

# **COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE**

## **Electoral Review – Consideration of Council Size 12th January 2012**

### **Report of the Head of Governance**

#### **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To enable the Committee to consider whether the Council should make a submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission on Council size, and, if so, to determine the contents of that submission.

**This report is public**

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (1) **That the Committee consider whether it wishes to make a submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on the appropriate size for the Council, and, if so, to consider the contents of that submission.**

##### **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 Members will recall that at its meeting on the 16th November 2011, Council received a presentation from representatives of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England concerning the forthcoming electoral review due to commence on the 9th January 2012.
- 1.2 The review will first decide Council size, that is, the number of councillors, and then the number of wards and their names and boundaries. Council, at its meeting on the 14th December 2011, authorised this Committee on its behalf to consider and approve any submissions to the Commission during the course of the review.
- 1.3 The Commission has indicated that by the end of January it hopes to have received enough evidence to make a decision on the most appropriate council size for the Council, as well as to agree whether a wider public consultation is needed on council size. It has therefore requested evidence by the end of January in relation to the most appropriate council size for the Council. The Commission will accept written evidence in support of proposals but has indicated that it wishes to meet group leaders towards the end of January, and this has been arranged for the 24th January. The Commission has indicated that it is up to the Council whether to make a formal council submission or whether it should be left to political groups.
- 1.4 The Commission will require a good rationale for what is proposed, particularly where any substantial change is proposed, and will test the rationale and underpinning assumptions. Any proposals will need to be based on technical evidence, for example on governance arrangements and committee places.
- 1.5 The council size will subsequently determine the average (optimum) number

of electors per councillor to be achieved across all wards of the Council. This number is achieved by dividing the electorate by the number of councillors on the Council.

1.6 The Committee therefore needs to consider whether it wishes to make a proposal in respect of council size, and if so, to formulate that proposal and authorise the Head of Governance to submit it to the Commission.

1.7 Attached at Appendix 1 is an extract from the Commission's Technical Guidance (May 2011) relating to council size, which should be used as guidance.

## **2.0 Proposal Details**

2.1 The Technical Guidance indicates that 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. The factors that influence council size can be drawn together into four broad elements:

- The decision making process
- Quasi-judicial processes eg planning and licensing
- The scrutiny process
- The representative role of the elected member

2.2 As members will be aware, the Council's business is currently conducted through the elected member bodies listed in Appendix 2. There are currently eight members of Cabinet (including the Leader), 18 places on the scrutiny committees, 44 places on regulatory committees and 35 places on the other decision making committees of Council. With 60 members, this equates to 1.75 places per member, and the Committee may wish to consider whether 60 is an appropriate number of members for the current workload. It should be noted that, with the exception of an increase in members of the Licensing Regulatory Committee from seven to nine, the sizes of the other committees have not been reviewed in recent years.

2.3 In considering the appropriate council size, members may wish to bear in mind that the current size pre-dated the Local Government Act 2000 which introduced the Cabinet system. Prior to that Act, the Council had a range of committees each with its own remit and responsibility for overseeing a function of the Council, and under that regime more councillors were required to attend more meetings. The Localism Act 2011 has made provision for councils to revert to the old committee system. The relevant provisions are not yet in force, and are likely to be supplemented by regulations which have not yet been published. Clearly Council may wish to consider this possibility in due course, and Members may wish to bear this in mind in considering the appropriate council size.

2.4 In addition to undertaking cabinet/committee work, councillors represent the Council on outside bodies. Currently Council makes appointments to 62 outside bodies, with a total of 110 appointments to those bodies. Of the 60 councillors, 41 currently represent the Council on outside bodies.

2.5 In addition to attending meetings, councillors have an important role in dealing with ward issues and performing a community leadership role within their wards. It is difficult to assess the time commitment of this role, and indeed this is likely to vary from councillor to councillor.

2.6 The results for Lancaster in the 2010 National Census of Local Authority

Councillors indicate that the average time spent by a councillor on council business was 16.2 hours per week. However, this was based on responses in 2010 from only 23 of the 60 councillors.

- 2.7 There are currently 31 parishes within the district, covering Morecambe, Carnforth and the rural areas. The impact of the existence of parish councils on the role of the local ward councillor is difficult to assess. This is something that the Committee may wish to consider, although it seems unlikely that the existence of the parish councils will be material to the consideration of the size of this Council.

### **3.0 Details of Consultation**

- 3.1 There has been no consultation at this stage. The Council has been invited to submit its views to the Commission, and it is open also to the groups to submit their own representations. The Commission will then decide whether a wider public consultation is required on council size.

### **4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)**

- 4.1 The options open to the Committee are to decline to make a submission on behalf of the Council, leaving it to the individual groups to put forward their views, or to put forward a formal submission on behalf of the Council. If the Committee takes the latter approach, it would be open to it to take a view on appropriate council size and formulate its reasoning in support of that view at this meeting, and, if necessary, to authorise the Head of Governance to finalise the submission in consultation with the Chairman. Alternatively, the Committee may wish to obtain further information, and to meet again to formulate its submission. However, Members are reminded that any submission must be with the Commission by the end of January.

### **5.0 Conclusion**

- 5.2 The Committee's views are sought.

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| <b>CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT</b><br><b>(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)</b> |
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| None directly arising from this report. The number of the electorate will be divided by the number of councillors to determine the average number of electors per councillor to be achieved across all wards. |
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| <b>LEGAL IMPLICATIONS</b> |
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| None directly arising from this report. It is open to the Council to suggest any council size provided that it can justify its proposal. |
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| <b>FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS</b> |
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| None directly arising from this report. The eventual size of the Council will have financial implications in terms of member allowances and support, but these cannot be quantified at this early stage where the Commission is simply seeking proposals. |
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**OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS****Human Resources:**

None

**Information Services:**

None

**Property:**

None

**Open Spaces:**

None

**SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

**MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Monitoring Officer has prepared the report in her capacity as Head of Governance.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

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