DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE FUTURE ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR PRESTON IN LANCASHIRE

Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE)

February 2017

The Conservative Party
THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY

This submission sets out the Conservative Party’s draft recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the City of Preston.

Members of the elected Conservative Group are:

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Cllr Susan Whittam Cllr Trevor Hart
Cllr David Hammond Cllr Christine Abram
Cllr Stephen Thompson Cllr Daniel Dewhurst
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Cllr Lona Smith Cllr David Walker
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Cllr Roberta Cartwright Cllr Stuart Greenhalgh
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This submission also includes the contributions made by Cllr Thomas Davies who died on 19/11/2016 after submissions were received and compiled.

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I. Number of developments – active and proposed – and the projected increase in constituents (2022) by ward – to be submitted at a later date.

II. Number of complaints received by residents in the North West and Eastern Regions of the City with regards to major developments – to be submitted at a later date.

*Both Appendix’s’ will be submitted when available. A FOI was made to the council to gather this information. The Council were late in supplying this information.
CONSERVATIVE GROUP DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. During the first phase of consultation we received nineteen representations, including all members of the Conservative Group. In light of these representations and evidence available to us, we have reached a preliminary conclusion which we set out in this submission, Draft Conservative Group recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Preston City Council in Lancashire.

2. Our draft recommendations were based on the nineteen representations, the findings of the Cross-Party Boundary Group (CPBG), and the City Council’s Draft Submission, which, we believe, achieved some improvement in electoral equality. Therefore, we second that:

   • Preston City Council should see a significant reduction in the number of councillors, from 57 to 46-49;
   • The council continues to discharge its regulatory functions as described in its own draft submission;

3. However, we submit significant modifications to the City Council’s Draft Submission in a number of areas, using our own proposals. We propose that:

   • Preston City Council’s future housing projections, although positive, should be strengthened to demonstrate the greatest possible increase in housing forecasts; and
   • Elections should move from the current system of ‘thirds’ to ‘fixed all out’ elections every four years.

Draft Recommendation
Preston City Council should comprise 46-49 councillors. The council should move to holding ‘all out’ elections every four years.

4. Our proposals would result in significant improvements in electoral equality across the Council and the City of Preston, which we believe will greatly improve turnout, strengthen accountability, and introduce a sense of electoral fiscal responsibility. In addition, we submit that such proposals would allow the electoral department to investigate other matters relating to elections.
CONSERVATIVE GROUP CONSULTATION

1. The Conservative Group consultation sought to engage members in a dialogue about the future of the Council and its requirements in four key areas:
   - The role and responsibilities of a Councillor;
   - Time dedicated to being / becoming a Councillor;
   - Involvement in the Community; and
   - Governance.

2. The consultation was separated into two phases. Phase one focused on a Councillor’s key responsibilities; time taken to complete constituency case work; methods of interacting with the community; involvement in the community; and committee workload. Phase two centred on the changing nature of Local Governance since the previous boundary review in 2002 and its impact on member’s ability to influence change and the implications of Election Cycles. Has the role of the Council and thus Councillors been restricted or enlarged since the previous boundary review have funding programmes and initiatives locally and nationally, such as the New City Deal or housing legislation, impacted the weight of responsibility on some members? How have election cycles affected members ability to represent constituents.

3. The consultation asked fourteen questions in total and nineteen responses were received. All Conservative members responded to the consultation, highlighting that the future of the Council’s electoral equality is an important issue to a large contingent of Council Members. In the second Cross-Party Boundary Review Group (CPBRG) on 20/11/16, it was noted that the Conservatives were the only functioning group to have submitted representations on behalf of all its membership. Representations were not fully received from all Labour and Liberal members.

   How many years have you been an elected City Councillor?

4. The Conservative Group had a total of nineteen members, ranging in age and experience.

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* This submission includes the contributions made by Cllr Thomas Davies after the preliminary consultation with
5. Out of nineteen members, twelve (sixty-three per cent) have been elected for less than ten years, whilst seven members (thirty-seven per cent) have been elected for more than ten years; six members (thirty-two per cent) have been elected for more than fifteen years; one member has been a councillor for more than twenty-nine years. The table below shows a breakdown of members experience.

