



The Electoral Commission

*Local authority governance referendum
question testing*

*Research report
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The Electoral Commission

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1 Executive Summary

This section provides a summary of the research objectives, method, sample and main findings (discussing each element of both the EC and CLG referendum questions).

1.1 Research Objectives

The research objective was to identify any elements of the referendum questions which proved problematic for users in the context of EC question assessment guidelines; to explore the reasons for these problems and to explore possible ways of addressing these problems.

1.2 Research Method and Sample

The research approach was qualitative and comprised:

- **Stage 1: 2 days desk research** by Research Works Limited, analysing findings from referendum question research conducted since 2001;
- **Stage 2: 4 focus group discussions** (1.5 hours duration, 8 respondents);
- **Stage 3: 75 individual face-to-face interviews** conducted in three community hall day venues.

The total sample comprised 107 respondents, all of whom were eligible to vote in local authority governance referendums. The sample excluded those considering campaigning in local referendums in future and anyone fundraising, working or canvassing on behalf of any political party.

The sample achieved a range of: gender, age, socio economic status, ethnic origin, literacy (including those for whom English was a second language),

voting experience, motivation to vote in a referendum and included those with disabilities (including mild learning disabilities).

Respondents discussed CLG's proposed referendum questions, and also alternatives developed by the EC to support discussion.

1.3 Main findings

The factors which broadly influenced responses to the referendum question were: level of knowledge about local authority governance; engagement with local authority governance; and levels of literacy.

Across the sample, there was a widespread lack of understanding of how local councils are organised. For many, answering a question asking for a decision between two options was therefore considered problematic. Respondents routinely requested information about the three different governance options to support their decision-making.

Whilst respondents did not expect the ballot paper to provide this information, many made their decision based on a rudimentary level of understanding gained from the ballot paper. Therefore, many made their decision solely based on whether their choice would constitute 'change' or 'no change' or whether their choice would involve one person (i.e. a mayor or a leader) or many people (i.e. a committee).

Overall, the CLG question was typically perceived as long-winded. The overall length of the question was felt to make the task of completing the ballot paper more difficult, particularly for respondents with learning disabilities and those with English as a second language and lower levels of literacy.

1.3.1 The question opening

The CLG version of the question opening was extremely well received by a majority from across the sample. It was perceived to have a personal focus (*'How would you like X Council to be run?'*) and was interpreted as an opportunity to state a preference (*'How would you like X Council to be run?'*) It was also described as an 'open' question, simply asking for opinions. This preference positively influenced respondents' level of engagement with the question and their confidence in answering it.

By comparison, the way in which the EC alternative question opening was asked (*'Who should run X council?'*) did not encourage a majority of respondents to engage with the question. Consistently negative perceptions stemmed from the use of the word 'should'. Respondents felt under pressure to provide a 'right' answer, rather than an answer simply reflecting their opinion. 'Should' was also felt to suggest that voters would already know about local government governance and have made a judgement about how it should be run – which they typically had not.

1.3.2 CLG answer options

To address the overall length of the CLG question as a whole, respondents consistently suggested omitting the first part of each of the answer options, which repeats the last part of the question opening. The question opening and answers would then read: *How would you like X Council to be run? By a committee or committees ... by a mayor ... by a leader.*

The alternative EC version of the answer options reflects this suggested improvement. In doing so, the alternative EC version also omits the word 'should' found in each of the CLG answer options (*'X Council should be run*

by...}). Tonally, the word 'should' was perceived to be too directive. It was consistently considered tonally inappropriate for a referendum question.

1.3.3 EC alternative answer options

Overall, the perceived brevity of the alternative EC answer options and use of bold to highlight the words 'mayor', 'leader' and 'committees' was felt to facilitate understanding. For those with sight impairments, lower levels of literacy, English as a second language and learning disabilities, the use of bold was particularly important. It enabled them to grasp the key word on the first read-through, which provided a focus for subsequent attempts.

1.3.4 Mayoral answer options

The alternative EC version of the mayoral answer option also reflects another suggested improvement: it does not repeat the name of the council area when referring to 'voters' who elect the mayor. Respondents felt that repetition of the name of the council twice in the CLG mayoral answer option (e.g. 'Leeds Council should be run by a mayor who is elected by voters in the city of Leeds') was unnecessary – contributing to the length and perceived difficulty of engaging with the ballot paper.

1.3.5 Committee answer options

Ideally, respondents wanted the 'committee' answer option (whether the CLG answer option '*X Council should be run by a committee or committees made up of elected councillors*' or the alternative EC answer option '*One or more **committees** made up of elected councillors*') to specify whether they were voting for one committee or a number of committees.

However, there was no evidence of any lack of understanding of the word 'committee'. Although it did not address frustrations with the perceived

vagueness of the answer option, the use of 'one or more committees' in the alternative EC answer option addressed complaints with the CLG answer option about repeating the word 'committee' (*'X council should be run by a committee or committees...'*).

1.3.6 Leader answer options

The alternative EC version of the 'leader' answer option – 'A **leader** who is an elected councillor and is chosen as leader by a vote of the other elected councillors' – was typically considered long-winded. Respondents clearly expressed their view that this answer option needs to be simplified to facilitate understanding. Deletions were routinely suggested: 'and is', 'as leader', 'a vote of' and 'elected'.

The research suggests that deleting 'and is' and 'as leader' will simplify the sentence without compromising understanding. However, retaining clear signals about how leaders are elected is recommended, given: confusion about how leaders are elected; and the important part that the way in which leaders are elected plays in the decision-making process. Retaining both uses of the word 'elected' and the phrase 'by a vote of' results in the following answer option: *"A leader who is an elected councillor chosen by a vote of the other elected councillors."*

1.4 Conclusions

The research findings support the development of a hybrid question, retaining the well-received CLG question opening and adopting the alternative EC answer options commended for their brevity.

2. Background

Local authority governance can be organised in different ways:

- **The mayor and cabinet executive:** the mayor is directly chosen by local voters in an election.
- **The leader and cabinet executive:** the leader of the council is one of the councillors. He/she is elected by his/her fellow councillors.
- **A committee system:** the whole council has decision-making powers and can decide how they want to be organised. If they wish, they can pass their decision-making powers to one or more committees made up of councillors.

In 2012, a proposed change to the law (the Localism Bill) will give local authorities the opportunity to change the way that they are organised. There will need to be a referendum for this change to happen when:

- The local authority is already organised in a way that was chosen by a referendum;
- The local authority decides to change the way it is organised and decides to have a referendum;
- There is a valid petition from a certain number of local people;
- The authority is required to hold a referendum regarding a change to a mayor and cabinet leadership system by the government.

