



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Moving the date of English Local Government elections to the date of the European Parliamentary elections in 2014

Consultation

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Consultation

1. This consultation seeks views about moving the date of the local elections from 1 May 2014, so that they take place on the same day as the European Parliamentary elections in that year. It invites the views of the public and other interested parties, including local authorities, on whether or not to move the local government elections. Subject to the responses to this consultation, we will consider whether to use the power in section 37A of the Representation of the People Act 1983 to make an order to move the date of the local elections so that they and the European Parliamentary elections take place at the same time and are combined.
2. Elections to the European Parliament will be held in the spring of 2014; under existing legal provisions on 5 – 8 June, unless the Council of the European Union (in effect the Governments of the 27 member states of the European Union acting together) decides otherwise. The Council has proposed moving the date of the 2014 European Parliament elections to 22 – 25 May. The European Parliament will be consulted on this amendment before the Council formally adopts a decision to change the date but in an indicative vote in November 2012, the European Parliament was supportive of such a change. For the United Kingdom all of this would mean European Parliamentary elections on either Thursday 22 May or Thursday 5 June.
3. While we are specifically inviting the views of the consultees listed at Annex A, we welcome comments from any interested groups or individuals. We will have regard to all representations before finally deciding whether to exercise the order-making power changing the local election date in 2014.

Local elections in 2014

4. In 2014 elections are scheduled for 1 May for the 160 principal local authorities in England listed at Annex B and for 5 directly elected mayors (in Hackney, Lewisham, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Watford). There are also a number of elections to parish councils in England scheduled for that date. The Government is minded, subject to this consultation and the approval of Parliament, to move the date of all these elections so that they will be held at the same time as the elections to the European Parliament and combined with those European Parliamentary elections.

The legislation

5. Section 37A of The Representation of the People Act 1983 provides that the Secretary of State, by Order, may change the date of local elections in any year so

that those elections will coincide with a European Parliamentary general election being held in that year. Before making such an Order the Act requires the Secretary of State to consult the Electoral Commission and such other persons as the Secretary of State considers appropriate. The 1983 Act also provides that any such Order may include consequential provision amending other legislation in order to deal with certain practical consequences of moving the election date such as amending the dates for the holding of annual meetings (we are minded to provide that annual meetings should be held in the period beginning four days after the date of the elections and ending on 31 August 2014).

6. For these purposes local elections include elections to principal local authorities, elections of directly elected mayors and elections to parish councils. When these elections are held on the same day as European Parliamentary elections, the polls are combined. In addition provisions included in the Political Parties and Elections Act 2009 provide that the European Parliamentary elections will be held in Great Britain on local government boundaries, administered by the Returning Officers for elections of councillors to local authorities.

Holding elections on the same day

7. It is a fundamental principle that elections must be free and fair, ensuring the free expression of the opinion of the people. Part of complying with this principle is to ensure that elections are accessible and convenient for the voter. It is less convenient for voters to be asked to turn out and vote twice within a period of weeks and hence having elections on the same day supports the fairness of elections.
8. Previous combination of these two sets of polls (in 2004 and 2009) shows that it is more cost effective to run them as a combined poll than two stand-alone elections on different days. By combining the polls we estimate savings on electoral administration of some £10 million. There may also be savings for the political parties in election campaigns being held in combination rather than separately for the local and European Parliamentary elections. And turnout has been seen to increase where this particular combination of polls has taken place in the past.
9. Moreover, if the date of the local elections is not changed to the date of the European elections, then as the timetable for the European Parliamentary elections runs for 25 working days prior to polling day, there would be an overlap in the timetable for that election with the closing stages of the local elections on 1 May. This is all the more so if the European Parliamentary elections are moved to the 22nd of May 2014.

10. There is a risk that this may cause confusion for electors who could receive poll cards and see publicity for the European elections prior to voting in the local elections, and create complexities for administrators who will be required to publish the notice of the election and deal with nominations from candidates for the European elections in the weeks leading up to polling day for the local elections.