6. Table 1.1: *Members experience by percentage (%).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of members elected (%)</th>
<th>Less than 4 years</th>
<th>More than 4 years</th>
<th>More than 10 years</th>
<th>More than 15 years</th>
<th>More than 20 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How many hours per week do you contribute to constituency casework?

7. In terms of **how many hours per week do members dedicate to constituency case work** and **whether the number of councillors per ward is sufficient**, four-fifths of the responses to the consultation indicated a variance in contribution week-by-week to constituency issues.

8. Under the Local Government’s Guide, ‘Becoming a Councillor’, it is indicated that most Councillors input varies between 5 - 20 hours per week. In 2015-16, the Conservative Group contributed a combined total of approx. 234 hours per week on constituency case work; this equates to over 12 hours per member per week (not including commitments to committees or additional involvement in the community; for example, Parish Council meetings). Below, Table 1.2 shows a breakdown in hours contributed by Conservative members to simple casework issues, such as bins, parking, grass cutting et al.
9. Table 1.2: Hours contributed by Conservative members to casework issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Hours per week</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits &amp; Housing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highways &amp; Transport</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensing</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog Fouling, Litter etc.,</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. Further responses to our consultation on ‘time contribution’ also varied considerably depending on the complexity of constituency case work and additional involvement in the community; the following observations were made:

11. Firstly, the majority of responses indicated a significant increase in the hours contributed due to the upsurge in house building in the North West and Eastern regions of the City. A number of members, predominantly those representing Rural North, Rural East, Lea & Cottam and Greyfriars, highlighted the increasingly difficult task of consulting with key stakeholders and constituents whilst maintaining relatively moderate working hours. This is in large due to various reasons, including: the number of developments taking place; the progression [or lack] of such developments; the number of dwellings being built; the increase in the number of constituents as a result of development; enforcement of development conditions; and developers and/or contractors failing to comply with planning permissions and policy which may be of discomfort to local communities and residents.

12. Moreover, responses suggested that the increased number of developments, and their size, broadened the complexity of issues as constituents raised concerns spanning more than one authority; consequently, this means members are having to rely more heavily on council staff / officers across a number of departments and authorities to resolve constituent concerns.
13. Appendix 2 shows the number of developments – active and proposed – and the projected increase in constituents (2022) by ward. Appendix 3 shows the number of complaints received by residents in the North West and Eastern regions of the City with regards to development.

14. Secondly, members pointed toward the local funding programme, ‘The New City Deal’, national and local house building objectives, and countywide infrastructure projects, as long-term factors, which have increased their contributions as constituent concerns are heightened. In particular, members pointed toward the Broughton Bypass and East-West Link Road as projects, which have increased member contributions substantially, as a result of attending meetings, making representations, and liaising with additional community organisations.

15. Finally, it was noted that Preston, as an Authority, has a total of nine parishes, eight of which are located in local government wards currently represented by Conservative members: Grimsargh, Haighton, and Broughton-in-Amounderness in Rural East Ward; Whittingham, Barton, Goosnargh, and Woodplumpton in Rural North Ward; and Lea & Cottam Parish in the same respective ward. All members representing these wards commented on their obligation to attend meetings relating to Parish concerns and have, conventionally, been involved in supporting their respective Parish’s activities.

16. With regards to long-standing community campaigns and commitments, the following additional issues were considered to be of substantial importance and requiring of additional commitment.

17. In Greyfriars, Garrison, Sharoe Green, and College, members pointed toward the Fulwood Leisure Centre as a longstanding commitment given that the Council currently operates the service. It was also noted that the Council had recently announced plans to “tender” the service to potential operators or buyers, which would require an increase in member contributions in order to convey concerns over its future. Likewise, members representing the same wards also commented on the Royal Preston Hospital (RPH) and the support provided by representatives to tackling issues, such as parking and traffic problems, by working with the council and relevant stakeholders. The temporary closure of Chorley A&E department and its impact on RPH was also noted, likewise the closure of the Fulwood Library by Lancashire County Council (LCC) was considered to be a significant undertaking for members to communicate concerns raised by constituents at the appropriate meetings.
18. In Rural East and Rural North, members noted the size of wards and the above average contribution in hours dedicated to the role as a result of travel and additional community organisations. In addition, it was reaffirmed that seven out of nine parishes were located within these two respective wards, resulting in more time being contributed to additional community organisations, such as PACT. Moreover, the adoption of *Grimsargh Wetlands* by Grimsargh Parish Council was considered to be a significant campaign in Rural East and requiring of Councillor support as an initiative of its size was not deemed to have been undertaken by a local community before.

