

Date of meeting:	20 March 2023
Title of Report:	Update reference Tracking Decision - Minute 60 of 16 January 2023
Lead Member:	Councillor Andy Lugger, Chair of Audit and Governance Committee
Lead Strategic Director:	Giles Perritt (Assistant Chief Executive)
Author:	Ross Jago, Head of Governance Performance and Risk
Contact Email:	Ross.jago@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	ECC/01/23
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

This report provides an update on the meeting of the Task and Finish group charged with the design and implementation of a consultation on the electoral cycle.

Proposed Methodology

Members of the Task and Finish Group considered whether there should be any restrictions to who may be invited to contribute to the consultation. Following discussion the Task Group proposed that all residents of Plymouth should be able to contribute to the consultation.

Following discussion it was agreed that the following methods should be used to collect consultation feedback / responses.

- Online questionnaire
- Hard copy in locations across the City
- Supporting engagement events with key stakeholders

The process would be undertaken in line with the following timetable -

Activity	Date	Comment
Phase 1 – Pre-Communication / Advertising	22 May – 05 June 2023	Awareness raising/information sharing
Phase 2 - Consultation	05 June – 16 July 2023	6-week fieldwork and accompanying engagement activity

Final findings report and briefings complete	25 August 2023	Final findings report complete
Phase 3 - Feedback through Council communications	08 September 2023	Publication for Council Associated Communications and direct messaging to stakeholder groups
Council	18 September 2023	Full council debate on the issue.

Proposed Question

Members discussed the proposed question at length due to the requirement to remain as balanced and as straight forward possible. The task group were keenly aware that subtle differences in the phrasing of a question or the response options can affect responses.

As a result of the discussion it was agreed that the following question would be proposed for approval.

Which option would you prefer for Plymouth residents to elect their councillors?

- Change to 'Whole Council Elections'
- Keep the current system
- I have no preference

Members requested an "explainer" alongside the question to ensure that respondents understood what whole / current system means.

Members also agreed an open text option to capture the reasons for the participant's response.

Alongside asking for the participants' postcode to ensure good representation from across the city, demographic information on age and disability would be collected as part of this consultation.

Communications

The following communication objectives were agreed:

- Raise awareness of the current election cycle model and the pros/cons of moving to a four yearly approach
- Encourage residents to have their say – striving to have representation from across the city
- Ensure that all other stakeholders in the city are aware of the consultation and the implications to local decision making

The supporting information will focus on the following:

- Why people should give their views
- What are the pros and cons of either option
- How people can give their views – online form / hard copy in libraries
- The process for decision making

The task group also agreed that information should be supplied in relation to the electoral review and that officers should ensure that an explanation and clarity is provided in respect of how Councillors are currently elected and specifically how it works in "two member" Wards.

In preparation for the launch of the consultation on 5 June 2023, the views of the task group will be sought in relation to the "explainer" which will detail the current system of election and the possible alternative, along with communication approaches.

Recommendations and Reasons

The Audit and Governance Committee is recommended -

1. to approve the methodology as detailed above;
2. to approve the consultation question as follows –

Which option would you prefer for Plymouth residents to elect their councillors?

- Change to 'Whole Council Elections'
 - Keep the current system
 - I have no preference
3. to delegate to the Task and Finish Group the final approval of the communications approach in preparation of the communication campaign to begin ahead of the launch of the consultation on 5 June 2023.

Reason: To comply with the Council resolution of the 21 November 2022 (minute 24 refers).

Alternative options considered and rejected

None. As a committee of council the Audit and Governance Committee is required to comply with the Council resolution.

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

The Corporate Plan commits the Council to engaging with and listening to our residents, businesses and communities. The Council's values include a commitment to Plymouth being a place where people can have their say about what is important to them, and where they are empowered to make change happen. The recommendations of this report seek to deliver these commitments in respect of a key element of the Council's democratic arrangements.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

The costs associated with a public consultation and analysis of the results will be met from within existing revenue resources.

Financial Risks

None arising directly from this report.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

None arising directly from this report.

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

* When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.

None arising directly from this report

Appendices

*Add rows as required to box below

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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Background papers:

*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Full Council minutes, 21 November 2022 (Minute 24 refers).							
Audit and Governance Committee minutes, 16 January 2023 (Minute 60 refers)							

Sign off:

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Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Giles Perritt

Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes

Date agreed: 16/03/2023