

Report to: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 6 July 2015

Report Title: Boundary Review Council Size

Report By: Jane Hartnell
Director of Corporate Services and Governance

Purpose of Report

1. To advise Members of the current review of the Hastings and East Sussex County Council's electoral boundaries and to consider options for our council's size.
2. To present the findings of the all-member survey to inform our decision about Council size.
3. To note the recommendation of the Working Arrangements Group (WAG) meeting on 17th June 2015.
4. To make recommendations to Full Council in respect of council size, in order for this recommendation, if agreed, to be submitted to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) by the final deadline of 7th August 2015.

Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet recommend to Full Council to maintain the existing number of members at 32 members, across 16 wards in respect of the council size, and that this recommendation is submitted to the LGBCE.

Reasons for Recommendations

To enable Cabinet to make recommendations to Full Council on council size as part of the boundary review, taking account of the findings of an all member survey and the recommendations of WAG in relation to the review.

Introduction

1. Members will recall that on the 24th March 2015, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) presented to the Council information about the electoral review that has been instigated for East Sussex County Council and the boroughs and districts within the County; this has occurred due to their being an electoral imbalance in the wards and districts across the County.
2. In Hastings, 38% of our wards have an electoral variance of more than 10% from the average.
3. Essentially, there are 2 parts to the review, firstly we need to make proposals in respect of the size of the Council and secondly, we will make proposals in respect of ward numbers, boundaries and names. In both cases we will need to supply robust evidence in respect of electorate equality and forecasts and whether the wards reflect significant communities, themes and landmarks. This report solely considers the issue of Council size.
4. Due to simultaneous reviews being undertaken county-wide, consistency of approach is being overseen by a joint officer project team with representatives from all the authorities, each local authority is however, responsible for its own review.

Hastings Borough Council - Current Position

5. As members will be aware, Hastings Borough Council currently has 16 borough wards and 32 councillors as a result of the last boundary review undertaken in 2000. In addition, there are 8 county council divisions, and as a result of the last ESCC boundary review in 2003, we have coterminosity of our borough wards and county divisions.

The review – considerations

6. When considering the council size the Commission needs to be satisfied that the number of Councillors proposed must be sufficient to ensure that 3 specific functions can be undertaken, namely Governance, Scrutiny and Community Representation.
7. It is also useful to consider the Council size in light of likely future policy developments e.g. localism, transformation, the possibilities of further shared service and/or devolution powers, outsourcing and service delivery changes, corporate plan commitments and of course a future of continued financial constraint.
8. The Commission has also made it clear that Council size changes will only be considered if they are within specific representation ranges appropriate to the size and demographic of the borough. In the case of Hastings, the approved size range is a council membership of from 25-57, thus we are currently in the lower part of the recommended size range.

Analysis

9. As previously stated, the Boundary Commission must be satisfied that any proposed arrangements are sufficient to ensure that the 3 specific functions can be carried out - each of these are addressed below:

Governance

10. The following table set outs the Council's current governance committee arrangements and number of Members serving on each committee.

Committee	Number
Schedule A	
Annual Council	32
Council	32
Cabinet	9
Audit	5
Council Appointments	5 (as & when required)
Standards	5 (as & when required)
Employment/HR	4 (as & when required)
Environment & Safety	5
Overview & Scrutiny	14
Planning	10
Licensing	15 (4 for each meeting, as & when required))
Schedule B	
Museums	10
Charity	3
Discretionary rate relief	9 (as & when required)
Working Arrangements Group	7
Member training & Develop Group	4
Total Cttee places	100

11. Since the introduction of the executive style of governance in 2000, the Council has kept under review its decision making structure. With the introduction of new legislation we have increased the number of committees, increasing the demand on member's time.
12. With regard to regulatory committees, whilst a proportion of regulatory decisions are made by officers under delegated powers, there is a need for these committees to be maintained in their current form and meeting cycle.
13. In relation to Governance, all of the above assumes the future Council will operate with the existing committee structure - this is considered sound and effective with the current number of councillors. It is our belief that 32 members is minimum required to operate this structure effectively. No changes to committee structures are proposed at this time and members would be expected to explore and review option's for committee and meeting structures as part of the normal Council processes as required. It would be unusual if committee structures did not change again over the next 3-5 years.