19. In Lea & Cottam, members noted the substantial development currently taking place and the additional support provided to the Preston North End Training Ground, University of Central Lancashire Sport Centre and Cottam Brickworks site. Travel commitments between the three distinct areas: Lea, Lea Town and Cottam was also not without consideration.

20. Finally, it is submitted that Conservative members are facing unprecedented difficulties in constituency case work as the Council looks to make savings predominantly in rural areas. For example, in the previous year the Council has introduced a “Bin Tax” on those with gardens; shifted grass cutting from Preston to Lancashire Council, which has resulted in fewer, inconsistent servicing of green areas; and begun a formal process to see remaining landscape services enforced onto Parish Councils (eight out of nine PC’s are in Conservative Wards).

Members further involvement in the Community

21. In response to the question ‘do you undertake any other involvement in the community, which you would be expected to do as a Councillor?’, all members indicated that they felt obligated to take up an active interest and heavy involvement with community groups or organisations in their respective wards. Below is a breakdown of [Conservative] wards and members’ involvement in those communities:

**College**

22. It was noted that members for College undertake an involvement in: Police & Community Together (PACT); Friends of Highgate Wood Community Organisation; and weekly Surgeries.
Garrison
23. It was noted that members for Garrison undertake an involvement in: Police & Community Together (PACT); and weekly Surgeries.

Greyfriars
24. It was noted that members for Greyfriars undertake an involvement in: Police & Community Together (PACT); the Friends of Conway Park Community Organisation; St John’s Bowling Club; and weekly Surgeries.

Lea
25. It was noted that members for Lea undertake an involvement in: Lea & Cottam Parish Council; Cottam Village Action Group (COVAG), which works to scrutinise local development in the Cottam area; Police & Community Together (PACT); and Cottam Community Association and School Governor Meetings.

Preston Rural East
26. It was noted that members for Preston Rural East undertake an involvement in: Whittingam, Highton, Grimsargh, and Broughton-in-Amounderness Parish Councils; Grimsargh and Broughton Parish Council Neighbourhood Plan Working Parties; and Police & Community Together (PACT).

Preston Rural North
27. It was noted that members for Preston Rural North undertake an involvement in: Whittingam, Goosnargh, Woodplumpton and Barton Parish Councils; NW Stakeholder Liaison Group; two resident associations; School Governor Meetings; and Police & Community Together (PACT) meetings; Whittingam Sport and Social Club

Sharoe Green
28. It was noted that members for Preston Rural North undertake an involvement in: Royal Preston Hospital (RPH); Resident Parking Actions Groups; Police & Community Together (PACT); and weekly Surgeries.

29. The majority of members that responded to the consultation said that the current approach of high-level attendance at public meetings, community groups and organisations, together with an
active involvement in Parish Council activity, increased their hours contributed by 6 hours per month (on average). This number does not take into consideration travel time.

How do members communicate with their constituents?

30. In terms of how members prefer to communicate with their constituents and solve casework, all of the responses to the consultation indicated that the preferred method was through direct communication, as apposed to other forms, such as social media and telephonic communication.

31. Of those that expressed a view a majority felt that direct communication with constituents was the most efficient method in resolving ward issues, liaising with council officers and completing committee work. A number of respondents noted that engagement through direct communication significantly reduced the time taken to resolve casework and was more “personal”, enabling constituents to feel more comfortable when contacting their representative in the future.

32. In terms of direct communication, most responses indicated two preferred modes: face-to-face communication -either through meetings or surgeries- and via an email service provided by the Council. With regards to the former, it was noted that 63 per cent of members routinely held Surgeries in the local community, whilst all members annually conducted a door-to-door consultation and held meetings throughout the year to discuss key issues with constituents and stakeholders in the community. Just over 31 per cent indicated the frequent use of a mobile phone to communicate with constituents; few, however, suggested telephonic communication as a means of completing casework, start to finish.

