National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):** was originally introduced in March 2012 and most recently (as of writing) updated in 2023. It sets out the Government's priorities for planning in England.

**Neighbourhood Forum:** is the body that lead on the production of a neighbourhood plan in neighbourhood areas that are not covered (either in part or in whole) by a town or parish council.

**Neighbourhood Plans:** introduced under the Localism Action 2011 and prepared by local communities for a particular neighbourhood area. The plans are taken forward by neighbourhoods themselves although there are parts of the process where the local authority provides assistance.

**Planning Aid:** provides a free, independent and professional planning advice service to individuals and groups who cannot afford professional fees.

**Planning Committee:** a committee (full title 'Development Control Committee') composed of ward councillors which is responsible for planning applications, Tree Preservation Orders, Masterplans & Design Codes and enforcement action for the whole Borough.

**Planning Inspectorate (PINS):** the body which provides an Inspector (appointed by the Secretary of State) to carry out an independent assessment of the soundness of a Local Plan Document or Sustainability Appraisal. The Inspectorate also processes planning, listed building consent, advertisement and enforcement appeals.

**Planning Portal:** is the Government's online planning and building regulations resource for England and Wales.

**Planning Practice Guidance:** this complements the NPPF and is electronic Government guidance that sets out in more technical detail how particular planning issues should be addressed.

**Prior approval application:** an application notifying the Council that an applicant intends to carry out development that does not require planning permission.

**Soundness:** a Local Plan Document will be sound if it meets certain tests at the Examination stage. These tests require that a document is prepared according to the correct procedures, that it conforms to other policies, and that its proposals are coherent, consistent and effective.

**Submission:** the stage in producing a Local Plan Document when it is given to the Secretary of State for independent examination.

**Supplementary Planning Document (SPD):** a Local Development Document which provides supplementary information to support the Local Plan. An SPD may be related to a topic or to a specific area.

**Sustainability appraisal:** a tool for appraising policies to ensure they reflect sustainable development objectives (that is social, environmental and economic factors) and required in the Act to be undertaken for all Local Plan Documents.

**Validation:** On receipt of a planning application, the Local Planning Authority will check the application to determine whether it's complete and verify that all the necessary information, including the planning fee, has been received. Once an application has been deemed valid, the determination process starts and notification is given to the applicant in writing.

**Produced by**

The Forward Planning Team  
Rossendale Borough Council  
Room 120  
The Business Centre  
Futures Park  
Bacup  
OL13 0BB

Tel: 01706 217777



# Equality Impact Assessment

# Appendix B

The council carry out Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) to analyse the effects of our decisions, policies or practices.

Throughout this document, policy refers to any policy, strategy, project, procedure, function, decision or delivery or service.

The EIA should be undertaken/started at the beginning of the policy development process before any decisions are made.

Policies are developed and reviewed using a consultative approach involving relevant internal and external stakeholders. Officers must consider what action needs to be taken to help overcome or minimise any disadvantages that people who share a protected characteristic will experience in compliance with the Equality Act 2010.

<b>Name of policy:</b>	Statement of Community Involvement 2024
<b>Lead officer name</b>	Anne Storah
<b>Job title</b>	Principal Planner (Forward Planning)
<b>Service area</b>	Planning
<b>Telephone contact</b>	01706 252418
<b>Email contact</b>	annestorah@rossendalebc.gov.uk
<b>Date Assessment commenced</b>	28/01/24
<b>Date assessment completed</b>	5/03/24

### The main aims/objectives of this policy are:

The Statement of Community Involvement (2024) sets out how the community and other stakeholders can be involved in the planning process including the preparation of local planning policies, neighbourhood plans and decisions on planning applications

Indicate the status of the policy or decision

New/proposed  Modified/adapted  Existing

Indicate protected characteristics have been assessed

Age	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Disability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Gender reassignment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Religion/belief	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sexual orientation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sex	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Pregnancy/maternity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Race	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Marriage or civil partnership	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

