

ITEM NO: 14 Appendix 1

Have your say on local democracy Governance and Electoral Cycle Consultation

Consultation Overview

Southampton City Council will soon be deciding whether to introduce changes:

1. In the way decisions are made about Council policies and services.
2. In the way elections are held in the City.

These proposals have significant implications for everyone who live and / or work in the city.

The Council has agreed that it will undertake formal consultation on these proposals. The Council will be making a final decision about which options to adopt in September 2010.

What are the current arrangements?

Southampton City Council has 48 councillors representing 16 wards across the city (three councillors per ward). One councillor in each ward is elected per year for three consecutive years and in the fourth there is no election for councillors as European elections take place. This system is known as "elections by thirds".

Once elected, the councillors of the largest group (the political party with the most councillors) choose a Leader (does this have to be approved by Full council?). The Leader then chooses a small team of councillors from among its group to form a cabinet who make decisions on policies and services.

What are the options for change?

1. ***Changing the way decisions are made about Council policies and services:***

- (a) Decisions on policies and services in Southampton are presently made by the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet. Whilst the Council can continue to operate this arrangements, new regulations mean that the Leader is appointed for either a four year term or until their period of office expires. The Council may, however, by resolution remove a leader before their term of office expires.
- (b) Alternatively, the Council can change its Executive arrangements to an elected Mayor and Cabinet model. In this arrangement, councillors would be elected together with a Mayor. The Mayor would be elected for a four year term of office and would choose cabinet members to help make decisions.

2. ***Changing the way elections are held in the City:***

- (a) Southampton City Council currently holds elections by thirds. Councillors are elected on a four year term of office and one councillor per ward retires each year. There are no city elections in the fourth year.
- (b) The Council can now consider moving to a system of whole Council elections. This means that instead of electing a third of councillors every year, electors would vote for all councillors at the same time, once every four years.

If the Council resolves to change its election cycle to whole Council elections, the elections of all 48 councillors would take place in 2011 and every four years after that.

Why are these changes being proposed?

The Government has asked all Councils to consider changing the system by which they take decisions about Council policies and services. It has also asked Councils to consider whether to change the frequency with which elections are held in the City. The Government believes:

- That holding elections every four years will reduce “voter fatigue” by removing the need to hold annual elections.
- Political plans and aspirations can be aligned to the long term financial and business plans and strategies of the Council.
- The Leader or Mayor would be elected for a four year period which would be the same period if a four yearly election cycle was chosen.

Additional considerations

There are arguments on both sides for the structure of an election cycle. Some of the benefits of the current system include:

- With only one-third of seats contested each year it ensures experienced councillors remain regardless of the outcome.
- Councillors who lose their seats are presented with an earlier opportunity to stand again.
- One councillor is elected for each ward at a time, allowing the electorate to focus on the aptitude of particular candidates.
- It is easier for independent and smaller party candidates to stand and be represented when less seats are contested.

Some of the benefits of a move to a four-year cycle include:

- Political stability, enabling longer term visioning and planning.
- Considerably less cost to the taxpayer (approximately half).
- Less confusion as all electors in Southampton would be voting at the same time.
- Ability for electors to completely change the political leadership of the Council and therefore its direction.

What will not change?

- The Council will continue to consist of 48 councillors, three representing each ward in the City.
- You will still be able to vote at elections in person at polling stations, or by using a proxy voter or by postal vote.
- There will still be a Mayor and Sheriff appointed to undertake ceremonial duties.

We need to know what you think

No decisions will be made without taking into consideration a range of views and opinions. These arrangements are fundamental to local democracy and it is therefore essential that local people and communities are consulted regarding their preferences. Please let us have your views by completing the following questionnaire.

Questionnaire

DECISION MAKING (Governance)

1. Do you think that Southampton City Council should:
PLEASE TICK ✓ ONE BOX ONLY

(a) Keep the current model of decision making with a Leader of the Council (chosen by elected councillors) and a Cabinet (chosen by the Leader)	
(b) Change to a system of a directly elected Mayor (elected by voters every four years) and a Cabinet (chosen by the elected Mayor)?	
(c) No opinion	
Please use this space if you would like to explain the reason for your answer.	

ELECTIONS (Electoral Cycle)

2. Do you think that Southampton City Council should:
PLEASE TICK ✓ ONE BOX ONLY

(a) Keep the current electoral cycle of electing one third of city councillors for three years out of four, or	
(b) Change the current electoral cycle so that all city councillors are elected at the same time every four years?	
(c) No opinion	
Please use this space if you would like to explain the reason for your answer.	

ELECTIONS AND YOU

3. Before reading this item, how well informed would you say you were about the local election process and when city council elections take place?
PLEASE TICK ✓ ONE BOX ONLY

Very well informed	Fairly well informed	Not very well informed	Not well informed	Don't know

4. Which of the following elections you would normally vote in?

PLEASE TICK ✓

(a) Local city council elections	
(b) National parliamentary elections	
(c) European elections	
If you have not ticked any of these options would you please explain why you do not vote?	

5. If the City Council elections only happened every four years would you be more likely to vote?

PLEASE TICK ✓ ONE BOX ONLY

Yes	No

ABOUT YOURSELF

Please complete these questions which will help us to see if there are differences between the views of different residents. All the information you give will be kept completely confidential.

6. What is your postcode

7. What is your interest in Southampton

(a) Live here?	
(b) Have a business here?	
(c) Belong to a voluntary organisation, special interest or community group?	
(d) Work for a statutory body	
(e) Work for other relevant stakeholder? Please provide details	

8. What is your age?

9. Are you male or female?

Male	Female

10. To which of these groups do you consider you belong to?

PLEASE TICK ✓ ONE BOX ONLY

White

British

Irish

Any other White background
(✓ AND WRITE IN BELOW)

Mixed

White & Black Caribbean

White & Black African

White & Asian

Any other Mixed background
(✓ AND WRITE IN BELOW)

Chinese and Other ethnic groups

Chinese

Black or Black British

Caribbean

African

Any other Black background
(✓ AND WRITE IN BELOW)

Asian or Asian British

Indian

Pakistani

Bangladeshi

Any other Asian background
(✓ AND WRITE IN BELOW)

Other ethnic group
(✓ AND WRITE IN BELOW)

Thank you for your time.

If you would like to receive feedback on the decisions made, please give your name, postal or email address in the spaces below.

Postal or email Democratic and Members' Services Manager
Civic Centre,
Southampton,
SO14 7LY

This consultation will be open for 12 weeks from Thursday 13th May to Friday 6th August 2010. To take part, complete the online form. The results of the consultation will be taken to a meeting of the full Council in September 2010 for an overall decision to be made.

If you have any questions, please contact Democratic and Members Services on 023 8083 2430 or email democratic.services@southampton.gov.uk.