

Southampton City Council's formal response to the Ministry of Justice's consultation paper on Weekend Voting

<p>Question 1</p> <p><i>Do you think that polling day should be:</i></p> <p>✓ A weekday,</p> <p>X A Saturday</p> <p>X A Sunday, or</p> <p>X Take place over both Saturday and Sunday?</p> <p><i>Please tell us why.</i></p>
<p>Unless it was proven that moving voting day to a weekend improved voter access and turnout we believe it should remain as it is. In addition, availability of premises for use as polling stations, traditionally churches and halls will be easier on a Thursday than a weekend</p>
<p>Question 2</p> <p><i>Who would be affected by changing the voting day to a weekend and how?</i></p>
<p>People are accustomed to making arrangements on a weekday to vote and some employers even acknowledge the need for slightly late/early starts to accommodate this. At weekends people are less likely to give up their own time as they will be engaged in other activities.</p>
<p>Question 3</p> <p><i>Do you think that greater access to advance voting in polling stations should be made available alongside weekend voting? Please explain why.</i></p>
<p>No – pilots held in 2007 proved that advance voting does not increase voter participation.</p>
<p>Question 4</p> <p><i>Do you think that greater access to remote voting (whether through traditional postal voting or by electronic means) should be made available alongside weekend voting? Should such arrangements be explored even if polling day were not moved to the weekend? Please explain why.</i></p>
<p>There is a common perception that changes to make voting easier, particularly through the use of postal, electronic or digital voting combined with this proposal to shift polling day to a weekend or setting up polling stations in places people go naturally, such as shopping centers, results in increased turnout. There is however very little evidence to support this. Were there to be evidence that showed that such procedural changes did make a difference to the level voter turnout / that it would achieve greater democratic engagement, we would support it. In the absence of that,</p>

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we do not think that greater access should be made available.

Question 5

What do you perceive to be the benefits and the drawbacks of remote e-voting?

The lack of any evidence that such a facility would enhance turnout, combined with the logistical cost and security issues involved with introducing such arrangements.

Question 6

Should the Government pilot weekend voting before introducing it across the UK?

Yes, but not on just one occasion, this should be piloted over a period of 3 years and then if it is proven that it increases voter participation then it should be rolled out to all local authorities.

Question 7

What other issues may arise if the polling day is moved to the weekend? What are the issues for:

- *Resources?*
- *Polling station venues?*
- *Security?*

Administration of the election?

Resources – It is getting more and more difficult to staff polling stations on a Thursday and this often involves giving staff a day off to carry out the duties – if weekend voting was introduced it would be more difficult to employ staff at Polling Stations and to assist with the count. There would be a cost implication involved as you would have to take into account weekend working. Fees would have to be increased to attract staff. Also, if voting was introduced over the whole of the weekend then we would need staffing for two concurrent days – not everyone would be prepared willing or able to work both days of the weekend, so more staff would be needed.

Polling Station venues –securing venues for polling stations would be made more difficult as most of those currently used would be more attractive for weekend use by the general public.

Security – If weekend voting were to be held over Saturday and Sunday then a system would have to be in place to secure the ballot boxes overnight and also a secure place to store the postal votes handed in at the polling stations. This would be very difficult to administer.

Administration of the election – If there were to be a combined election, counting combined weekend voting would involve elections staff working significantly more days, the stress and additional working hours would be difficult to manage and the

APPENDIX 1.

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practicalities would mean that the results would take longer to deliver..
Question 8 <i>If weekend voting is introduced for local government elections, do you agree that the normal time for holding these elections should be moved from the first Thursday in May to the second weekend in May?</i> <i>If not, please explain which weekend you believe it would be most appropriate for these elections to be held and why</i>
Yes
Question 9 <i>Are you aware of any barriers which prevent individuals from voting? What are the issues and how can they be overcome?</i>
No