

# Local Elections and Governance Issues

## Consultation Report

### Background

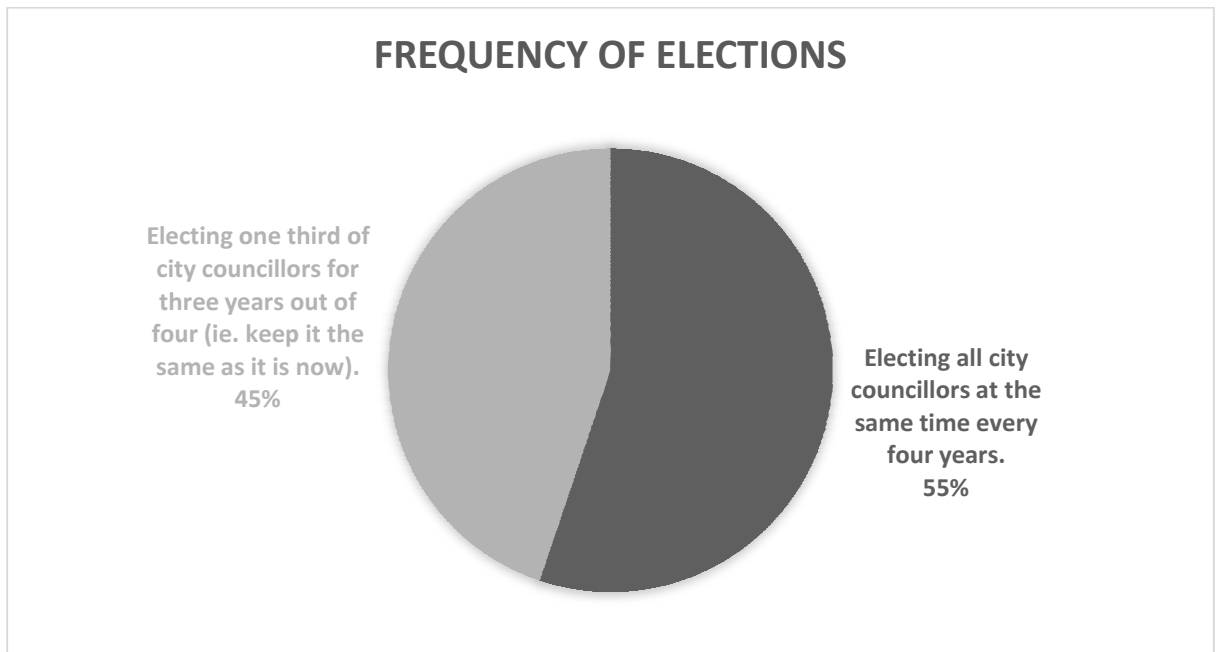
1. This Appendix summarises the consultation process and consultation feedback received in relation to local elections and governance issues.
2. Following approval of a motion at Full Council on 17 September 2014, Southampton City Council launched a consultation seeking people's views regarding the frequency of elections, the possibility of having an elected mayor and the number of Councillors in the City.
3. There are set times, every four years, on which a council can take a decision on changes to its electoral cycle. A consultation was last held on the electoral cycle and governance model in 2010, as the last time that a resolution could have been passed to make changes in Southampton was 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010. We are currently in the period on which a decision to make changes to the electoral cycle could be taken by the Council (May 2014 and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014).
4. The consultation was undertaken between 4 October 2014 and 6 November 2014 in order to enable Full Council to make a decision in November. This will allow time for the option of introducing any changes to the electoral cycle next May should that be option be supported at Full Council.
5. The consultation documentation and survey was available on the Council's website and can be found at annex 1 Hard copies of the consultation survey were also available in the Gateway Office, at all Southampton libraries and Local Housing Offices and on request from the Council. The consultation was promoted via Stay Connected (the Council's e-bulletin system), a press release, radio interview with the Leader and social media.
6. Key organisations in the City including Southampton Voluntary Services, Business South, Hampshire Chamber of Commerce, the NHS and Hampshire Constabulary were also made aware that the consultation was taking place and asked them to disseminate this information among their contacts.

