

COUNCIL

14 OCTOBER 2009

Present :- Councillor Henry Spyvee (Chairman)
Councillor Sonia Lewis (Mayor)
Councillor Helen Chuah (Deputy Mayor)
Councillors Christopher Arnold, Nick Barlow,
Lyn Barton, Kevin Bentley, Mary Blandon,
Elizabeth Blundell, John Bouckley, Nigel Chapman,
Peter Chillingworth, Barrie Cook, Nick Cope, Mark Cory,
Robert Davidson, Beverly Davies, Tina Dopson,
Andrew Ellis, Margaret Fairley-Crowe, Stephen Ford,
Wyn Foster, Ray Gamble, Christopher Garnett,
Martin Goss, Chris Hall, Mike Hardy, Dave Harris,
Pauline Hazell, Peter Higgins, Theresa Higgins,
Mike Hogg, Martin Hunt (Deputy Leader) , John Jowers,
Margaret Kimberley, Justin Knight, Michael Lilley,
Sue Lissimore, Jackie Maclean, Jon Manning,
Richard Martin, Kim Naish, Nigel Offen,
Beverley Oxford, Gerard Oxford, Philip Oxford,
Gaye Pyman, Ann Quarrie, Lesley Scott-Boutell,
Paul Smith, Terry Sutton, Laura Sykes, Nick Taylor,
Jill Tod, Anne Turrell (Leader of the Council) ,
Dennis Willetts, Julie Young and Tim Young

The meeting was opened with prayers by the Mayor's Chaplain, The Reverend David Harper.

19. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 8 July 2009 were confirmed as a correct record subject to an amendment to minute 14 to reflect the fact that Council had agreed that copies of responses sent to Have Your Say! speakers at the meeting on 8 July 2009 and at future Council meetings would be circulated to all councillors.

20. Have Your Say!

Andy Hamilton addressed the Council pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 6(2). He clarified comments made in an article in the Essex County Standard on 9 October 2009 about the circumstances of a previous complaint he had made. He believed there had been a serious breach of public duty by the Council in the sale of 15 Queen Street. This was an example of how the administration promoted its personal interests at the expense of the community. There had been deliberate obstruction and a disregard for the truth. His request that the sale be suspended to allow further offers with community gain to be considered had been ignored. He had lodged complaints against the Estates Officer and two Councillors and unless a public apology was received by 25 October 2009 he would refer the matter to the Ombudsman.

Councillor Smith, Portfolio Holder for Culture and Diversity responded and stressed that the administration had acted properly in respect of 15 Queen Street. It would have been improper for him to take into account his own preferences as to whom the building should be sold to. He had urged Mr Hamilton to take legal advice before attempting to purchase the property.

21. Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor announced that the Museums Service had won Museum Event of the Year in the Essex Tourist Awards 2009 for the Guardians of the King exhibition. The Mayor offered his congratulations to the museum staff.

The Mayor thanked Birkett Long for their help in the Run for Fun event and also thanked senior officers and their sponsors for the funds raised in the sponsored abseil down the Town Hall.

Details of forthcoming events had been circulated to all Councillors. The Mayor drew particular attention to the Oyster Feast and the Remembrance Day service and urged Councillors to support the Remembrance Say service in particular.

22. Risk Management Strategy

RESOLVED that the recommendation contained in minute 29 of the Cabinet meeting of 9 September 2009 be approved and adopted.

23. Provision of New Cremators for Colchester Crematorium

RESOLVED that the recommendation contained in minute 32 of the Cabinet meeting of 9 September 2009 be approved and adopted.

24. Office of High Steward

RESOLVED that the recommendation contained in minute 14 of the Accounts and Regulatory Committee meeting of 22 September 2009 be approved and adopted.

25. Future Electoral Arrangements

Councillor Turrell introduced a debate on future electoral arrangements, in particular the issue of whether the borough should move to a system of four yearly whole Council elections, rather than elections in thirds. If Council was minded to move to whole

Council elections, a resolution approving this would need to be passed by Council by two thirds of those present and voting at the meeting by 31 December 2010. This would introduce whole council elections in May 2011.

At the end of the debate a straw poll would be held on the question of whether the Council should move to a system of four yearly whole council elections. It was stressed that this was not a formal vote and was not binding in any way, but was a device to allow an assessment of the Council's view on the question.

