

# Whole Council Elections: Public Consultation Proposals

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## Methodology

The public consultation will be published online between Monday 26 July and Friday 3 September 2021.

Specific email invitations to respond to the consultation will be sent to:

- All Borough Councillors
- Town and Parish Councils (via the Clerk and Chairman)
- Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum
- Tunbridge Wells Access Group (paper copy)
- Kent County Council Division Members
- The Members of Parliament for the Borough
- Maidstone Borough Council

Except for the group above, respondents will be asked to supply their name and postcode, but the consultation will not discount responses from outside the borough area (although Members may choose to give weight as appropriate to responses from outside the borough area).

All responses will be captured through the online form on the Council's website, except where a respondent has specifically asked for a paper copy of the consultation.

The results of the consultation will be reported back to the General Purposes Committee in September 2021.

# Consultation

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council currently has 48 Councillors who are each elected for a four-year term. The Borough area is divided into 20 roughly equal 'wards'. The Councillors are elected to, and represent, their local ward.

The Council currently uses a 'by thirds' electoral system. This means that over four years, elections are held in years one, two and three for a third of the Council each year (16 Councillors). In the fourth year County Council elections are held.

The Council is considering moving to 'all out' elections. This means that over the four-year term, elections would only be held in year one for all Councillors at the same time.

## Benefits of 'all out' Elections

Research suggests that 'all out' elections are fairer and more equitable to the electorate, and that the electoral system is clearer and easier to understand.

Currently, electors in areas of the Borough where there are three councillors to elect in their ward (the area they represent), get to vote three times over the course of four years. Electors in areas where there is only one councillor representing the area only get to vote once. This means that some electors in the Borough have more influence on the political make-up of the Council than others.

Research also suggests that holding elections once for all Councillors is easier for the electorate to understand. This is particularly the case for young people or those with an ethnicity other than white, which suggests that 'all out' elections can improve equality of opportunity.

All out elections would make an approximate saving of over £200,000 over four years by reducing the number of elections held from three to one.

## Benefits of Elections by Thirds

The benefits of this system have been stated as providing greater stability for the Council in terms of its membership. Electing by thirds reduces the risk of wholesale change within the Council and allows for succession planning because there is always a mixture of new and experienced Councillors on the Council.

Additionally, electing by thirds provides the electorate a greater opportunity to be involved in decision making at the Council, and arguments have been put forward that this makes Councillors more democratically accountable.

Lastly, it has been stated that some smaller political parties would find it difficult to field enough candidates to contest all seats at an all-out election. However, electing by thirds does not, in and of itself, create a greater availability of candidates for any party, but those candidates who are willing to stand have more frequent opportunities to do so.

Electing by thirds is the current electoral system of the Council, and so there would be no saving or additional costs associated with retaining this system of electing.

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1. Do you think that Tunbridge Wells Borough Council should move to an all-out electoral system, where elections are held once every four years for every Councillor?

Yes

No

2. Do you have any comments you would like Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to take into account when deciding whether or not to move to all out elections?

Comments