

Changing to whole council elections – explanatory document

(Published to accord with s.35 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007)

Hertsmere Borough Council held a special meeting on 16 July 2014 and decided to change to a scheme for whole council elections. This means that, on 7 May 2015, and every fourth year afterwards, electors in Hertsmere will vote to elect all 39 borough councillors simultaneously.

Hertsmere Borough Council agreed to pass an Order to amend the scheme for parish and town council elections within Hertsmere. From 2015 the election of all Parish Councillors will take place on the same day as elections for borough councillors.

These decisions were made by Hertsmere Borough Council, following a recorded vote requiring a two-thirds majority, in accordance with sections 32 to 35 and 53 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (the Act). A copy of the relevant council report is attached to this explanatory document as Appendix A.

The council conducted consultation earlier this year regarding proposed changes to its electoral scheme. At that time Hertsmere's councillors were elected 'by thirds', as a third of the seats on the council were up for election each year for three consecutive years, before one year in which no borough council elections were held. Each councillor would serve a term of four years regardless of the year in which they were elected.

The council consulted with residents, parish and town councils, through our website, community groups, via Facebook and Twitter and council officers. The consultation asked whether the council should remain with the election by thirds or move to a scheme for whole council elections whereby each councillor is still elected for four years but they are all elected at the same time at the beginning of the four years.

The level and detail of the response to the consultation is contained within the report at Appendix A.

The main reasons given in favour of changing were:

- a council has a clear mandate for four years, allowing it to adopt a more strategic, long term approach to policy and decision making – and focus less on yearly election campaigning.
- avoids election fatigue and the results are simpler and more easily understood by the electorate. There would be a clear opportunity for the electorate to change the political composition of the council once every four years.

- greater publicity of whole council elections may generate higher turnout. The Electoral Commission suggests that electorates associate more clearly with whole Council elections.
- Cheaper for the council and political parties as well as less disruptive to public buildings used as polling stations.

The main reasons given for keeping elections 'by thirds' were:

- avoids electing a complete change of councillors with no experience and allows continuity of councillors; avoids disruption to on-going policies.
- more likely to be influenced by local rather than national politics, and this national influence will increase given the trend toward Parliamentary elections being held on the same day as local elections.
- encourages people into the habit of voting, and voting for one person is well understood by voters. Voting for two or three councillors under whole council elections could cause confusion.
- allows judgement of a council annually rather than every four years and allows the electorate to react sooner to local circumstances, thereby providing more immediate political accountability.

Hertsmere Borough Council also noted the view of the Electoral Commission who considered that it was fundamentally unfair and unacceptable that within an individual local authority some electors may have fewer opportunities to vote and influence the political composition of the authority than their neighbours in a different Ward. The Electoral Commission had recommended 'that each local authority in England should hold whole council elections, with all councillors elected simultaneously, once every four years.'

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.hertsmere.gov.uk

The council's principal office address is:

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