

3 Overview findings

3.1 The options

The three options on which the consultation took place were:

- A. Leader of the Council (drawn from the Council) with a 'Cabinet';
- B. Elected Mayor (elected by all voters) with a 'Cabinet';
- C. Elected Mayor (elected by all voters) with a 'Council Manager'.

The consultation paper sets out what each of these options entails, how the options are likely to affect individual voters, why the changes are being considered at all, and why the Council's preferred option is Option A – to have a Leader of Council with a Cabinet (see Appendix 1 for a copy of the consultation paper).

3.2 The headline results

There were some clear messages coming out of the consultation. These were:

- Over 40% of those interviewed considered that Option A would help the Council's decision-making process, in making decisions that:
 - were more efficient and effective (43%);
 - were more clearly accountable (41%);
 - were more in touch with local people (43%);
 - involved them more (41%);
 - helped to represent the county better at regional and national level (39%);
 - got everyone together to work for the good of the county (41%).
- This compares with just under 30% of those interviewed considered that Option B would help the Council's decision-making process, in making decisions that:
 - were more efficient and effective (27%);
 - were more clearly accountable (29%);
 - were more in touch with local people (27%);
 - involved them more (27%);
 - helped to represent the county better at regional and national level (29%);
 - got everyone together to work for the good of the county (27%).

- Just over 10% of those interviewed felt that Option C would help the Council's decision-making process, in making decisions that:
 - were more efficient and effective (11%);
 - were more clearly accountable (11%);
 - were more in touch with local people (10%);
 - involved them more (11%);
 - helped to represent the county better at regional and national level (11%);
 - got everyone together to work for the good of the county (12%).
- About 40% of those interviewed considered that Option A would most encourage them to vote in a local election, while 26% considered Option B would most encourage them and 11% considered that Option C would. A significant number of interviewees (18%) stated that they would not vote were any of these structures to be in place, but it is not clear whether they would vote anyway.
- Overall 58% of those interviewed considered that the Council's existing decision-making system could be improved (although some made the comment that they did not know enough about the current system to give an informed view on this question). Those who supported Option A felt less slightly less strongly about this (57% of them), whereas those who wanted a greater degree of change and supported Options B and C felt more strongly (67% of them).
- In terms of support for the Council's preferred option, those who supported it themselves were (not surprisingly) 100% supportive: of those who would have preferred a different option, 18% preferring Option B would support the Council anyway and 14 % of those preferring Option C would support the Council anyway.
- The reasons given for supporting each option were quite similar. People appeared to be looking for a solution which offered:
 - better options and ideas:
 - more accountability to the public;
 - greater democracy.
- They also appeared to be voting *against* solutions which seemed to offer:
 - change – option A is the closest to the current position;
 - too much power being concentrated in one individual – as in the elected Mayor (although others saw this as a way of getting things done more effectively).
- Approximately 80% of those who had raised an issue with the Council in the previous twelve months had done so with an employee rather than an elected member (12% could not remember whom they had contacted).

3.3 Implications of the headline results

In summary, the implications for the Council of the headline results set out above are:

- Option A – Leader with Cabinet, has clear support over the other two options involving an Elected Mayor, given the current level of knowledge and understanding of the public;
- The choice of option may change when there is greater understanding, as there is a significant number who either feel that they do not have enough information to answer the questions, or who do not feel particularly strongly about any of the options, (ie. a large number of ‘floating voters’);
- The majority of interviewees considered that the Council’s decision-making could be improved, with those who felt this more strongly supporting the more radical options (B and C);
- There is a view that the Elected Mayor would help represent the county better at regional and national level;
- The reasons given for supporting a particular option were similar from all respondents (whichever option they prefer). The difference is therefore in the way that people interpret the features that each options offers. When implementing the preferred option, the Council may need to give consideration to explaining the features that it offers and how these meet the expressed needs of local people;
- Most contact that interviewees currently have with the Council is with officers – this being the case, the role of members in the new structure and how they interface with the public may need to be reconsidered;
- There is some presumption against change, and some evidence that interviewees are voting for Option A because it represents the least degree of change. Again in considering the implementation of the preferred option, this may need to be addressed in terms of how the proposed changes will still meet people’s expressed needs and indeed meet them in an improved way;
- There is a significant proportion of people who do not support Option A, and although some of those have indicated that they would support the Council’s choice anyway, many would not willingly support it. The Council needs to consider how it meets the needs of these people and ‘wins them over’ in implementing its preferred option. (Some aspects of this have been set out above).