

**Report of the Democracy and General Purposes Committee
held on 20 November 2023 – Parish Election Cycle - Order**

Timetable	
<i>Meeting</i>	<i>Date</i>
Democracy & General Purposes Committee	20 November 2023
Council	29 November 2023

Wards affected	All
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Executive Summary

This report requests authorisation to put in place an order under Section 53 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to align all Parish Council election cycles with the Whole Council Election cycle of Maidstone Borough Council. With the first such elections to take place in May 2024.

This report makes the following recommendations to the Council: That

1. The alignment of all Parish Council election cycles with Maidstone Borough Council's election cycle be agreed, with the first such elections to take place in May 2024; and
 2. Delegated authority be given to the Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance to put in place the Order required to give effect to the Council's resolution.
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1. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 Maidstone Borough Council has changed electoral cycles to whole council elections with the first such elections taking place in May 2024.
 - 1.2 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 provides a limited power for a relevant authority to align the election cycles of parish councils in its area to match its own if it has agreed to change its own cycle to whole council elections.
 - 1.3 Changing the parish councils' election cycles to align with Maidstone Borough Council's has been discussed previously in considering Whole Council Elections (see Democracy and General Purposes Minutes – 30 June 2021) and has been the assumption in various discussions with parish councils.
 - 1.4 The advantages of aligning the elections cycles are:
 - Election risks are reduced over the election period (4 years)
 - Electoral administration becomes easier over the election period
 - Costs for parish councils that have contested ordinary elections are cheaper as these costs are carried by the Borough Council (if ordinary elections were held separately parishes would be charged for them as with by elections)
 - Turnout at ordinary parish elections improves and poll cards are automatically provided as part of the requirements on Borough Council elections
 - There is clarity for the electorate with local elections and PCC elections combined one year, KCC elections the next year and then 2 years with no scheduled elections.
 - 1.5 The only disadvantage is that there will be one off change to when parishes hold their elections. 17 parishes were scheduled to have ordinary elections in May 2024 already, and at each election by thirds there are usually only 2 or 3 parishes that have contested elections. The change will mean that some existing parish councillors who would previously have had terms of office for four years will have them made shorter and will need to stand again, though contested elections remain unlikely.
 - 1.6 Whilst there is no formal requirement to consult parishes, this issue, including its impacts on lengths of office, has been discussed with a significant number of parishes in conversations between electoral services, clerks and councillors. In addition, all parishes have been contacted to inform them of this report being published so that they have the opportunity to attend the meeting and put their views forward, but the clear expectation since the adoption of Whole Council Elections has been that this change would happen.
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2. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND WHY NOT RECOMMENDED

2.1 The Council could decide not to align parish council elections with its own elections and retain a scheme of a third of parishes being up for election three years in four with two of those rounds being run without borough elections and funded by parishes directly.

This was not the recommended option for the reasons set out in 2.4 and 2.5

3. REPORT APPENDICES

None

4. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Democracy and General Purposes Committee, Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 June 2021.