In the debate, the following arguments were made in favour of moving to whole council elections:-

- Whole council elections would give an administration the chance to deliver the manifesto on which it was elected. The current system of election by thirds encouraged an administration to take a short term view as there was nearly always an election approaching. This encouraged a tendency to focus on day to day issues. Removing this pressure would give an administration the time to take a longer term view and to implement policies that may be unpopular in the short term or require a long lead in time. Whole council elections would also give an administration to develop and learn. There was a sharp learning curve for a new administration and, under election by thirds, as soon as the learning curve was mastered, the administration faced elections again. If the administration changed, the learning curve began again.
- Election by thirds was inefficient. It meant that for at least one month a year (except in the one year in four when there were no elections), Councillors were not fully focused on running the Council. This led to officers working at less than full capacity. This was not in the best interests of the borough.
- Whole council elections would also give the opposition the opportunity and motivation to become an effective opposition. It would remove the temptation to simply hope for a change in administration at the next elections. It would give the opportunity for opposition councillors to develop their skills and role as opposition members, particularly their role in scrutiny which would become more effective. It would give more time to develop alternative policies.
- By encouraging both the administration and opposition to move away from concentrating on short term day to day issues the quality of political debate should improve as should relations between the political groups.
- Whole council elections would be compatible with the new political structures being advocated by the government.
- Whole council elections would lessen electoral fatigue and therefore may increase turn out at borough elections. Under election by thirds, electors were bombarded with political literature, which led to disenchantment.
- There were savings associated with whole council elections, which were approximately three-fifths of the cost of elections by thirds.
- Councillors would continue to engage with their constituents without the incentive of elections. The removal of the pressure of elections would give more time to deal with constituents. There were single member wards in the borough who were effectively on a four yearly cycle.

The following arguments were made against moving to whole council elections:-

- Elections by thirds provided excellent motivation for Councillors to continually engage with their constituents. There was a danger that under whole council elections that councillors would work hard in years one and four, but would “coast” in the middle two years. There was a danger that if councillors failed to engage with their constituents or political debate declined as a result of moving to whole council elections, that support for extremist parties could grow.
- Elections by thirds provided a regular influx of new blood to the Council which brought new ideas and fresh approaches. It also provided opportunities for high quality councillors who lost their seats to seek re-election quickly. Under whole council elections the Council would lose their expertise and knowledge for a minimum of four years, which was not in the best interests of the borough.
- Whole council elections would disenfranchise newcomers to a ward who would have to wait considerably longer to elect a representative than they would under elections by thirds.
- Whole council elections could lead to a party assuming control of the council for an extended period which was only temporarily popular at the time of the elections
- Whole council elections could lead to dramatic swings in results, rather than the more incremental changes delivered under elections by thirds. Also elections by thirds gave an opportunity for extreme swings caused by national events to be rectified locally more quickly.
- Under the current electoral system only a very small swing was required for a party to gain control of the Council. Such a small swing was not sufficient mandate to gain control for a period as long as four years. Therefore, whole council elections could only be supported in conjunction with electoral reform.
- Political parties may have difficulty finding sufficient candidates to contest each seat.
- The savings delivered by whole council elections were noted, but this was too important an issue to be resolved on the basis of cost.

In addition, the following points were also made:-

- A referendum should be held to allow the people of the borough to decide whether to move to whole council elections. This could be conducted alongside the borough elections in 2010.
- Support for a referendum was not universal. There were concerns in particular about the legitimacy of the result if there was a low turnout.
- Whether there was any merit in compulsory voting, if the Council moved to a system of whole council elections.

A summary of the comments made by individual members is at Appendix A.

A informal vote and non-binding vote was taken on whether the Council should move to four yearly whole council elections, the result of which was FORTY voted FOR, SIXTEEN voted AGAINST, TWO ABSTAINED from voting.

A further informal and non-binding vote was taken on whether a referendum should be held on the issue of whether the Council should move to whole council elections the results of which were THIRTY FOUR voted FOR, ONE voted AGAINST and TWENTY

THREE ABSTAINED from voting.

26. Suspension of Council Procedure Rules

RESOLVED that Council Procedure Rule 11(2) be suspended to permit the following motion to be discussed and debated at this meeting.