### Consultation Survey Results

7. The consultation held on election and governance issues in 2010 yielded a total of 29 responses. The current consultation has resulted in 1438 responses. This increased response rate reflects the efforts that have been made to improve the level and type of consultation undertaken.
8. The first question in the survey related to the frequency of elections:

- What is your preference for the frequency of the electoral cycle for Southampton City Council?

Of those that responded, 635 were in favour of electing one third of city councillors for three years out of four, while 781 respondents favoured electing all city councillors at the same time every four years.



9. The vast majority of comments from those who supported a move to 4 year elections related to 2 key issues

- increasing political stability/consistency and long term planning;
- reducing the cost of elections.

*"I think there are pros and cons of both, so not an easy decision. However, on balance, electing a council once every 4 years would ensure more stability for that period (for good or ill), and should aid more efficient planning and governance."*

*"I would agree that this option has significant advantages in terms of greater stability and enabling longer term visioning and planning. It will also reduce costs to the taxpayer. It is unlikely to cause any problems in terms of the potential loss of experienced councillors since the chances of all sitting members losing their seats at the same time must presumably be relatively low."*

*"Cost have been cut everywhere else and elections are expensive."*

10. Other issues that respondents raised in support of moving to 4 year elections included:

- Improving voter turnout;
- Reducing the burden on buildings which hold elections – i.e. schools;
- Easier for residents to understand.

11. Respondents in favour of electing one third of city councillors for three years out of four, focused their comments around
- Retaining councillors, knowledge and experience rather than having a whole new council;
  - Less scope for a radical shift which could be influenced by national or time limited issues;
  - More opportunity for residents to be engaged in the democratic process and 'judge' the performance of the Council.

*"4 yearly would make the result too closely linked to instant opinion and electioneering. By spreading it out the council is more accountable as the public get to show their displeasure more often and parties would have to listen for the whole of the 4 years instead of just the last one."*

*"Allows experienced councillors to always be in place. Keeps some continuity from one year to the next. Allows voters to concentrate on one candidate at a time, and gives candidates a bigger profile at election time Some councillors wd resign during their term anyway, so bye-election costs."*

*"It would not be good to risk having a whole new council, possibly with many inexperienced members. The current system also enables some change in the make-up of the council to reflect current issues without being "stuck" for 4 years with the same pattern when issues will change."*

12. Other issues raised in support of elections by thirds included:

- All in one is too confusing;
- Avoids complacency among Councillors and helps them be more focused;
- The current system works so why change it.

