

WHOLE COUNCIL ELECTIONS - ANALYSIS

1. Overview of Factors to be Included

- Consideration of pros and cons (including those summarised from the Member consultation below)
- Cost analysis
- Impact on time and resources for officers and Members, including the interruption to the committee flow
- Consultation – method and content (see Appendix 2)

2. 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

3. Cost Analysis

ELECTIONS BY THIRDS		2024	2025	2026	2027
Election Type		District PCC General ¹	County	District	District
Estimated proportion of spend		33%	0%	100%	100%
Estimated Expenditure		£91,666	£0	£164,000	£164,000

District Election Cost (based on budget incl. by elections) £164,000²

4 year Cost **£419,666**

WHOLE COUNCIL ELECTIONS		2024	2025	2026	2027
Election Type		District PCC General ¹	County		
Estimated proportion of spend		33%	0%	0%	0%
Estimated Expenditure		£91,666	£0	£0	£0

District Election Cost (Estimate incl. by elections) £275,000²

4 year Cost **£91,666**

Whole Council Election Saving £328,000

Annualised saving **£82,000**

	Election By Thirds	Whole Council Election
Vacancies ³	18 or 19	55
Wards ³	18 or 19	26 or up to 55
Electorate (est.)	90k	120k
Cost (incl. by elections)	£164k ²	£275k ²
Parish elections (dependent on contested)	up to 21	up to 40

¹ General election scheduled for 2024 under FTPA but no Parliament has gone full term yet.

² These costs are broad estimates only and significantly dependent on the outcome of the boundary review.

³ The references to vacancies and wards in this table are subject to change depending on the outcomes from the LGBCE boundary review.

4. Practical Impact on the Calendar:

- Currently lose early May from the calendar, as per our local choice
- Publicity restrictions in place 'Purdah' – limits types of decisions able to be taken in April (impact is managed so minimal in practice)
- Publicity restrictions currently happen in four out of four years (three Borough, one County)
- Under Whole Council Elections publicity restrictions would happen in two out of four years (one Borough, one County)

5. Impact on Electoral Services and elections resourcing

- 5.1 Electoral Services carry out Electoral Registration functions and Election functions. Whole Council Elections impacts only on Borough Elections not any other function performed by the team as set below:

Electoral Registration	Election functions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rolling registration • Annual Canvass • Postal refresh (January) • Service voters and other declarations • Polling Place Review • Community Governance Reviews • Boundary maintenance (UPRNs etc.) • Register control and access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary election activity - Parliamentary, County, PCC and referendums • By elections (Parliamentary, PCC, County, Borough, and Parish) • Other elections (i.e. prison) • Neighbourhood plan referendums • Other (misc.) referendums (e.g. linked to CGR or BID)

- 5.2 Running elections involves the work of the Electoral Services team and officers from Democratic Services, Policy and Communications, Business Improvement, Borough Services and others in preparing for the count. On the day of the poll and count staff from across the authority are given a day to work on the election.
- 5.3 It is hard to estimate the full resource opportunity cost of this – but in any event these resource requirements would only be removed one year in four – assuming no other elections take place in that year (i.e. a General Election).
- 5.4 The possibility of electoral services staffing reductions has been raised previously but this is unlikely to be achievable (see 4.1). As shown we would have elections three years in every four as a minimum, and registration work is now all year round. However, the additional time freed up one year in four (assuming no General Election) would be to provide capacity to ensure all other activities are up to date, look at Democratic Engagement, and look at services developments through improvements to the canvass, registration and election processes.
- 5.5 There is an argument that currently, with local elections run three years in four and county elections in the fourth, that electoral services and the wider elections team maintain practice at running local elections and this improves our ability to deliver them. It could also be argued that running a local election for the whole council would be a significantly bigger undertaking than an election by thirds. However, in reality, with the

number of elections we would be running, and our capacity to run larger elections (such as a General Election) it is really only the scale of the nominations process that would represent a new challenge for the team. We would put in place actions required to cover this (for example providing office cover to free electoral services staff to receive nominations). The cost of a Whole Council Election budget has factored in the increased size of an all out election, potential complexities from multi-member wards and an increase in by-elections in coming to the savings calculation.

6. Impacts on Members

- 6.1 Members would be better placed to comment on the resource requirement and impacts of interruptions caused by elections due to campaigning and publicity restrictions. Depending on the natural timings of issues publicity restrictions 'Purdah' could have either a significant or limited impact each year. Campaigning impacts would presumably have a varying degree of impact dependent upon the 'party machinery' available to support local groups and is not something that officers can effectively evaluate.
- 6.2 The choice of election cycle will impact Members insofar as the Local Government Boundary Commission for England will soon be conducting a boundary review of Maidstone Borough. If the Council stays with elections by thirds the review will aim to produce uniform three Member wards across the Borough. Therefore staying with elections by thirds will definitely result in a change to wards and Members.
- 6.3 If the Council changes to all out elections ('Whole Council') then a variety of different Ward membership sizes are possible and single member wards can be requested. Please note that changes are likely regardless of which system is chosen but the status quo of elections by thirds is no longer an option.