1. State any positive or negative impact on the protected characteristic(s) (added additional rows if needed)

Protected characteristic	Positive/Negative	How does it impact?
Age	Neutral	The document has a greater emphasis on online consultation methods and removes libraries as deposit points; could disproportionately impact older people who are less likely to be online.
Disability	Neutral	
Religion/belief	Neutral	<p>However, a copy of all consultation documents will still be available for viewing at the council offices; site notices near proposed allocations will be used to publicise consultations within the direct locality; and the document makes a specific commitment to make reasonable adjustments for equalities purposes upon request. Overall this would maintain the advancement of equality of opportunity.</p> <p>Provision is made for consultation documents to be clear and easy to read and available for viewing at the Council's office and online. Where appropriate consultation events will be held at accessible locations in the Borough. We also aim to ensure documents are clear and easy to read.</p> <p>Consultations are open to members of the public with alternative formats available on request.</p>
Race	Neutral	The benefits of the document would be equal as they apply to the public generally.
Pregnancy/maternity	Neutral	The benefits of the document would be equal as they apply to the public generally.
Sexual orientation	Neutral	The benefits of the document would be equal as they apply to the public generally.
Gender reassignment	Neutral	The benefits of the document would be equal as they apply to the public generally.
Sex	Neutral	The benefits of the document would be equal as they apply to the public generally.
Marriage or civil partnership	Neutral	The benefits of the document would be equal as they apply to the public generally.

2. Explain and give examples of any evidence/data used (add additional rows if needed)

Evidence	How does this have an impact on the protected characteristic?
Local Plan consultation	Whilst the SCI has been updated, the consultation techniques have not been significantly amended. One key change has been to remove the viewing of documents at public libraries.

	These consultation techniques were used during the pandemic when the team undertook a number of consultations. During this time Lancashire County Council closed the libraries whilst the OSS remained open.. The response rate was high and no complaints were reported by stakeholders. For residents without access to the internet, either their own or someone else's (eg belonging to a neighbour or family member), we made alternative arrangements to ensure stakeholders remained informed.
--	---

### 3. Outcome of EIA

What course of action does this EIA suggest you take?	Please indicate
Outcome 1- The EIA has not identified any potential for negative impact on the protected characteristics. Progress to <b>EIA approval – section 5</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Outcome 2- The EIA has identified a possibility for negative impact on the protected characteristics. <b>An EIA Action Plan must be completed to mitigate the negative impact – section 4 before approval section 5</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 4. EIA action plan

Based on the above impact assessment, findings/evidence and outcomes identified, please complete the Action Plan below. The action plan should address:

- Any gaps in findings/evidence research including any consultation or engagement regarding the policy and its actual/potential impacts
- How you will address any gaps
- What practical changes/action that will help reduce any negative impacts identified
- What practical changes/action that will help enhance any positive contributions to equality

Negative impact identified	Action required	Lead officer	To be completed

<b>Monitoring and reviewing the effect of the policy</b>
Please state how you will monitor the impact and effect of this policy
<b>It is mandatory to review the SCI within 5 years of being adopted and it may need to be revised earlier due to legislative changes expected to be made to planning in the near future and potential digital improvements.</b>

### 5. EIA approval (to be completed by the relevant Head of Service/Director)

- Outcome of EIA agreed/approved by Management Team: 05/03/2024
- Published on council website: (date)

Signed: ..... (Head of Service/Director) (date)



## SPECIAL URGENCY DECISION

Leader of Council:

Name: Councillor Alyson Barnes  
Date agreed: 07/03/2024

Chair of Overview and Scrutiny:

Name: Councillor Samara Barnes  
Date agreed: 07/03/2024

Decision Taker:

Rob Huntington  
Date: 07/03/2024

Details of Decision and Reasoning:

Decision to:

- Accept the additional £257,940 Local Authority Housing Fund grant

In July 2023 a special urgency decision was made to accept £429k from the Local Authority Housing Fund to provide 4 homes for Afghan families and an additional unit to relieve homeless pressures.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> February 2024, Rosendale Borough Council was allocated a further £257,940 from the Local Authority Housing Fund, which requires the Council to commit to the provision of a further 3 temporary accommodation units. The Council is required to accept the amount by the 5<sup>th</sup> of March 2024 and return the MOU by the 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2024.

Under normal circumstances and within the constitution, the decision to accept the grant would be via Full Council however, the decision request falls outside of the forward plan timescales and there is not a Council meeting within the required timescale to approve the decision. The next Full Council is the 20<sup>th</sup> March 2024 and there is not time to convene a meeting of Full Council prior to 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

Under the Constitution, the Chief Executive may agree action due to an emergency which must be taken to safeguard the interest of the Council.

This funding is capital funding announced by the government to support the Afghan cohort.