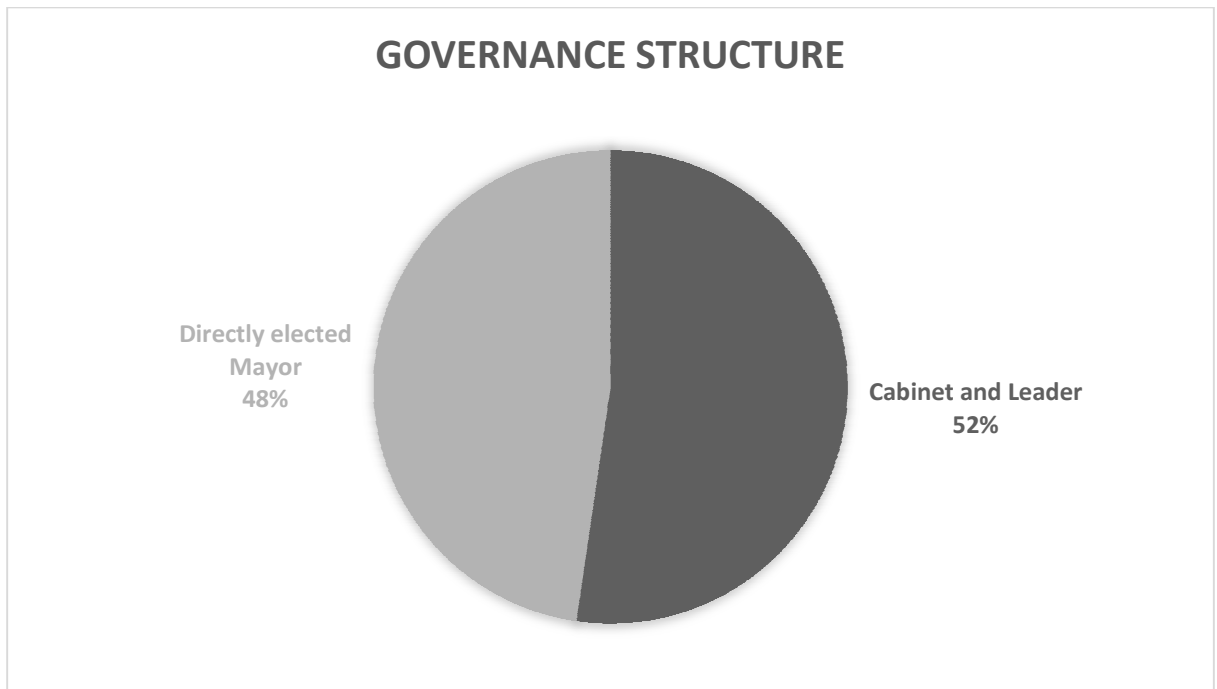
13. It is also worth noting that a small number of respondent suggested an alternative option of elections every two years.

14. Whilst the key issue for consultation was the frequency of elections the Council was also keen to seek views regarding governance structure and the number of councillors in the City. It is important to note that a decision on changing the Council's governance structure to an elected Mayor cannot take place without a referendum on the issue, and a reduction in the number of members would require a review by the Local Government Boundary Commission and the agreement of Parliament. Views have been sought on these issues to help Council consider if these are changes that they would like to pursue further.

15. The second question in the survey related to governance structures:

- Do you think Southampton City Council should continue with the Cabinet and Leader model or replace this with a directly elected Mayor?

This question produced the most divided opinion with 740 respondents in favour of keeping the Cabinet and Leader model while 675 were in favour of a directly elected Mayor.



16. The most frequent reasons given for supporting the Cabinet and Leader model included:

- A directly elected Mayor might not be in agreement with majority of councillors;
- Too much power in one person if there was a directly elected Mayor;
- The cost associated with having a directly elected Mayor (including the referendum).

*“A directly elected mayor could find himself in a position where he could not form a workable cabinet because a majority of councillors were opposed to his policies.”*

*“The cost of implementing this change is likely to be huge. Giving too much power to one person is unwise.”*

17. Those who supported a move towards a directly elected Mayor most frequently commented:

- Less political and decisions could be more focused on the good of the city;
- More democratic with more accountability to residents;
- A directly elected mayor would have a higher profile both within and outside the City.

*“A directly elected mayor gives the electorate more involvement in who is going to represent our city.”*

