

## **Vibrant Local Leadership – ODPM Policy Paper February 2005**

### **Extract:**

#### **The Cycle of Local Elections**

49. The current cycle of local elections in England means that councils are elected through a number of different cycles. More than half of all councils hold whole council elections every four years, but others hold elections in two or three years out of four for proportions of the council's seats. This situation is felt by many to be confusing for the public and the Electoral Commission has responded to the Government's invitation to look at this issue by recommending that whole elections are held every four years for all councils, together with a recommendation on how this might be implemented.

50. The Government has carefully considered the Electoral Commission's recommendations and is minded to agree with the principal recommendation to move to whole elections for all English councils, although not necessarily on the same day. Whilst the Government acknowledges the arguments for local.

51. There are several, detailed arguments about how such a system of whole council elections could be introduced. There are, for example, arguments about whether these should be spread over one, two or more separate election days during a four yearly period and whether these would be differentiated by types of authority, or more randomly. The Government plans to hold further discussions with the Electoral Commission and representatives of local government about the desirability and feasibility of any such changes.

#### **The potential benefits of whole elections**

The Government sees a number of benefits accruing from such a move:

- A higher level of public understanding about the system that would, in itself, be an aid to supporting the clarity and visibility of local leadership;
- Equity between electors. Some electors within the same authority area can, at present, have fewer opportunities to vote and influence the overall composition of their council than do their neighbours in a different ward. In areas with partial elections, but no uniform pattern of members per ward, electors may become disaffected when control of the council changes in elections where they have no opportunity to participate;
- Stability. As discussed previously when dealing with the mayoral model, whole elections every four years provide an inherent stability that allows policies to be developed and implemented over a reasonable period that the local electorate can form a judgement on;

- Participation and turnout. The Government accepts that less frequent elections do reduce the number of separate opportunities for people to stand as local representatives or become involved in the local political process. Equally, more frequent elections may tend to dilute public interest in the council. This is particularly the case as election by thirds is often unlikely to offer a clear opportunity for a locality wide judgement on the overall performance of a council and the prospect of a clear shift in control where local people felt that was merited.