

Whole Council Elections Consultation: Summary of Results and Analysis

59%

Of respondents favoured whole council elections

41%

Of respondents favoured election by thirds

433

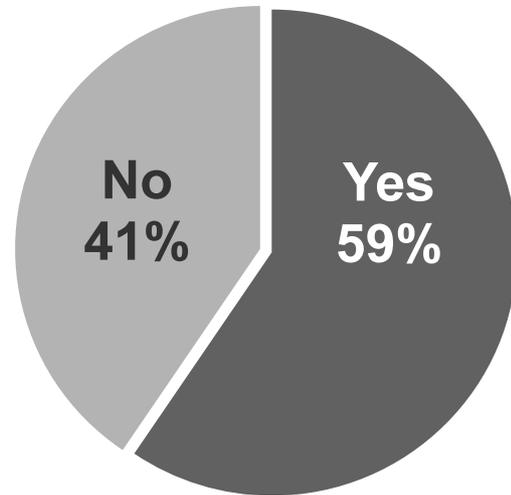
Total number of respondents to consultation

390

Number of respondents that live in Brentwood

308

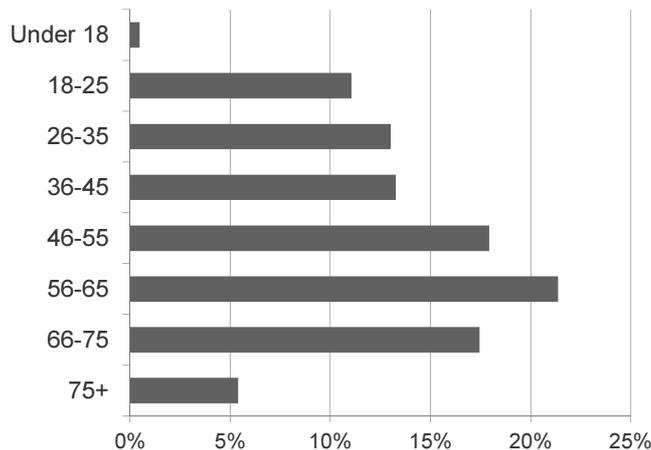
Number of respondents that voted in the most recent Borough election



election were in favour of changing the way in which Borough Councillors were elected.

73% of respondents who **did not vote** in the last Borough election were in favour of changing the way in which Borough Councillors were elected.

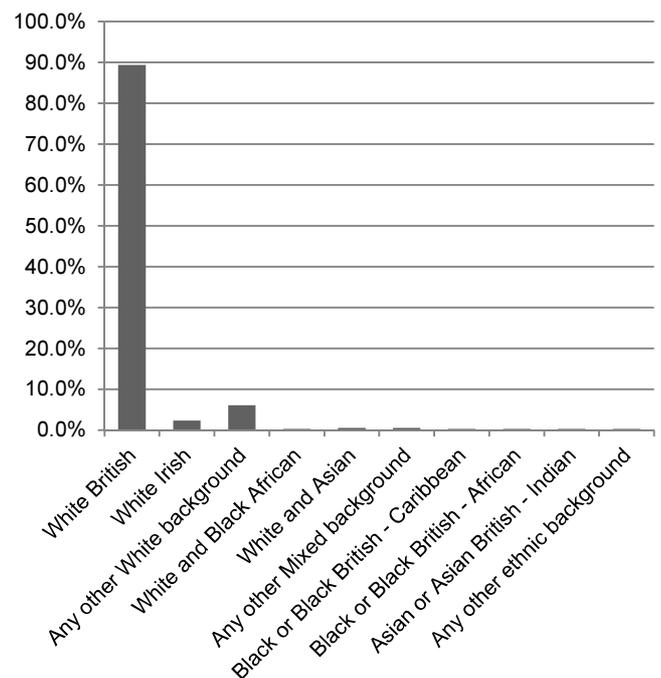
Age Profile of respondents



76% of respondents under 35 voted in favour of changing to whole council elections

62% of respondents between 36-65 voted in favour of changing to whole council elections

40% of respondents over 65 voted in favour of changing to whole council elections



Whole Council Elections Consultation: Methodology

The consultation method for Brentwood was the creation of an online consultation form using existing skills and resources. The consultation period was six weeks, from 24 October to 8 December 2014.

