

Appendix 2

Whole Council Elections – Consultation Options

This appendix sets out the costings for three levels of consultation and sets out some proposed wording for the consultation document and the format of the question for the Committee to approve. The three levels are:

- Full – Sending a copy of the consultation document to every household
- Medium – Sending a copy of the consultation document to a sample of 15,000 households and conducting face to face interviews in key locations around the Borough
- Minimal - Producing an online survey, emailing consultation mailing list, advertising via social media etc. and collating the responses

Confidence – depending on sample size and return rate consultations have varying degrees of margin of error. The industry standard is 5%, Maidstone Borough Council aims for at least 3%. Each of the options below has a stated margin of error based on a return rate assumption. Above a certain threshold there is a diminishing return on rate of improvement.

What is a margin of error? If you repeated the exercise 100 times then it would come back 95 times with a result +/- the amount stated (i.e. if 50% of people said 'Yes' with an error rate of +/- 2% then the results would be 48%-52%).

	Full	Medium	Minimal
	Forms sent to every occupied household (70,000)	Residents Survey style – 15,000 sample plus face to face	Online survey (online and email list)
Postage*	£28,000	£6,000	£0
Return Postage*	£0-£30,800	£0-£6,600	£0
Print	£1,500	£350	£0
Staff time (Opp. Cost)	£2,000	£4,000	£1,500
Total	£31,500-£62,300	£10,350-£16,950	£1,500
Margin of error at 20% response rate	+/-0.78%	+/-1.7%	+/- 8%

*Costs of postage do not include 2021 Royal Mail price uplift.

Consultation on method of elections for Maidstone Borough Council

Maidstone Borough Council are consulting on how often electors should vote for our councillors. We are interested in your views on whether we should change to 'whole' council elections every four years or retain the existing system of election 'by thirds'. This page gives background information and the reasons for both electoral cycles to help give you an informed view on the issue.

The consultation closes on xx xx

Our Council

Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) currently consists of 55 Councillors who are elected by voters in 26 Wards. The Councillors represent residents and make decisions on the running of MBC.

MBC provides numerous services including waste collection, street cleaning, development planning, housing, parking, benefits, culture and leisure (including the museum, parks and open spaces), licensing, environmental health, building control and others services.

Current Electoral Cycle – election 'by thirds'

Currently the Council holds elections 'by thirds' meaning that in 3 years out of 4 one third of seats are up for election.

Whole Council Elections

Under the Local Government and Public Involvement Health Act 2007, the Council has the power to change its electoral arrangements to 'whole council elections' which would mean that all seats on the Council would be elected at the same time, once every four years.

Please note that the elections for the County Council, UK Parliament and the Police and Crime Commissioner will not be affected by any future change in Maidstone Borough Council's electoral cycle.

Reasons to keep elections 'by thirds'

- A regular turnover of Council members.
- Decisions are being made annually rather than every 4 years which means voters are able to react sooner to local circumstances, thereby providing more immediate political accountability.
- Maintaining the current system may encourage people to vote by getting them into the habit of voting regularly.

Reasons to change to whole council elections

- When a Council has a 4 year mandate it can adopt a long term strategic approach to policy and decision making with less focus on yearly election campaigning.
- The results from whole council elections are simpler and more easily understood by the electorate. This may increase turnout at local elections.

- There would be a better opportunity for voters to change the political makeup of the Council as all seats would be up for election.

Local Government Boundary Review

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England will soon be reviewing Maidstone Borough's ward boundaries and the numbers of Councillors in each ward. If the Council stays with elections by thirds the Commission will aim for all wards to have three Members each. If the Council changes to Whole Council Elections then each Ward can have a varying number of Members, or the Council can ask for single Member wards.

Cost Implications

The current budget for running local elections by thirds is £164,000 per annum. Running a single election every four years will result in savings. Please see the report to Democracy and General Purposes committee for more information (insert link to report).

Why Respond?

As part of making its decision on this the Council will take into account the opinion of its residents. We are therefore asking you to let us know which system you would prefer.

"Should the Council have elections by thirds, or whole council elections?"

Elections By Thirds

Whole Council Elections

(MARK YOUR PREFERRED OPTION ONLY)

Equalities and monitoring information