At an Extraordinary meeting of Council held on 18 November 2015 the Council resolved to change to whole Council elections from May 2018.

The Council also agreed to make an Order to alter the years of ordinary elections of parish councillors to align with the years in which ordinary elections of the Council take place. From 2018 the election of all parish councillors will take place on the same day as elections for district Councillors.

These decisions were made by Harrogate Borough Council, following a unanimous decision, in accordance with section 33 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 which required a majority of at least two thirds of the Members voting on it. A copy of the relevant Council report is attached to this explanatory document as Appendix A.

The Council conducted consultation in the period 11 September to 22 October 2015 regarding changing the electoral cycle. Harrogate Borough Council’s Councillors are currently elected ‘by thirds’, as a third of the seats are up for election each year for three consecutive years, before one year in which no district council elections were held. Each Councillor serves a term of four years regardless of the year in which they were elected.

At an extraordinary meeting of Council held on 10 September 2015 the Council resolved to commence a consultation process and noted the following advantages of moving to whole Council elections:

- Certainty when a Council has a four year mandate, allowing a strategic approach to policy and decision making to be adopted
- Avoids uncertainty during election campaigning and ‘purdah’

The main reasons for keeping elections ‘by thirds’ were:

- Ensured a regular return of new Members
- Allowed judgement of a Council annually rather than every four years, providing more immediate political accountability
- Encourages people to develop a regular habit of voting
- Enables elections staff to retain a practical up to date knowledge of running district elections

The Council consulted with residents, parish councils, HBC Councillors, voluntary and community groups and the district panel using press releases and via the Council’s website. The consultation asked whether the Council should remain with the election of one third of Councillors on an annual basis or move to electing all...
district Councillors at the same time every four years. A summary of the consultation responses is contained within the report at Appendix 1.

The main reasons given in favour of changing were:

- Reduced costs
- Improved democratic accountability
- Increased voter turnout

In accordance with section 35 of the Act this explanatory document is available for public inspection at the Council’s principal office at all reasonable times. It is also available to the public through the Council’s website at www.harrogate.gov.uk

The Council’s principal office address is:

Harrogate Borough Council, Civic Centre, St Luke’s Avenue, Harrogate HG1 2AE
1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To advise Council on the outcome of consultation on a possible move from elections by thirds to election of the whole council once every four years.

1.2 To seek a Council resolution on whether the electoral cycle for Harrogate Borough Council should be changed to whole council elections every 4 years from 2018.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

2.1 Council note the outcome of the public consultation detailed in this report and at Appendix 1.

2.2 Council determine whether:-

a) To continue with the current elections regime of elections by thirds; or

b) To change to whole council elections every 4 years as from 2018.

2.3 If the Council chooses to change the electoral cycle to whole-Council elections once every four years, the Council authorises the Head of Legal & Governance to issue the necessary public information as required by the legislation and undertake any further actions necessary to give effect to the Council’s resolution.
3.0 RECOMMENDED REASON/S FOR DECISION/S

Council resolved on 10 September 2015 to commence a consultation process with a view to determining if the electoral cycle for Harrogate Borough Council should be changed to whole council elections every 4 years from 2018. A copy of that report is at Appendix 2. Having consulted on the proposal for changing the electoral cycle, it is now a decision for Full Council as to whether or not the Council wishes to change the electoral cycle.

4.0 THE REPORT

Background

4.1 Council is referred to previous report for background information; information on comparative authorities; comparative information about each type of electoral cycle; details of the process for changing electoral cycles; associated costs and practicalities.

Consultation

4.2 Prior to passing the resolution to convert the Electoral cycle to whole Council Elections, the Council must have taken reasonable steps to consult with such persons as it thinks appropriate on the proposed changes. The consultation activity by the Council was made up of the following:

- The publication of background information and a survey on the Have Your Say consultation page of the Council website between 11 September and 22 October 2015 seeking views on the possible changes to the council electoral cycle.

- Hard copies of the consultation survey were also available on request from the Council.

- The District Panel, being 850 Harrogate District residents from all backgrounds and age groups, were contacted and invited to respond to the consultation questionnaire.

- Parish Council's notified by email, 6 were sent in the post for the attention of the Parish Clerks.


4.2 The summary results of consultation will be published on the Councils 'Have Your Say' website page from 10 November 2015.
Consultation Responses

4.3 51 individuals responded to the consultation. Of those 51,

- 16 (32%) were in favour of elections by thirds
- 32 (62%) were in favour of whole council elections
- 3 (6%) had no preference

4.4 The comments in favour of elections by thirds can be categorised as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Number of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>System which currently works well</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electorate can respond quickly</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5 The comments in support of whole council elections can be categorised as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Number of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saving in costs</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide continuity</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in turn out of elections</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparing to National Government</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6 Council is referred to the detailed consultation results and comments at Appendix 1

5.0 REQUIRED ASSESSMENTS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The following were considered: Financial Implications; Human Resources Implications; Legal Implications; ICT Implications; Strategic Property/Asset Management Considerations; Risk Assessment; Equality and Diversity (the Public Sector Equality Duty and impact upon people with protected characteristics). If applicable, the outcomes of any consultations, assessments, considerations and implications considered necessary during preparation of this report are detailed below.

