

Title of Report	ELECTORAL BOUNDARY REVIEW - COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION	
Presented by	Councillor Keith Merrie Infrastructure Portfolio Holder	
Background Papers	Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBCE) – Electorate Forecasts – A Guide for Practitioners LGBCE – Council Size – A guide for local authority elected members and staff	Public Report: Yes
Financial Implications	There are no financial implications arising from the proposed submission on Council size.	
	Signed off by the Section 151 Officer: Yes	
Legal Implications	The LGBCE has functions under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. It may at any time conduct a review of the area of the Council, and recommend whether a change should be made to the electoral arrangements. The Council is required to co-operate with the Commission, and must provide any information that it may reasonably require in connection with its functions (Section 56). As part of the review, the Council and others may make submissions proposing electoral arrangements considered appropriate. Legal advice has been provided by the Legal Services Team throughout the process.	
	Signed off by the Monitoring Officer: Yes	
Staffing and Corporate Implications	There are no implications arising from the proposed submission on Council size.	
	Signed off by the Head of Paid Service: Yes	
Purpose of Report	To approve a submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission on the size of the Council as part of the full review of electoral boundaries within the District.	
Recommendations	THAT COUNCIL: 1. APPROVES THE COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION AT APPENDIX A TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND ON THE FUTURE SIZE OF THE COUNCIL	

	2. CONSIDERS WHETHER IT WISHES TO INDICATE A PREFERENCE ON THE ISSUE OF SINGLE MEMBER WARDS.
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1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is a parliamentary body established by statute to conduct boundary, electoral and structural reviews of local government areas in England. The Commission is independent of government and political parties. It is directly accountable to the Speaker's Committee of the House of Commons.
- 1.2 The LGBCE notified the Chief Executive of its intention to carry out a review of the Council's electoral arrangements, due to electoral inequality, in 2023. The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the Act) gives the LGBCE the power to undertake reviews for the following reasons:
- At the request of the local authority; or
 - If the local authority meets the Commission's intervention criteria:
 - (a) If one ward has an electorate of +/-30% from the average electorate for the authority.
 - (b) If 30% of all wards have an electorate of +/-10% from the average electorate for the authority.

And the imbalance is unlikely to be corrected by foreseeable changes to the electorate within a reasonable period.

- 1.3 A review has been triggered by the second reason as there is electoral inequality in a number of wards. Appendix 1 shows the electoral position provided to the LGBCE in Autumn 2022 based on the data from the Register of Electors on 1 December 2021.
- 1.4 An electoral review examines and proposes new electoral arrangements for the whole local authority. These are:
- The total number of councillors to be elected to the council: council size
 - The names, number and boundaries of wards
 - The number of councillors to be elected from each ward

The review is likely to have implications for the whole local authority not just areas with high levels of electoral inequality.

- 1.5 The review seeks to adjust electoral ward boundaries to correct the current inequality but will also consider forecasts of future elector numbers.
- 1.6 Phase 1 of the review concentrates solely on Council size and does not at this stage consider where ward boundaries will ultimately lie. Ward numbers and boundaries will be considered and consulted upon during phase 2 of the review.
- 1.7 The outcome of the review, including Council size is not predetermined. The Commission will only take decisions after giving careful consideration of the evidence. There is no national formula or template, each case is considered on its own merit. The Commission will however make its judgement on Council size by considering three broad areas:

- Governance arrangements of the council and how it takes decisions across the broad range of responsibilities.
- Scrutiny functions relating to its own decision making and the council's responsibilities to outside bodies.
- The representational role of councillors in the local community and how they engage with people, conduct casework and represent the council on partnership organisations.

2.0 PROCESS TO DATE

- 2.1 Since September officers from various teams around the Council have provided information to assist with compiling the evidence to complete the submission document. As part of the evidence gathering all members were sent a survey to complete to also help formulate the submission.
- 2.2 During that time the Electoral Review Working Party has met to consider what size the Council should be. The group has considered the projected population, the results of the survey and the draft submission. The notes of the working party meetings of November 2023, December 2023 and January 2024 are attached at appendix 2.
- 2.3 Officers have also been collating information for the LGBCE to assist with the second stage of the review. This consists of projected forecasting, digital maps of the wards and polling districts and details of key contacts to be consulted during the process. This information is to be submitted by 31 January 2024.