The government is consulting the Electoral Commission on the proposed questions to be asked at the local authority governance referendums. The Electoral Commission (EC) intends to respond by the end of October. The EC commissioned qualitative public opinion research to inform its response to the consultation on the proposed referendum questions. This report documents the findings.

3. Research Objectives

The overall research objective was to gain insight into how the general public reacts to and understands the proposed referendum questions. The tasks were:

- Firstly, to identify any elements of the referendum questions which prove problematic for users in the context of EC question assessment guidelines;
- Secondly, to explore the reasons for these problems;
- And finally, to explore possible ways of addressing these problems.

The overall purpose was to support the EC's response to the Department for Communities and Local Government's referendum question consultation.

4. Research Method

The research approach was qualitative and comprised:

- **Stage 1: 2 days desk research** by Research Works Limited, analysing findings from referendum question research conducted since 2001;
- **Stage 2: 4 focus group discussions** (1.5 hours duration, 8 respondents);
- **Stage 3: 75 individual face-to-face interviews** conducted in three community hall day venues.

The desk research contributed to the development of the topic guide and stimulus for both the focus group discussions and individual face-to-face interviews (appendix A topic guide, appendix B stimulus). An awareness of findings from previous research on previous iterations of these questions conducted by EC has also informed analysis of the primary qualitative data.

The findings from the focus group discussions raised a number of key intelligibility issues, i.e. issues that may affect voters' ability to read and understand the referendum question. The individual face-to-face interviews 'tested' the relative importance of these issues amongst a broader range of those who would be eligible to vote.

Qualitative research reflects the range of opinions in a given population. It does not aim to represent opinion and is not statistically representative in any way.

5. Research Sample

In total, the sample comprised **107 respondents**:

- All were eligible to vote in local authority governance referendums
- None were considering campaigning in local referendums in future
- None were fundraising, working or canvassing on behalf of any political party
- Ethnic minority representation was achieved across all 4 groups and 3 community hall days
- A range of voting experience was achieved
 - o Those who typically voted in all local/general elections
 - o Those who voted in some elections (e.g. General or Local)
 - o Those who had never voted in an election
- A range of motivation towards voting in local referendums was achieved
 - o Those who were sure they would vote
 - o Those who were uncertain whether they would or would not vote

5.1 Stage 2 – 4 x extended focus group discussions (1.5 hours duration), 8 respondents

- Group 1: 17-30 years old, ABC1
- Group 2: 31-45 years old, C2DE
- Group 3: 46-65 years old, ABC1
- Group 4: 66+ years old, C2DE

ABC1 and C2DE refer to socio economic status of head of household. Broadly speaking, AB encompasses professional or managerial occupations; C1 encompasses skilled non-manual occupations; C2 encompasses skilled manual occupations; C2 encompasses unskilled manual occupations; and E refers to people who are unemployed.

5.2 Stage 3 – 3 x community hall days, 75 respondents, interview duration 20-30 minutes

20 spontaneously recruited depth interviews were conducted in each of three locations (Lewisham, Wellingborough and Leeds). The sample achieved a mix of:

- Gender
- Age
- Socio economic group
- Ethnic origin (12 respondents from BME groups across the sample)
- Different levels of literacy
- Those for whom English is a second language

In addition, 5 pre-recruited depth interviews were conducted in each location:

- 1 x respondent aged 17-20 years old
- 2 x respondents with mild learning disabilities
- 2 x respondents for whom English was a second language

Across both the spontaneously recruited and pre-recruited depth interviews:

- A range of voting experience was achieved
 - o Those who typically voted in all local/general elections
 - o Those who voted in some elections (e.g. General or Local)
 - o Those who had never voted in any elections
- A range of motivation towards voting in local referendums was achieved
 - o Those who were sure they would vote
 - o Those who were uncertain whether they would or would not vote
 - o Those who were certain that they would not vote
 - o Those who had not heard of referendums

5.3 Recruitment

All respondents were free-found via on-street interviewing. All respondents were screened with a recruitment screener developed by Research Works and approved by the research team at The Electoral Commission (see Appendix C).

5.4 Research Locations

The research was conducted in five locations, chosen to represent different local authority governance systems. The group discussions were held in Watford (where the Council is led by a Mayor) and Chipping Sodbury (where

the Council – South Gloucestershire - is led by a Leader). The community hall days were held in Lewisham (where the Council is led by a Mayor), Wellingborough (where the Council is led by a number of Committees) and Leeds (where the Council is led by a Leader).

5.5 Stimulus

There are three possible governance options, which means there are six possible questions (illustrated in appendix B), depending on what the proposed change is from, and to. The research evaluated each of the six possible referendum questions. There were two potential questions for each location, depending on its system of governance, as follows:

- In areas where the council was run by a mayor (Watford and Lewisham), respondents were asked to assess two questions: moving from a mayoral system to a committee system; and moving from a mayoral system to a leader system.
- In areas where the council was run by a leader (Leeds and Chipping Sodbury), respondents were asked to assess two questions: moving from a leader system to a mayoral system; and moving from a leader system to a committee system.
- In areas where the council was run by a committee (Wellingborough), respondents were asked to assess two questions: moving from a committee system to a mayoral system; and moving from a committee system to a leader system.

The research evaluated two versions of each question: the CLG's proposed version and an alternative drafted by the EC as stimulus to support the discussion. As well as looking at each version of the question as a whole

(referred to as 'the question'), respondents were asked to evaluate each part of both versions:

- question opening - the first sentence, ending in a question mark.
- answer options – the options part of the question referring to a leader, mayor or committee(s).
- change statement – the sentences which say whether each option represents change or no change from the current arrangements.

The interview commenced by asking respondents to answer the one version of the question. They were then asked to discuss the clarity of the question and each element of it. They then evaluated the second version in the same way. The focus group discussions discussed the CLG version of the question first, followed by the EC version. In the community hall days, the order of the questions discussed was rotated. Half the sample saw the CLG version first; half saw the EC alternative first.

6. Detailed Findings

The detailed findings section discusses factors influencing responses to the question wording first, followed by an overall assessment of the CLG question and alternative EC version of the question. The report proceeds to discuss each element of the question i.e. both the question opening and answer options before making recommendations for improvements.