We now require an urgent decision to enter into the Memorandum of Understanding by the 11<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

This is not a legally binding document but sets out the understanding of the grant.

In summary, the funding aims are:

1. Provide sustainable homes for those on Afghan resettlement schemes
2. Provide better temporary accommodation to those owed a relief duty
3. Reduce temporary accommodation costs
4. Reduce impact on the social housing waiting list

The additional funding is to be spent by August 2024.

The total allocation of funding from the LAHF is now £686,940.

Decision to be taken by:

Rob Huntington, Chief Executive

Documents to be considered by the decision taker:

[Local Authority Housing Fund: Round 2 prospectus and guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)  
Memorandum of understanding

Implications:

Legal- In order to meet the deadlines for receipt of the funding it is imperative that the MOU be signed prior to the next meeting of Council.

HR – Delivery of this MOU will be supported by the Property Services Team.

Finance-  
Signing the updated MOU will release the revised Tranche 2 payment which includes the additional grant award and increase the temporary accommodation units target by a further 3 properties



Status:

Open – for publication

Date:

8<sup>th</sup> March 2024

## NOTES

### A Key Decision is defined as one that either:

- a) is, in value worth more than £100,000, or
  - b) has a **significant impact** because (for example) it either:
    - (i) affects individuals or organisations outside the Borough; or
    - (ii) will have a long term (more than 5 years) or permanent effect on the council or the borough.
1. Status - Is the issue an open and public matter or is it a private and excluded matter as described in Schedule 12 A of the Local Government Act 1972. If it is an open matter it is for publication. If it is a private matter it is not for publication and you state the reason why and the appropriate paragraph number of Schedule 12A.
  2. Implications – List any financial staffing and legal implications and remember to consult with legal, human resources and finance. Also consider implications such as LA21 Environment, Human Rights Act 1998. Equal opportunities, Community Safety, IT, Land and Property and Partnership Working.
  3. When the decision has been made and the form signed by the decision taker and the portfolio holder the form should be sent to the Committee Services Manager.

<b>Subject:</b>	Committee review	<b>Status:</b>	For Publication
<b>Report to:</b>	Council	<b>Date:</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> March 2024
<b>Report of:</b>	Committee and Member Services Manager	<b>Lead Member:</b>	Environment and Corporate Services
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	General Exception <input type="checkbox"/>	Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Equality Impact Assessment:</b>	Required: No	Attached: No	No
<b>Biodiversity Impact Assessment:</b>	Required: No	Attached: No	No
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Carolyn Sharples	<b>Telephone:</b>	01706 252422
<b>Email:</b>	<a href="mailto:carolynsharples@rossendalebc.gov.uk">carolynsharples@rossendalebc.gov.uk</a>		

**1. RECOMMENDATION**

Council agree the following committee changes and Constitution changes as detailed in Appendix A (with effect from 2nd May 2024):

- a) reduce the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to seven elected members.
- b) changes to committee terms of reference and working groups.

**2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- To consider proposed changes to the structure and remit of the Council’s committees, panels and working groups.
- The proposed changes will assist with the transition to 30 councillors in May 2024.
- Changes include reviewing the terms of reference of various committees, panels and working groups, to help reduce the expected workloads and reduce the number of committee and working group members to assist with substitution requirements.
- Governance Working Group considered the report and proposed changes to the Constitution on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2024. The group recommended approval with the exception of the proposal to reduce the Audit and Accounts Committee to five members.

**3. BACKGROUND**

The report aims to identify where changes can be made to the committee structure and remit in order to assist with councillor workloads and the transition from 36 to 30 councillors in May 2024.

**4. DETAILS**

4.1 From May 2024 the changes proposed by the Local Government Boundary Commission will be introduced in Rossendale concerning the number of councillors and structure of the local electoral wards. The impact of this will see an increase in councillor workloads. This report seeks to review and make proposals to minimise impact from the changes being introduced.

**Committee structures**

4.2 The Council has four main committees which are open to the public in addition to the Cabinet, these are Development Control, Licensing, Audit and Accounts and Overview and Scrutiny.

4.3 To minimise impact from the reduction in the number of councillors it is proposed to reduce the size of committees and working groups where possible. This will assist political groups in finding suitable trained substitutes from their reduced numbers who will be able to cover for any committee absences should the need arise.

