

Report to: Council, 11th July 2023

Report of: Corporate Director - Planning and Governance

Subject: WARNDON PARISH COUNCIL / ST PETER THE GREAT COUNTY PARISH COUNCIL: REVIEW OF ELECTION ARRANGEMENTS

1. Recommendation

- 1.1 That Council resolves to undertake a public consultation on the options set out in this report between July and September 2023 on Parish Council election arrangements in relation to their 4-year election cycle;**
- 1.2 That Council delegates to the Corporate Director – Planning and Governance responsibility for implementing the consultation; and**
- 1.3 That Council notes, that on the conclusion of the consultation a further report will be made to Council for consideration and approval of the appropriate option.**

2. Background

- 2.1 At an Extra-Ordinary meeting of Council on 22nd February 2022, the Council resolved to change from elections by thirds to whole council elections every 4 years as from 2024.
- 2.2 The resolution was passed following the outcome of a stakeholder consultation process which concluded that the majority of respondents supported a move to whole council elections with a sizeable minority preferring to remain with elections by thirds.
- 2.3 As a result of this decision, it now means that Warndon Parish Council and St Peter the Great Parish Council, who also hold whole council elections every 4 years, have a different 4-year election cycle.
- 2.4 Both parishes had scheduled elections in May 2023, although in the event there were no contested seats. The next elections are scheduled to take place for both parishes in May 2027, being a year behind the City Council elections in May 2028.
- 2.5 The current parish election timings mean that the parish councils would be required to fund the whole cost of administering their Poll for May 2027, as opposed to sharing the cost with the City Council, which both parishes did when the City Council held its elections by thirds.
- 2.6 Both parish councils have expressed their view to the Deputy Returning Officer for Worcester that with limited budgets, self-funding whole parish elections would not be sustainable.

- 2.7 Prior to the parish council elections held on 4th May 2023, both parish councils published a formal notice stating that the parish council was minded to request that Worcester City Council conducts a review, including carrying out a public consultation process, of its election arrangements.
- 2.8 The notice stated that the consultation process would seek stakeholder views on the following options:
- Option 1:** Extend term of office following May 2023 elections by 1 year resulting in the next Parish elections taking place in May 2028 with City Council elections.
- Option 2:** Reduce term of office following May 2023 elections to 1 year resulting in the next Parish elections taking place in May 2024 with City Council elections.
- Option 3:** Make no changes, resulting in the next Parish elections taking place in 2027 on their own and every four years after.
- Option 4:** Hold an election in 2027 and then either:
- (a) have another election in 2028 and thenceforward every four years (in line with the City Cycle) or
 - (b) not have another election until 2032 and thenceforward every four years (in line with the City Cycle).
- 2.9 Following the publication of the formal notice and substantial discussions between the City Council's Deputy Returning Officer, St Peter the Great County Parish Council on 13th April 2023 and Warndon Parish Council at its meeting on 3rd April 2023 resolved to request the City Council to take any necessary steps to review parish council election arrangements, including the delivery of a consultation process if required. Furthermore, the decision made by the City regarding the outcome of the consultation process has been requested by the both parish councils to be made by the end of 2023 at the latest.
- 2.10 The power of Council to change Parish Council cycles is contained in Section 53 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

3. Consultation Process

- 3.1 In addition to both parish councils requesting a review of parish council election arrangements, it is considered good practice by the Electoral Commission for the City Council to demonstrate it has taken reasonable steps to consult with such persons as it thinks appropriate on the proposed changes.
- 3.2 It is recommended that the consultation process is carried out between July and September 2023 for a period of time.
- 3.3 It is further recommended that City Council publicises the consultation via parish council communication channels, a press release, on the Council's website and via social media.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 For officers on behalf of the Parish Councils to work with stakeholders to commence the consultation on the options as set out in this report.
- 4.2 On the conclusion of the consultation, and by the end of the year, to bring a further report to Council for consideration and approval of the appropriate option. In addition to this, to seek Council's resolution to make and publicise an Order to change the Parish Council's election cycle.

5. Implications

5.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications

By changing both the parish councils 4-year election cycles to align with the 4-year election cycle for the City Council, would result in costs remaining in line with existing budgets which allow for parish elections at the same time as City Council elections. Not changing the cycle would result in some costs arising for the City Council in terms of arranging and managing the election which could not reasonably be passed to the parish councils, such as premises costs and management time. These are difficult to quantify but would not be significantly in addition to the Council's existing budgeted costs. As indicated in the report, transferring the full costs of running a stand-alone election to the parish councils would create significant financial pressures for those councils.

5.2 Legal and Governance Implications

None resulting from implementing the consultation process. In situations where a Council has resolved to change its own election cycle, the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, Section 53 gives power to councils to alter years of ordinary elections of parish councillors. The council may by order make provision that changes the years in which the ordinary elections of parish councillors for any parish situated in the council's area are to be held.

The power may only be exercised so as to secure that those elections are to be held in years in which ordinary elections of district councillors for a ward in which any part of the parish is situated are to be held.

5.3 Risk Implications

There are no significant risks identified.

5.4 Corporate/Policy Implications

Any change to both parish council 4-year election cycles would be published on the Council's website, Parish Council websites and publicised with stakeholders.

5.5 Equality Implications

There are no specific equality implications identified for the consultation process. Elections must be delivered in such a way as to ensure the needs of people with protected characteristics are considered and appropriately accommodated.

5.6 Human Resources Implications

None identified.

5.7 Health and Safety Implications

None identified.

5.8 Social, Environmental and Economic Implications

Regular review and debate of the Council's governance and electoral arrangements is one mechanism by which the residents and businesses of Worcester can be assured that the Council is responsive to their needs and interests.

Ward(s): **Warndon Parish South/Warndon Parish North/St Peter's**

Contact Officer: **Claire Chaplin – Deputy Registration/Returning Officer Tel: 07792 662271 Email: claire.chaplin@worcester.gov.uk**

Background Papers: **None**