

# **CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE - 1 SEPTEMBER 2003**

## **REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

### **THE CYCLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS IN ENGLAND**

#### **Purpose of Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to enable consideration to be given to responses to eight questions posed in the attached consultation document 'The cycle of local government elections in England' and to consider recommendations for simplifying the current election cycle, with a view to determining an overall County Council response.

#### **Background**

2. In its White Paper Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services, published in December 2001, the Government noted that:

The current cycle of local government elections is confusing...It is too easy for electors to lose track of when elections are to be held or how many votes they have on any particular election day. And this arrangement can lessen the immediate impact of voters' behaviour on council control.

3. In January 2003, the Government invited The Electoral Commission to review the cycle of local elections in England and identify options for change that would simplify the current cycle. This review covers elections to principal local authorities (including mayoral elections), the Greater London Authority and parish councils. In recommending any options for change, the Commission may consider changes to councillor's terms of office, the number of councillors for local authority areas and the number and boundaries of local authority wards and divisions.

#### **Consultation**

4. The eight questions posed in the consultation paper are:
  - (1) Should there be a more uniform pattern of local government electoral cycles in England? If so, why?
  - (2) To what extent should local preferences be taken into account when considering future arrangements for local government electoral cycles?

- (3) Should the current four-year term of office for local councillors be retained? If not, why?
  - (4) In areas with more than one tier of local government, should elections to different levels continue to be staggered, or held at the same time? Why?
  - (5) In developing options for change to current local government electoral cycles, should the Commission consider the possible future combination of local government elections in England and other national or European elections? If so, why?
  - (6) Do you have any comments or further evidence on the evidence which we have gathered? In particular, we would value any practical experience or local examples of the issues discussed.
  - (7) In addition to the arguments outlined above, are there any other relevant issues which we should take into account?
  - (8) In considering the simplification of the local government electoral cycle, which issues or arguments are the most important? Why?
5. The situation in Leicestershire is very straightforward in that the County Council and all Districts Councils in the area have “whole Council” elections. This means that local elections, either County or District, occur every two years. This seems to work satisfactorily and members may therefore wish to recommend as part of the County Council’s response that a staggering of elections in two tier areas should continue.

### **Timetable**

6. The deadline for comments to the Electoral Commission is Friday, 3 October 2003. The Electoral Commission will then submit their final report, including recommendations, to the Deputy Prime Minister by 29 January 2004.

### **Equal Opportunities Implications**

7. None.

### **Recommendations**

8. The Committee is recommended:
  - (a) To note the report;
  - (b) To respond to questions 1-8 within the consultation paper; and
  - (c) To submit the response to the Electoral Commission by 3 October 2003.

## **Background Papers**

None.

## **Officer to Contact**

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## **List of Appendices**

Consultation Paper, July 2003.