3.0 PROPOSED COUNCIL SIZE

- 3.1 The final submission based on the template provided by the Commission is attached at appendix 3.
- 3.2 The factors outlined in the Boundary Commission's guidance document were carefully considered in preparing the submission to the Commission in terms of the number of the Councillors and the resulting electoral ratio. The Council's submission is informed by reviewing Councillors meeting and decision-making commitments, case workloads, community engagement work, forecast population growth (appendix 4) and comparisons to other local authorities. The views of all Councillors were sought via a member survey.
- 3.3 The Council's submission, which was agreed by a three to two vote at the Electoral Review Working Party on 10 January 2024, recommends that North West Leicestershire should remain at 38 Councillors. This will equate to an electoral ratio of 2,358 electors for each Councillor by 2030, based on population forecasts and considering planned housing activity and electoral registrations.
- 3.4 The report concludes that 38 Councillors is the optimum number of Councillors required to ensure effective governance and scrutiny. The reasons for retaining this number are, that the current model of governance is well-established and has proven to work well. With the ongoing development of digital technology, residents are better able to access information and services directly via the Council website, but the Council recognises that there are residents who do not have access to the internet or choose not to use it and prefer to contact their ward member for support. There would be no additional budget pressures to fund.
- 3.5 Other council sizes were considered by the working party. It was felt that, whilst it could result in potential financial savings for the authority, reducing councillor numbers could not

be justified with the ongoing population growth, which is set to continue and therefore increasing the casework of the councillors. Consideration was also given to increasing the Council size by one to 39 but was not felt to be necessary as, through the all-member survey, it was noted that councillors' workloads were proportionate and would continue to be so through the review of the warding arrangements, which would ensure representational equality across the district. It was also felt that an increase in numbers would see additional budget requirements to fund the increase at a time when the Council was already facing ongoing financial pressures.

3.6 The LGBCE will consider the Council's submission and will subsequently publish their final decision on the future size of the Council. This is expected to be on 12 March 2024. Once the LGBCE decision on Council size has been published, the second part of the review will commence which will focus on the ward arrangements of the district. Officers will develop proposals and they will be discussed on a regular basis with the Electoral Review working party to develop them further and refine for agreement by Council.

4.0 SINGLE/MULTI MEMBER WARDS

4.1 The last Electoral Review that was carried out on North West Leicestershire, in March 2012, was at the request of the Council to move from multi to single member wards.

4.2 Unless a request is submitted to the LGBCE for the review of the warding arrangements to be undertaken on single member wards, then the review will be carried out working towards multi member wards. These will be either one, two or three member wards. The Council is, therefore, asked to consider whether it wishes to indicate a preference on the single member ward issue.

4.3 Should the Council indicate a preference to continue with single member wards, this decision will be communicated to the LGBCE when the submission is sent in. Should preference be to move back to multi member wards this does not need to be communicated to the LGBCE.

Policies and other considerations, as appropriate	
Council Priorities:	Planning and regeneration Clean, green and Zero Carbon Communities and housing A well-run council
Policy Considerations:	The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is a parliamentary body established by statute to conduct boundary, electoral and structural reviews of local government areas in England.
Safeguarding:	None at this stage
Equalities/Diversity:	The Commission will work to achieve electoral equality and will consider representations made to it by other public authorities, community groups, residents associations, electors, political and other stakeholders during later stages.
Customer Impact:	The Commission will work to achieve electoral equality and will consider representations made to it by other public authorities, community groups, residents associations, electors, political and other stakeholders during later stages.

Economic and Social Impact:	None at this stage
Environment, Climate Change and Zero carbon:	None at this stage
Consultation/Community/Tenant Engagement:	Electoral Review Working Party The LGBCE will commence formal consultations once it has determined what the appropriate Council Size should be.
Risks:	Should the Council not make a submission to the LGBCE, then the Council would have little or no ability to shape the Commission's recommendation.
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