

**TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL  
FULL COUNCIL 22 NOVEMBER 2012**

**FURTHER ELECTORAL REVIEW OF THE BOROUGH: COUNCIL SIZE**

**REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: LAW, DEMOCRACY AND PUBLIC PROTECTION**

**PART A) – SUMMARY REPORT**

**1.0 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) commenced a further electoral review of the Borough in October 2012. The last review was completed in 2002, and the Order that came out at that time gave the Borough a pattern of 33 wards and 54 councillors. 16 wards are single member; 13 wards elect two members and 4 wards elect three members. One of the crucial requirements for such a review is the appropriate number of councillors because this then leads to the quota of electors to councillors. This, in turn leads to the allocation of councillors to wards, ensuring that, as far as possible, every councillor represents approximately the same number of electors. The Commission's technical guidance document can be viewed at the following link

<http://www.lgbce.org.uk/documents/lgbce/guidance-policy-and-publications/guidance/electoral-review-guidance-august-2012.pdf>

Consultation is currently taking place on council size – the appropriate number of councillors that are required to transact the business of the council effectively.

Full council in September approved that a submission be made to LGBCE for a preferred Council size of 54 councillors by the Boundary Review Committee. The main opposition group made a separate submission in support of a council size of 44 and based on a return to the 'Committee system'. LGBCE considered both submissions and decided to consult on both numbers from the end of October. Submissions can be viewed at [www.lgbce.org.uk](http://www.lgbce.org.uk) Consultation on council size closes on 3 December. If

appropriate, further submissions can now be made supporting proposals for council size. This work lies within the remit of Boundary Review Committee and a further meeting has been scheduled for 26 November to discuss any further submission in support of a council size of 54. The Assistant Director: Law, Democracy & Public Protection, in consultation with the Chairman of Boundary Review Committee can then be tasked with ensuring that any response is made to LGBCE by 3 December

**2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

**2.1 That the Boundary Review Committee meet to determine, if appropriate, whether a further submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) for a Council size of 54 councillors**

**2.2 That the Assistant Director Law, Democracy & Public Protection in consultation with the Chairman of Boundary Review Committee be delegated with ensuring that any further submission is made to LGBCE by 3 December.**

**3. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

<b>COMMUNITY IMPACT</b>	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>
<b>DELIVERY DATE</b>	<i>Timetable not currently formulated by Local Government Boundary Commission for England</i>	
<b>FINANCIAL/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT</b>	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
<b>LEGAL ISSUES</b>	No	The Local Government Boundary Commission for England has a statutory duty to keep under review electoral arrangements at local authority level

<b>OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS &amp; OPPORTUNITIES</b>	Yes	The Local Government Boundary Commission for England began 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.
<b>IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS</b>	Yes	Borough-wide impact.

## **PART B) – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

### **4.0 COUNCIL SIZE**

4.1 The guidance that the Commission provides on the issue of council size is reproduced at the Annex to this report.

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](http://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](http://www.telford.gov.uk/elections)

Agendas and papers of Boundary Review Committees can be found here.  
<http://apps.telford.gov.uk/demservice/CommitteesDetails.asp?theCommittee=Boundary>

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## **Annex**

### **Extract from Local Government Boundary Commission for England, *Electoral Reviews: Technical Guidance* (July 2012)**

#### **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 or divisions of the authority. We cannot consider the patterns of wards or divisions 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 boroughs – 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 areas. 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 (the 2000 Act), 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 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.

## 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

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 to be assured that the reduction will not jeopardise the ability of a council to manage its business effectively. Equally, we will wish to examine closely proposals for council sizes of above a hundred councillors.

## 5.10

In short, whatever council size local authorities have in mind, we will wish to test the assumptions underlying the proposals regardless of whom they are from.

## 5.11

Our preliminary discussions with principal local authorities which will take place around six months in advance of the formal start of the review, will give us the opportunity to hear their views about council size and begin to test the assumptions made to us. This will not be due to any presumption on our part but rather 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. The preliminary discussions will therefore progress most effectively if the local authority has considered its view at the earliest possible stage and is able to provide supporting evidence for it.

## **Factors to consider when making a proposal on council size**

### **5.12**

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.

### **5.13**

Broadly speaking, we will take a view on the right council size for an authority by considering three areas:

We will look at the governance arrangements of the council and how it takes decisions across the broad range of its responsibilities.

The Commission will look at the council's scrutiny functions relating to its own decision making and the council's responsibilities to outside bodies.

We will also consider the representational role of councillors in the local community and how they engage with people, conduct casework and represent the council on local partner organisations.

### **5.14**

The Commission also asks local authorities and local people to consider the number of councillors for the authority not simply in the context of the council's current arrangements, but also likely future trends or plans. In every review it carries out, the Commission aims to ensure its recommendations remain relevant for the long term and will aim to recommend a number that delivers effective and convenient local government well after the completion of the electoral review..

### **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**

We are often asked for a more detailed breakdown of the sort of rationale we are seeking in support of a council size proposal. We have therefore developed further guidance (see Appendix C) that local authorities and political groups are asked to consider in submitting their council size proposals to us. They are not exhaustive and we encourage local authorities and others to present us with any such further material as they consider appropriate. We are, of course, content to discuss the guidance at preliminary meetings in advance of the review commencing.

#### 5.17

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.

#### 5.18

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.

#### 5.16

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.