6.1 Factors influencing responses to the question wording

6.1.1 Knowledge about local authority governance

Across the sample, there was a widespread a lack of understanding of how local councils are organised:

- In areas where the council was run by a committee (Wellingborough) or leader (Chipping Sodbury and Leeds), a majority did not know how their local council was run;
- In areas where the council was run by an elected mayor (Watford and Lewisham), a majority were aware that the council was run by a mayor. However, in both areas, understanding of the full extent of the mayoral role was inconsistent. Most perceived the mayoral role to be largely 'ceremonial'.

Due to their lack of understanding of how local councils are organised, respondents found it difficult to answer a question asking them to decide between two options. As a result, respondents were more likely to make a decision based on a rudimentary level of understanding gained from the question, typically either:

- Whether their choice would constitute change from the current system or no change;

- Whether their choice would involve one person (i.e. a mayor or a leader) or many people (i.e. a committee). For example, respondents in Wellingborough were largely content to make their decision about changing from a committee to either a mayor or a leader based on whether they wanted one or more people in charge.

There was a balance between those favouring 'change' and 'no change' across the sample, without any sense of bias towards one option or the other emerging.

It was clear that a lack of understanding about local authority governance affected respondents' confidence in answering the question. A majority simply felt that they did not know enough about local government in order to make a choice about how it should be run.

Respondents routinely requested information about the three different governance options to support their decision-making. However, unlike some previous research respondents, respondents did not feel that this information should be provided on the ballot paper itself.

Overall, respondents wanted to be able to understand the implications of the changes proposed by the questions. Respondents wanted to understand what difference each of the systems would make in terms of: how things will be run differently, as well as 'getting things done', 'listening to people' – and cost.

Where necessary, stimulus explaining the different systems of governance was used to facilitate engagement with the discussion. Having learned a little more about local authority governance, respondents felt more confident and better equipped to contribute to a discussion about question wording.

Respondents were also informed that information about the different governance options would be made publicly available in the run up to the

referendum. There was strong support for making information available locally. Suggestions included information in local papers, public meetings, door-dropped leaflets and face-to-face canvassing.

6.1.2 Level of engagement with local government

Those with a greater level of engagement with local government (i.e. regular voters with an interest in local issues) were able to make more informed decisions.

Those with more engagement with local government also tended to have greater knowledge about local authority governance. However, there were a minority with lower levels of knowledge with an appetite for becoming more engaged; and those with apparently higher levels of knowledge (e.g. those in mayoral areas) who were not particularly interested in becoming any more engaged.

For example, of the group aware that their council was run by a mayor, only a minority of more engaged and interested respondents understood that their mayor had an executive role within the council:

"I know that our mayor doesn't just go around opening things. She gets stuck in with all the other councillors." (Female, 31-45 years old, C2DE, Watford)

Most of the less engaged and less interested described the role of the mayor as ceremonial:

"A mayor sounds like someone who wants to go to garden parties and have tea and sandwiches." (Male, 46-65 years old, ABC1, Watford)

Those with lower levels of engagement were also more likely to make a decision based on whether the option would constitute 'change' or 'no change' (rather than the specific type of change being suggested):

"I would stick with committee. I don't feel the need for change ... I just think if it's not broke, then don't fix it." (Female, 31-45 years old, C2DE, Wellingborough)

"Is change always a good thing? I don't know. Things aren't perfect, but by voting for change it could make things worse." (Female, 31-45 years old, ABC1, Wellingborough)

There was a balance between those favouring 'change' and 'no change' across the sample, without any sense of bias towards one option or the other emerging.

6.1.3 Levels of literacy

Varying ability to read the ballot paper influenced understanding of the question. For example, more literate respondents were able to follow sentences with several clauses without difficulty. Less literate respondents typically found it more difficult to synthesize understanding from a sentence made up of several clauses.

The amount of attention paid to reading the question also influenced the level of understanding respondents were able to achieve. Those who took their time to read the question tended to gain a better understanding. For example, the 'leader' answer option was more likely to be understood if respondents simply took their time.

However, all too many relied on what they described as 'skim-reading'. This tended to result in the question needing to be read and re-read several times.

Respondents attempting to understand the question in this way tended to struggle more with comprehension.

For this group, the use of bold was particularly important. It enabled them to grasp the key word (i.e. 'mayor', 'leader' or 'committee') on the first read-through, which provided a focus for subsequent attempts. Respondents were able to retain a sense of what the answer option was about - whilst working out what the rest of the answer option meant.

6.2 Overall reactions

6.2.1 Overall response to the question

Across the sample, there was a strongly held preference for brevity. This finding reflects previous research findings: brevity has been established as an important factor in referendum question wording in question assessments by the EC since 2002.

Brevity was a particularly important factor for those with lower levels of literacy or English as a second language who felt that they would be more likely to understand a question using as few words as possible.

As a result, the style in which the alternative EC version of the question was written was generally preferred:

"It needs to be explained briefly, so that people can pick up on the key words." (Female, 31-45 years old, ABC1, Wellingborough)

"They've cut bits out, but they're bits that don't help with anything. They aren't needed." (Male, 46-65 years old, C2DE, Wellingborough)

Although respondents with mild learning disabilities reported that they would need support to complete any ballot paper, they reported that they would be more willing to attempt the EC's alternative version. This view was simply based on the reduced number of words, which looked less intimidating.

The adjectives used to describe the style of the EC question (both spontaneously chosen and selected from an adjectives sheet) included: **simple, straightforward, direct, condensed, easier on the eye, to-the-point (most commonly cited), short, clear, concise and approachable.**

The CLG version of the question was perceived as comparatively long-winded. A majority felt that the CLG version of the question was unnecessarily 'wordy':

"It's a long-winded way of saying the same thing [as the EC version]. It's the same information." (Female, 31-45 years old, C2DE, Wellingborough)

"Not all those words are needed. It's a lot to take in." (Male with a disability, 66+ years old, C2DE, Wellingborough)

The repetition of the council's name contributed to the perception that the CLG version of the question was long-winded. Criticism of repetition was particularly strong in areas with a long council name i.e. South Gloucestershire Council and Wellingborough Borough Council and when reviewing the mayoral answer option (which mentions the name of the council twice):

"They don't need to keep repeating Wellingborough, they've done it three times! Same with committee." (Female, 17-30 years old, C2DE, Wellingborough)

Overall, the length of the CLG version of the question was felt to make the task of completing the ballot paper more difficult. In particular, respondents

with learning disabilities (and, to a lesser extent, those with English as a second language and lower levels of literacy) felt overwhelmed by the length of the CLG version of the question, feeling that there was simply too much to take in.

