

Draft Consultation Strategy

Methodology

The public consultation will be published online between **1 August 2022 – 16 September 2022** for a six-week period. All responses will be captured through an online form on the Council’s website. A dedicated link will be created to ease the completion of the form. Upon request, a paper version of the form will be issued. Paper versions of the form, together with a leaflet, will be made available in Libraries, Town Halls and One Stop Shops.

The online consultation will be supported by a comprehensive communications campaign to encourage participation and responses.

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

- All Borough Councillors
- Members of Parliament for the Borough

Excluding the above, respondents will be asked to supply their name and post code and other demographic information such as age, ethnicity and gender to enable the council to demonstrate a wide ranging and representative response.

The Local Government Association produced a checklist for delivering “effective consultations”. It includes a checklist which forms the basis of Sandwell Council’s framework for delivery of the consultation.

Draft Consultation Questions

1. How often would you prefer to elect councillors to Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council.?

Option 1	Option 2
<p>I would prefer to elect councillors by thirds (a third of councillors are elected every year for 3 out of four years – the current system)</p> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input data-bbox="411 1621 502 1684" type="checkbox"/> </div>	<p>I would prefer to elect <u>all</u> councillors once every four years</p> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input data-bbox="970 1621 1061 1684" type="checkbox"/> </div>

2. Do you have any comments you would like Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council to take into account when deciding whether or not to move to whole council elections once every four years.?

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The table below sets out the proposed communication channels:

<p>Audience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Electors and general public• Council staff• All elected members (including cabinet members, town chairs, ward members)• MPs• Voluntary and community sector:• Other stakeholders including WMCA, partners, etc
<p>Consultation method</p> <p>Online consultation shall be via Microsoft Forms or Survey Monkey or their equivalent.</p>
<p>Channels</p> <p>Promotion of the consultation via all appropriate comms channels including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Website (consultation webpage under Elections and Voting with promotion via Elections homepage banner and carousel)• Social media channels• Leaflet and paper versions in libraries and One Stop Shops across the borough• E-newsletter to residents• Gov.Notify – text alerts to voters via Elections Team• Press releases• Member updates (e-newsletter)• Voluntary and community sector (e-newsletter)• Internal comms to staff including intranet, Weekly News updates etc• Digital screens in council buildings• Newspaper adverts

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Accessibility

Paper copies of the consultation to be made available to those who cannot fill it in online via the Elections Team. An Equality Impact Assessment will be completed prior to the consultation process.

Translation options will be considered and made available upon request.

Cost of the consultation

Indicative costs of running an online consultation are minimal, due to digital channels being the primary method. Funding of the consultation will be from existing budgetary provisions. The main costs will be associated with:

- Printing and postage of online forms
- Production and printing costs of any campaign materials (leaflets)

Actual and necessary costs will be detailed as part of the final report presented at the extraordinary meeting of the council.

Monitoring and Reporting

The Electoral Services team alongside Communications officers will monitor and collate the responses.

A draft report will be prepared by officers which includes a detailed analysis of the responses and submitted to the MD Commissioner/Leadership Team, who will refer a report to council for decision. The decision timetable is outlined in Appendix B.

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Draft Consultation Document (online) will be adapted for paper version

Have your say on how often elections are held for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council.

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council is running a public consultation between 1 August 2022 and 16 September 2022 on a potential change to its election cycle.

How many Councillors does the council have?

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council currently has 72 councillors representing 24 wards across Sandwell. All 24 wards have three councillors representing them. The councillors are elected to and represent their local ward.

What is the council's current election cycle?

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. There are no elections held in the fourth year and this is known as a fallow year.

What alternative elections cycle is being considered?

The council is considering whether it should move to a whole council (all-out) electoral system. Under the whole council model, all seats on the council would be elected at the same time, once every four years. There would be no borough elections in between these four years, except for any by-elections as a result of a casual vacancy.

Benefits of elections by thirds

- Provides regular opportunities for the public to vote and decide on how the council should be run.
- One councillor is elected for each ward at a time, allowing the electorate to focus on the aptitude of candidates.
- Keeping the current system would retain a large proportion of councillors along with their knowledge and experience.
- Candidates who wish to stand for election have more opportunities to do so.

Benefits of whole council elections

- Deliver a clear mandate from the electorate once every four years.
- Give a controlling political party time to set a clear four-year vision, enabling longer term strategic decision making and accountability.
- Holding whole council elections once every four years would result in around £550,000 savings per four-year election cycle.
- The electoral system is clearer and easier to understand.

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How is the decision to change the elections cycle made?

Councillors will consider all the consultation feedback received during the public consultation at an Extraordinary Council Meeting in late October 2022. Two thirds of the councillors present would have to vote in favour of the change to make it happen.

Questions

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2. Do you have any comments you would like Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council to take into account, when deciding whether or not to move to whole council elections once every four years.?

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Consultation Checklist**

Ensure the consultation is necessary	On 22 March 2022, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities announced an intervention package and a set of Directions to ensure the council was able to comply with its best value duty under Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999. The Council published its Improvement Plan in response to the Secretary of State in which it states its commitment to explore the move to whole council elections.
Legal and Governance requirements including any data protection considerations	A Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) will be prepared and a member of the information governance team will have sight of material prior to issue.
Set clear objectives	The objective of the consultation is to seek the views of the public, elected members and other stakeholders around changing the electoral cycle in Sandwell.
Co-ordination of the exercise	A number of officers will co-ordinate the consultation. This will be a corporate, cross-departmental project.
Sufficient timescales	Best practice guidance suggests the consultation should be between six and twelve weeks. Sandwell's consultation will run for six weeks.
Document costs	All costs related to the consultation will be recorded and outlined in a final report presented to council.
Identify participants	Key participants have been identified and listed as part of this strategy.
Promote the exercise	A communications and engagement plan will ensure that key messages are delivered, and public awareness of the consultation is achieved.
Gather and input data	All online data will be recorded directly into spreadsheet format and results collated.
Monitor the responses	Responses to the consultation will be monitored weekly and any issues highlighted and escalated.

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Analyse the results	The data received from the consultation will be analysed and formulated into a detailed report for consideration by either the Governance and Constitution Review Committee or Leadership. The Committee/Leadership Team will subsequently prepare a final report for Council.
Determine Outcomes	The outcomes of the consultation will form part of a final report that will be presented at an extraordinary meeting of the Council. The results will assist Council with making a decision on whether to move to whole council elections.
Feedback and Evaluation	The evaluation of the consultation results, in relation to the objectives, will take place following any Council resolution to change the electoral cycle.