Finance

5.2 Retaining elections by thirds in the new regime would require budget growth that has not been accounted for in the Council’s medium term financial strategy.

Legal
5.3 Under the provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, councils that elect by thirds can move to whole-council elections by passing a resolution at a special meeting of the Full Council, the resolution will only be deemed carried if there are two-thirds majority of those voting vote in favour of a proposed change to the electoral cycle. This Act also enables the Council to make an order to change the electoral cycle of Parish and Town Councils. If the Council so resolves, it will be unable to change the scheme again for at least five years.

5.4 There are statutory arrangements which must be met once the Council resolution is passed including a requirement to publicise the fact that a resolution has been passed and produce an explanatory document; and to notify the Electoral Commission of the resolution.

**Background Papers -**

**OFFICER CONTACT:** Please contact Jennifer Norton if you require any further information on the contents of this report. The Officer can be contacted at Crescent Gardens, Harrogate HG1 2SG by telephone on 01423 556036 or by e-mail at Jennifer.Norton@gmail.com
Electoral Cycle Survey: Summary
11 September - 22 October 2015

51 responses

Consulted with:
- District Panel: 850
- Parish Councillors: 86
- HBC Councillors: 54
- Voluntary & Community Sector: over 1000 (via HARCVS bulletin)
- Residents via press release & detail on HBC website ‘Have Your Say’

98% of respondents were a Harrogate district resident

- 16 (32%) respondents were in favour of elections by thirds
- 32 (62%) respondents were in favour of whole council elections
- 3 (6%) respondents had no preference

*Due to the low response rate the sample is not representative of the Harrogate district population.

What is your preference for the frequency of the Electoral Cycle?

![Bar chart showing responses]

- Electing one third of district councillors on an annual basis
- Electing all district councillors at the same time every four years - ‘Whole council elections’
- I have no preference
46 respondents provided details about their age

- 48% (22) respondents were aged 35-64 years old
- 48% (22) respondents were aged 65+ years old
- 4% (2) respondents were aged 34 years and below

44 respondents answered the illness, disability or infirmity question

- 14% (6) respondents said they had an illness, disability or infirmity
### Summary comments -

**Themes for and against the different election cycles**

#### For elections by thirds:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Continuity purposes</td>
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<td>Democratic accountability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voter turn out</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National reasons</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### For whole council elections:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Costs</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic accountability</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter turn out</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**No preference: 2 comments**
- The Council must decide
- 50-50 Election cycle
Electoral Cycle Survey: Analysis

Electoral cycle preference by age

Preference for elections by thirds

- 46% of respondents who preferred elections by thirds were aged 65-74 years old.

- There were no respondents aged 44 years and below who preferred elections by thirds.

Preference for whole council elections

- 37% of respondents who preferred whole council elections were aged 65-74 years old.

- 6% of respondents were aged 34 years old and below.
Detailed comments

Comments for elections by thirds:

- To promote continuity & avoid possibility of a totally inexperienced council being elected
- The Council's reasons and also this system encourages politically minded residents to engage in political activity on a continual basis thus keeping abreast of issues in their local communities.
- Electing a third of councillors annually avoids the problem of a national issue making a huge difference to the political make-up of HBC. A national issue can result in a brief but huge political swing in local elections, which under the suggested system of an election only every four years could mean a huge political difference in HBC for all four years.
- The Parish Councillors feel that the present system has served them well over a considerable period and should continue
  - for continuity and stability purposes
  - Sensible solution
- The council and councillors would be more likely to pay attention to the views of residents.
- This response is being sent on behalf of Knaresborough Town Council and at a meeting on the 12th October it resolved to favour the election of one third of district councillors on an annual basis. It felt it is important, from a continuity point of view, to maintain councillors over a longer period of time and elections based on this format ensures councils do not lose all their councillors at any one election.
- Provides the electorate with the opportunity to respond to circumstances more quickly
- Consistency

Comments for whole council elections:

- Could increase turnout therefore more democratic.
- Cost saving significant
- It would mean that for at least 3 years out of every 4 councillors could work together in a sensible way achieve the best for our community. As things stand the political parties spend all their time trying to score points from the opposition.
- I feel it may make the council more responsible as a whole, for the decisions it makes. The cost is a factor as well.
- Because annual elections mean that the ruling group is more concerned about the forthcoming election than making important decisions which are put off until after the election with the same period inertia repeated in subsequent years.
- Its a no brainer looking at the cost savings and providing stability
- Save money, allow councillors to make proper decisions without delaying them around elections, reduce voter fatigue
- It will save money; it will allow the council to undertake a longer-term vision. In contrast to some of the views expressed, I think it will increase voter participation.
- Long term planning and lower costs.
- Cost
- More cost efficient
- The current thirds process makes the Council politically unstable when clear leadership and a long-term strategic approach is needed
- The cost implications are very much in its favour, and easier for the candidates. Hopefully they can make a difference!
- Purely as a way of saving cost.
- I think annual elections with retirement by thirds a terrible waste of time and money.
- By doing so It brings consistency in policies and saves C.T. payers money
- It will save money by saving 2 elections in the four year period.
- To save money
- As a previous Councillor it became increasingly difficult to find people interested enough to knock on doors or deliver leaflets for candidates or party. The public also often complained of Election 'activities' ending on their doorstep every year. The General Election seems to be fixed on a 5 year rota and County Cou sees happy with an ‘all-out’ Elections on the fourth year *(received by formal letter)*
Comments for no preference