The adjectives used to describe the CLG question (both spontaneously chosen and selected from an adjectives sheet) included: **cluttered, messy, repetitive, long-winded, hard to read, 'too much', formal, confusing, overloaded, over-the-top and waffle.**

A minority of those who were less engaged with local government and less likely to vote felt that the CLG question was more explanatory and therefore preferable to the EC version. However, none amongst this group were able to articulate *why* they felt that the CLG question was more explanatory. Interpretation of respondents' verbatim comments suggests that the CLG version communicated the *impression* of providing more detail, rather than specific, additional, identifiable details:

"It looks like it is explaining more." (Female, 31-45 years old, C2DE, Leeds)

6.2.2 Bold

There was strong support across the sample for bolding key words. The use of bold was identified as a way of emphasising key differences in the EC's 2010 assessment of the question proposed for the referendum on the powers of the National Assembly for Wales.

As described in section 6.1.3, the highlighted word offered those with lower levels of literacy a choice that was clear and immediate:

"It makes it obvious what you are voting for." (Male, 17-30 years old, ABC1, Chipping Sodbury)

"That's shorter and they've put the words in bold. I think it's more likely to be understood that way. It's more approachable." (Male, 31-45 years old, C2DE, Leeds, English as a second language)

"It's much clearer. The key bits stand out in nice, thick bold." (Female, 46-65 years old, ABC1, Watford)

Moreover, those with visual impairments commended the use of bold. This small group felt that it made reading the question easier.

6.3 The question opening

6.3.1 CLG question opening

How would you like _____ Council to be run?

The wording of the CLG question opening generally appealed. Most interpreted the CLG question opening as an invitation for their opinion. This was a response to a perceived personal focus:

"How would you like X Council to be run?"

The way in which the CLG question opening was written was also interpreted as an opportunity to state a preference:

How would you like X Council to be run?"

The way in which the question opening was posed was therefore perceived to be encouraging. As a result, a majority from across the sample felt that the question opening was more engaging, as they answered the question as part of the research process:

"It's a nicer question because it is actually talking to me." (Male, 46-65 years old, C2DE, Leeds)

"It's more specific to the reader and their choice." (Female, 17-20 years old, ABC1, Leeds)

It was also considered to be an 'open' question. It was not considered to make any assumptions about voters' prior knowledge of local authority governance; nor was it considered to make any assumptions about whether there is a 'right' or 'wrong' answer to this question:

"It's subjective and not objective, which is good ... There's an emphasis on choice here and I like that." (Male, 65+ years old, ABC1, Leeds)

"That's more friendly and open. It makes you more comfortable with your opinion." (Male, 17-30 years old, C2DE, Leeds, South Asian)

Adjectives used to describe the CLG question opening (both spontaneously chosen and selected from an adjectives sheet) included: **friendly, empowering, involving, approachable, open, reassuring and personal.**

In addition, a minority who knew more about local authority governance felt that 'how' accurately reflected the focus of the question. They felt that the question was referring to the *way* in which local government is organised, and that 'how' was therefore the accurate question wording:

"If you say 'how', no matter 'who' it is, they have to run it a specific way." (Female, 31-45 years old, C2DE, Watford)

Overall, the CLG version of the question opening was extremely well received by a majority across the sample. This preference influenced respondents'

level of engagement with the question during the research process and their confidence in answering it.

6.3.2 EC question opening

Who should run _____ Council?

The tone of the alternative EC question opening was typically described as 'formal'. For a small minority of those with lower levels of literacy and for whom English was a second language, the question opening was described as 'intimidating'.

Overall, the way in which the alternative EC question opening was asked did not encourage a majority of respondents from across the sample to engage with the question during the research process.

Adjectives used to describe the alternative EC question opening (both spontaneously chosen and selected from an adjectives sheet) included: **forceful, demanding, blunt, dictatorial, pressurising**. These negative perceptions stemmed from the use of the word 'should':

"Why should it be?" (Male, 46-65 years old, ABC1, Watford)

"It's like they're telling you what to do." (Male, 31-45 years old, C2DE, Watford)

The use of the word 'should' meant that respondents felt under pressure to provide a 'right' answer, rather than an answer which they felt simply reflected their opinion. The use of the word 'should' was felt to imply that a judgement is being made, rather than a view being expressed:

"Well, it's about our preference. It's not about 'should'. But I'd like to think we'd make the right decision." (Female with a disability, 46-65 years old, C2DE, Wellingborough)

Voters were more likely to feel that the alternative EC question opening presupposed some level of knowledge about local government governance. The use of the word 'should' suggested that voters would already know about local government governance and have made a judgement about how it should be run. In reality, the majority had not:

"It assumes you 'should' know all about it, rather than just have an individual preference." (Female, 31-45 years old, C2DE, Wellingborough)

A minority amongst those who knew little about local authority governance felt that 'who' more accurately reflected the focus of the question than 'how'. They interpreted the question as asking about a person, more than a way of running a local authority. They therefore felt that 'who' was the most appropriate question word. For this group, 'how' implied that a qualitative judgement, rather than a choice needed to be made:

"Better than they are doing now is the answer." (Male, 66+ years old, C2DE, Chipping Sodbury)

6.4 Overall response to the answer options

6.4.1 CLG answer options

As described in section 6.2.1, the length of the CLG version of the question was felt to make the task of completing the ballot paper more difficult due to the length of the answer options. To address the overall length of the CLG answer options, respondents consistently suggested omitting the first part of the sentence for each of the answer options. The question would then read:

How would you like X Council to be run?

By a committee or committees made up of elected councillors."

Or

By a mayor who is elected by voters in X."

The removal of repetition reflects referendum question research findings from 2010 which recommended that information should only be repeated if it helps to clarify the question.

In addition, there was consistent antipathy towards the word 'should' ('X Council should be run by... ') across the sample. Tonally, the word 'should' was perceived to be too directive:

"The word 'should' is directing you, like pointing a gun at you ... It's too heavy. It's sort of saying 'you should be doing this'." (Male, 46-65 years old, ABC1, Watford, South Asian)

Despite criticism of the use of the word 'should', respondents did not feel that it led to any bias in any of the answer options. It was noted that 'should' is used in each of the answer options. Use of the word 'should' was not perceived to lead respondents towards any particular answer. However, use of the word 'should' was consistently considered tonally inappropriate for a referendum question.

6.4.2 EC answer options

In general, the brevity of the EC answer options and use of bold was felt to facilitate understanding. The positive response to the use of bold is discussed in greater detail in section 6.2.2.