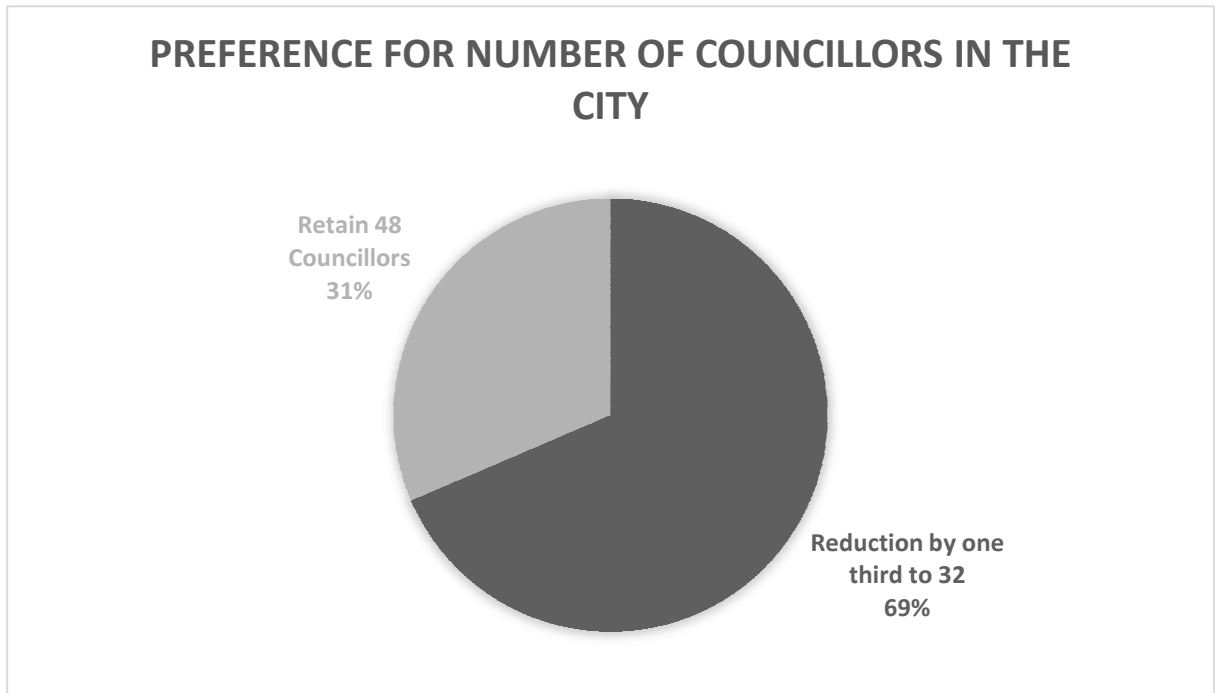
*“I simply believe that a directly elected Mayor would be more accountable than a political leader. Voters don't elect the leader - this is decided by the party in charge and therefore isn't very democratic.”*

*“It would be good to have a high-profile Mayor, someone really energetic & charismatic, who can act as an advocate for the city in the way that Boris acts for London.”*

18. The final question in the survey related to the number of councillors in the City:

In relation to the number of councillors on the Council, do you think they should remain the same at 48, or be reduced by one third to 32?

This question produced the most consensus with 959 favouring a reduction by one third to 32 councillors and 440 preferring to retain 48 Councillors.



19. The majority of respondents who favoured a reduction by 1/3 to 32 Councillors cited cost reduction as the reason for this choice.

20. Other frequently made points included:

- Given the size of the City/wards there was no need for more than 2 councillors per ward;
- Reduction would help improve communication and decision making;
- The reducing size of the Council should be reflected in the number of councillors;
- The suggestion that some councillors do not work hard enough.

*“Save the council money by reducing the spend on their allowances. It would create a greater visibility to residents if there are only two representatives in each ward as they would know who they are!”*

*“it seems that other cities have a higher ratio of constituents to Councilors, it would reduce costs and it might be simpler to have a smaller, more focused, group of members”*

*“Reducing Councillors by one third is a huge reduction in city finances at a time the city as a whole has had to make a lot of cut backs. Councilors have been largely unaffected whilst emphasis has been given to services & Council employees. Two councillors per ward are more than enough”.*

21. Respondents who favoured retaining 48 councillors mostly focused their comments around the workload of remaining councillors if the number was reduced and the assertion that

having more councillors made them more representative of City residents. Other issues raised included

- The current numbers seem about right
- Less people willing to stand as a councillor
- More chance of cross party representation
- Allowance rather than councillors should be cut

