

**COUNCIL**  
**20 January 2022**

**PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**TITLE OF REPORT: COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND ('LGBCE')**

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC SERVICES MANAGER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: LEADER OF COUNCIL/COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

COUNCIL PRIORITY: BE A MORE WELCOMING, INCLUSIVE AND EFFICIENT COUNCIL /  
BUILD THRIVING AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

*2022-2027 PEOPLE FIRST; SUSTAINABILITY AND A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER*

**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The first stage of the Electoral Review of North Herts Council by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is determination of Council Size (number of Councillors) to represent North Herts Council from May 2024.
- 1.2 The Council needs to agree the submission to the LGBCE by the required deadline of **21 January 2022**. Failure to agree the submission will result in the LGBCE imposing a council size.
- 1.3 Having discussed Council Size at the Boundary Review Project Board, Group Leaders suggested a Council Size of 50 Members given the projected growth in the Local Plan; and the nature of the district with its mix of more densely populated towns and sparsely populated large rural areas that need to be a manageable size geographically for the rural ward councillors. It is also believed that reducing the number of Members (thereby increasing workload for others) could deter or discourage individuals from standing as a Councillor, thereby further impacting on diversity of representation.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1. That Council approves the document on Council Size, attached as Appendix A, for submission to the LGBCE, noting the deadline for submission is 21 January 2022 (suggested Council Size of 50).

**3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1. The LGBCE undertakes periodic reviews of local boundaries. This has not been undertaken for this District since 2006 and following a number of requests to undertake

this review, a [timetable](#) for doing so has been agreed with the Council. As part of this process the LGBCE require information on Council size (number of Councillors).

3.2. The LGBCE invite submissions from a range of stakeholders through a public consultation. This includes the Council, elected representatives, political parties, parish councils, and the public. As such, if this Council does not make a submission, or fails to make a coherent case, the LGBCE will base its recommendation for the future size of this Council on other submissions they receive.

3.3. A Council Size of 50 Members has been proposed following discussion amongst Group Leaders at the Project Board, given the projected growth in the Local Plan; and the nature of the district with its mix of more densely populated towns and sparsely populated large rural areas that need to be a manageable size geographically for the rural ward councillors. It is also believed that reducing the number of Members (thereby increasing workload for others) could deter or discourage individuals from standing as a Councillor, thereby further impacting on diversity of representation.

#### **4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

4.1 This Council should make a submission to the LGBCE regarding council size. There are no other alternative options.

#### **5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

5.1. Preliminary meetings with various Officers and Members have been held with the LGBCE, concluding with the presentation to Members by the LGBCE on 14 July 2021.

5.2. A Boundary Review Project Board was established and relevant senior officers, and the Consultant meet on a monthly basis with the Group Leaders, most recently meeting on 5 January 2022 to consider the relevant issues relating to the review, prior to reports being submitted to Council.

#### **6. FORWARD PLAN**

6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

#### **7. BACKGROUND**

7.1. The LGBCE is responsible for conducting reviews of local authority electoral arrangements. This is through an 'electoral review'. The LGBCE completed its last review of North Hertfordshire in May 2006.

7.2. The Commission has intervention criteria – one of the criteria being if 30% of all wards have an electoral imbalance of more than 10% of the average ratio of electors to Councillors for the Authority. Another being where one or more wards have an electoral imbalance of more than 30% of the average ratio for the Authority. In North Herts, 33% of wards now have a variance outside the 10% threshold and the electoral district is therefore overdue a review.

7.3. A timetable has been agreed with the LGBCE for the Review – when key pieces of work must be submitted. The first key piece of work is to develop a 'council size' proposal

which includes the resolution of Council to change its electoral cycle from elections by thirds to whole council elections as of May 2024, and also to decide the appropriate number of Councillors for the authority. **The submission on Council size must be submitted to the LGBCE by 21 January 2022.** Ward boundaries will not be considered until this phase of the process is complete.

- 7.4. The LGBCE ultimately make a judgement on Council size based on three broad areas:
- a. The governance arrangements of the Council and how it takes decisions.
  - b. The Council's scrutiny functions relating to its own decision making and its responsibilities to outside bodies.
  - c. The representational role of Councillors in the local community.

