

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

BOUNDARY REVIEW COMMITTEE 23 AUGUST 2012

FURTHER ELECTORAL REVIEW OF THE BOROUGH

REPORT OF THE AD: LAW, DEMOCRACY AND PUBLIC PROTECTION

PART A) – SUMMARY REPORT

1.0 SUMMARY OF REPORT

1.1 This report draws to a conclusion the work that the committee has undertaken in considering what the Council should recommend to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England as an appropriate size for Telford and Wrekin Council. In particular, this report covers information on committee workloads, the interim outcomes of a member workload survey and consideration of likely future developments in the member role. This information was requested by the committee at its meeting of 19th July 2012.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the committee make a recommendation to the Council as to its preferred council size for Telford and Wrekin Council .

3. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Priority Plan objective(s)?	
	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 COUNCIL SIZE

4.1 At its meetings of 21st June and 19th July, the committee has considered the question of council size, which is important to the start of the forthcoming Further Electoral Review of the borough. Council size sets the electoral quota for the review, and in turn the quota is a key consideration in the formation of borough wards that ensure that every councillor represents about the same number of electors.

4.2 To recap, some of the key statutory criteria that the review will have to follow include:

- electoral fairness: ensuring every councillor represents about the same number of electors within a 10%+/- variance from the electoral quota;
- the need to work within existing parish boundaries, but with a capacity to alter parish ward boundaries so that they are co-terminous with borough ward boundaries;
- using clear and identifiable physical barriers for boundaries: boundaries in the no-man's land between communities of identity;

- respecting and avoiding partitioning our communities of identity;
- taking into account the electorate in six years time.

4.3 In the committee's meeting of 21st June, the guidance that the Commission provides on the issue of council size was considered, and that guidance is reproduced at the Annex to this report. The committee also looked at the effects of moving to a 40-member and a 50-member council on the current wards, and which of the wards would be well away from the 10%+/- variance from the resultant electoral quotas.

4.4 At its meeting of 19th July, the committee considered what borough warding arrangements might look like for a 40-member and a 50-member council. For that meeting, the committee worked to the current electoral quota and to an interim, projected electoral quota for 2018. It was noted that the interim projections are only initial estimates, and it is the final elector projections that are being formulated by the Delivery and Planning Team that will be used in the review, provided that they satisfy the Commission's audit checks. The meeting was reminded that the provision of draft mapped wards could only be indicative at this stage and served to highlight the different levels of electorate (which would be a key indicator of Council size) that higher or lower numbers of members would lead to. However, it was also suggested that the exercise had shown certain 'pinch points' across the Borough which were likely to be the areas that would be difficult to resolve in the review. These included the shortfall of electors in The Gorge parish to provide a single member ward, the considerable new development that was scheduled in the western part of central Telford, the shortfall of electors in Wellington that might need to be remedied by taking in electors from Shawbirch or Admaston in Wrockwardine parish, the possible shortfall of electors in Newport for four or three wards under the different models, the risk that it might prove necessary to use 'rural' areas to top up shortfalls in the electorates of adjoining 'urban' areas and the creation of 'mixed' urban-rural wards, and how best to amalgamate the rural areas into wards with the necessary electoral quotas.

4.5 For this meeting, members have asked for three further studies to enable them to complete their consideration of an appropriate size for Telford and Wrekin Council:

- further detailed work on committee memberships and workloads;
- the outcomes of the workload survey of all Members that had been undertaken;
- an assessment of the additional workloads that were likely to be generated by statutory changes, such as health and wellbeing and welfare work, and by corporate cultural changes, such as the moves towards increased community involvement and the co-operative council.

4.6 Committee memberships and workloads

Committee, Group or Panel	No of seats	Number of Meetings		Average Length of Meetings	Comments
		2010/2011	2011/2012		
Governance					
Council	54	6	9	2 hr 30mins	
Standards	7	3	4	1 hour	
Standards Sub-Committee	3	8	11	1 hour	It is expected that the number of Sub-Committee meetings will decrease under the new Standards regime. These are ad hoc meetings – the three members for any one meeting can be drawn from the “pool” of the seven Standards Committee members
Audit	7	6	5	2 hours	Number of meetings reduced to four for 2012-13, but meetings have been getting longer
Council Constitution Committee	7	6	6	1 hour	Quarterly meetings programmed, but further ad hoc meetings are sometimes required
Boundary Review Committee	7	N/A	1		Regular meetings during a Boundary Review, but otherwise likely to meet intermittently
Executive					
Cabinet	9	18	13	1 hour	The maximum number of Cabinet members permissible (including the Leader) is ten. Meetings in 2011-12 were about every four weeks, compared with every two weeks previously. Cabinet also meets informally as a Policy Review Group – approximately monthly
Regulatory					
Plans Board	9 (+ subs)	18	18	2 hours	Plans Board meets on a three-weekly cycle – this has generally been seen as necessary in order to ensure that applications are determined within the eight-week target. Members (and Parish Councils) can request that particular applications are determined by the Board – some of these would be determined probably under the scheme of officer delegation otherwise. The length of meetings has increased since the introduction of public speaking
Licensing Committee	10	12	4	1 hr 30 mins	There are usually four business meetings a year. There were a larger number of meetings in