Councillor Tina Dopson (in respect of her employment by Essex County Council) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

Councillor Dave Harris (in respect of his past membership of the governing body of Thomas Lord Audley school) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

Councillor Lyn Barton, Councillor Kevin Bentley, Councillor Theresa Higgins, Councillor John Jowers, Councillor Anne Turrell and Councillor Julie Young (in respect of their membership of Essex County Council) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

Councillor Peter Higgins and Councillor Tim Young (in respect of their spouses' membership of Essex County Council) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

Councillor Gaye Pyman (in respect of her spouse's membership of the governing body of Philip Morant School) declared a personal interest in the following item which is also a prejudicial interest pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(10) and left the meeting during its consideration and determination.

Councillor Nick Cope (in respect of his long standing campaigning against the extension of Norman Way and the loss of open space that would result from such an extension) declared a personal interest in the following item which is also a prejudicial interest pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(10) Councillor Cope made representations in accordance with paragraph 12(2) of the Code of Conduct for Members and then left the meeting during the Council's consideration and determination of the item.

Councillor Martin Hunt (in respect of his long standing campaigning against the extension of Norman Way and the loss of open space that would result from such an extension) declared a personal interest in the following item which is also a prejudicial interest pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(10) Councillor Hunt made representations in accordance with paragraph 12(2) of

the Code of Conduct for Members and then left the meeting during the Council's consideration and determination of the item.

27. Notices of Motion pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 11// Resolution informing Cabinet of the view of Council on the Schools Investment Programme

Essex County Councillor Jeremy Lucas addressed the Council pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 6(2). He argued that for the sake of current infant and junior school pupils in Colchester, nothing should be done to compromise the promised funding. He was working behind the scenes to try and secure secondary education provision in South Colchester and it was likely that a vocational college would be established in South Colchester. He did not understand why such a major project should be so dependent on a local issue. The proposed road would not solve the problems of traffic and parking during the school day and the open land in question did add to the quality of life in the area. However, after considerable thought he had concluded that the road should be allowed as the remaining green space would be donated to Fields in Trust; the road verges would be planted with semi-mature trees which would give it an "avenue feel" and because recently an ambulance had had difficulty accessing the Philip Morant site which highlighted the need for a better road access.

Mr Loxley addressed the Council pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 6(2). He presented the results of a survey undertaken by the Liberal Democrats in Prettygate which had shown that those who were in favour of the new road access, only supported it because of the proposed expansion of the school, which the majority opposed in any case. 96% of the responses to Essex County Council's consultation had opposed the expansion and the County Council should be invited to reconsider its decision. The Council should not tie itself to any decision which would result in the loss of valuable green space. There was no justification for a new access road on the basis of access for emergency vehicles. This was an issue about obstruction of existing roads which could be resolved in other ways.

Mr Quince addressed the Council pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 6(2) and stated that the £130 million investment in schools in Colchester must be welcomed. It would play a huge part in rebuilding schools and ensure the best opportunities for the children of Colchester. He was shocked that anything might be done to hinder this investment. The decision to close Thomas Lord Audley and Alderman Blaxill schools had been taken and it was misleading to suggest that they would not close if the road did not go ahead.

Mr Kennedy, Chair of the Irvine Road Area Residents Association addressed the Council pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 6(2). This was a non-political organisation who were working to improve the environmental amenity of the area. The road would be built on part of a designated open space which was part of a safe access route to three schools. It was a valuable amenity area for local residents and was particularly heavily used by dog walkers. It also provided safe routes for local wildlife. The provision of the road was not pivotal to the success of the schools

reorganisation. It was being used to deflect other arguments against the reorganisation. Philip Morant had been able to expand and develop in the past without such a road and the solution was to reduce traffic to the school.

Councillor Cope addressed the Council in accordance with Paragraph 12(2) of the Code of Conduct for Members. He expressed his frustration that campaigning for local residents had compromised his ability to represent those views in Council. He explained that the new road access to Philip Morant was opposed by residents in Irvine Road. It was also opposed by the Poets Corner Residents Association and he had also received a petition from residents in Audley Road against the road. If proceeded with, the new access would lead to a loss of open space, increased pollution and traffic congestion on local roads and the loss of safe routes to local schools.

Councillor Hunt addressed the Council in accordance with Paragraph 12(2) of the Code of Conduct for Members. He was pleased to note that Philip Morant had now applied to the Council to have the land transferred to them as this meant this was no longer an abstract debate. He questioned whether the road was needed and whilst he noted that it was now claimed that the school reorganisation was dependent on the road, it was not mentioned in the consultation paper and this was contrary to comments made by Lord Hanningfield in public meetings. The motion that Council was being invited to approve was being introduced at the bidding of Lord Hanningfield.