- 4.4 It is proposed to reduce the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to seven elected members from ten.
- 4.5 There are no proposed changes to the Audit and Accounts Committee, although a proposal to reduce this committee to five members was considered by the Governance Working Group. The Governance Working Group recommended keeping seven members on this committee to keep it the same size as the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, since the committee also provided a scrutiny function. No changes are proposed to the size of the Development Control Committee, since the size of this committee was already reduced from nine to seven in May 2023. There are also no changes proposed to the Licensing Committee.
- 4.6 The Licensing Act 2003 (“The Act”) s.6 (1) requires a licensing authority to establish a licensing committee consisting of at least ten but not more than fifteen members of the authority. As the current number of elected members on this committee is eleven, no further changes are proposed for the following reasons:
- The majority of the work undertaken by this committee is through sub-committees comprised of three members taken from the main Licensing Committee, rather than the work being carried out by the entire committee membership.
  - There is just one full committee meeting every March to approve sub-committee minutes and for the committee to receive any relevant updates. Additional meetings will only be scheduled on an ad hoc basis (where necessary) to review and make recommendations relating to licensing policy.
  - Substitutes are not permitted on anything which falls under “The Act”, therefore there is no proposal to reduce committee numbers further since Licensing Sub-committee Hearings must be conducted within specified timescales, using members from the main committee only, and in some instances ward member restrictions also apply in the case of premises licence hearings. Therefore to reduce membership further would create a risk of there being insufficient members available to form a panel within the required legal timescales.
- 4.7 Cabinet size would remain unaffected by any proposals since the Leader of the Council is required to make the Executive Cabinet appointments.
- 4.8 It is proposed to reduce the size of the working groups from seven to five members and review and consolidate the number of working groups by amending the terms of reference.

## **Terms of Reference (TOR)**

### **Overview and Scrutiny**

- 4.9 The TOR for Overview and Scrutiny need to be reviewed since they contain duplications and items that are no longer relevant, suggested amendments are as follows:
- To delete the reference to scrutiny forms, since these are work programme requests and are already included in the TOR.
  - In relation to consultations, it is proposed to delete this reference since the Council has created a separate Consultation Working Group (to be amended to the Cross Party Working Group) to deal with consultation responses.
  - To consider adding extra wording to the reference to the Corporate Plan so the subsequent duplication can be deleted.
  - To amend the wording in relation to Rossendale Leisure Trust to reflect the focus of monitoring performance.

## **Appointments and Appeals Committee**

4.10 A panel is formed from the committee membership to hear staff dismissal appeals or to consider the appointment or dismissal of Chief Officers. The wording at this section has been amended to reflect current practice in line with the Council's Disciplinary Procedure and other relevant Council policies.

## **Working Groups**

4.11 The Council has a number of working groups in existence which can be consolidated to reduce the number of groups, or brought up to date by reviewing the terms of reference. It is proposed to reduce the number of members on working groups to five (from seven) unless otherwise stated.

4.12 Other than the number of members on the group, there are no proposed changes to the Governance Working Group.

4.13 It is proposed to discontinue the Grants Advisory Working Group, since a delegation already exists to determine grant requests for up to £5000 as detailed in Part 3 Delegations to Specific Officers, Chief Finance Officer, section 7.2d of the Council's Constitution.

4.14 It is proposed to rename the Consultation Working Group the Cross Party Working Group and remove any other existing groups set up for the purpose of cross party consultation to ensure there is no duplication. This includes the Project Development Consultation Group and also the Leisure Cross Party Working Group. The Project Development Consultation Group has not met for some considerable time and whilst it is not included in the Constitution it is referenced in the annual list of Committee Appointments. The remit of these groups can be accommodated in the functions of the Cross Party Working Group. Changes have been proposed to the TOR to make better use of this group and allow a more flexible approach to its membership. A more fluid membership has been proposed, and the group can be expanded where a wider range of views are being sought (so long as this is in keeping with the political balance).

4.15 The Local Plan Steering Group was set up to develop the Local Plan, but is now only required to undertake the subsequent reviews. The TOR and title have been amended to reflect this change.

## **5. RISK**

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

- The reduction in the number of councillors and bigger ward areas will increase councillor constituent case work. There is a need to try to reduce other workloads to accommodate the new changes.
- Political groups will struggle to accommodate committee work and find suitable committee substitutes (when required), without reviewing and amending the committee structures and terms of reference.

## **6. FINANCE**

There are no specific financial implications identified arising from this report.

