

Parish Election Cycle

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Democracy and General Purposes Committee	20 November 2023
Council	29 November 2023

Will this be a Key Decision?	Not Applicable
Urgency	Not Applicable
Final Decision-Maker	Council
Lead Head of Service	Angela Woodhouse, Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance
Lead Officer and Report Author	Ryan O'Connell, Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

This report requests authorisation to put in place an order under Section 53 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to align all Parish Council election cycles with the Whole Council Election cycle of Maidstone Borough Council. With the first such elections to take place in May 2024.

Purpose of Report

Recommendation to Council

This report makes the following recommendation to the Committee

That Council be recommended to:

1. Agree that all Parish Council election cycles be aligned with Maidstone Borough Council's election cycle with the first such elections to take place in May 2024; and
2. The Director of Strategy Insight and Governance be given delegated authority to put in place the Order required to give effect to the Council's resolution.

Parish Election Cycle

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place <p>We do not expect the recommendations will by themselves materially affect achievement of corporate priorities.</p>	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected <p>We do not expect the recommendations will by themselves materially affect achievement of corporate objectives.</p>	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Risk Management	Covered in the risk section below.	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Financial	The proposed action will minimise costs of running elections. Both for the MBC where the opportunity cost of running parish elections out of sync with our own elections will be avoided, and for parish councils who will continue to not be charged for their elections that coincide with Maidstone Borough Council elections.	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager

	The actions proposed are within agreed budgets.	
Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Legal	The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 Section 53 allows a local authority to change the election cycles of parishes in its area purely for the purpose of aligning them once an authority has changed to whole council elections. This is done by way of an order which the delegated authority would authorise.	Monitoring Officer
Information Governance	The recommendations do not impact personal information (as defined in UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018) the Council processes.	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Equalities	Combining parish elections with borough elections will ensure that poll cards are used for all ordinary parish elections which will increase accessibility for electors by giving them notice of the elections and of what their options are for absent voting.	Equalities & Communities Officer
Public Health	None	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Crime and Disorder	None	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Procurement	None	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Biodiversity and Climate Change	Combining parish elections with Borough Council elections will reduce the amount of travelling and wastage produced by elections over the full election cycle.	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Maidstone Borough Council has changed electoral cycles to whole council elections with the first such elections taking place in May 2024.
- 2.2 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 provides a limited power for a relevant authority to align the election cycles of parish councils in its area to match its own if it has agreed to change its own cycle to whole council elections.
- 2.3 Changing the parish councils' election cycles to align with Maidstone Borough Council's has been discussed previously in considering Whole Council Elections (see Democracy and General Purposes Minutes – 30 June 2021) and has been the assumption in various discussions with parish councils.
- 2.4 The advantages of aligning the elections cycles are:
- Election risks are reduced over the election period (4 years)
 - Electoral administration becomes easier over the election period
 - Costs for parish councils that have contested ordinary elections are cheaper as these costs are carried by the Borough Council (if ordinary elections were held separately parishes would be charged for them as with by elections)
 - Turnout at ordinary parish elections improves and poll cards are automatically provided as part of the requirements on Borough Council elections.
 - There is clarity for the electorate with local elections and PCC elections combined one year, KCC elections the next year and then 2 years with no scheduled elections.
- 2.5 The only disadvantage is that there will be one off change to when parishes hold their elections. 17 parishes were scheduled to have ordinary elections in May 2024 already, and at each election by thirds there are usually only 2 or 3 parishes that have contested elections. The change will mean that some existing parish councillors who would previously have had terms of office for four years will have them made shorter and will need to stand again, though contested elections remain unlikely.
- 2.6 Whilst there is no formal requirement to consult parishes, this issue, including its impacts on lengths of office, has been discussed with a significant number of parishes in conversations between electoral services, clerks and councillors. In addition, all parishes have been contacted to inform them of this report being published so that they have the opportunity to attend the meeting and put their views forward, but the clear expectation since the adoption of Whole Council Elections has been that this change would happen.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 The Council could decide to align parish council elections with its own elections on a once in four year cycle (see 2.4 and 2.5 for advantages and disadvantages).

3.2 The Council could decide not to align parish council elections with its own elections and retain a scheme of a third of parishes being up for election three years in four with two of those rounds being run without borough elections and funded by parishes directly.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Option 3.1 is the preference for the reasons set out in 2.4 and 2.5.

5. RISK

5.1 Elections carry significant risks and are managed accordingly with mitigations and contingencies in place to ensure their integrity. By combining parish council elections with the Borough Council elections the overall risks of running multiple separate elections are reduced as one set of plans and contingencies will cover those elections together and increase overall resilience.

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

6.1 The subject of Whole Council Elections has been debated many times over the last ten years. This included discussion of the impacts on parishes and that the intention has been to align the election cycles. This report gives effect to that intention.

6.2 The assumption by parishes and discussions with them over Whole Council Elections have all been predicated on the basis that their elections would align with the Borough Council's.

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

7.1 Council will be recommended to agree the resolutions and then an order will be produced and put in place. Parish Councils will be informed formally that their election cycles have changed.

8. REPORT APPENDICES

None

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Democracy and General Purposes Minutes – 30 June 2021