

Consultation on Political Structures and Elections

Background Information

This document provides further information about the options for political structures and elections and issues that you might like to take into account in providing your comments.

Political structures

Under the 2007 Act the current Leader and Cabinet model is no longer an option. All Councils operating this scheme will be required to adopt one of the new governance models before 31st December 2010.

Two models of executive arrangements are possible:

- (a) An elected Mayor and Cabinet Executive (proposals to adopt this model are subject to a referendum);
- (b) A new style Leader and Cabinet Executive (the so-called “strong leader” model where the Leader is elected by Council but s/he appoints members of the Cabinet and allocates responsibility for executive functions)

The terms of office for both models would be 4 years. The first such 4 year term would commence in May 2011.

All the executive functions of the Council will be vested in the Leader or Mayor, who will decide how those powers are to be discharged. He or she will appoint the Cabinet directly and allocate responsibility for the discharge of executive function

The Council is able to choose whether to allow for the removal and replacement of the Leader by Council during the 4 year term. The constitution could be amended to reflect this. However, this is not an option in respect of the Mayoral model.

If the Council failed to make the change to its governance arrangements in accordance with the legislative requirements, the Secretary of State can make an order specifying that the new Leader and Cabinet Executive arrangements will apply.

Local residents are invited to form their own view on which is the best model for Wyre Forest and to let us know by taking part in the consultation. To assist, here is some information about potential strengths and weaknesses of the two options:

Elected Mayor and Cabinet

Potential strengths	Potential weaknesses
Clear accountability of an individual to provide political leadership and direction for the district	Requires a referendum before it can be implemented which would cost money to organise (c £100k)
Enhanced ability for the Mayor to take decisions swiftly	May be perceived as putting too much power in the hands of one person
Fixed Term	Clash in identity between Elected Mayor and Town Mayors
Easily identified individual	4 year term what if the Elected Mayor was incompetent.

Leader and Cabinet

Potential strengths	Potential weaknesses
Does not require a referendum – can be implemented with minimum cost	
Can provide strong leadership but can also be removed from office by Council before the end of the four year term	

Electoral Arrangements

Section 32 of the 2007 Act contains powers for District Councils to change their electoral arrangements. Currently Wyre Forest District Council has a scheme for elections by thirds. The legislation allows the Council to opt for whole Council elections.

If a resolution was passed by the Council to change its electoral arrangements to whole council elections, the scheme would commence in 2011 and elections would be held in May 2011 and every four years thereafter (which means that the next elections would be in May 2015, May 2019 and so on).

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Whole council elections every four years

Potential strengths	Potential weaknesses
Promotes stability and a strategic approach among councillors: councillors know they have to work together as a team for four years and, subject to any by-elections, there is consistency of membership with strong relationships being formed over the term of office	There can be a significant change in councillors at each set of elections
Avoids the current situation where councillors may be tempted to put off difficult decisions because there are elections in almost every year – in particular there is a risk of “blight” in the months before any election period	Clash with General election in 2015
Aligns with the statutory requirement for the leader/mayor to be elected for a four year term	Can make it more difficult for smaller parties to contest most/all seats
Significant cost savings: one set of elections rather than three would save an estimated £140+k over a four year period.	Possible loss of experienced councillors en bloc
Potential savings for political parties particularly those that contest all seats.	Annual elections keep political parties on their toes.

Elections by thirds

Potential strengths	Potential weaknesses
Tend to result in more gradual change in personalities/political balance of the council.	More costly than whole council elections
Allow the electorate to express their displeasure with the council generally or particular political groups on a regular basis	Doesn't always support a strategic approach by Councillors particularly on difficult decisions which keep being put off because of frequent elections.
Easier for smaller parties to contest most/all seats	Doesn't align with 4 year term for leader/mayor
Keeps political parties on their toes	More costly for political parties that contest all seats

Implications for Parish and Town Councils

A change to the electoral cycle could mean that some Town and Parish Council elections would no longer be held at the same time as District Council elections. If District Council elections were held in 2011 and every four years thereafter, the cost of holding Town and Parish Council elections in other years would be charged in full to the Town and Parish Councils.

Under section 53 of the 2007 Act, the District Council may make an order to alter the years in which the ordinary elections of Parish Councils are held.

If the District Council opts to move to whole Council elections, views are invited from Town and Parish Councils on whether such an order should be made, to provide that ordinary elections of Parish Councils should be held in the same year as elections to the District Council.

We look forward to receiving your views.