There were very few suggested improvements to either the mayor or committee answer options. It was the leader answer option which was felt to need significant improvement, as described in section 6.5.2, below.

6.5 The 'Leader' answer option

6.5.1 Perceptions of the word 'leader'

Perceptions of the strength of governance associated with the word 'leader' were inconsistent. When interpreted in context (i.e. if respondents understood that a leader leads the council), leaders tended to be perceived as people with strong leadership qualities:

"The leader is someone bigger than the mayor. More authority." (Female, 46-65 years old, ABC1, Watford)

"A leader is strong, has authority, is a decision-maker." (Male, 31-45 years old, C2DE, Watford)

However, if interpreted out of context (i.e. if respondents did not understand that a leader leads the council and were thinking about other types of leaders they had heard of), the word was not felt to imply strength of governance:

"It sounds like a scout leader or something." (Male, 46-65 years old, ABC1 Watford)

6.5.2 Understanding of the different way in which leaders and mayors are elected

Those in non-mayoral areas were much less likely to identify that the way in which mayors, leaders and committees are chosen are different. For example:

- In an area with a high profile mayor such as Lewisham, a majority were able to identify the difference between mayors who they knew are directly elected and leaders who are elected by other councillors;
- By comparison, only a minority in Wellingborough identified that a mayor would be directly elected by voters and that a leader would be elected by other councillors. Similarly, in Leeds only a minority identified that a leader would be elected by other councillors or that a mayor would be directly elected by voters.

Those who were able to identify that the way in which mayors and leaders are elected are different (once they had read the question) tended to be those with good levels of literacy who read the question carefully:

"With a mayor elected by voters you can directly choose what they represent, and then the people are getting what they want." (Female, 31-45 years old, ABC1, Wellingborough)

Those who failed to identify the difference in how leaders and mayors are elected (once they had read the question) tended to be those with lower levels of literacy who found the sentence difficult to understand:

"But a mayor is a leader isn't he? I mean, he's leading us." (Male, 17-30 years old, C2DE, Lewisham, Black Caribbean)

When identified, the way in which the two options are elected (i.e. the fact that a mayor is 'elected by voters' and that a leader is 'elected by a vote of the other elected councillors') had the potential to affect decision-making, as discussed in section 6.5.4.

6.5.3 CLG 'Leader' answer option

"X Council should be run by a leader, who is an elected councillor chosen by other elected councillors."

As discussed in section 6.2.1, the repetition between the last part of the CLG question opening (*How would you like X council to be run?*) and the beginning of the answer option (*X Council should be run by ...*) was consistently criticised. Respondents felt that the length of the CLG answer made the task of understanding their options unnecessarily more difficult. The regularly suggested solution was to delete the first part of the answer option: (*How would you like X council to be run? ... by a leader ...*)

The removal of repetition reflects referendum question research findings from 2010 which recommended that information should only be repeated if it helps to clarify the question.

Overall, the answer option was considered too longwinded. Although the words themselves were not considered difficult to understand, the way that the sentence is constructed was considered confusing. To simplify the sentence, the deletion of the second 'elected' was sometimes suggested. The sentence would read:

"X Council should be run by a leader, who is an elected councillor chosen by other councillors."

The drawbacks of deleting the second 'elected' are discussed in the next section, 6.5.4.

6.5.4 EC 'Leader' answer option

*'A **leader** who is an elected councillor and is chosen as leader by a vote of the other elected councillors.'*

The alternative EC version of the answer option reflects respondents' suggested improvement and does not repeat the last part of the question opening (as in the CLG answer option). However, it adds a number of words to the CLG version (as underlined below):

"A leader who is an elected councillor and is chosen as leader by a vote of the other elected councillors."

The result was that this particular alternative EC answer option was typically considered long-winded:

"You don't need the word leader twice. Of course he's 'chosen as a leader' because he's 'a leader'." (Female, 46-65 years old, ABC1, Watford)

The alternative EC version is longer than the CLG version and requires respondents to synthesize five separate elements:

- *"A leader [1]*
- *who is an elected councillor [2]*
- *and is chosen as leader [3]*
- *by a vote [4]*
- *of the other elected councillors [5]."*

Across the sample, respondents clearly expressed their view that this answer option needs to be simplified to facilitate understanding:

"A lot of people aren't going to understand the bottom [leader] option. If they're not 'in the know', and they're there, they're going to put a cross on something, they're likely to put it on the top one [mayor] because it's short and they can understand it." (Male, 31-45 years old, C2DE, Watford)

"There's too much to take in. You get lost." (Female, 31-45 years old, C2DE, Watford)

To simplify the sentence and facilitate understanding, deletions were routinely suggested. Examples included: "A leader who is chosen by a vote from amongst the other elected councillors" or "A leader who is elected by your chosen councillors" or "A leader who is chosen by a vote of the other elected councillors". However, it should be noted that previous research evaluating different iterations of referendum questions has identified that answer options should be symmetrical. In this case, consistency would involve stating that the leader would be 'an elected councillor' elected by 'other elected councillors'.

Of the deletions suggested, the following were common:

- 'and is' was perceived as unimportant and unnecessary.
- 'as leader' was also perceived as repetitive and unnecessary (and was experienced as rather irritating).
- It was also suggested that the second 'elected' and 'a vote of' were deleted, simply because it repeats the word 'elected' twice and deleting both will shorten the sentence.

However, the decision about whether to delete the second 'elected' and 'by a vote of' needs to be made in the context of confusion about the different ways in which 'mayors', 'committees' and 'leaders' are elected (as described in section 6.5.2), as well as the perceived importance of being able to make this distinction.

When identified, the fact that a mayor is *'elected by voters'* and that a leader is *'elected by a vote of the other elected councillors'* had the potential to affect decision-making. For example, two respondents in Leeds and one in Watford changed their minds about their choice when they realised that a leader (on their second or third reading of the answer options) would be chosen by *'a vote of the other elected councillors'*:

"Oh, 'an elected councillor chosen by other elected councillors'. I've just read that. Can I change my mind?" (Female, 31-45 years old, C2DE, Watford)

Given the uncertainty about how leaders are elected and the important part that the way in which leaders, mayors and committees are elected played in decision-making, the research suggests that the leader answer option should retain both uses of the word *'elected'*. For clarity, the answer option needs to state:

- who the potential leader is (i.e. that they are an *'elected councillor'* who has already been elected by local voters);
- and who is electing him or her as leader (i.e. the people voting for the leader are also *'elected councillors'* who have already been elected by local voters).

