

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

BOUNDARY REVIEW COMMITTEE 21 JUNE 2012

FURTHER ELECTORAL REVIEW OF THE BOROUGH

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF GOVERNANCE

PART A) – SUMMARY REPORT

1.0 SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report is intended as one of a series of three briefings and reports for members in the run-up to the further electoral review of the borough that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England will commence in October 2012. The three committee meetings will enable members to consider in turn: (1) an overview of the review, how it will be conducted, the statutory requirements and the main stages of the review together with an introduction to the council size question; (2) consideration of the community of identity question linked to electorate forecasting across the borough, and finally (3) consideration of the “effective and convenient local government” (how many councillors does it take) question leading to the committee’s recommendation to council on what it considers should be the council’s view on the appropriate council size.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The report is for members information at this stage.

3. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Priority Plan objective(s)?
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	No	
	Will the proposals impact on specific groups of people?	
	No	<i>Borough Wide</i>
DELIVERY DATE	<i>Timetable not currently formulated by Local Government Boundary Commission for England</i>	
FINANCIAL/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT	No	Costs associated with the electoral review are in the form of officer time and will be met from within existing budgets. MLB 17.01.12
LEGAL ISSUES	No	The Local Government Boundary Commission for England has a statutory duty to keep under review electoral arrangements at local authority level
OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES	Yes	The Local Government Boundary Commission for England has served notice on the council that it will commence a Further Electoral Review in October 2012. The outcome of any review may change the size of the council, number and boundaries of wards, names of wards and allocation of councillors to wards.
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	Yes	Borough-wide impact.

PART B) – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

4.0 BRIEFING FOR MEMBERS ON THE REVIEW

The Electoral Services Team Leader will provide a briefing for members on the review, and slides will be circulated to members at the meeting.

5.0 AN INTRODUCTION TO THE COUNCIL SIZE ISSUE

5.1 The appropriate size (number of councillors) of the council is key to this review, because that then leads to the electoral quota of electors to councillors, which in turn leads to the division of the borough into wards and the allocation of councillors to wards that ensures that, as far as is possible, every councillor represents approximately the same number of electors.

5.2 Preliminary discussions between the commission and the council will focus heavily on this issue, and there is likely to be a six-week open consultation on this issue from mid-October to the end of November. Therefore, the key issue for members and their groups to consider over the summer period is what they consider to be the appropriate size for the council. Members have been expressing views on this issue for some time now, in the knowledge that the review is approaching. This and the committee's next two meetings are intended to help members and their groups to focus and justify their views, not only by thinking about council size itself, but also by considering the closely-related questions of community identity, future residential development, electorate forecasting, and the "effective and convenient local government" (how many councillors does it take) question. At the end of the day, however, it will be appropriate for the council itself to give its view on this matter so that a formal, council submission can be made to the commission, and the third meeting of the committee could make the appropriate recommendation. This, of course, does not then prevent the political groups and individual members from making their own submissions, either in support of the council submission or in an alternative submission.

5.3 The commission has issued guidance as to what it will be looking for in the views that are put forward to it on the question of council size and this is reproduced in the annex to this document. The last major change to the role of elected members was in the Local Government Act 2000 which laid down the executive (cabinet), regulatory/ quasi-judicial (planning and licensing), scrutiny and representational roles that members have. The commission will expect views to be argued along the lines of "effective and convenient local government": how many councillors does it take to allow the council and individual councillors to conduct those statutory roles and the council's business most effectively? The commission requests that "those submitting proposals to us should examine the political management and working practices of the council under review, and make well-argued and reasoned proposals. We have no pre-conceived views on the number of councillors necessary to run any particular local authority effectively, and we are content to accept proposals for an increase, a decrease or the retention of the existing number of councillors, but only on the basis that they can be justified."