					2010-11 because the full Committee was dealing with hearings relating to taxi licensing. Some of these meetings lasted a full day. In 2011-12, these matters were delegated to a sub-committee. However, there were no taxi sub-committee hearings in 2011-12 owing to the increased use of officer delegation together with the large number of drivers now being licensed by the neighbouring Shropshire Council.
Licensing Sub-Committee	3-5	7	8	3 hours	These are ad hoc meetings, largely relating to premises licensing. The three or five members for any one meeting can be drawn from the "pool" of the ten Licensing Committee members. The meetings take the form of hearings, and can be quite lengthy
Scrutiny					
Scrutiny Management Board	7	N/A	9	1 hour 30 mins	The Board comprises the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees together with two opposition members
Scrutiny Committee – Finance & Budget	8	N/A	8	2 hours	The information recorded for Scrutiny Committees only relates to formal public meetings convened in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972. In 2010-11, the Committees only met formally two or three times, but in addition members of the Committees met informally as working groups on a number of occasions.
Scrutiny Committee – Children & Young People	8	2	9	2 hours	See above
Scrutiny Committee – Co-operative & Communities	8	N/A	6	2 hours	
Scrutiny Committee – Adult Care & Support	6	2	N/A		
Scrutiny Committee – Active Lifestyles Leisure & Culture	6	3	N/A		
Scrutiny Committee – Joint Health	3	5	5	3 hours	
Scrutiny Committee – Housing Regeneration & Prosperity	6	3	N/A		
Scrutiny Committee – Efficient Community Focused Council	6	3	N/A		
Scrutiny Committee – Protection & Cohesion	6	2	N/A		
Scrutiny Committee – Environment & Rural Area	6	2	N/A		
Scrutiny Committee – Adult Social Care	8	N/A	5	2 hours	
Scrutiny Committee – Health	8	N/A	5	2 hours	
Personnel					

Appeals Committee (Transport/Employee)	7 (+ subs)	14/4	3/13	1hr 30min/4 hrs	These are ad hoc meetings. The three or five members for any one meeting can be drawn from the "pool" of the seven Appeals Committee members, plus substitutes. The meetings take the form of hearings, and can be quite lengthy – up to a full day for employee appeals
Personnel Board	7	0	8	2 hours	These are ad hoc meetings. Some meetings where the Board is interviewing candidates for chief officer posts can take a half or full day
Employee JICF	7	1	2	1 hour	Employee JICF has recently been "reactivated" and is meeting on a quarterly basis
Other Committees					
Parish Forum	7	4	3	2 hours	

MEMBER WORKLOAD SURVEY RESULTS AUGUST 2012**INFORMATION ABOUT YOU****What is your employment status?**

Full time 28.6%
Part time 28.6%
Retired/not working 42.9%

Are you a Parish/Town Councillor?

Yes 82.9%
no 17.1%

Are you a School governor?

Yes 48.6%
No 51.4%

Are you on any Outside bodies?

Yes 94.3%
No 5.7%

Are you a member of any community groups?

Yes 82.9%
No 17.1%

What positions do you hold on the Council?

Committee Member 57.1%
Committee Chair 31.4%
Committee Vice Chair 8.6%
Cabinet Member 17.1%
Working Group Chair/Vice 2.9%
Other 28.6%

ABOUT YOUR WARD

Do you hold fixed/street surgeries?