The research also suggests that *'a vote of'* (included in the EC answer option but not the CLG answer option) should be retained. *'A vote of'* provides a clear description of the process of electing someone that was clearly understood amongst those with lower levels of literacy.

Deleting *'and is'* and *'as leader'* and retaining both uses of the word *'elected'* and *'by a vote of'* results in the following answer option: *"A leader who is an elected councillor chosen by a vote of the other elected councillors."*

6.6 The 'Mayor' answer option

6.6.1 CLG 'Mayor' answer option

"X Council should be run by a mayor who is elected by voters in X."

As discussed in section 6.2.1, the repetition of the last part of the CLG question opening (*How would you like X council to be run?*) and the beginning of the answer option (*X Council should be run by ...*) was consistently criticised. Respondents felt that the length of the CLG answer made the task of understanding their options unnecessarily more difficult. The regularly suggested solution was to delete the first part of the answer option so it would read *'How would you like X council to be run? ... by a mayor ...'*

As discussed in section 6.2.1, respondents felt that repetition of the name of the council was unnecessary – and rather irritating. There was a strong preference for deleting the last mention of the council's name so that the answer option reads: *"By a mayor who is elected by voters."*

6.6.2 EC 'Mayor' answer option

"A mayor who is elected by voters."

The alternative EC version of the answer option reflects respondents' suggested improvements to the CLG version, and does not repeat the council's name. The answer option was easily understood and respondents did not have any comprehension difficulties.

6.7 The 'Committee' answer option

6.7.1 Perceptions of the word 'committee'

Associations with the word 'committee' were divided. In the focus group discussions, respondents expressed negative associations with the word 'committee'. Sharing decision-making between a group was perceived as a relatively weak form of governance.

Moreover, respondents consistently expressed their frustration about what they considered a 'vague', 'tentative' statement:

"It doesn't explain either, or what the difference would be. Is it committee or committees? How many people? ... It makes a difference ... It's just confusing." (Female, 46-65 years old, ABC1, Watford)

"It would put me off because it would make me think well, they don't know which one it is so I'm not voting for that." (Female, 46-65 years old, ABC1, Watford)

"They need to be more decisive." (Female, 31-45 years old, C2DE, Watford)

Frustration with the 'committee or committees' phrase also emerged in the one-to-one interviews. However, in the one-to-one setting respondents were less exercised by the issue. Indeed, in the hall day interviews in Wellingborough and Leeds, an alternative perception emerged. Rather than 'making decisions by committee' being perceived as a weak form of governance, respondents pointed out that there were benefits to power-sharing:

"Several people making decisions would work better. They could work together to improve Leeds." (Female, 31-45 years old, C2DE, Leeds)

"There's more accountability on the cabinet." (Male, 65+ years old, ABC1, Leeds)

"One leader only has one say. A committee will be less of a dictatorship." (Male, 46-65 years old, C2DE, Leeds)

Although frustration with the phrase 'committee or committees' negatively affected perceptions of this option amongst group respondents, individuals interviewed in the hall day setting were much more likely to articulate a range of perceptions about committees, both positive and negative.

6.7.2 CLG 'Committee' answer option

"X Council should be run by a committee or committees made up of elected councillors."

As discussed in section 6.2.1, the repetition of the last part of the CLG question opening (*How would you like X council to be run?*) and the beginning of the answer option (*X Council should be run by ...*) was consistently criticised. Respondents felt that the length of the CLG answer made the task of understanding their options unnecessarily more difficult. The regularly suggested solution was to delete the first part of the answer option: (*How would you like X council to be run? ... by one or more committees ...*)

Ideally, respondents wanted the answer option to specify whether they were voting for one committee or a number of committees. A number of committees was off-putting for many who felt that this would be a cumbersome, bureaucratic way to run local government.

However, despite frustrations with the 'committee or committees' answer option, there was no evidence of any lack of understanding of the word committee. Past EC assessments of different iterations of these referendum questions has reported that voters need a full description of all models. In this case there was no need for further explanation: respondents across the sample knew that a committee referred to a group of people making decisions together.

6.7.3 EC 'Committee' answer option

"One or more committees made up of elected councillors."

Although it did not address frustrations with the perceived vagueness of the answer option, the use of 'one or more committees' in the alternative EC answer option addressed complaints about repeating the word 'committee', which was considered unnecessary:

"Committee or committees is too long. That's not clear. One or more committees gets to the point quicker." (Female, 31 – 45 years old, C2DE, Wellingborough)

"They've cut it down, but they haven't lost anything vital I don't think, just repeated words and 'one or more committees' sounds better." (Female, 17-30, C2DE, Wellingborough)

"That's easier to understand. It could be one; it could be more. Simple." (Female, 46-65 years old, ABC1, Watford)

Overall, the phrase 'one or more committees' was preferred to 'committee or committees'. The lack of repetition was felt to enhance clarity.

In response to issues raised with the committee options in group discussions, two alternatives were assessed. The first aimed to reduce the perceived 'vagueness' by emphasising who make up the committees, and the second aimed to address the perceived weakness and vagueness of the "committee or committees" option.'

- The first – '*elected councillors who make up one or more committees*' – was perceived to make little difference. Changing the order of the sentence was not felt to clarify the perceived vagueness of the answer option
- The second – '*[X council should be run] by elected councillors, through a committee system*' - confused. Respondents failed to understand what 'a committee system' was. As a result, this suggested improvement was unhelpful because it introduced another unknown variable into the committee debate: what is a committee system?

Neither of these options provided an improvement on the original EC alternative answer option: 'one or more committees'.

6.8 The 'change' or 'no change' statement

Each of the answer options in both the CLG and EC versions of the questions contained a sentence to say whether the option was how the council is run now, or a change to how the council is run now.

This part of the question was recommended in the 2007 and 2008 EC referendum question assessments. The findings from this latest research are consistent: respondents across the sample appreciated the clarity of the statements indicating whether the option would constitute 'change' or 'no change'. The 'change' or 'no change' statement makes the question accessible to those with little knowledge about local authority governance:

"It doesn't make any assumptions about what we know because it explains whether it's a change or not." (Female, 46-65 years old, ABC1, Watford)

No one felt that making a decision on a 'change' or 'no change' basis was problematic:

"It makes it very clear cut. If you're happy you can go for the no change; if you're unhappy you can go for change." (Female, 46-65 years old, ABC1, Watford.)"