**7. LEGAL**

There are no specific legal implications identified arising from this report other than those detailed at 4.6.

**8. POLICY AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

There are no identified equality impacts or policy implications for the Council arising from this report.

**9. REASON FOR DECISION**

To accommodate councillor workloads and minimise the impact in the reduction of councillors from 36 to 30.

No background papers

**Part 1 Summary and Explanation page 3**

**1.3 How the Council operates**

The Council is composed of ~~36~~ 30 Councillors normally elected in thirds and, in usual circumstances, such Councillors serve for four years.

**Part 2 Articles pages 6, 8 and 15**

**ARTICLE 2 – MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

**2.01 Composition and Eligibility**

a) **Composition.** The Council comprises ~~36~~ 30 members, otherwise called councillors.

**2.06 Members Working Groups**

The Council has established the following Members Working Groups:

- Governance Working Group
- ~~Grants Advisory Group~~
- ~~Consultation Cross Party~~ Working Group
- Local Plan Review Steering Group

**ARTICLE 7 – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**7.01 Appointment, Membership and Terms of Reference**

The Council will appoint:

One Overview and Scrutiny Committee (~~10~~ 7 Members) plus one co-opted Member.

**Part 3 Terms of Reference pages 37 - 42**

**6. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The committee will:

- ~~To consider any scrutiny forms that are received and determine the appropriate course of action~~
- ~~To c~~Consider work programme requests and agree the work programme
- ~~To c~~Conduct research, undertake community and other consultation in the analysis of policy issues and possible options
- ~~To q~~Question and gather evidence from any person (with his or her consent)
- ~~To receive consultation documents as appropriate and agree a small response group to reply to specific documents, as necessary~~
- ~~To m~~Make recommendations to the Cabinet, Council and other organisations where appropriate
- ~~To p~~Produce an Annual Report
- ~~To d~~Develop and review such policy matters as it sees fit
- ~~To e~~Consider and implement mechanisms to encourage and enhance

## Appendix A

- community participation in the development of policy options
- ~~To e~~Question members of the Cabinet and/or committees and or officers about their views on issues and proposals affecting the area
- ~~To m~~Monitor existing council policies to ensure recommendations are being implemented
- ~~To m~~Monitor the Forward Plan and agree those policies to be scrutinised prior to decision by Cabinet/Full Council
- ~~To m~~Monitor complaints handling and Ombudsman enquiries through the Council's performance reports
- ~~To monitor Ombudsman complaints~~
- ~~To m~~Monitor and scrutinise the Council's Corporate Plan and policy objectives, and where appropriate service improvement plans, and make recommendations on the plan to the Cabinet
- ~~To e~~Consider and monitor the performance of the Cabinet and other council committees and officers, as appropriate
- ~~To a~~Assist the Council and the Cabinet in the Budget and Policy Frameworks
- ~~To e~~Consider budget options as part of the budget consultation process
- ~~To consider the Corporate Plan and make recommendations on the plan to the Cabinet~~
- ~~To s~~Scrutinise decisions made by the Cabinet and other council committees and officers
- ~~To e~~Question members of the Cabinet and Chairs of committees, Chief Officers and Head of Service about their decisions and performance
- ~~To s~~Set up Task and Finish Groups; with a maximum of two such groups operating at any one time; and to agree terms of reference and project plans before work starts
- ~~To e~~Consider final reports from the Task and Finish Groups
- ~~To d~~Deal with any relevant Councillor Call for Action requests and determine the appropriate course of action
- Scrutinise decisions referred to it under the 'Call-in Procedure'
- Review and scrutinise the performance of other public bodies whose operations affect the area and invite reports from them or request them to address the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and local people about their activities and performance
- ~~To l~~iaise with external organisations whose operations affect the area to ensure that the interests of local people are enhanced by collaborative working
- ~~To r~~Receive presentations from external organisations and partners
- ~~To s~~Scrutinise Rossendale's contribution to the Pennine Lancashire Community Safety Partnership and to act as the Council's Crime & Disorder Committee
- ~~To m~~Monitor the funding and legal agreements agreed with performance of Rossendale Leisure Trust ~~and receive financial/performance monitoring~~

~~reports.~~

## 7 REGULATORY COMMITTEES

### 7.1 DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE

The committee will:

1. ~~To c~~Consider and determine applications made by the Council, councillors or their spouses or partners, officers or where the relevant Director or Monitoring Officer has been made aware that a councillor or an officer has an interest in the property.
2. ~~To c~~Consider and determine all planning applications on Council owned land, by or on behalf of the Council, its parties, organisations or other agents.
3. ~~The c~~Consideration of objections and the confirmation/modification of tree preservation orders to which objections have been received.
4. Consider ~~T~~the nomination of a member of the Development Control Committee to represent the Council at any hearing or Inquiry, where the decision was made contrary to policy and officer advice.
5. PConsider planning applications relating to strategic applications which include:-
  - a) the provision of dwelling houses where:-
    - i. 15 or more dwellings are to be provided; or
    - ii. the site area is 0.5 hectare or more; or
  - b) buildings are to be provided with a floor space of 1000 square metres or more; or
  - c) the site to be developed is 1 hectare or more; or
  - d) developments which require an environmental statement.
6. ~~To c~~Consider and determine applications or notifications which have received three or more material planning objections and which are recommended by officers for approval.
7. ~~To c~~Consider and determine applications which have been called in, in accordance with the call in procedure (set out in Part 4 of this Constitution).

### 7.2 LICENSING COMMITTEE

The committee will deal with the following items, except those matters which are delegated to the Council and/or officers:

- Waste Management Licences
- Stage Play Licences
- Pet Shops Licences
- Animal Boarding Establishment Licences
- Guard Dog Licences
- Game Dealers Licences



## Appendix A

- Scrap Metal Dealers Licences
- Rag Flock and Other Materials Act
- Riding Establishment Licences
- Breeding of Dogs Act Licences
- Acupuncture
- Tattooing, Ear Piercing and Electrolysis
- Licences to Plant trees in highways
- Licences re Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act, 1964 /sections 44 and 45
- Dangerous Wild Animals
- House to House and Street Collections
- Licensing of Hackney Carriage Vehicles and Drivers and Private Hire Operators (delegated by Council 23/02/2011)
- Second Hand Dealers
- Hypnotism
- Sex Establishments
- Street Trading
- Licensing Matters (Licensing Act 2003)
- Licensing Matters Gambling Act 2005
- Policy statement on guidelines to convictions including statement of policy about relevant convictions (delegated by Council 26/03/2014)
- Enforcement Policy: Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Drivers (delegated by Council 23/02/2011)
- Hackney Carriage Intended 'Use' Policy (delegated by Council 24/02/2016)

Thee committee will deal with the following items via a politically balanced sub-committee (panel of 3 members), except those matters which are delegated to the Council and/or officers:

- Taxi Licence Applications (non-statutory committee)
- Premises Licences (statutory committee)

Sub-committees will be made up of Licensing Committee members, or if substitutes are required

(on the non-statutory committee only), any other member may substitute by agreement with the Chief Executive that the member has undertaken the necessary training to take part in the committee's work. The Chair of the Licensing Committee will act as the chair person for all Licensing Sub-Committee meetings, otherwise the Vice-chair of Licensing will fulfil this role where available. They will automatically chair the sub-committees without the need to be formally appointed as the chair person.

## 8. STANDARDS PANEL

### Roles and Functions

The Standards Panel will have the following roles and functions:

- a) To consider and determine complaints about breaches of the Members' Code

- of Conduct;
- b) To deal with any reports from the Monitoring Officer on standards complaints;
- c) To exercise functions in relation to standards arrangements for Whitworth Town Council and the Members of Whitworth Town Council.

## 9. APPOINTMENTS AND APPEALS COMMITTEE

### The committee will:

1. ~~To u~~Undertake all stages in respect of the appointment or dismissal of Chief Officers in accordance with the Council's Officer Employment Procedures.
2. ~~Personal Dismissal Appeals~~

~~To h~~Hear and determine dismissal appeals of Council staff in line with the Council's Disciplinary Procedure and other relevant Council employment policies. in connection with:

- ~~i. the grading of posts~~
- ~~ii. grievances~~
- ~~iii. disciplinary action, including dismissal~~
- ~~iv. other claims relating to individual contracts of employment~~

### ~~3. Other Appeals~~

~~To hear and determine any appeal against the decision of the Council (except where such appeals have been delegated to officers or to another body or committee).~~

## 10. AUDIT AND ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

### Statement of purpose

1. The Audit and Accounts Committee is a key component of Rossendale Borough Council's corporate governance. It provides an independent and high-level focus on the audit, assurance and reporting arrangements that underpin good governance and financial standards.
2. The primary purpose of the committee is to provide independent assurance to the members (being those charged with governance) of the adequacy of the risk management framework and the internal control environment. It provides independent review of the Council's governance, risk management and control frameworks and oversees the financial reporting and annual governance processes. It oversees internal audit and external audit, helping to ensure efficient and effective assurance arrangements are in place.
3. The committee's members should therefore behave objectively and independently in their deliberations and decisions.