33. With regards to the latter, a majority suggested that whilst the use of an email service was paramount to enabling constituents to contact representatives and, likewise, representatives to contact Council Officers, it was not considered to be a preferred mode when communicating and/or discussing key issues within the community (“casework”). Instead, respondents argued that the use of an email services was a means to “follow-up” on issues with the relevant council department or to ascertain information after having already discussed matters in person. This was largely, due to members’ experiences of attempting to understand key information from
constituents and to assist in the resolution process as swiftly as possible; it was also considered to be a much clearer mode of communication.

34. Conversely, responses suggested that email was the preferred mode of communication when liaising with Council Officers; this was, however, due to an understanding that officers may be restricted by time and diary commitments whilst members, *vice versa*, may be unable to travel into the Council during working hours. Should officers be more readily available and at short notice, it is widely held that members would opt to liaise face-to-face as apposed to email.

35. Only a very small proportion of those that did respond (11 per cent) indicated that, from time to time, they use social media in a Councillor capacity. Moreover, out of a total of 19 [Conservative] members, only two use social media (including Twitter and Facebook) to communicate with constituents or stakeholders in a Councillor capacity. Interestingly, it was noted that social media was not considered to be a “frequent” mode of communication amongst either “new, younger” members or more “senior” members, dissuading the relationship between age and social media. It was also noted that members were aware of different forms of social media and the training available by the Council.

36. The graph below shows a breakdown of the mode of communication used by members to liaise with constituents in relation to ward issues.
Do members dedicate time to the discharge of the Councils Regulatory functions.

1. With regards to involvement in the discharging of the Council’s Regulatory functions, it was noted that Conservative members sit on the following committees: Planning Committee; Licensing Committee; Licensing Sub Committee; Taxi and Miscellaneous Committee; Audit Committee; Standards Committee; Employment Committee; and the Chief Officer Employment Committee. For a detailed outline of each committee see Preston City Councils submission to the Boundary Commission on Electoral Equality (Chapter: Regulatory, Section 1.7.).

2. Table 2.1 shows a breakdown of primary committees and the number of Conservative members who sit on those committees:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Committee</th>
<th>Number of members</th>
<th>Number of Conservatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning Committee</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensing Committee</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensing Sub Committee</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxi &amp; Miscellaneous Committee</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audit Committee</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards Committee</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Committee</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Officer Employment Committee</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member Development</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steering Group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview and Scrutiny</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. In addition to the eight committees, the council also operates three annual ‘Task & Finish Groups’ which focus on contemporary issues relating to Council business and/or the City in which Conservative members also partake.

4. Out of a total of nineteen members, eighteen members sat on either a committee or a Task & Finish group during 2016-17, demonstrating a strong sense of involvement by councillors in the discharging of the Councils regulatory functions and in the wider contemporary issues relating to the City of Preston. Furthermore, eighty per cent of Conservative members chose to sit on
either two or more committees, whilst twenty-five per cent sat on four or more. With regards to Task & Finish groups, nine members sat during 2016-17, and nine will sit during 2017-2018.

5. In response to the question about **how much time members contribute to committee work** (including Task & Finish Groups) each month, in addition to constituency work and any involvement in the community, the average response indicated an increased hourly commitment of 18 hours per month per Councillor taking into consideration any necessary prior committee reading, research or site visits.

6. Of those representations that were received, no member indicated that at any point there were too few items to discuss during committee meetings, nor were any committees which cancelled meetings consistently.

7. In relation to committee activity, however, we submit that the Council has undergone a significant reduction in regulatory function since the previous boundary review in 2002. In particular, we note that whilst prospective involvement amongst Conservative members remains high on committees, the overall number of committees and the places available has drastically fallen. We note the following committees are no longer operating since the annual meeting of the Council on 16/05/2002: Environment and Sustainability Review Board; Housing and Direct Services Review Board; Regeneration, Community and Leisure Services Review Board; Resources and Performance Review Board; Appeals and Miscellaneous Committee; Appeals and Miscellaneous Sub-Committee; City Centre Working Group; Local Joint staff Consultative Panel; Local Government Modernisation Working Panel; Member Development Steering Group; and the Parish Consultative Forum.