"That's what you're going to remember about the question: 'this is how the council is run now'. There's no confusion there." (Female, 31-45 years old, C2DE, Watford)

"You're not going to know if anything's going to change unless it's actually stated." (Female, 31-45 years old, C2DE, Watford)

Respondents did not have any difficulty understanding the CLG version of the change statement and the alternative EC version of the change statement was not perceived to provide any greater clarity.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

By comparing and contrasting the CLG question and the alternative EC version of the question, the research revealed that both have strengths. Overall, the strength of the alternative EC version is brevity: it uses short sentences and is simple, direct and concise and therefore improves upon the CLG version since respondents found it easier to understand and to-the-point.

The strength of the CLG version is the answer opening which was well received by a majority across the sample. The research findings therefore support the development of a hybrid question:

- Retain the CLG question opening based on a consistently positive response to a question which openly asks voters about their personal views. This preference positively influenced respondents' level of engagement with the question and their confidence to answer the question:

"How would you like X Council to be run?"

- Adopt the EC answer options, based on their brevity and use of bold, both of which were felt to facilitate understanding. To answer the CLG question correctly, the EC answer options will need to read as follows: *"By a leader ...", "By a mayor ..." and "By one or more committees..."*
- Of the EC answer options, the 'leader' answer option needs to be simplified to facilitate understanding. The recommendation is to:
 - delete *'and is'* (perceived to be unnecessary and not compromising intelligibility)
 - delete *'as leader'* (perceived to be repetitive, unnecessary and not adding anything, so could be deleted without compromising intelligibility)
 - and retain both uses of the word *'elected'* and the phrase *'by a vote of'* which support understanding of the way in which the leader is elected (a point of confusion and an important decision-making factor). Following this recommendation results in an answer option which describes the option clearly and accurately: *"A leader who is an elected councillor chosen by a vote of the other elected councillors"*
- The 'change' or 'no change' statement should remain as it is an important way of making the question accessible to all by indicating the implications of each option, i.e. whether it would be a 'change' or

'no change'. This element ensures that the question does not assume anything about voters' level of knowledge of local government governance options.

Appendix A:
Research Topic Guides

J.1840 EC LOCAL AUTHORITY GOVERNANCE REFERENDUMS
GROUP TOPIC GUIDE

1. INTRODUCTIONS

- *Introduce self and Research Works Limited, an independent market research agency*
- *Thank you for coming along this evening. We are going to be discussing local government, but not our individual political views*
- *It's my job to make sure I've heard and understood everyone's views. There are no right or wrong answers*
- *The research is being conducted on behalf of The Electoral Commission*
- *When relevant: staff from The Electoral Commission team are watching us and listening to us with interest*
- *Explain confidentiality (MRS Code of Conduct)*
- *Ask permission to record the interview, explaining that the recording will only be used for Market Research purposes (Data Protection Act)*
- *Housekeeping: phones off please, toilets, confirm finish time*
- *Does anyone have any questions they'd like to ask before we begin?*

2. WARM UP

- Ask each person to introduce themselves: their name, what they do for a living (for employed), family status, are they from the area
- Ask respondents to comment on their voting behaviour, stressing that I'm hoping for a mix of those voting always, sometimes and never: when do you tend to vote and why? Are you more motivated to vote in some elections than others? If so, why?

3. TASK 1: COMPLETING THE REFERENDUM QUESTION (CLG VERSION, QUESTION 1)

- *I am going to hand around a question on a sheet of paper. I would like you to answer it without talking to anyone else. Please don't worry if you feel unsure – that's what we're going to be discussing*
- Present respondents with **STIMULUS A** (CLG referendum question)
- Once all respondents have answered the question
- *I'd like you to mark up your question sheet noting any parts you felt were clear and less clear. (Offer respondents some suggestions for marks they may want to use: rings, crosses/ticks, wavy lines, faces, with green markers for clear and red for unclear)*

4. LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE IN REFERENDUM QUESTION ANSWERS (CLG VERSION)

- How confident are you that you have given the answer you wanted to?
- What makes you feel confident?
- What is making you feel less confident?

5. UNDERSTANDING OF THE REFERENDUM QUESTION (CLG VERSION)

- What do you think the question is asking?
- Tell me, what did you note down?
- What did you find clear and less clear – and why?
- What did you find less easy to understand – and why?
- If different points-of-view emerge, ask respondents to identify why

- Moderator: probe if necessary - are comprehension difficulties coming
 - o from the way the question is worded – if so where?
 - o or from lack of knowledge – and if so, what do we need to know?
- *Moderator: use explanatory stimulus if necessary to provide the information respondents are lacking [**STIMULUS B** – local authority governance]*
- Were there any other words or phrases you felt were unclear?
- Please use your notes and tell me each of your points
 - o What difficulty have you identified?
 - o Is it essential that we address this difficulty – or would it be 'nice-to-have, but not essential?
 - o And how could the difficulty could be addressed?
- *I'm going to hand around a sheet of paper with some other ways of looking at the question . I'd like us to work through it together.*
- Share **STIMULUS C**. Taking each of the questions in turn:
- If the question poses a problem, ask: how could we address this difficulty?
 - o Is it essential that we address this difficulty – or would it be 'nice-to-have, but not essential?

(Moderator, mark up large version of CLG question with respondent suggested improvements on a board)

6. **RESPONSE TO ALTERNATIVE REFERENDUM QUESTION (EC VERSION)**

- *Explain that we have alternative ideas for how each part of the question could be written.*
- Share around **STIMULUS D** (EC suggested question wording)
Immediate reactions – how does this alternative compare to the original? What has changed?
- For each element (question, options and change/no change) ask:
- What did you find easy to understand?