### Governance

The committee will:

4. Review the Council's corporate governance arrangements against the good governance framework, and consider annual governance reports and assurances.
5. Review and recommend the local code of corporate governance for adoption by

## Appendix A

the Council.

6. Review the annual governance statement prior to approval and consider whether it properly reflects the risk environment and supporting assurances, taking into account the head of internal audit's opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and control.
7. Consider the Council's arrangements to secure value for money, and review assurances and assessments on the effectiveness of these arrangements.
8. Consider the Council's framework of assurance and ensure that it adequately addresses the risks and priorities of the Council.
9. Consider the Council's arrangements for discharging its duties in relation to promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct by members and co-opted members, in accordance with the Localism Act 2011.
10. ~~To m~~Make recommendations to the Cabinet, Council and other organisations where appropriate.

### **Risk management and control**

The committee will:

11. Monitor the effective development and operation of the risk management framework and processes across the Council.
12. Monitor progress in addressing risk-related issues reported to the Committee.
13. Consider reports on the effectiveness of internal controls and monitor the implementation of agreed actions.
14. Review the assessment of fraud risks and potential harm to the Council from fraud and corruption.
15. Monitor the counter-fraud strategy, actions and resources, including any instances of whistleblowing.

### **Internal audit**

The committee will:

16. Consider the internal audit charter approved by Lancashire County Council.
17. Approve the risk-based internal audit plan, including the Internal Audit Service's resource requirements, the approach to using other sources of assurance and any work required to place reliance upon those other sources.
18. Approve significant interim changes to the risk-based internal audit plan and resource requirements.
19. Make appropriate enquiries of both management and the head of internal audit to determine if there are any inappropriate scope or resource limitations.
20. Consider reports from the head of internal audit on internal audit's performance during the year, including the performance of any other external providers of internal audit services.

These will include:

- a. Updates on the work of internal audit including key findings, issues of concern and action in hand as a result of internal audit work.
- b. Regular reports on the results of the Audit Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme.
- c. Reports on instances where the Internal Audit Service does not conform to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and Local Government

## Appendix A

Application Note, considering whether the non-conformance is significant enough that it must be included in the annual governance statement.

21. Consider the head of internal audit's annual report:
  - a. The statement of the level of conformance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and Local Government Application Note and the results of the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme that supports the statement.
  - b. The opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and control together with the summary of the work supporting the opinion, which will assist the committee in reviewing the annual governance statement.
22. Consider summaries of specific internal audit reports as requested.
23. Receive reports outlining the action taken where the head of internal audit has concluded that management has accepted a level of risk that may be unacceptable to the Council or there are concerns about progress with the implementation of agreed actions.
24. Contribute to the Audit Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme and in particular, to the external quality assessment of internal audit that takes place at least once every five years.

### **External audit**

The committee will:

25. Consider the appointment of the Council's external auditor proposed by Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited and assess whether there are any valid reasons for the Council to object.
26. Support the external auditor's independence through consideration of its annual assessment of its independence and review of any issues raised by Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited.
27. Approve the letters of representation required by the external auditor and consider the external auditor's annual letter, audit opinion, relevant reports, and the report to those charged with governance.
28. Consider specific reports as agreed with the external auditor.
29. Comment on the scope and depth of external audit work and to ensure it gives value for money.
30. Commission additional work from the external auditor as necessary.

### **Financial reporting**

The committee will:

31. Review and approve the annual statement of accounts. Specifically, it will consider whether appropriate accounting policies have been followed and whether there are concerns arising from the financial statements or from the audit that need to be brought to the attention of the Council.
32. Consider the external auditor's report to those charged with governance on issues

arising from the audit of the accounts.

**Accountability arrangements**

The committee will:

33. Report to those charged with governance on the committee’s findings, conclusions and recommendations concerning the adequacy and effectiveness of their governance, risk management and internal control frameworks; financial reporting arrangements; and internal and external audit functions.