11. In summary the benefits of holding the local and European Parliamentary elections in combination on the same day are:

- it will be more convenient for voters to have to visit the polling station once only, meaning that more voters are likely to participate in the election;
- it will result in the election periods for the local and European elections running together and avoid the start of the European election period overlapping with the end of the local election period;
- it will reduce costs incurred by local authorities and central Government in funding the conduct of the polls and for political parties in distributing election material and canvassing voters; and
- those responsible for voter awareness campaigns, particularly the Electoral Commission and local authorities, will be able to concentrate their efforts in increasing awareness of one single election day.

12. However, at times concerns have been raised about combining polls. It has been suggested that holding two or more elections on the same day, particularly where different voting systems are in use for the different elections, has the potential for increased confusion among electors. The risk of confusion is greater, the greater the number of polls being held on the day concerned. It is recognised that if there is a single day for local and European Parliamentary elections there could be in some areas at least 3 polls (to the European Parliament, principal local authorities and to parish councils) to which might be added a poll for a Council Tax referendum¹ and a poll for a local referendum of another type.

13. Practical issues relating to the administration of the elections can arise when they take place on the same day. Administration may be more complex; Returning Officers will still have to conduct more than one ballot and undertake more than one count. We also need to consider the practicalities such as counting arrangements, Returning Officers' responsibilities, funding arrangements and information for voters. However, in previous years such combination has been sought by interested groups including those running the polls and the conduct of combined elections has been successfully undertaken.

¹ Under powers granted in the Localism Act the Secretary of State may move Council tax referendums from May to another date by Order.

Views sought

14. We would welcome your views on the following questions:

- **Do you consider that Government should seek to move the date of elections to principal local authorities in 2014, including elections of directly elected mayors, from 1 May so that they are held on the same day as, and in combination with, the European Parliamentary elections?**
- **If we change the date for those elections should we also move the date of parish council elections where they are scheduled to take place on 1 May 2014?**
- **If we change the date of elections to principal authorities, should we also move the date of any council tax referendums where they are scheduled to take place on 1 May 2014?**
- **What practical issues do you foresee in combining effectively local elections with the European Parliamentary elections?**
- **What practical issues do you foresee in combining effectively local elections with any referendums?**
- **What action do you think should be taken to address these practical issues (whether by local authorities, Government or the Electoral Commission)?**

Timetable

15. The timetable to make the necessary changes to achieve the date change is dependent on securing Parliament's approval to the necessary secondary legislation.

16. If we are to make an order moving the date of the local elections in 2014, such an order must be made by the end of October 2013. If following the consideration of the results of this consultation we were to change the date of the local elections, we would lay an order moving the date of the elections before Parliament not later than June 2013.

Confidentiality and data protection

17. Any responses to this consultation may be made public. If you do not want all or part of your response or name made public, please state this clearly in the response. Any confidentiality disclaimer that may be generated by your

organisation's IT system or included as a general statement in your fax cover sheet will be taken to apply only to information in your response for which confidentiality has been specifically requested.

18. Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure in accordance with the access to information regimes (these are primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004). If you want other information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, there is a statutory Code of Practice with which public authorities must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence.
19. In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. The Department will process your personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and in the majority of circumstances this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties

Responding to this consultation

20. All responses to this consultation should be sent to arrive no later than 13 May 2013 to:

E-mail: maggie.crosby@communities.gsi.gov.uk

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Annex A

Consultees

The consultation is specifically addressed to those listed below; in addition the consultation paper is available on the web, and comments from all are welcomed.

The Electoral Commission

Local authorities in England
The Local Government Association
The National Association of Local Councils

National political parties with representatives in the European Parliament and Local Government

Confederation of British Industry
Institute of Directors

Association of Electoral Administrators
Society of Local Authority Chief Executives
Society of Local Council Clerks
Association of Chief Police Officers
Chief Fire Officers Association

Annex B

Elections to principal councils in 2014

Councils shown in bold are likely to hold whole council elections in 2014 to introduce revised electoral arrangements (changes to the number of councillors and the names and boundaries of wards)