- What did you find less easy to understand?
 - Review the difficulties respondents have identified and the improvements respondents have suggested (section 5): has this version addressed these difficulties? Or can it still be improved?
 - o Is it essential that we make this improvement – or would it be 'nice-to-have, but not essential?
 - Ask respondents to have a look at **STIMULUS C** again. If the question poses a problem, ask: how could we address this difficulty?
 - o Is it essential that we address this difficulty – or would it be 'nice-to-have, but not essential?
- (Moderator, mark up large version of CLG question with respondent suggested improvements on a board)

7. REVIEW OF SECOND REFERENDUM QUESTION (CLG VERSION)

- *We've compared two versions of one question. Now I'd like to show you another question where the answer options are different.*
- Present respondents with **STIMULUS F** (second CLG referendum question)
- Ask respondents to identify the new part of the question (i.e. the different answer option). Focussing on the different answer option:
 - Is this easy or less easy to understand?
 - Does one option sound better than the other? Why?
 - If different points-of-view emerge, ask respondents to identify why
 - *Moderator: probe if necessary - are comprehension difficulties coming*
 - o *from the way the answer is worded – if so where?*
 - o *or from lack of knowledge – and if so, what information is needed?*
- *Moderator: use explanatory stimulus if necessary to provide the information respondents are lacking [**STIMULUS B** – local authority governance]*

8. REVIEW OF SECOND REFERENDUM QUESTION (EC VERSION)

- *Explain that we have an alternative version of the answer which I would like to share with you.*
- Present respondents with **STIMULUS E** (second EC referendum question)
- Immediate reactions – how does this alternative version compare to the original version?
- What did you find easy to understand?
- What did you find less easy to understand?
- Review the difficulties respondents have identified and the improvements respondents have suggested (sections 5, 6 & 7): has this version addressed these difficulties? Or can it still be improved?
 - Is it essential that we make this improvement – or would it be 'nice-to-have, but not essential?

9. CONCLUSIONS

- Finally, I'd like to ask: what would your advice be to the people writing this referendum question? What key recommendations would you make?

10. THANK AND CLOSE

J.1840 EC LOCAL AUTHORITY GOVERNANCE REFERENDUMS

HALL DAY TOPIC GUIDE

1. INTRODUCTIONS

- *Introduce self and RWL, an independent market research agency*
- *Thank you for coming in. We are going to be discussing local government, but not our individual political views*
- *The research is being conducted on behalf of The Electoral Commission*
- *Explain confidentiality (MRS Code of Conduct)*

2. WARM UP

- Ask respondent to introduce themselves: their name, what they do for a living (for employed), family status, are they from the area
- Ask respondent to comment on their voting behaviour: when do you tend to vote and why? Are you more motivated to vote in some elections than others? If so, why?

3. COMPLETING THE REFERENDUM QUESTION

- *I am going to hand you a question on a sheet of paper which I'd like you to answer. Please don't worry if you feel unsure – we'll be discussing that*
- Present respondent with question (**CHECK ROTATION**)
- Ask respondent to 'think aloud' as they answer the question. *Prompt if necessary: what are you thinking about?*
- Once completed ask: what is the question asking you?

4. LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE IN QUESTION ANSWERS

- How confident are you that you have given the answer you wanted to?
- What makes you feel confident?
- What is making you feel less confident? Please be specific – which words, or phrases are making you feel less confident?

5. UNDERSTANDING OF THE QUESTION (SPONTANEOUS)

- What, specifically, did you find clear and less clear – and why?
- What, specifically, did you find less easy to understand – and why?
(Moderator note respondent's suggested amends on respondent's mocked up ballot paper). **Looking at the notes on respondent's ballot paper:**
 - o What difficulty have you identified?
 - o And how could the difficulty could be addressed?
 - o Is it essential that we address this difficulty – or would it be 'nice-to-have, but not essential?
- Moderator: probe if necessary - are comprehension difficulties coming
 - o from the way the question is worded – if so where?
 - o or from lack of knowledge – and if so, what do we need to know?
- *Moderator: use explanatory stimulus (if necessary) to provide the information respondent is lacking [STIMULUS B]*
- Does this information make any difference to your understanding of the question? What (if anything) has become clearer? What (if anything) has become less clear?
- Given this understanding, are there any (further) clarifications you would suggest making to the question?

6. UNDERSTANDING OF THE QUESTION (PROMPTED)

- Share **STIMULUS C**. Taking each of the questions in turn:
- If the question poses a problem, ask: how could it be addressed?
 - o What difficulty have you identified?
 - o And how could the difficulty could be addressed?
 - o Is it essential that we address this difficulty – or would it be 'nice-to-have, but not essential?

7. RESPONSE TO ALTERNATIVE REFERENDUM QUESTION

- Explain that we have an alternative idea for how the question could be written.
- Present respondent with alternative question (**CHECK ROTATION**)

- Immediate reactions – how does this alternative compare to the original?
What has changed?
- For each element (question, options and change/no change) ask:
- What did you find easy to understand?
- What did you find less easy to understand?
- Has this version addressed the difficulties we identified in the first question?
Or can it still be improved?
 - Is it essential that we make this improvement – or would it be 'nice-to-have, but not essential?
- Ask respondent to have a look at **STIMULUS C** again. If the question poses a problem, ask: how could we address this difficulty?
 - Is it essential that we address this difficulty – or would it be 'nice-to-have, but not essential?

When reviewing the 'committee' answer option, listen for respondent's views. If they identify a difficulty with the phrase 'committee or committees', prompt with alternative STIMULUS D.

- *To what extent (if at all) does this alternative address the difficulty?*
- *Is it essential that we make this improvement – or would it be 'nice-to-have, but not essential?*

8. CONCLUSIONS

Moderator: write out respondents' version of the question, using either CLG or EC as a basis, with respondents' suggested improvements. Ask them to review their version of the question: is this clear? Are there any further improvements you would like to make?

Appendix B: Questions used in the research

Wording proposed by the Department for Communities and Local Government

Opening question	Answer options (two of which appear on any one ballot paper)	Change/no change statement
How would you like x Council to be run?	x Council should be run by a leader, who is an elected councillor chosen by other elected councillors.	This is how the council is run now.
	Or	
	x Council should be run by a mayor who is elected by voters in the [insert "borough", "city", "county" or "district", as appropriate, of <i>name of local authority area</i>].	This would mean that the way the council is run would change.
	Or	
	x Council should be run by a committee or committees made up of elected councillors. This is how the council is run now.	

How would you like x Council to be run?

x Council should be run by a leader, who is an elected councillor chosen by other elected councillors.

Or

x Council should be run by a mayor who is elected by voters in the [insert "borough", "city", "county" or "district", as appropriate, of *name of local authority area*].

Alternative wording drafted by the Electoral Commission

Opening question	Answer options (two of which appear on any one ballot paper)	Change/no change statement
Who should run x Council?	A leader who is an elected councillor and is chosen as leader by a vote of the other elected councillors.	This is how the council is run now.
	A mayor who is elected by voters.	This would be a change from the way the council is run now.
	One or more committees made up of elected councillors.	

e.g.

Who should run x Council?
A leader who is an elected councillor and is chosen as leader by a vote of the other elected councillors. This is how the council is run now. <input type="checkbox"/>
A mayor who is elected by voters. This would be a change from the way the council is run now. <input type="checkbox"/>