**11. WORKING GROUPS**

**GOVERNANCE WORKING GROUP**

Number of Councillors: ~~7~~ 5  
Quorum: 3

Terms of Reference

The working group will:

- ~~To m~~Monitor and review the Constitution and make recommendations on proposed amendments to Full Council.
- ~~To R~~Recommend improvements to Full Council resulting in a strong governance framework to ensure that ethical governance arrangements are appropriate and sufficiently robust.
- ~~To d~~Develop and provide strategic direction to formulate, implement, promote, monitor and evaluate member development.
- ~~To m~~Monitor strategically and to prioritise development plan activities.
- ~~To m~~Monitor strategically the member development budget.
- ~~To e~~Ensure link to Council aims, priorities and objectives.
- ~~To m~~Maintain the Member Development Charter
- ~~To e~~Ensure cross-party communication.
- ~~To e~~Ensure and promote equality and accessibility.
- ~~To p~~Promote diversity.
- ~~To d~~Demonstrate continuous improvement.
- ~~To a~~Agree the Induction Programme.
- ~~To p~~Promote the Protocol on Member/Officers Relations
- Assisting Councillors and Co-opted Members to observe the Members’ Code of Conduct
- Arranging training for Councillors and Co-opted Members on matters relating to the Members Code of Conduct
- Produce an Annual Training Programme

**~~GRANTS ADVISORY WORKING GROUP~~**

~~Number of Councillors: 7~~  
~~Quorum: 3~~

~~Terms of Reference~~

## Appendix A

- ~~• To review applications and make recommendations to the relevant Lead Member, the relevant Director and the Council's Section 151 Officer on grant allocations specifically:~~
- ~~• To consider how the grants assist the Council with their shared objectives in line with the Council's Policy on Grants to Voluntary Sector Bodies.~~
- ~~• To consider how to publicise availability of grant opportunities.~~

### **CONSULTATION CROSS PARTY WORKING GROUP**

Number of Councillors: 7~~5~~  
Quorum ~~(for responses)~~: 3

#### Terms of Reference:

- ~~• Consider any matter which requires cross party consideration or response.~~
- ~~• Group leaders will confirm their participating members prior to each meeting convened.~~
- ~~• Substitutes may be provided where required e.g to cover absence or conflict of interest.~~
- ~~• The number of councillors on the group may be expanded where a wider range of views are sought, so long as political balance is retained.~~
- ~~• A Chairperson will be agreed at the start of the first meeting for each matter being considered by the group.~~
- ~~• To consider consultations received by the Council.~~
- ~~• To provide feedback on consultations received by the Council.~~

~~The Consultation Working Group (CWG) will act as a wider consultation reference group on range of council related issues.~~

~~The CWG will agree a chairperson at the start of each consultation meeting should it be required to meet.~~

~~The CWG will operate on a virtual basis, unless otherwise deemed necessary. This is to ensure the best use of councillor and officer time. This means that wider consultation material will be circulated via email and responses will be collated via email by a given deadline.~~

~~In terms of decision making, the decision of the group will be made according to the majority view once the deadline for responses is reached, or for meetings normal procedures will apply for instances where there is an even split of opinion (chair's second/casting vote).~~

~~Substitutes may be provided for this group by notifying Committee and Member~~

~~Services if any of the following apply:~~

- ~~• There is a conflict of interest.~~
- ~~• Cover for absence.~~
- ~~• Another member has more specialist knowledge of the consultation topic.~~

## LOCAL PLAN REVIEW STEERING GROUP

Number of councillors: ~~7~~ 5  
Quorum: 3

### Composition

- ~~That m~~Membership of the Local Plan Review Steering Group should be based on the political balance of the Council.
- ~~The c~~Composition of the group should include the Lead Member covering planning and the Chair of Development Control Committee.

### Terms of Reference

#### The group will:

- ~~To m~~Make recommendations on the content of the Local Plan to officers prior to consideration of the plan by Council.
- ~~To a~~Act as a mechanism for keeping members of political parties informed of progress in reviewing the Local Plan ~~preparation~~
- ~~To c~~Consider the appropriateness of the evidence base and to provide comments as necessary on particular documents.
- ~~To p~~Provide member input to comments made on behalf of the Council to Government, statutory bodies and neighbouring authorities on planning issues.
- Consider Aany other matters as may be necessary to require the effective and timely preparation-review of the Local Plan.