It was PROPOSED by Councillor Bentley that:-

“Council welcomes and supports the £130 million Government investment into education in Colchester, which will benefit all school children throughout the Borough. The “Building Schools for the Future” funding will enable an extensive refurbishment and rebuild programme in order to provide a modern learning environment for our young people.

Council believes that nothing should be done, or left undone, which would impede or hinder this investment and that Colchester Borough Council should fully cooperate with Essex County Council to help secure this multi million pound investment.

Council supports the need of Philip Morant School to improve the road access to its premises as part of the investment into that school, for which planning permission has already been granted by this Council. These improvements should be expedited by means of the Cabinet cooperating fully with the appropriate authorities to enable the land to be made available for the building of the access road.

This to be agreed by Cabinet at its next meeting on 21 October 2009 and be carried out as expeditiously as possible.”

A MAIN AMENDMENT was moved by Councillor Barton, subject to an alteration, as follows:-

“The Motion concerning the view of Council on the schools investment programme be approved and adopted subject to the following amendments:-

- (i) In paragraph 1:-

- In the first sentence the deletion of the words “£130 million” and their replacement with the words “possible substantial”; the deletion of the word “will” and its replacement with the word “should”; the deletion of the word “all” and its replacement with the word “most” and the following additional words to be inserted at the end of sentence:

“and in order for this benefit to be felt fully urges Essex County Council’s Cabinet, even at this late stage, to change its decision to close Thomas Lord Audley and Alderman Blaxill schools, both of which are on an improving curve.”

- In the second sentence the insertion of the words “ This Council recognises that” at the start of the sentence; the insertion of the words “to take place at schools who choose to be included” between the words “refurbishment programme” and the words “in order to provide” and the following additional words to be inserted at the end of the sentence:-

“such as the facilities which will be offered at the newly built school on the Charles Lucas site which council fully supports.”

(ii) In paragraph 2:-

- The insertion of the words “subject to legal, administrative and financial requirements” between the words “believes that” and the words “nothing should be done” and the insertion of the words “on matters over which Essex County Council has control” between the words “Essex County Council” and “to help secure”.

(iii) The deletion of the wording at paragraph 3 and its replacement with the following wording:-

“Having received a formal request for a lease or purchase of Colchester Borough Council open space, the council will in the normal way of conducting council business, assess whether there is a need for Philip Morant School to improve the road access to its premises by enacting the planning permission which has rested with the governing board of that school for the last 10 years; will discuss and reach financial terms with the school governors for a possible lease to be offered; and will carry out the public consultation required by law when disposing of public open space should such disposal be contemplated. “

(iv) The deletion of the word “agreed” and its replacement with the word “discussed” and the deletion of the words after the word “Cabinet” and the insertion of the following words “next Wednesday” “

The MAIN AMENDMENT was LOST (TWENTY ONE voted FOR, TWENTY EIGHT voted AGAINST and SIX ABSTAINED from voting).

A named vote having been requested pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 15(2), the voting was as follows:-

Those who voted FOR were:-

Councillors Barlow, Barton, Blandon, Chuah, Cook, Cory, Gamble, Goss, Hall, Harris, P. Higgins, T. Higgins, Hogg, Knight, Manning, Naish, Offen, Scott-Boutell, Smith, Sykes and Turrell.

Those who voted AGAINST were

Councillors Arnold, Bentley, Blundell, Bouckley, Chapman, Chillingworth, Davidson, Davies, Ellis, Fairley-Crowe, Foster, Garnett, Hardy, Hazell, Jowers, Kimberley, Lissimore, Maclean, Martin, B. Oxford, G. Oxford, P. Oxford, Quarrie, Sutton, Taylor, Tod, Willetts and the Deputy Mayor (Councillor Lewis).

Those who ABSTAINED from voting were:-

The Mayor (Councillor Spyvee), Councillors Dopson, Ford, Lilley, J. Young and T. Young.

Councillor Scott-Boutell left the meeting at this point.

The MOTION was thereupon put and CARRIED (THIRTY TWO voted FOR and TWENTY-TWO ABSTAINED from voting).