The consultation form included both quantitative and qualitative questions.

Interested parties were selected from the Council's list of outside organisations in line with best practice elsewhere. Interested parties were contacted by letter and two follow up e-mails were sent. Posters were placed around the town centre and in libraries. The consultation was promoted on social media and in the local press including the Gazette, Brentwood Weekly News and PhoenixFM.

Paper copies of the consultation form were made available in reception at the Town Hall and on request. A new consultation email list was utilised to directly contact over 200 people with information regarding the consultation.

Overall, 303 respondents used the online form (whether this was accessed directly from brentwood.gov.uk or through the link given in the consultation e-mail). 130 respondents gave their answers using a paper form.

Whole Council Elections Consultation: Summary of Comments made by Respondents

Over 80 comments were received on the consultation forms. Many comments were similar and repeated comments made by others. The table below quotes specific respondents in a balanced way.

Broadly in favour of retaining a scheme of election by thirds	Broadly in favour of changing to whole council elections
<p>“Current system encourages ongoing engagement with the electoral process and allows for the injection of fresh blood without waiting four years. A number of our current councillors have benefited from being able to run the year after losing an election.”</p>	<p>“Stability is needed to provide a decent term for the leading party/coalition to execute their plans. The fine balance of Brentwood Borough Council is an indicator of how volatile things will be under the present regime...This is suboptimal for all involved - whoever is leading the council should have the ability to do so for a decent term.”</p>
<p>“Keep the system as it is. With the narrow majority of the present administration it would be unfair to have four years of control with such a slim margin of one or two seats.”</p>	<p>“The current nature of elections also do not allow the electorate to simply throw out a council that is performing miserably, instead having to wait several years, incrementally voting out the underperforming members over three (or more) election cycles.”</p>
<p>“I have seen the Essex county councillors do what they feel because an election is 4 years later. I believe an election by thirds is the most democratic in a multi-member ward system.”</p>	<p>“As practised in Lincoln. Saves money, allows councillors to work for the community rather than canvassing every year for one another. Gives stability to the council. Very much in favour of this change.”</p>
<p>“This proposed change risks poorer quality Councillors and discourages those elected being held regularly enough to account. I also strongly believe that it is a threat to the already worryingly low participation in politics. I vehemently oppose.”</p>	<p>“London Boroughs use this system successfully and it provides stability for a four year period enabling the Administration to implement its policies without continual change. It would also relieve the electorate from the tiresome petty politicking every year!”</p>
<p>“Better for democracy to retain the present system, increases accountability and keeps councillors on their toes and in touch with their wards.”</p>	<p>“The proposed change has more benefits than the one existing basis. As a former school governor I was never happy that the school had to close for an extra day every year to accommodate the polling station.”</p>
<p>“Continuity of experience is needed. Whole council elections run the risk of having too many new councillors at the same time. There is also the risk of some particular issue influencing voters at a particular moment in time and thus effecting a political change. Over a period of time such influence might be tempered by other issues...”</p>	<p>“I believe a change to whole council elections would help a council pursue its policies and allow the electorate more time to see these policies take effect without hinderance of annual change. Also there would be the benefit of financial savings which can be spent on public spending. It would of course also bring elections more in line with Parliament saving potential confusion with so many elections.”</p>
<p>“National political allegiances have no place in local government. Local issues need to be regularly updated to reflect local needs and the current system gives opportunity to make changes much earlier.”</p>	<p>“The saving envisaged is substantial but my preferred choice would be election of half the Council every two years. Localism is different from national politics and voters may feel that a 4yr mandate is just a little too long (as I do).”</p>
<p>“The gradual change of councillors means there is less disruption to on-going policies and enables new Councillors to learn how to get things done...The wholesale change of the Council complexion for a four year term prevents the electorate ‘speaking through the ballot box’ and whereas a four year system might prove less costly, one has to ask - what price democracy? The by-thirds system also avoids any Councillor who loses their seat having to wait four years before re-standing.”</p>	<p>“It would bring the election in line with other elections and would also save money. I found the current system confusing at the last election as some councillors remained in their elected term. It did not allow for each party's mandate to be examined as a whole. The proposed new system would allow this and allow the electorate to make a better informed judgement in electing councillors.”</p>
<p>“Whole council elections will just allow councillors more time to be unaccountable and make self-serving decisions without consulting/considering the electorate.”</p>	<p>“The ward sizes are uneven—please solve this first! Having to vote three times on the same ballot paper is overly confusing.”</p>
<p>“Fiscal savings from elections should not be a consideration in the way democracy works. This is just one of the costs of a free society.”</p>	<p>“On balance I think the additional cost of one third elections is offset by the opportunity to change the complexion of the Council more frequently.”</p>