## **8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 8.1 There is no limit to the number of Councillors that can be elected to represent a ward or division. However, the Commission would not usually accept a proposal for more than three Councillors to represent a ward.
- 8.2 Following the Council meeting of 7 December 2021, the Authority resolved to move to all-out/whole council elections as of May 2024. As such, a mixture of single, two and three member wards can be considered in this review by the Commission.
- 8.3 Attached at Appendix A is the proposed submission on council size. Members are invited to read, note and agree to this submission. The submission is that the Council Size should be 50.
- 8.4 As part of the overall review process, officers are required to provide detailed forecasts for the number of local government electors, looking ahead to 2027. This is based on current electorates (provided by Electoral Services) and planning projections (from Planning Services), both assessed at a local level. The methodology (attached for information at Appendix B) has been reviewed by the Project Board and since agreed by the LGBCE, and the calculated Electorate Forecast by ward (Appendix C) has also been accepted in principle by the LGBCE. These documents will accompany the Council Size submission.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Section 55 – 59 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 gives the Commission the power to review the electoral arrangements of all, or any, principal councils in England.
- 9.2 The legislation states that 'the total number of members of the council' forms part of an authority's electoral arrangements. The Commission refers to this as 'council size'. The legislation does not set out how many Councillors each authority should have. It is the Commission's responsibility to determine the appropriate number of Councillors for each authority.
- 9.3 The Commission will recommend a council size that, in its judgement, enables the council to take its decisions effectively, to discharge the business and responsibilities of the council successfully, and to provide for effective community leadership and representation.

- 9.4 Legislation places several obligations on the Commission in conducting the review and it also places a requirement on the Authority to, if requested by the LGBCE, provide any information as they may reasonably require.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 There could be savings if the overall number of members were reduced. For example, if there were to be a reduction of Members by approximately 10%, to 44, it would generate a saving of £25.5K (*based on the 2021/22 scheme of basic allowance of £5,100 per annum per Member*). There could also be savings in other costs, such as the provision of IT equipment/licenses and subsistence. The reverse of this being that an increase in the overall number of members will cost the Council more and there would be no opportunity to generate savings.
- 10.2 Based on the 2021/22 scheme an increase of one Councillor will increase the members allowance budget by £5,100 which does not account for any subsistence, mileage, childcare or dependent carers allowance. There is also a Members Training Budget which will need to be increased by £233. To provide IT equipment and relevant licence for one additional Member will be circa £2,000 (including a laptop, one monitor, docking station, headset, licence, tablet, case and keyboard and data sim card).

## **11. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1. The starting point for an Electoral Review is to decide the appropriate number of Councillors for the authority. Whilst the final decision is for the LGBCE, the Commissions preference is where an authority actively engages with the process. Council size submissions can be made by a range of stakeholders through a public consultation by the Commission. This includes the Council, elected representatives, political parties, parish councils, and the public. As such, if this Council either do not make a submission, or fail to make a coherent case, the LGBCE will base its recommendation for the future size of this council on other submissions they receive.

## **12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2. The Council size submission will not impact on the requirement of the Public Sector Equality Duty. However, the Electoral Review will support the LGBCE who are obligated under law to deliver electoral equality, reflect community interests and identities and promote effective and convenient local government.

## **13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report as this is not a procurement exercise or contract.

## **14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

## **15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

15.1 The appointment of the Consultant to undertake the Boundary Review has assisted to alleviate some of the pressure within the Democratic Services Team whilst it is significantly under resourced.

## **16. APPENDICES**

16.1 Appendix A – Council Size Submission

16.2 Appendix B – Electorate Forecast Methodology

16.3 Appendix C – Electorate Forecast to ward level

## **17. CONTACT OFFICERS**

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## **18. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

18.1 Presentation by the LGBCE to Members on 14 July and the accompanying LGBCE 'Electoral Review of North Hertfordshire – A Guide for Councillors' circulated to all Members on 14 July.

18.2 Council – 23 September 2021 – Electoral Cycle Consultation – Minute No. 52 refers  
<https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=136&MId=2614>

- 18.3 Council - 7 December 2021 - [Agenda for Council on Tuesday, 7th December, 2021, 7.30 pm - North Hertfordshire District Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)
- 18.4 Local Government Boundary Commission for England – Council Size Guidance – A guide to making a strong submission [Council Size Guidance](#)
- 18.5 [Electoral Review Timetable](#) as agreed with the LG BCE (included within the briefing documents provided to Members on 14 July 2021).