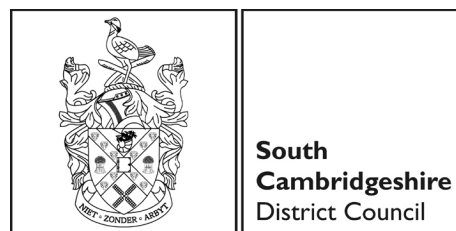


CONSULTATION PAPER SENT TO ALL PARISH COUNCILS, LOCAL MPS AND MEMBERS OF THE LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Consultation on proposed changes to the Local Elections system



1. We would welcome your views by Friday 28 April 2006 on whether to move from the present system of electing the District Council by thirds to proposals for all-out elections so that all SCDC councillors would be elected together at the same time, once every four years. This consultation will not affect the local elections in May 2006.
2. The views received from residents, parish councils, MPs and other partners will be taken into account this summer, when the Council will decide whether or not go forward with the proposed change. If a significant majority of district councillors agree the proposals at that time, the Council would then formally apply to the Secretary of State to make this change under section 7(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

About the District Council

3. The District Council comprises 57 councillors, representing different parts of South Cambridgeshire. A councillor's normal term of office is four years, unless elected in an unscheduled by-election. Whilst some wards have one councillor, others are represented by two or three. These arrangements will continue whether the Council keeps the present system or makes the proposed change.

The present system – 'Electing by Thirds'

4. Currently, elections for one third of the Council's seats are held three years out of every four (in May). This means that all seats are elected once during that period. Wards with a single district councillor have an election once every four years. Residents in wards with more than one seat on the District Council get to choose a representative two or three times during the four-year cycle. In every ward, elections to parish councils are held at the same time as an election to the District Council.

The proposed change - 'All Out' elections

5. Some councillors have suggested that it would be better if elections to all seats on the District Council took place together at the same time, once every four years. (For those district councils that already have 'all-out' elections, the next ones are currently scheduled to take place in May 2007). The timing of elections to many parish councils would be changed so they would all coincide with the District Council elections. The

district and parish council elections would be kept separate from the four-yearly elections to the County Council, which are due next in 2009.

Pros and Cons

6. The Council agreed to carry out this public consultation on 28 October 2005 (the minutes of the meeting can be found on our website at www.scambs.gov.uk). Councillors have already had some initial discussions about the merits of each case. Here are some of the key points.

The case for the present system <i>'Electing by Thirds'</i>	The case for the proposed change <i>'All Out' elections</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It can help voters to focus on local issues, which might otherwise be drowned out by national issues and campaigning by political parties. • It can allow more gradual change at the Council, rather than the possibility of big political change every four years. New councillors can learn from more experienced ones. • "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." • It can keep councillors on their toes and accountable to their local electorate, particularly in wards with more than one district councillor. • The proposed change could confuse voters by holding all district and parish council elections at the same time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It could raise the local profile of the elections. Every voter could consider the local issues and choose their councillors at the same time. • It could provide greater certainty in planning ahead over four years, with less risk of annual changes of power and policy. New councillors could still learn from more experienced ones. • It could save £80,000 every four years in the costs of running elections. • It could increase accountability through greater public interest and higher voter turn-out, particularly in wards with more than one district councillor. • The present system can cause confusion and voter fatigue through frequent elections in multi-councillor wards.

Have your say

Please let us know your views about the proposals **by Friday 28 April 2006**. As well as indicating which option you or your organisation prefers, please briefly explain the reasons for this. (If you would not be prepared for your views to be reported to a future Council meeting, please let us know.) Replies should be made in writing to "Electoral Services, South Cambridgeshire District Council, South Cambridgeshire Hall, Cambourne Business Park, Cambourne, Cambridge CB3 6EA" or by e-mail to consultation@scambs.gov.uk.

March 2006