A named vote having been requested pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 15(2), the voting was as follows:-

Those who voted FOR were:-

Councillors Arnold, Bentley, Blundell, Bouckley, Chapman, Chillingworth, Davidson, Davies, Dopson, Ellis, Fairley-Crowe, Ford, Foster, Garnett, Hardy, Hazell, Jowers, Kimberley, Lilley, Lissimore, Maclean, Martin, B. Oxford, G. Oxford, P. Oxford, Quarrie, Sutton, Taylor, Tod, Willetts, J. Young and T. Young.

Those who ABSTAINED from voting were:-

The Mayor (Councillor Spyvee), The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Lewis), Councillors Barlow, Barton, Blandon, Chuah, Cook, Cory, Gamble, Goss, Hall, Harris, P. Higgins, T. Higgins, Hogg, Knight, Manning, Naish, Offen, Smith, Sykes and Turrell.

28. Questions to Cabinet Members and Chairmen pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 10

In view of the late hour it was *RESOLVED* that the questions to Portfolio Holders and Chairman be cancelled and written responses be sent to the pre-notified questions.

29. Schedules of Decisions taken by Portfolio Holders

It was *RESOLVED* that the schedules of Portfolio Holder decisions for the period 25 June 2009 – 2 October 2009 be noted.

30. Appendix A

Councillor Bentley supported the principle of whole council elections as they would give an administration the opportunity to fulfil the programme it was elected on. Under the present system, a new administration inherits the outgoing administration's budget, and then only has approximately eight months to govern before it has to start preparing for elections again. This lessens the time an administration has to put its ideas into practice. It would also give the opposition more time to prepare well thought out and consistent policies. Overall whole council elections would bring far greater stability to local politics in Colchester.

Councillor Jowers noted that if the Council did move to whole council elections then a number of Councillors would need to go through two elections in two years. Overall, though, there were massive benefits from whole council elections. Elections by thirds promoted short term solutions, as an administration would only have eight months in power before it began to concentrate on elections again. He had experience of both systems and felt four yearly elections enabled an administration to take a longer term view and get more done. It also enabled a better relationship with the opposition to develop and gave the public a break from constant campaigning.

Councillor Hunt indicated that whilst he understood the compelling arguments in favour of whole council elections he was concerned that it may lead to councillors becoming lazy and only seeking to engage residents in pre-and post election years.

Councillor Willetts explained that he had experience of whole council elections both as a County Councillor and a Braintree District councillor. He did not believe that whole council elections led to Councillors failing to communicate and engage with their constituents. He was concerned about the amount of political literature distributed to the electorate as a consequence of the current system. The people of Colchester should be allowed to decide the borough should move to a system of whole council elections.

Councillor Barlow expressed concern that given the current electoral system, only a very small swing was required for a party to gain control of the Council. A party could gain control with a share of the vote as small as 30% and he did not believe that this was a sufficient mandate to gain control of the Council for a four year period.

Councillor Foster argued that the system of election by thirds did not give a new administration time to plan and deliver its policies. There was little point in an administration holding power for just one year. There was a steep learning curve when taking power and as soon as this was mastered, the administration faced elections again which could lead to it being voted out. It was in Colchester's best interests to move to whole council elections.

Councillor T. Young expressed sympathy with the views expressed by Councillor Barlow and argued that there was need for fairer system of electing councillors. He

supported the idea of whole council elections subject to the caveat that it was incumbent on Councillors to ensure that active political debate continued. It was where there was no active political debate amongst mainstream parties that extremist group could gain a foothold.

Councillor Arnold believed that whole council elections would give the opposition the opportunity and the motivation to become an effective opposition. Under the present system there was a temptation for the opposition just to hope that it may regain power within a year, which could be a disincentive to organised and effective opposition. Linked to this, it would give scrutiny a better opportunity to flourish. Whole council elections would also help an administration an opportunity develop and carry through policies that make take more than one year to implement. Whole council elections would also be cheaper and might address issues of low turnout at elections by reducing electoral fatigue.

Councillor Naish expressed concern that under whole council elections the “flavour of the month” may gain control of the Council and then would be able to retain it for a long period. He noted the suggestion that a referendum be held to determine whether the Council should move to whole council elections, but was concerned about the legitimacy of the result if there was a low turnout. If the Council did move to whole council elections, he wondered if there was any merit in some form of compulsory voting.