- The Council must decide - I have no specialised knowledge to help me say yes or no to either proposal
- 50-50 ELECTION CYCLE

Do you have any further comments........

- Chairman of Parish council which already has a four yearly election cycle
- If it's good enough for national government then it should be good enough for us.
- The Council must weigh the costs versus the pros and cons
- Rename council as Harrogate District Council, then there will be a clear distinction between Harrogate Town and Harrogate District
- This response is on behalf of Harrogate Branch Labour Party Submitted by its secretary, after the branch discussed the issue on 22nd September.
- If it ain't broke don't fix it. The present system works well. - also with an election every four years some people would not vote until they are 22 years old.
- Would prefer not to have local elections and general elections at the same time if possible. However, there does need to be safeguards in place for the councillors and the electorate.
- This response is a collective view expressed by Killinghall Parish Council at its meeting on the 07/10/15. Clerk of KPC, 08/10/15
- This would allow for continuity and a refresh
Electoral Cycle Consultation

Harrogate Borough Council is consulting on how often we should vote for our councillors. We are interested in your views on whether we should change to 'whole' council elections every four years starting in May 2018 or retain the existing system of election 'by thirds'. This page gives background information and the reasons for both electoral cycles to help you give an informed view on the issue.

This consultation closes noon on the 22nd October 2015.

Our Council
Harrogate Borough Council has 54 Councillors representing 35 wards (small parts of the district made up of rural and urban areas). Each urban ward (Harrogate, Knaresborough and Ripon) are represented by 2 councillors and rural wards are represented by 1 councillor. Each councillor is elected for a four-year term of office.

Current cycle - election 'by thirds'
Currently the council holds 'elections by thirds', meaning that in 3 years out of the 4 one third of seats are up for election. More particularly elections are held in urban wards in years 1 and 2, whilst in rural wards elections are only held in year 3.

Whole council elections
Under the Local Government and Public Involvement Health Act 2007, the Council has the power to change its electoral arrangements to 'whole council elections' which would mean that all seats on the Council would be elected at the same time, once every four years.

Please note that the elections for the UK Parliament and the European Parliament will not be affected by any future change in Harrogate Borough Councils electoral cycle.

Reasons to keep elections 'by thirds'
- A regular turnover of Council members
- Decisions are being made annually rather than every 4 years which means voters are able to react sooner to local circumstances, thereby providing more immediate political accountability
- Maintaining the current system encourages people to vote and get into the habit of voting

Reasons to change to whole council elections
- When a Council has a 4 year mandate it can adopt a long term strategic approach to policy and decision making with less focus on yearly election campaigning
- The results from whole council elections are simpler and more easily understood by the electorate. This may increase turnout at local elections.
- There would be clearer opportunity for the voter to change the political makeup of the Council once every four years
When holding whole Council elections it may not be practical to quickly count all of the votes for the Borough Council and Parish elections when they coincide with another election counting the votes for which would be given priority (e.g. the elections of the local Member of Parliament). This and the count process used when there is more than one Councillor per ward means there may be a delay in announcing the results of District & Parish Council elections if the council were to adopt whole council elections.

**Cost Implications**

The cost of conducting a district wide election could be in the region of £190,000. If the council does this every 3 out of 4 years it will be at a cost of £570,000 over 4 years. Whole council elections would be around £190,000 over 4 years. For details of the costs and other background information please see the report to Council [xxxxxx need to put link in xxxxx 10 September]

We would like to know what your preference for the frequency of the electoral cycle for Harrogate Borough Council?

- Electing one third of district councillors on an annual basis
- Electing all district councillors at the same time every four years
- I have no preference

Please use this space if you would like to explain the reason for your answer

Do you have any further comments

Thank you for completing the survey. The closing date is 22nd October 2015, 12 noon. The summary results will made available on the Councils 'Have Your Say' website page from the 10th November 2015.

Are you a resident of Harrogate District?

- Yes
- No

What is your age?

- under 18
- 18 - 24
- 25 - 34
- 35 - 44
- 45 - 54
- 55 - 64
- 65 - 74
- Over 75

Do you have any longstanding illness, disability or infirmity (long-standing means anything that has troubled you over a period of time or that is likely to affect you over a period of time)?

- Yes
- No