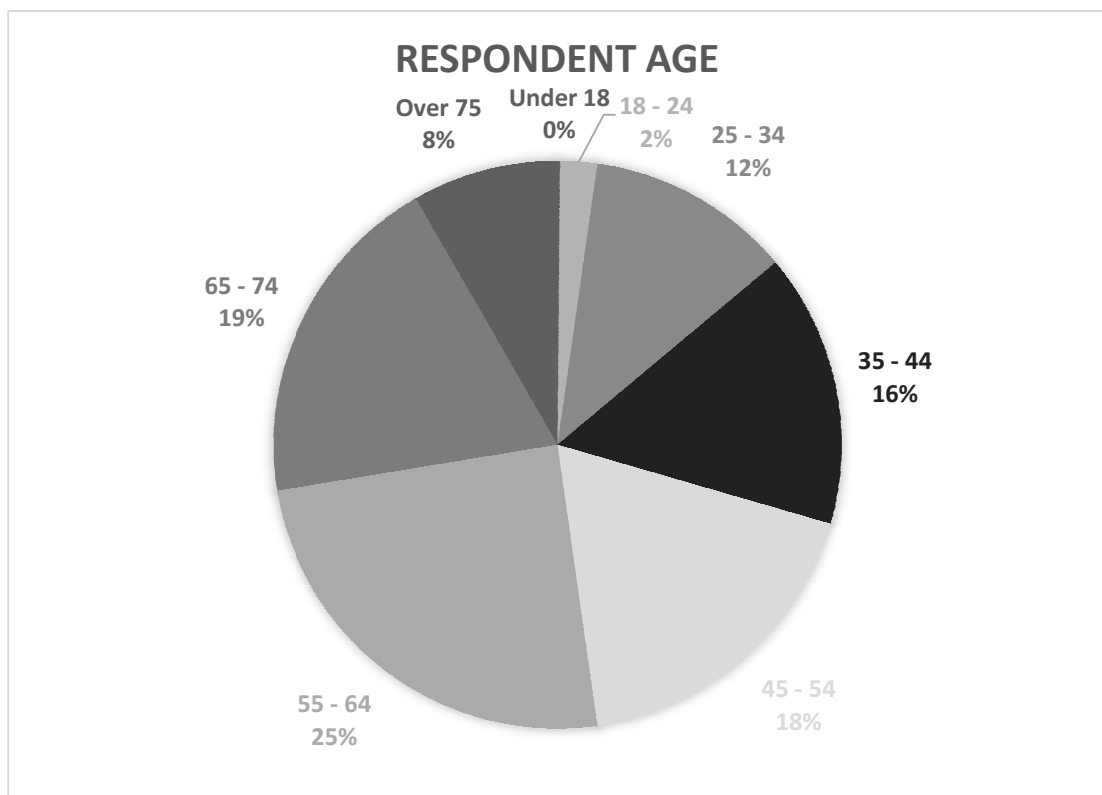
*"It's difficult to get hold of Councillors & reduction would add to problem. They would also have to heavy or spread of responsibility if reduced in number."*

*"More councilors ensures a better represented population. Less councilors would mean individual influence is increased."*

*"Southampton is a big vibrant city, as such should have the right number of councillors, 32 is way too few. 48 is prob about right."*

22. However, it is important to note that several respondents, particularly in those who selected retain 48 councillors, felt that they needed more information on how this would work and what the effects would be in order to make an informed decision.

23. In terms of the demographic makeup of respondents to the survey, 1349 gave a Southampton postcode compared to 88 who did not. There were 95 paper responses and 1342 online submissions. The age profile of respondents was as follows:



**Other responses**

24. The Council also received one written response on behalf of the Hampshire Chamber Of Commerce – Southampton, who discussed the consultation at their Business Board. The chamber favoured

- Electing all city councillors at the same time every four years.
- Reducing by one third the number of councillors on the council (if time allows and to achieve this quickly).
- Replacing the Cabinet and Leader model with a directly elected Mayor for the City as stage 2, once the above have been achieved.

25. Their reasons for this, in addition to savings involved, were to give more consistency in leadership and direction by local politicians and in the long term decision making by the Council concerning the economy. They also felt the results from whole council elections are simpler and more easily understood by the electorate, so may increase turnout at local elections. Whole council elections would be more compatible with any decision to adopt a directly elected Mayor for the city, as Mayors are also elected on a four yearly cycle and there would be a clearer opportunity for the electorate to change the political composition of the Council once every four years, instead of yearly as now.