8. In addition, when asked **whether members consider their involvement in the discharge of the councils regulatory function to have changed** since the previous boundary review, those members who have served more than two terms commented upon the drastic reduction of committees available to sit on. Moreover, it was noted that whilst the number of Full Council meetings has stayed the same, and the involvement of the Conservative Group in the Councils discharge of regulatory functions remains high, the overall size of the council –by number of departments and committees- has significantly fallen.
PROJECTED VOTER POPULATION FIGURES

1. With regards to the projected voter population forecast due to be submitted in the Council’s own draft submission, we would like to highlight the position regarding the North West Development Plan which is seeing a significant extension to development within a number of wards including Lea Ward and Preston Rural North Ward. An extensive programme of building new homes is taking place, which will naturally increase the population in these areas. Any changes to the number of Ward Councillors and ward boundaries must take this into consideration if we are to meet the needs of residents. This is presently providing extensive case work as the development progresses and will transfer to individual case work as residents move in.

2. Further, we submit that the Conservative Group reserve the right to review the Councils own forecast (when complete) and monitor changes in projections due to the high volume of applications for planning permission and the substantial number of developments proposed and on going in predominantly Conservative wards.

3. Whilst we recognise that a decision as to future projected population figures needs to be made quickly so a review of boundaries may commence, we would ask the Commission to note such voter projections have not been completed in time for members to comment in this first submission. We were provided with a ‘draft’ forecast, however, this document was inaccurate and demonstrated a large number of mistakes.
ELECTION CYCLE DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There have long been calls to curtail the local Governing Party’s power to hold a local election at a time of his or her choosing for the purpose of seeking a partisan political advantage for himself and his party. Although views are mixed on election cycles, it is well established amongst Conservative and Liberal Groups (two thirds of the political party makeup in Preston), that a move toward ‘all out’ elections every four years would be a welcome development. It is questionable whether a leader, and or the governing party should be able to use their position in local government to give him and his party an electoral advantage by holding the next local election to a schedule that best suits him. We therefore acknowledge the principle behind fixed four yearly elections and submit the recommendation that Preston should make a transition from the current election cycle of ‘thirds’ to ‘all out’ elections. In doing so, we make the following submissions:

2. Firstly, we submit that fixed terms of four years will bring practical advantages to local Government and Council Officers, by giving both a greater degree of predictability and continuity. There would be greater certainty about planning for a local legislative programme, including proper overview and scrutiny of the Council’s political and financial budget, without the inconsistencies that come with elections in ‘thirds’. The inability for political manoeuvring would further lead to a steadier approach to major Council decisions, since breaks in the political calendar will be fewer, and meetings more consistent. The leading Party under a ‘fixed four-yearly’ election cycle won’t have the ability to withhold major, difficult or unpopular decisions until after a yearly election takes place or on a non-election year.

3. Juxtaposed, leadership may be vastly improved as the short-term “fears” over political consequences become less severe; under a fixed four-year election cycle, Constituents and elected members will have the opportunity to demonstrate a level of consistency in decision making, clear legislative programme or voting pattern; under the current ‘thirds’ system, Councillors often fixate on short term political consequence as apposed to providing long-term efficient local services.

4. Secondly, it is submitted that in a period of ‘austerity’ and reduction in Local Government funding, elected representatives should not be immune to the consequences of reduced funding and, where possible, should look inward for reductions in spending. By making a transition from thirds to all out elections, the authority will save an immediate £118,000.00 every alternative year; a saving of £236,000.00 every four years. In addition, we submit a conservative saving to be possible in
additional staffing costs per year as fewer resources are extracted to cope with the election season. The coinciding of local elections with that of Parish, and County, elections will also further present significant savings and more efficient joined up thinking across government. The funding available to Councils, which coincide with General Elections cycles, must also be noted as a positive contributing factor.

