

Proposed Move to Four Yearly All Out District Council Elections

Background Sheet

Prepared by

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1) Background:

In January 2004 the Electoral Commission produced a report entitled '*Cycle of Local Government Elections in England*'. The executive summary can be viewed at: http://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/files/dms/Electoralcyclesexecsummary_11597-9057__E__.pdf. In short, the report recommends *inter alia* that local authorities which currently elect their members by thirds should move to a single, four yearly, all out election. As far as South Cambridgeshire is concerned, there are two main arguments commending this move i) Financial ii) increasing democratic accountability.

2) The financial argument.

Elections are expensive. The portfolio holder has confirmed that each stand alone District Council election costs the authority around £65,000. Whilst combining elections does not result in the saving of the whole cost of the years 'missed', the savings are nevertheless very substantial. The Resources and Finance Director has confirmed that by moving to an all out system the authority would save around **£80,000** over the four year cycle if the District Election were held separately or around £130,000 if it were combined with the County Elections.

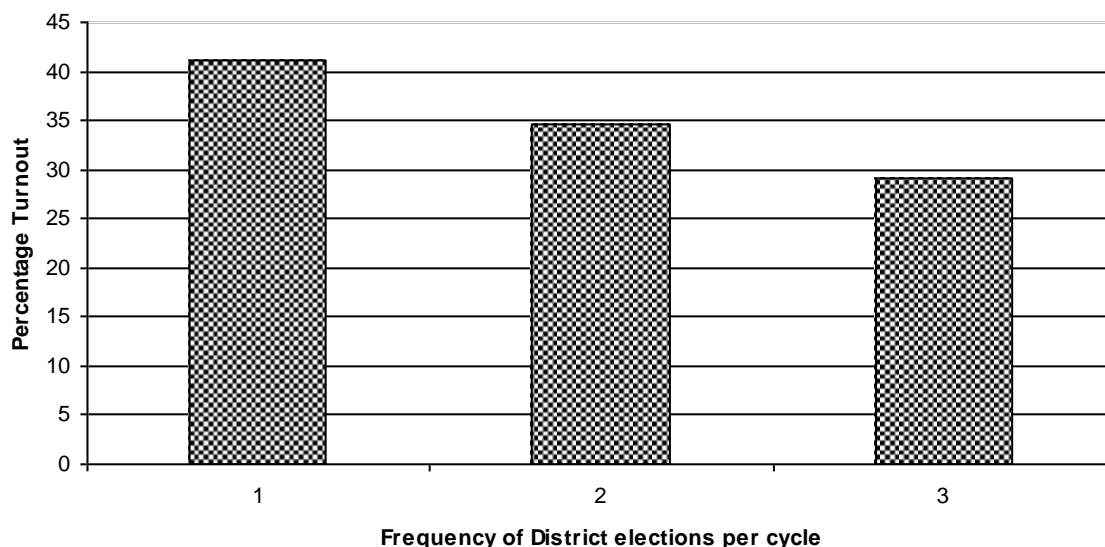
3) Democratic Accountability:

At present, even a major voting swing can have little effect on the overall composition of the Council. This is likely, as the Electoral Commission points out, to demotivate voters. There is also clear evidence that multiple elections result in 'election fatigue'. An analysis of voter turnout figures for the most recent complete cycle of one third out elections, 2000, 2002 & 2003 shows that turnout is significantly lower ($P < 0.001$) in wards which vote twice or three times in the cycle than in wards which vote only once (Fig.1).

4) The electoral cycle:

Whilst the greatest savings could be obtained by combining District and County Elections, there are strong arguments against this. The first is that such an arrangement could lead to confusion about the roles and policies of the two tiers of government. For that reason, this option was rejected by the Electoral Commission.

South Cambridgeshire Election Turnout 2000-3



The second argument is logistical. There has been an increasing tendency on the part of Central Government to combine local with Parliamentary and European elections.

I am advised by the Returning Officer that holding three major elections together would produce excessive delays in the count by the need to verify three sets of ballot papers before counting of any of the polls could begin. It should also be bourn in mind that for reasons of economy it is usual to combine District and Parish Elections. This arrangement should continue under the 'all out' system. The likely electoral cycle is shown in Figure 2. This assumes that 'all out' elections are introduced in 2008, allowing all members to serve a full four year term. For these reasons, the option of running County and District elections concurrently is rejected.

Fig. 2

YEAR	CURRENT SYSTEM	PROPOSED SYSTEM
2005	County Parliamentary	-
2006	1/3 District	none
2007	1/3 District	none
2008	1/3 District	All out District
2009	County European Parliamentary?	County European Parliamentary?
2010	1/3 District Parliamentary?	Parliamentary?

5) Public and Parish Council Consultation:

It is accepted that this Council has a duty to consult with members of the public without any statutory requirement to do so where parties to be consulted have a legitimate expectation of consultation.

The requirements of any consultation have been formulated and adopted by the Courts and are now known as the Sedley Rules: -

“First,... consultation must be at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage. Secondly...the proposer must give sufficient reasons for any proposal to permit of intelligent consideration and response. Thirdly...adequate time must be given for consideration and response and, finally, fourthly...the product of the consultation must be conscientiously taken into account in finalising any ...proposals”
Any change to this Council’s electoral arrangements should, naturally, follow these requirements.

6) Conclusion:

It is recommended that Council supports the following motion:

- i) The District Council apply to the Secretary of State, that he make an Order pursuant to Section 86 of the Local Government Act 2000 to secure that the scheme for elections of Councillors for the District of South Cambridgeshire be in accordance with Section 85 (2) of the said Act and that accordingly:-
 - (a) the term of office for Councillors be four years
 - (b) that elections are held every fourth year
 - (c) all the Councillors are elected in each year
 - (d) the Councillors retire together.
- ii) That, if possible, District Elections in 2006 and 2007 are suspended and that the first all out elections be held in 2008.
- iii) That parish council elections be coordinated to coincide with the four yearly District Elections.
- iv) A formal process of consultation be initiated in accordance with the Sedley Rules as mentioned above.