Councillor G. Oxford argued that whole council elections would allow an administration to work on medium term strategies. If an administration was only in power for one or two years, it was not able to see policies through. He did not believe that Councillors would cease to engage with their constituents if elected for four years, and if they did they would lose their seats.

Councillor Blundell noted that if the Council moved to whole council elections there would a considerable saving to the Council, as the cost of whole council elections was approximately three-fifths of the cost of elections by the thirds. The position of the electoral services staff also needed to taken into account.

Councillor Hogg supported the current system of elections by thirds. He believed this helped keep councillors “on their toes”. He believed there was a real fear that under whole council elections councillors would work hard in years one and four, but would coast in the middle two years. Four yearly elections would disenfranchise newcomers to a ward as they may have to wait considerably longer to elect a representative than they would currently. This was particularly true in wards such as St Annes which had a fairly mobile population. He noted the savings that could be made by moving to whole council elections but this was too important an issue to be decided on the issue of cost.

Councillor Kimberley believed that the arguments for and against whole council elections were finely balanced. There were advantages to the Council in receiving a fresh intake of councillors annually. She did not support compulsory voting. She agreed that the people of Colchester should be allowed to decide whether the Council should move to whole council elections and the issue should be addressed in the Courier.

Councillor Offen argued that voting by thirds meant that Councillors effectively stopped work for one month per year and led to officers working at less than full capacity for that month. This was inefficient and would not be allowed in any other major public body. Whole council elections would allow proper programmes to be delivered and would allow the administration the time and mandate to get on with implementing a programme rather than being deflected by day to day issues. The level of debate would improve and would be less partisan.

Councillor Chapman supported maintaining elections by thirds and endorsed Councillor Hogg's comments. He felt that whole council elections would be of particular benefit for members of the executive, but could be frustrating for backbenchers. Four yearly elections could also lead to dramatic swings in results, rather than the more incremental changes delivered under the current system. Also he believed that political parties may have difficulty finding sufficient candidates to contest each seat.

Councillor Sutton believed that the new political structures with a leader in post for four years was leading the way to whole council elections. The new system would be incompatible with elections by thirds. As a business, the Council should be looking for stability, which four yearly elections would give. Whilst he would miss the annual "dogfight" of elections, the debate over the budget would still provide a forum for this. Whole council elections would allow an effective opposition to develop. Whole council elections would benefit the whole of Colchester and therefore should be supported by Council.

Councillor Hazell supported the principle of whole council elections, which would benefit both residents and council officers. They would give councillors more time to engage with residents, without the pressure of elections looming. The idea of a referendum on the issue was supported. However she did not support the idea of compulsory voting

Councillor Gamble supported the comments of Councillor Hogg and drew attention to the borough elections in 1990 when the national conservative government was very unpopular and a number of good conservative councillors lost their seats. With whole council elections, such councillors would be out of office for four years. Elections by thirds gave an opportunity for such extreme swings caused by national events to be rectified locally more quickly.

Councillor T. Higgins drew attention to the fact that wards within the borough had different numbers of Councillors. Single member wards effectively had four yearly elections already. She explained that in Australia, voting was only compulsory for those that had registered to vote and registering was not compulsory. She agreed that a referendum was a sensible way forward and suggested that this could be held along with the borough elections in 2010.

Councillor Chillingworth supported whole council elections on the ground that it would lead to more efficient ways of working for the Council, as Councillor Offen had explained, and because it would lessen the demands on the electorate, who were called out to vote too often.

Councillor Dopson noted that central government used four to five year terms which allowed it to set out policies and deliver them. Whole council elections for the borough would lead to a stronger administration with the opportunity to deliver a proper programme. It would also deliver a stronger opposition with more effective scrutiny. Decision taking would improve as it would not be so dependent on immediate factors. She was not convinced about the need for a referendum on whole council elections.

Councillor P. Higgins gave further details of the voting system in Australia.

Councillor Turrell explained that from her experience at Essex County Council that whole council elections gave an opposition the time to build more effective arguments against the administration. She did not believe that whole council elections would lead to a failure engage with the electorate: there would also be parish and European elections which would give an opportunity to campaign. She also agreed with the points made about the need for electoral reform. Four yearly elections would give time for an administration to get its policies through and not be governed by short term factors. Under the present system, an administration often had to spend the first six months following the previous administration's policies for the first six months. No sooner had it begun to implement its own policies when it faced election again.