

Explanatory Document: Change to Barnsley Council's Election Cycle

Providing clarity on the shift to whole council elections

Overview of the Change

Barnsley Council has made the decision to move from electing councillors by thirds to whole council elections under Section 34 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. This significant change means:

- Previous system: Barnsley held local elections by thirds, with an election each year for three consecutive years, followed by a year without elections.
- New system: All councillors elected at the same time once every four years, starting 7 May 2026.

This resolution follows a strong public consultation response, with 87% of participants supporting the move. It aims to improve efficiency, stability, and cost-effectiveness in council operations. Two thirds of councillors have voted in favour of this change.

Reasons for the Change

Barnsley Council identified several reasons for the move, including:

- Cost savings: The new system is projected to save approximately £1.2 million over seven years.
- Stability: Whole council elections promote political continuity, supporting long-term projects and governance.
- Alignment: The change aligns Barnsley with most councils in England, as two-thirds already elect by whole council elections.
- Response to policy: The government's English Devolution White Paper supports modernisation of electoral practices.

Key Details

- Next election: The first whole council election will take place on 7 May 2026.
- Legal framework: The change complies with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, which mandates public consultation, a special council meeting, and a two-thirds majority vote.
- Implications: Once implemented, Barnsley Council cannot change its electoral scheme for the next five years.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What are whole council elections?

Whole council elections are when all councillors are elected at the same time, once every four years. This contrasts with the previous system of electing by thirds. Voters will be able to vote for up to three candidates on their ballot paper.

2. Why is Barnsley Council making this change?

The council aims to enhance political stability, achieve significant cost savings, and align its practices with most councils in England.

3. How was the public consulted?

A six-week consultation period from 20 March to 2 May 2025 invited feedback via online submissions and written responses. The consultation was widely publicised through social media, newsletters, and notifications to relevant stakeholders.

4. Will this impact the voting system?

No, the voting system remains unchanged. Councillors will continue to be elected based on the existing electoral framework.

5. Will councillors serve longer terms?

No, councillors will continue to serve four-year terms, as they do now. The change simply alters when elections occur.

6. What are the financial benefits?

The new cycle is expected to save Barnsley Council £1.2 million over seven years. This is achieved by reducing the frequency of elections.

7. When will the first whole council election take place?

The first whole council election under the new system will be held on 7 May 2026.

Contact Information

For further enquiries or to access background papers, please email electoralservices@barnsley.gov.uk.