5. Furthermore, by coinciding the changing of election cycles with a reduction in the number of elected representatives, the Council can look to save a further £136,000.00 every four years. Cumulatively, this would lead to a total saving of £372,000.000 per election cycle. Table 3.1 demonstrates those savings.

6. Table 3.1: Savings to be made by moving to ‘all out’ elections (based on 48 Councillors)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description (four yearly saving)</th>
<th>Saving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reduction in Councillors</td>
<td>£136,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By moving to ‘all out’ elections</td>
<td>£236,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>£372,000.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Conjointly, the benefit to the local economy is, as so far is possibly known, unchartered yet promising. There is great potential for long-term investment in infrastructure and job creation providing stability is apparent: regular changes of political control, or the prospect, annually, can lead to a lack of stability for local businesses, since changes in council policy toward Housing, Licensing, Business et al., have to capacity to change every 12-months. Indeed, in a City burdened with high unemployment, soaring levels of child poverty and low household income, it is unrealistic to deliver fruitful and beneficial change in the form of investment, employment, and regeneration projects within a thirds election cycle. What’s more, under a fixed all out system, local government would have the ability to set local tax rates (and soon, business rates) for a four-year period, helping local

*Savings have been confirmed by Preston City Council as a result of the 2017 proposed Conservative budget.
residents, particularly those on low income, take more control over their lives, financially. Likewise, it would also pave the way for greater long-term business investment.

8. Third, we raise concerns regarding ‘turnout’ at elections and the dilapidated state of local democracy, leading members to believe we are dangerously close to a tyranny of the minority [thesis], whereby a minority segment of the population has a certain degree of primacy in the Council’s decision making. Not since 2010 has the Council, or a seat, changed hands or been ‘controlled’ by an alternative Party (the ‘swing’ in Deepdale ward in 2016 was a result of retirement, not contest). Indeed, it is submitted that it is impractical and unrealistic for this Council to expect the general public to be as enthused and involved in the democracy of the City of Preston as we, its representatives are; surely greater effort must be made by this Council to make the process of accountability more practical. What’s more, under the current system of thirds, members of the public are reduced to making a long-term decision solely based on the previous 12-months. Under a fixed four-year cycle, constituents will have the opportunity to review local government over a more durable period of time, which will allow them to make an informed decision; Councillors are often judged on the last twelve months, which can be unfair given than all wards are 2-3 members who are elected on a rotating basis.

9. In 2016, no local election attained a turnout higher than 40 per cent, whilst some acquired little more than 20 per cent. Table 3.1 shows the average level of turnout in 2016 in comparison to that of 2015, when both local and General elections took place. As can be seen, on a solely local election year, turnout is, on average, half of what it is on a General Election year. Therefore, it can be said that the concentration of all out elections will mean stronger turnout, which is good for democracy. In addition, each Councillor will have the opportunity to share a similar mandate. Currently, under the thirds system, some Councillors are elected on a General Election year (high turnout) whilst others are elected on a sole local election year; this leads to an intolerable level of electoral equality.

10. Councillor fatigue is also a problem: currently, political parties struggle to incentivise constituents to stand for election, or become elected representatives, due to the difficulties associated with time. Under a thirds system, it is significantly harder to get unfamiliar members elected to the Council as there is more concentration on a single individual, who may not have the preferable level of experience, through time or resource, to contest an election each year until elected. Under all out elections, however, more new members have the opportunity of being elected on a ‘ticket’ system. Equally, younger members are often disillusioned from becoming involved due to the difficulties involved with constant election campaigning. Younger members of the community could be
suggested to have difficulties with ‘commitment’ considering the relatively low allowance scheme offered to elected members, long-term aspirations, living at home, or trying to establish a long-term career. In addition, whilst each member is elected for a four-year term it is expected that a member would support his/her ward colleagues; therefore, breaks in the Council calendar to focus more heavily on other aspirations, are few. Evidence as to the difficulties associated with incentivising new candidates may be demonstrated by how few new members come to be elected on the Council.

