

## **COUNCIL – 30 JANUARY 2024**

### **ITEM 10 - ELECTORAL BOUNDARY REVIEW - COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION**

#### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

As detailed in the report, members will be aware that during the discussions of the working party an increase in numbers to 39 was considered. The Labour group have since provided a summary for an increase to 39. For Council's information the summary is detailed below:

#### **“SUMMARY FOR AN INCREASE TO 39**

The following Council size options were considered:

##### **Remain at 38**

Consideration was given to remaining at the current size of 38. Currently NWLDC is already above the mean number of electors per councillor for nearby and similar councils (2132:2059). Based on the current forecast population for 2030 the ratio of number of electors to each councillor would be 2,358, almost 300 electors per councillor above the mean for comparable councils. This would place NWLDC in the upper, fourth quartile of electors per councillor.

The ongoing trends, highlighted above, of an increasingly ageing population and a rise in homelessness across the district (30% increase in over 65s in last 10 years), are likely to lead to a significant increase in casework and a poorer service to electors if the number of councillors remains at 38.

The Council's governance model includes flexibility in the size of Cabinet, with a maximum of ten including the Leader. The current Cabinet size is seven including the Leader. With a council size of 38 and the current balance of power comprising 19 administration councillors, 17 Labour and 2 Independent, the administration needs to appoint a minimum of five members to the Scrutiny Committees and a further five to the Audit and Governance Committee, leaving a maximum of nine councillors available for Cabinet positions. It is therefore not currently possible to expand the Cabinet to the constitutional maximum of ten, and expanding to nine would require five councillors to serve on both Scrutiny Committees, which is not conducive to thorough scrutiny. Future administrations should have the flexibility to appoint a larger Cabinet should they feel this to be necessary. Even with the current Cabinet size of seven, at least three members must sit on both Scrutiny Committees.

As mentioned above, the number of external partnerships and joint arrangements requiring Cabinet members to sit on their governing bodies has and is likely to continue to increase. This is one aspect that could warrant a future increase in Cabinet size, thus better distributing these tasks. Another is the increasing need for attention to climate change, the environment and biodiversity matters.

As has been found following the last Local Government elections in May 2023, an even number of councillors can lead to a less stable administration. This Council is currently evenly balanced (19 administration councillors and 19 non-administration councillors), with many important Council decisions resting upon the casting vote of the Chair. This situation means that stability is often dependent upon the presence or absence of just one councillor and places undue pressure on councillors who are unwell to attend council meetings.

##### **Increase the current number of 39:**

Based on current forecast population for 2030 the ratio of number of electors to each councillor would be 2,297. This appears to be in line with other authorities that have undergone recent reviews. It would bring the Council down into the third quartile of similar and nearby councils; We would still be below the mean number of councillors of 40 but be in a more reasonable position.

An odd number of councillors is also more likely to result in a stable power balance (e.g. 20:19 would be the least stable scenario)

In terms of workloads for members, the current model of governance has been well established for a number of years. It has proven to work well, whilst being reviewed to ensure that it remains effective. Members would continue to serve on the same number of committees that they currently do. The additional member would provide extra resilience for the Scrutiny and Audit and Governance Committees, which require there to be no cross over in membership and which Cabinet members cannot sit on, and for the broader functions of committees, sub-committees, working parties and task and finish groups. It would also allow expansion of the cabinet to its maximum constitutional size, should this be deemed necessary in the future, or allow expansion of the Cabinet to eight places whilst retaining the current distribution of places on Scrutiny.

Following a recent survey carried out with members it was acknowledged, that on a whole, members felt that their workload was proportionate and manageable at the current time, however, with the forecast growth in population and the current financial climate, which could lead to an increase in casework around issues such as homelessness and arrears, an additional member would again provide additional resilience to effectively represent the electorate.

An increase in the number to 39 would see only a small additional cost in relation to allowances and support to members.

### **Reduction in numbers**

Consideration was given to reducing the number of Councillors and although it could result in potential financial savings for the authority, it was felt that this could not be justified with the ongoing population growth, which is set to continue and therefore increasing the casework of the Councillors. As stated above, the current model of governance has been in place for a number of years and is well established. Reducing the number of Councillors could potentially mean that the governance and committee structures would need to be reviewed and amended and the Council does not see any justification for that.

### **Increase to 40 or above.**

We also considered an increase in council size above 39 but it was felt that this would impose an unjustifiable level of additional costs on taxpayers. 40 councillors would again bring the Council to the less preferable position for stability of an even number.

### **Recommendation:**

Taking into account all relevant data and analysis, North West Leicestershire District Council proposes that its number of councillors increases by one to 39 to effectively operate and represent the electorate.”