Whole Council Elections Consultation: Summary of Response from Interested Parties

Parish Councils	
Blackmore, Hook End & Wyatts Green	Declined to provide a comment.
Doddinghurst	No response received.
Herongate & Ingrave	Declined to provide a comment.
Ingatestone & Fryening	"The turnover is better [under the current system] as there are always plenty of councillors around to help the new members."
Kelvedon Hatch	"[We are] strongly in favour of retaining the current system of one third elections each year of a four year cycle. The main thrust being that this presents a better system of accountability than [whole council elections]."
Mountnessing	"The majority of the members of Mountnessing Parish Council who have given their views...are in favour of retaining the existing system. There are no members who are in favour of whole council elections."
Navestock	No response received.
Stondon Massey	"They should elect all 37 councillors at one election. It will reflect the mood of the borough at one point in time."
West Horndon	Declined to provide a comment.
Bordering Councils	
Chelmsford Council	"This will both save money and stop the short-termism that thirds encourages."
Basildon Council	No response received.
Thurrock Council	No response received.
Epping Forest Council	"The only point that I would make to your Council is that there are no occasions when this Council undertakes electoral work for Brentwood Borough as any overlap falls to Brentwood to administer. This will be the case in May 2015 when...the western section of our district...will also be administered by your (Acting) Returning Officer."
Havering Council	Declined to provide a comment.
Political Parties in Brentwood	
Labour	"The local party membership do not believe the advantages outweigh the disadvantages for the proposal in its current form. It is the Brentwood and Ongar Labour Constituency Party's belief that the inconsistencies in the ward population size and number of councillors per ward needs to be addressed before any change to the democratic system is progressed. If and when these changes were made the party would reconsider its position."
UKIP	No response received.
Brentwood First	"A stronger Council of any political colour or none, with the confidence to govern for four years and deliver a clear set of policies as well as bringing the Council more in line with every other form of Government in the UK is both pragmatic and sensible with a huge cost saving which can ensure money is invested in our Borough and residents"
Green	"We have mixed feelings about it. Obviously it would save money but some people prefer annual elections and turnout doesn't seem to be much different...we are undecided."
Liberal Democrats	"We are in favour of 'all up' elections."
Conservatives	"We do not support the suggested change to whole council elections."
Members of European Parliament (East of England), Member of Parliament for Brentwood and Ongar and the Police and Crime Commissioner	
Received the consultation letter.	

Outside Organisations

34 *Outside Organisations*, as listed in the Brentwood Borough Council Handbook 2014/15, received the consultation letter. Responses were received from the following:

Brentwood Access Group	Declined to provide a comment.
Brentwood Arts Council	"We are in complete agreement that it would not be appropriate for us as an organisation to have a view on the content of the Consultation documents."
Trustees of Headley Common	Declined to provide a comment.
Federation of Small Business	"The FSB is a non partisan organisation and such does not consult on constitutional matters...however item 1.1 in your report [estimates] savings of £138,000 to £195,000... We would of course be delighted to be involved in discussions at a later date that would deploy some of this saving to supporting businesses in Brentwood."