Shire (two-tier) district councils electing by thirds

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Amber Valley | 35. Newcastle-under-Lyme |
| 2. Basildon | 36. North Hertfordshire |
| 3. Basingstoke and Deane | 37. Norwich |
| 4. Bassetlaw | 38. Pendle |
| 5. Brentwood | 39. Preston |
| 6. Broxbourne | 40. Purbeck |
| 7. Burnley | 41. Redditch |
| 8. Cambridge | 42. Reigate and Banstead |
| 9. Cannock Chase | 43. Rochford |
| 10. Carlisle | 44. Rossendale |
| 11. Castle Point | 45. Rugby |
| 12. Cherwell | 46. Runnymede |
| 13. Chorley | 47. Rushmoor |
| 14. Colchester | 48. St Albans |
| 15. Craven | 49. South Cambridgeshire |
| 16. Crawley | 50. South Lakeland |
| 17. Daventry | 51. Stevenage |
| 18. Eastleigh | 52. Stratford-on-Avon |
| 19. Elmbridge | 53. Stroud |
| 20. Epping Forest | 54. Tamworth |
| 21. Exeter | 55. Tandridge |
| 22. Gloucester | 56. Three Rivers |
| 23. Great Yarmouth | 57. Tunbridge Wells |
| 24. Harlow | 58. Watford |
| 25. Harrogate | 59. Welwyn Hatfield |
| 26. Hart | 60. West Lancashire |
| 27. Havant | 61. West Oxfordshire |
| 28. Hertsmere | 62. Weymouth and Portland |
| 29. Huntingdonshire | 63. Winchester |
| 30. Hyndburn | 64. Woking |
| 31. Ipswich | 65. Worcester |
| 32. Lincoln | 66. Worthing |
| 33. Maidstone | 67. Wyre Forest |
| 34. Mole Valley | |

Unitary (single-tier) district councils electing by thirds

1. Blackburn with Darwen
2. Derby
3. Halton
4. Hartlepool
5. Hull
6. **Milton Keynes**
7. North East Lincolnshire
8. Peterborough
9. Plymouth
10. Portsmouth
11. Reading
12. **Slough**
13. Southampton
14. Southend on Sea
15. Swindon
16. Thurrock
17. Warrington
18. Wokingham

Shire (two-tier) district councils electing by halves

1. Adur
2. Cheltenham
3. Fareham
4. Gosport
5. Hastings
6. Nuneaton and Bedworth
7. Oxford

Metropolitan district councils electing by thirds

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Barnsley | 19. Rochdale |
| 2. Birmingham | 20. Rotherham |
| 3. Bolton | 21. Salford |
| 4. Bradford | 22. Sandwell |
| 5. Bury | 23. Sefton |
| 6. Calderdale | 24. Sheffield |
| 7. Coventry | 25. Solihull |
| 8. Doncaster | 26. South Tyneside |
| 9. Dudley | 27. St Helens |
| 10. Gateshead | 28. Stockport |
| 11. Kirklees | 29. Sunderland |
| 12. Knowsley | 30. Tameside |
| 13. Leeds | 31. Trafford |
| 14. Liverpool | 32. Wakefield |
| 15. Manchester | 33. Walsall |
| 16. Newcastle Upon Tyne | 34. Wigan |
| 17. North Tyneside | 35. Wirral |
| 18. Oldham | 36. Wolverhampton |

London Boroughs electing by whole council

1. Barking & Dagenham
2. Barnet
3. Bexley
4. Brent
5. Bromley
6. Camden
7. Croydon
8. Ealing
9. Enfield
10. Greenwich
- 11. Hackney**
12. Hammersmith & Fulham
13. Haringey
14. Harrow
15. Havering
16. Hillingdon
17. Hounslow
18. Islington
- 19. Kensington & Chelsea**
20. Kingston Upon Thames
21. Lambeth
22. Lewisham
23. Merton
24. Newham
25. Redbridge
26. Richmond Upon Thames
27. Southwark
28. Sutton
- 29. Tower Hamlets**
30. Waltham Forest
31. Wandsworth
32. Westminster

London boroughs holding elections for the directly elected mayor

1. Hackney
2. Lewisham
3. Newham
4. Tower Hamlets

Shire (two-tier) district councils holding elections for the directly elected mayor

1. Watford