

Appendix B – Election Cycle Consultation 2024/25, Partners & Staff Feedback

The election cycle consultation asked residents for their views on how often they would like to vote for their local councillors. During the same period partners to Southend-on-Sea City Council and staff at the Council were provided with the opportunity to participation from the perspective of their day to day working with the Council.

Partners were asked:

We would like to know, as a key stakeholder to the Council, whether the election cycle has a positive or negative bearing on your interaction and business with us, and as a result what your preferred approach would be.

Seven partners responded including representatives from prominent local private business and the voluntary and community sector.

All partners were in favour of a whole council election process.

A universal reason provided was the belief that a whole council election system would provide more stable leadership and the ability for longer-term planning and implementation of policy and projects.

Additional reasons included the need for financial prudence and the positive opportunity of not losing momentum during the pre-election period.

Each of the responses are provided in full below:

1	<p>Our organisation, and those within the sector who interact with the Council, would benefit from a more politically stable setting in Southend. A whole council election once every four years would provide the opportunity to better plan and collaborate on a longer-term basis. The administration and Councillors would benefit from greater confidence as elected members. A 4 year cycle provides more accountability, as the Council has a greater opportunity to implement its commitments. This in turn would enable a more financially resilient SCC with better planning, no longer vulnerable to volatile administration changes and varying impacts on sectors in which it supports.</p> <p>There is a strong argument that a clear financial benefit is to be had running a four yearly election across the city compared to three in every four years, with less disruption and the removal of pre-election period each year where we have experienced instances of momentum loss across many work streams.</p> <p>However, moving to a new four year cycle would require significant local messaging and communications campaign to ensure understanding and provide clarity on the process at the ballot box.</p>
2	<p>Whole council elections would bring us more in line with Government General Elections, which brings consistency with General and Local. It also gives each party the opportunity to develop and implement any policies within that time frame. This hopefully would bring people to come forward to vote for what party they believe will be better for the development of their City.</p>

3	Stability and clarity are key for us.
4	Whole council elections allow for progress and more stability, in what seems like an environment of conflict between local politicians. The downside of course being, if someone does a poor job!
5	Our business outlook is one which is based on establishing and working on stakeholder relationships that are long term, so if we had a preference and I'm not entirely sure that we do, it would be for council elections to be as far apart as possible.
6	The option of moving to a four yearly, all up, election cycle would be our preferred option. Not only would this hold the potential for a more strategic and longer-term approach to the planning of investment decisions by elected Members but, on a practical note, it might also enable some more certainty and consistency in terms of the Council's partner representatives. At present, this means that our Board, can often experience annual changes of personnel and this does not assist long term political consistency and contribution into the Board.
7	Our organisation is strongly in favour of changing to a four-yearly election cycle. We believe this avoids the potential scenario where the authority is almost permanently in either pre-election or post-election mode (soon to be followed by another pre-election period). A four-yearly cycle should mean more stability and focus, affording the council time to develop and implement its plans without constant distractions or changes of course.

Southend-on-Sea City Council staff were asked to take part in a focus group session on 9th January 2024. At the session officers were asked to discuss the operational impact of both options, what strengths they felt existed and whether they identified any weaknesses to ways of working.

Thirteen officers took part and represented various departments across the Council including highways, planning, procurement, adult and children’s social care, and corporate functions such as finance, HR and ICT.

A summary of the key points identified is presented below:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Thirds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More cross party working takes part to enable smoother transition from one year to the next and this is considered to be a collaborative and positive way of working. • More regular election campaigning provides councillors opportunity to engage with the public and understand their needs and preferences which can feed into policy and service design (however, it was recognised that whole election cycle itself doesn’t prevent Cllrs from regularly engaging with the public). 	<p>Thirds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aligning and adjusting to new portfolio structures each year takes time and officer capacity. • During Adult and children’s services inspections a graded judgement will be provided on leadership. Officers are required to provide assurance evidence of how stability is maintained within the context of frequent changes in political leadership.
<p>Whole:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Corporate Plan that is published for a longer period of tenure than the timetable currently allows for. Which means less ambiguity during the shorter time no Corporate Plan is published. • More opportunity to agree longer term documents such as the Local Plan and Local Transport Plan which have a longer development period. • Budget conversations can happen on a rolling basis throughout the year. • Financial saving. Staff are finding efficiency savings in their ways of working. This feels like an opportunity for Councillors, and staff connected to running elections, to do the same. • Less pressure on staffing capacity to facilitate regular elections and formations of each new municipal year. • Better engagement on induction programme. 	<p>Whole:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Larger induction programme to manage. However, it was considered that greater engagement would be a benefit which would outweigh the logistical organisation.

In summary, staff identified more potential opportunities for efficient ways of working through a whole council election cycle than is currently experienced with ‘thirds’.