

Dear Sir or Madam,

I wish to make a submission on behalf of the Green Party Group of councillors regarding the review of electoral arrangements in Norwich. The 10 Green Party Councillors who make up the official opposition feel that:

- 1) The current number of 39 councillors is appropriate for the nature and duties of the council.
- 2) It is disappointing that, unlike numerous other councils which have run consultations on the issue, Norwich City Council decided not to consult residents on whether they want to retain the status quo (which sees councillors elected by 'thirds') or move to a system of 'all-out' elections.
- 3) The council's decision to retain elections by thirds significantly restricts the options for redrawing the ward boundaries. Switching to all-out elections would leave open the possibility for two-member or single-member wards to be introduced, which might allow wards to better represent communities

I am writing this submission to you today to highlight the Green Party's position that residents should be fully consulted on the electoral arrangements they wish to see for Norwich. The lack of a proper consultation on this matter, of the kind carried out by other councils across the country, before making a decision of this magnitude is deeply troubling for us.

While we believe that a public consultation should be used to guide the decision about frequency of elections, the Green Party Group's own preference is to move to four-yearly all-out elections. Members of the group have become increasingly concerned by the number of constituents complaining about the number of elections and the growth of voter apathy especially towards local elections. Voters in Norwich have had 7 different elections since May 2015 – two general elections, one EU referendum, one Police and Crime Commissioner election, two district council elections and one Norfolk County Council election.

It is important to remember that democracy goes beyond elections – it is also about participation, and that should be available to all citizens every day of the year. My group's view is that annual elections (if county council elections are included) can actually hinder democracy by causing 'election fatigue' among voters, as well as causing most council business to stop for six weeks every year.

Furthermore, introducing all-out elections makes it easier to create wards of different sizes that better represent their respective communities. Currently most wards are made up of multiple, sometimes even completely different communities. My ward of Mancroft, for instance, which largely covers the city centre, is comprised of many communities, some of whom feel far closer to communities in other wards. Beyond the obvious financial savings, 'all out' elections would make it easier to create some one- and two-member wards which correspond more accurately with existing communities, rather than being based on sometimes arbitrary lines, because of the constraints enforced by having to have 13 wards each with three councillors, as is currently the case.

Many other cities and districts have moved over to having their elections every four years, including others in the region, such as Great Yarmouth and South Cambridgeshire. The Green Party Group feels that the people of Norwich would be likely to welcome a similar change here.

It is for these reasons that I urge you to recommend a full consultation be carried out allowing residents to have their say on this issue. Failing that, we consider that the appropriate decision would be to follow the 'direction of travel' that has emerged around the country by moving over to all-out elections starting in 2019.

Yours faithfully,

**Cllr Martin Schmierer**  
Green Party Group Leader  
and Norwich City Councillor for Mancroft Ward