The main issues in the council size debate are likely to focus on the following list, which is not intended to be conclusive:

- Member roles – what is the adequate number to conduct the ceremonial, executive, regulatory, scrutiny and representational roles of the council?
- Member workloads – is there a 'tipping point' in reducing council size at which members would start to be unable to undertake the increased executive and regulatory roles alongside the increased representational roles?
- Does a smaller council create a more 'professional' council? Does a larger council lead to many 'supernumerary' councillors?

- Public perception – is there a council size that can be more acceptable to the general public?
- Can council size be related to single member wards – is there a council size, for example, that maximises the number of single member wards?
- Extent of change to wards – is there a point at which it can be minimised? Is significant change to a well-understood model that has generally worked well desirable?
- Levels of representation – what is appropriate for the diversity of the area and its inhabitants? For example, is there a council size that ends up disadvantaging certain communities or groups.
- Parishes – is there a ‘tipping point’ in council size where the effects on the parish councils’ electoral arrangements become excessive?
- Who will drive the decision? Can the council ‘drive’ the final decision out of compromise, or will the commission step in where there can be no compromise?

The Commission has suggested that two particularly useful submissions on council size, which the Council, political groups or individual members can consider as model documents, are those submitted by Rushcliffe District Council and The Vale of White Horse District Council in their recent reviews. Links to these documents are as follows:

http://www.lgbce.org.uk/_documents/lgbce/submissions/rushcliffe/council-size/rushcliffe-council-rushcliffe-cs-sub-2012-01-18.pdf

http://www.lgbce.org.uk/_documents/lgbce/submissions/vale-of-white-horse/vale-of-white-horse-council-submission-cs-2012-03.pdf

Documents and information used in the preparation of this report can be found on the website of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England at www.lgbce.org.uk. Of particular relevance is the Commission’s guidance: *Electoral reviews: technical guidance* (May 2011). Ward maps and electorates (at 1 December 2011) can be found at our elections website at www.telford.gov.uk/elections

Report prepared by Melvin Humphreys, Electoral Services Team Leader, telephone 01952 383202

Annex

Extract from Local Government Boundary Commission for England, *Electoral Reviews: Technical Guidance* (May 2011)

Council Size

5.2 Council size is the starting point in any electoral review since it determines the average number of electors per councillor to be achieved across all wards of the authority. We cannot consider the patterns of wards without knowing the optimum number of electors per councillor, which is derived from dividing the electorate by the number of councillors to be elected to the authority.

5.3 We face a number of challenges in deciding on the most appropriate council size for any authority. There is wide variation in council size across England, not only between the different types of local authority – metropolitan and shire district councils, county councils and London borough – but also between authorities of the same type.

5.4 In our opinion, local government is as diverse as the communities it serves, providing services, leadership and representation tailored to the characteristics and needs of individual area. We believe, therefore, that each local authority should be considered individually and not compared with other authorities of similar geographic or population size, or those facing similar issues and concerns. In addition, the demographic make-up and dispersal of communities in England are such that to aim for equality in the number of electors each councillor represents as an average across the whole country would be impractical, if not unachievable.

5.5 Consistent, therefore, with our desire to support the preparation of electoral arrangements based on the local views and circumstances of councils and their communities, we are unwilling to apply strict mathematical criteria for council size or impose nationally a formula for its calculation. This also means that we will not base our decisions on council size on comparisons between local authorities. It is important therefore that, if we are to reach clear and transparent decisions on council size, we receive well-reasoned proposals that are based on the individual characteristics and needs of each local authority area and its communities.

5.6 Despite this respect for diversity it is important to remember that a local authority may not have fully considered the number of councillors for a number of years, and that during that time the role and responsibilities of local government and councillors have changed considerably. Following the Local Government Act 2000, most local authorities changed the way they make decisions and operate internally, some more so than others.