11. Moreover, leadership may also be regarded as ‘weakened’ as ‘thirds’ means most of the Council calendar for an elected member is dominated by campaigning. With the addition of holiday seasons (Christmas and Summer) and election seasons (March – May), a third of the Council calendar could be considered to be non-active. If the Council moved toward all out elections, elected Councillors would have significantly more time, over the course of their four-year term, to focus predominantly on constituency or council wide issues as opposed to worrying, politically, about the next election. Furthermore, for a number of years the only political groups to have stood a candidate in every ward have been the Conservatives and Labour and, even in 2016, one Labour candidate was uncontested. The expectation that all major parties contest all 84 local elections, 12 County and 1 General Election seat in a five year period is not realistically practicable.

12. Finally, we submit the rigour of holding elections in thirds means staff are unable to pursue other avenues relating to the elections department. By moving toward all out elections, the authority would have the capacity to research and investigate potential cases of electoral fraud and review electoral best practice; monitor efforts to increase turnout; advance voter registration; and increase the use of postal ballots. They could research new ways to incentivise communities to become involved in local politics and, perhaps, even encourage constituents to become a local Councillor. As it stands, all of these avenues are currently impeded due to a lack of time and resource.

13. Further to the above, it is acutely disappointing to our Group that we have needed to criticise and, more importantly, vote against the Council’s draft submission to the Commission for the process it has chosen to adopt. Whilst we, as a group, strongly support the Council’s submission for a reduction in Councillors, and agree with its report as to discharging the Council’s regulatory functions and future electoral voter calculations, we believe that a review of such legal and constitutional sensitivity should explore every avenue relating to electoral equality, rather than proceed with in haste. It has become apparent that the question of election cycles has not been considered, discussed, or explored.
in any capacity.

14. As noted previously, the Commission's prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Preston is, so far as reasonably practicable and consistent with the statutory criteria, to achieve electoral equality. In doing so, particular attention is paid to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992. The need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the identities and interests of local communities – and Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, which refers to the number of electors per Councillor being “as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough”.

15. In relation to Schedule 11, therefore, our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electoral figures nor the future capacity of the Council, but also on the frequency of election cycles and their “appropriateness” in relation to achieving such electoral equality. We submit that consultation must also have regard to the desirability of ‘thirds’ and to the cost of maintaining current electoral cycles, which might otherwise be positively broken.

16. It is also submitted that it is impractical to redesign an electoral scheme, which promises to provide a more efficient democratic institution but does not consider the most significant component in any given democracy – accountability. The ability for constituents to vote for any given representative, and the frequency in doing so, must surely require a gestation period.
CONCLUSION

1. In conclusion, Conservative members contribute an average monthly total of 40-60 hours per month toward their role as a Conservative Councillor. This figure includes official Councillor meetings, committee meetings, constituency casework and further work in the community, such as community groups.

2. The total monthly total of contributed hours is significantly higher than the Local Governments Guide to ‘Becoming a Councillor’ due to the significant housing development taking place in Conservative wards, the lack of appropriate infrastructure and the implications of multi authority planning conditions, which significantly increase constituent concerns and casework. This contribution will further increase as development is heightened.

3. Constituency concerns have been further raised due to the proposed closure of the Preston Army Barracks, the tendering of Fulwood Leisure Centre, the New City Deal and the Royal Preston Hospital (RPH), as PCC and LCC look to make savings in predominantly rural wards.

4. Conservative members continue to uphold strong attendance at official Council meetings and further sit on Committees and Task & Finish groups, despite a significant reduction in the number available since the previous boundary review.

5. The voter population projections submitted by the authority should reflect the greatest possible increase in housing in NW Preston. Particular consideration should be applied to Preston Rural North, Preston Rural East, and Lea & Cottam wards.

6. Preston City Council did not complete its projected voter population forecast prior to the date of the first submission deadline, which meant that the Conservative Group could not review (in full) its accuracy.

7. The implications of holding elections in ‘thirds’ are impractical and fiscally irresponsible. Significant savings would be made and accountability, turnout and demographic representation increased should the authority moved toward ‘all out, four-year fixed’ elections.
8. A transition toward all out elections, combined with a reduction in the number of councillors, would lead to further savings being made over a four-year period.

**Draft Recommendation**

Preston City Council should comprise 46-49 councillors. The council should move to holding ‘all out’ elections every four years.