Yes 88.6%

No 11.4%

If yes, how often do you hold your surgery?

weekly 22.6%

2 / 3 weeks 19.4%

monthly 45.2%

every 2 months 3.2%

quarterly 0.0%

less frequently 3.2%

MEETINGS YOU ATTEND (AVERAGE PER MONTH)

How long do you spend preparing/reading papers?

up to 5hrs 11.4%

6 - 10 hours 31.4%

11 - 15 hours 14.3%

more than 16hrs 42.9%

How long do you spend travelling?

up to 5hrs 42.9%

6 - 10 hours 34.3%

11 - 15 hours 11.4%

more than 16hrs 11.4%

How long do you spend in formal meetings of the Council?

up to 5hrs 11.4%

6 - 10 hours 20.0%

11 - 15 hours 37.1%

more than 16hrs 31.4%

How long do you spend in informal meetings with other Members?

up to 5hrs 42.9%
6 - 10 hours 20.0%
11 - 15 hours 20.0%
more than 16hrs 17.1%

How much time do you spend on meetings of outside bodies?

up to 5hrs 36.4%
6 - 10 hours 33.3%
11 - 15 hours 18.2%
more than 16hrs 12.1%

How long do you spend in meetings with Council officers?

up to 5hrs 37.1%
6 - 10 hours 25.7%
11 - 15 hours 11.4%
more than 16hrs 25.7%

How long do you spend in Group meetings?

up to 5hrs 62.9%
6 - 10 hours 31.4%
11 - 15 hours 5.7%
more than 16hrs 0.0%

How much time do you spend dealing with residents queries?

up to 5hrs 5.7%
6 - 10 hours 28.6%
11 - 15 hours 22.9%
more than 16hrs 42.9%

How much time do you spend attending meetings of the local community/forum?

up to 5hrs 60.0%
6 - 10 hours 25.7%
11 - 15 hours 11.4%
more than 16hrs 2.9%

How much time do you spend on meetings of school governors?

up to 5hrs 77.8%
6 - 10 hours 11.1%
11 - 15 hours 11.1%
more than 16hrs 0.0%

How long do you spend at Member Information Seminars or training?

up to 5hrs 85.7%
6 - 10 hours 14.3%
11 - 15 hours 0.0%
more than 16hrs 0.0%

How long do you spend attending conferences?

up to 5hrs 91.7%
6 - 10 hours 8.3%
11 - 15 hours 0.0%
more than 16hrs 0.0%

How long do you spend on Parish/Town Council business?

up to 5hrs 28.1%
6 - 10 hours 43.8%
11 - 15 hours 15.6%
more than 16hrs 12.5%

Do you feel that your workload as a Borough Councillor has increased in the last 2 yrs?

Yes 75.9%
No 24.1%

Do you feel that your workload as a Parish/Town Councillor has increased in the last 2yrs?

Yes 60.0%
No 40.0%

Reasons for increased workload ~Increased knowledge and understanding leads to taking on more work and responsibilities
~Appointment to a position of special responsibility eg) Cabinet, Chairman, Mayor etc
~Economic conditions generating more enquiries, complaints and issues

~Spending cuts resulting in increasing local challenges
~Issues of health, care and regeneration leading to longer and more frequent meetings
~More work has been devolved to Parish/Town Council level

Other time commitments
~Positions of responsibility outside the Council eg) Chairman of Parish Council, Magistrate, NAC Secretary, Office Holder in Voluntary Organisation
~Voluntary work
~Additional Political group work

TOTAL RESPONSES: 35

4.8 Assessment of the additional workloads being generated by statutory and corporate cultural change

The following note sets out a number of issues which Councillors may also wish to take into account in their consideration of an appropriate council size:

CHALLENGES

Health & Wellbeing

- Transfer of Public Health responsibilities to the Council
- Statutory duty to develop Health & Wellbeing Strategy by Health & Wellbeing Board
- Strategy must identify and respond to local issues to address health inequalities in the local population informed by local engagement

Economic/social pressures

- Understanding the impact of the recession in local communities – particularly rising unemployment rates and the need for up and re-skilling the local workforce
- Potential community impact of forthcoming benefit reductions

Inward investment

- 'Business Supporting, Business Winning Council' – member advocacy role to promote the Borough as a place to invest
- Engagement with existing local businesses to understand how the Council can better, more effectively support them

Council Financial Pressures

- Whilst delivering service changes and reductions, ensuring that the priority needs of the Borough's different communities continue to be met

Delivering the 'Localism' Agenda:

- Greater involvement/engagement with Town & Parish Councils

- Neighbourhood Planning – development of local plans at Town & Parish Council level
- ‘Community right to challenge’ – understanding the effective delivery of local services.

Co-operative working:

- Empowerment of local people/communities to shape local services and the Council’s relationship with communities
- With the community and community groups, developing new models of service delivery and management of community assets

REDUCING THE BURDEN

Over the last 2 years, there has been a reduction in the number and scope of statutory inspections/responsibilities. For example, Comprehensive Area Assessment.

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

The agendas for the Committee’s meetings of 21st June and 19th July can be found on the council’s website at

<http://apps.telford.gov.uk/demservice/CommitteesDetails.asp?theCommittee=Boundary>

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.