

## **Briefing Note - Notice of Motion – Whole Council Elections**

### **Annual Meeting of the Maidstone Borough Council**

**22 May 2021**

#### **1. Background**

- 1.1 In January 2021 the Democracy and General Purposes Committee considered taking Whole Council Elections out to consultation and it was agreed not to pursue it further.
- 1.2 'Whole Council Elections' is the consideration of whether to elect Councillors to Maidstone Borough Council once every four years or to continue electing Councillors 'By Thirds' – an election held for a third of Borough Councillors three in every four years (the fourth year being for County Council elections).
- 1.3 Since 2008 Whole Council Elections has been considered on six previous occasions:
  - (i) Following a motion to Council in 2008 to look at elections, a scrutiny review was commissioned in 2009 which led to public consultation on 4 yearly elections in September 2010. A motion to change the electoral cycle to all out elections was put to full Council in November 2010. This motion was lost.
  - (ii) On 17 September 2014 – A motion was put to full Council to change to a four-yearly cycle for elections. This motion was lost.
  - (iii) On 22 April 2015 – A motion was put to Council to hold a referendum on four yearly elections. This motion was lost.
  - (iv) In summer 2016 the Democracy Committee began a review of the electoral cycle and in November 2016 the Committee decided not to continue with the review.
  - (v) In November 2019 – Democracy and General Purposes Committee decided not to proceed to consultation on Whole Council Elections as it was unlikely to achieve the required two-thirds majority at Council
  - (vi) In January 2021 – Democracy and General Purposes Committee reviewed Whole Council Elections, including consideration of the upcoming Local Government Boundary Review and decided to proceed to consultation stage.

## **2. Brief Summary of Impacts**

- 2.1 The Democracy and General Purposes Committee previously agreed the factors to be included in considering Whole Council Elections. These have been set out in **Appendix 1**.
- 2.2 The motion references the impact on the boundary review of retaining elections by thirds. If elections by thirds (the current system) is maintained it will mean that ward boundaries and ward memberships will have to change to meet the Boundary Commission's legally required aim of uniform three Member wards across the Borough. There may be a one or two exceptions to this, but a significant case has to be made in each instance.
- 2.3 If a change is agreed to move to Whole Council elections a wider variety of options for ward memberships is available in the boundary review as uniform three Member wards will no longer be an aim.

## **3. Next Steps**

- 3.1 The issue of Whole Council Elections will be picked up from the last decision point in January 2021 and taken to Democracy and General Purposes Committee in June 2021. The Committee will be asked if they wish to proceed to consultation stage.
- 3.2 If the Committee agree to move to consultation stage the consultation will be carried out and the results reported to Democracy and General Purposes Committee for a final decision on whether to put the issue to an extraordinary meeting of Council. It is not possible to put a date on when this would come back to Council as the Democracy and General Purposes Committee will need to determine how extensive a public consultation they would like carried out.
- 3.3 If the Committee do not wish to proceed to consultation then no further action will be taken and elections by thirds will be factored into the LGBCE boundary review.

## **4. Links**

Democracy and General Purposes Committee – 27 January 2021  
- [Whole Council Elections – Consultation Stage Approval](#)

## WHOLE COUNCIL ELECTIONS – ANALYSIS (EXTRACT)

### 1. Pros and Cons of Whole Council Elections – Summary from Member Workshop, Survey and Committees

Pro	Con
Stability - would enable 4 years of strategy, work and building relationships	Increased potential for wholesale change - could lose many experienced Councillors and impact on continuity
Could improve voter engagement - reduced voter fatigue and potentially increase turnout	Parishes would need to align or face additional costs and their by-elections are less likely to coincide with borough elections.
Lower cost – see cost analysis	Hard to find suitable candidates for 55 seats
Increased focus on borough-wide issues for election campaigns	Reduced focus on Independent candidates and Ward/Street issues for election campaigns
Greater scope for wholesale policy change	Local elections can be related to National Politics so could become out of step with feelings.
Clearer delineation between Borough and County as distinction between elections would be clearer	Extra work for whole council election on the Elections team (e.g. nominations)
Training and induction for councillors is easier – done as one cohort	Feeling of reduced political accountability immediately following an election and less gradual change
Reduced time spent campaigning and canvassing, and in 'purdah'	Less canvassing to put Members in touch with their electorate