5.7 The political management structures that have come into place in most local authorities since the 2000 Act have changed the roles of all councillors, both those who sit on the executives and those who undertake the scrutiny and representational roles. In addition, various central government and local authority initiatives have affected the roles of local councillors, and the impact of these may affect the number of councillors needed to politically manage the authority. Finally, the development and the sharing of knowledge has provided opportunities for councils to learn from their own experience and that of others, encouraging innovation. Some councils have, however, used their experience of working in new ways in order to reach a view of the council size they think appropriate for their area, and tested that view through local consultation and electoral review. In a number of instances this has resulted in considerable reductions in council size.

5.8 Local authority proposals for council size that are based solely on an examination of national statistics, or simply an attempt to make it more consistent with that of a neighbouring area may mean that opportunities are missed either to reflect new models of political management or to adapt to changes in the responsibilities of local authorities.

5.9 When requesting a review in order to change council size, most councils indicate the new number they have in mind. We will need to ask questions about proposals to increase council size in order to establish whether there is a sound business management case for the proposed increase. In the case of a proposed reduction, we will need to be assured that the reduction will not jeopardise the ability of a council to manage its business effectively.

5.10 Whilst we have no absolute numbers in mind, there are obviously levels at which an authority risks being too small to discharge its statutory functions or too large to be able to function in an effective manner. For this reason, we will normally wish to give detailed consideration to proposals for council sizes of below thirty councillors. Equally, we will wish to examine closely proposals for council sizes of above a hundred councillors.

5.11 We will look for any measure of local consensus underpinning the proposals for council size that are submitted. In particular, where there has been local consultations on council size, we will consider the evidence which arose from that process.

5.12 Our preliminary discussion with principal local authorities to be reviewed will give us the opportunity to hear their views about council size. We will be able to determine whether there is already sufficient evidence on which we can base our judgement about the type of review to be undertaken (A, B or C) and our ability to tell people what size of council we would be minded to approve. Those preliminary discussions will therefore progress most effectively if the local authorities have by the

time they take place, considered the council size issue and assembled any evidence. We will want to test the conclusions that local authorities have reached. However, that testing will not be made in order to promote a preference on our part. It will be to ensure that we have a thorough understanding of why a particular council size has been proposed and that the authority has thought through all relevant considerations.

Factors to consider when making a proposal on council size

5.13 Proposals for council size are most easily, and regularly, argued in terms of effective and convenient local government (in terms of choosing the appropriate number of members to allow the council and individual councillors to conduct the council's business most effectively). Arguments can also be made on the basis of reflecting communities and allowing for fairness of representation.

5.14 We believe that factors that influence council size can be drawn together into four broad elements:

- The decision-making process – what decisions, taken where, and how is it managed?
- Quasi-judicial processes – e.g. planning and licensing – what is the workload and how is it managed?
- The scrutiny process – what is scrutinised and how is the total scrutiny workload managed?
- The representative role of the elected member.

5.15 Those submitting proposals to us should examine the political management and working practices of the council under review, and make well-argued and reasoned proposals. We have no pre-conceived views on the number of councillors necessary to run any particular local authority effectively, and we are content to accept proposals for an increase, a decrease or the retention of the existing number of councillors, but only on the basis that they can be justified. We do not accept, for example, that increases in an authority's electorate should automatically result in an increase in council size.

5.16 In the absence of sufficient justification we will consider responses to our challenge to the rationale for the council size being proposed and reach our own conclusions.

5.17 When we consulted on policies and procedures, some people asked us to consider value for money when we are presented with proposals on council size. We believe that value for money is, in part, addressed by our consideration of effective and convenient local government – that an ineffective council is unlikely to

offer good value for money. We do not feel that it would be appropriate to make further judgements on other value for money aspects of council size.

5.18 Even if we are content with the rationale provided in support of a proposal for council size, we may choose to consider whether it is necessary to change this number slightly in order to ensure better levels of electoral representation across the district (or county). Having regard to the nature and extent of communities or to appropriate ward/division boundaries, it is often possible to improve the levels of electoral representation across an authority by making minor modifications of one or two to the council size.