### **Conclusion**

26. The consultation on local elections and governance issues elicited a far greater response rate than the last consultation on the subject which was undertaken in 2010 and is clearly a subject that residents and stakeholders have a keen interest in.

27. The main question the survey relating to the frequency of the electoral cycle for Southampton City Council showed that slightly more respondent (55%) were in favour of moving to a four year election cycle over the status quo of election by thirds every three out of four years.

28. In relation to the other two questions on which the council was keen to seek views, there was also a split opinion in relation to future governance models with 52% preferring to retain a Leader and Cabinet Model and 48% in favour of moving towards and directly elected Mayor.

29. The final question, which related to the number of councillors in the City, showed the strongest consensus among respondents with over two thirds (69%) of respondents favouring a reduction in number to 32, while 31% of respondents were in favour or maintaining the current number of 48 councillors.

## Elections (Local and governance issues)

Southampton City Council has 48 councillors representing 16 wards across the city (three councillors per ward) and holds elections 'by thirds'. There are three councillors in each ward who are elected for a four year term of office. One of the three seats in each ward is up for re-election in three of the four years of the cycle. There are no council elections in the fourth year.

An alternative is 'whole Council' elections. This would mean that the election of all 48 councillors would take place in one election and then every fourth year after that.

What is your preference for the frequency of the electoral cycle for Southampton City Council?

- Electing one third of city councillors for three years out of four (ie. keep it the same as it is now).
- Electing all city councillors at the same time every four years.

Please use this space if \_\_\_\_\_  
 you would like to explain \_\_\_\_\_  
 the reason for your \_\_\_\_\_  
 answer (max 500  
 characters).

### Other Matters we would like your views on

While consulting on the electoral issue, we would also like your views on two other matters:

#### Directly elected Mayor

For each local authority there is an executive - a group of people who are in charge of what the Council does. This can be organised in one of two ways. In Southampton we follow the Leader and Cabinet model. Under this arrangement, following the Council election, the 48 councillors elect one of their number to be the Leader. He/she then appoints their Cabinet.

The alternative is a directly elected Mayor who is elected by all the voters in the Council's area to be the head of the Council's decision-making body in addition to the 48 councillors. Moving to a directly elected Mayor would require a local referendum. At this stage we are seeking your views on this option.



Do you think Southampton City Council should continue with the Cabinet and Leader model or replace this with a directly elected Mayor?

- Cabinet and Leader
- Directly elected Mayor

Please use this space if you would like to explain the reason for your answer (max 500 characters).

### Reduction in the number of councillors

The Council is currently made up of 48 councillors but this could be reduced by one third to 32. In order for this to be pursued, the Local Government Boundary Commission would need to conduct an electoral review and make recommendations to Parliament who would then make the final decision. At this stage we are seeking your views on whether this is something you would support.

In relation to the number of councillors on the Council, do you think they should remain the same at 48, or be reduced by one third to 32?

- Reduction by one third to 32
- Retain 48 Councillors

Please use this space if you would like to explain the reason for your answer (max 500 characters).

What is your postcode?

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How old are you?

- |                                   |                                  |                                  |                                  |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under 18 | <input type="checkbox"/> 25 - 34 | <input type="checkbox"/> 45 - 54 | <input type="checkbox"/> 65 - 74 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18 - 24  | <input type="checkbox"/> 35 - 44 | <input type="checkbox"/> 55 - 64 | <input type="checkbox"/> Over 75 |

Thank you for your time. The closing date is: 6th November 2014  
The results will be made available on the Council's website the following week.  
Any personal information you give to us will always be processed in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act 1998. We will only use the personal information you provide to deliver the services you have requested, or for our lawful, disclosed purposes. We will not make your personal details available outside our organisation without your consent, unless obliged by law.