Scrutiny

14. In terms of Scrutiny, there are 2 Overview & Scrutiny Committees (services & resources) which meet 4 times per year; in addition O & S undertakes a number of reviews per year. The work programme is planned at the beginning of the civic year. There is an informal work programming meeting for all Members of the Scrutiny Committees along with service managers and the Corporate Management Team, to identify areas for scrutiny reviews and policy review and development.
15. The Scrutiny Committees undertake most of their work through the formation of working groups/ task and finish groups which consist of a smaller number of members and other interested parties where appropriate.

All Member Survey/ Community Representation

16. All Members were invited to complete an online survey to ensure that Councillors had the opportunity to give their views on what size the Council should be in the future. The questions asked and analysis of the results of the survey can be seen in Appendix 1. Of the 30 members that were invited to complete the survey, 28 responded.
17. In summary, the majority of members (70%) consider that the Council size is 'about right' at the moment, with 30% considering there are too many members and one member stating there were not enough. In terms of attendance at meetings, 16 (57%) of members stated they spent between 3 and 7 hours per month in Council meetings and 11(42%) in non-formal council meetings. In addition, members advised they spend between 3 and 7 hours per month (35%) preparing for meetings and work associated with their committee responsibility with some spending (25%) over 10 hours per month.
18. The majority of respondents (87%) spent up to 10 hours a month dealing with constituents, the majority of contact being via email (96%), face to face contact (96%) and telephone (92%). The majority of members considered they had enough time to fulfil their councillor and political role effectively (74%), with 77% advising that their workload has increased since becoming a councillor.
19. At a recent seminar (8th June 2015) to which all members were invited, a number of reasons were also highlighted as to how Councillors roles have changed since the last boundary review, and in particular the following points were made:
 - a. Members were expected to be more accessible and play an active role as community leaders;
 - b. The reduction in staffing levels across the authority had meant that councillors were having to do much more 'ground work' that may in the past have been undertaken by officers;
 - c. There was an increased expectation that councillors would communicate electronically with residents and the council and that residents expect an instant response;

- d. There was a perceived difference in workloads and the type of work between the more deprived wards and communities within the borough and the more affluent areas of the borough;
 - e. There is a perceived misfit between the population, the population that have the right to register to vote and those that actually do register/vote – concern was voiced about how this could affect the LGBCE view of electorate to ward member ratio if this was based on those who have registered to vote only;
 - f. Electoral registration does not truly reflect those constituents that are actually asking members for help e.g. in Hollington Ward 30% of electorate are not registered but this is not reflected in the demands on members from ward constituents;
 - g. Concern that any reduction in member numbers would have an impact on the structure of the Council and officers, and members ability to serve their constituents.
20. With regard to changing the election cycle to 4 yearly rather the 2 yearly, 66% of members responded that they did not wish to change to a 4 year cycle, 33% would like to see a change to a 4-year cycle.

Timetable

21. With regard to the Boundary Review there is a very clearly outlined timetable set out by the Boundary Commission - see appendix 2. With regard to Council Size, we have to present draft proposals to the LGBCE by the 10th July and final proposals by 7th August.

Options Considered by WAG:

22. An analysis of the all member survey showed that over 70% (20) of members consider that the number of elected members is about right, 25% (7) consider that there are too many and 1 member considers that there are not enough. With this in mind and in conjunction with the other findings from our research the following options were presented to WAG on the 17th June 2015 for consideration as follows:

Option 1: To reduce the number of members to within the range of 25-57, with the final preferred number to be agreed by Council. If a reduction in members was to be agreed, this would have to be by a factor of 2 to account for our election cycle of every 2 years.

Option 2: To increase the number of members within the range of 25-57 members

Option 3: To maintain the existing number of members at 32 members, across 16 wards.

23. WAG agreed unanimously to recommend option 3 to Cabinet. The recommendations of Cabinet on Council size will be considered by Full Council on the 22nd July 2015, before being submitted to the LGBCE.

Policy Implications

24. Equalities and community cohesiveness - the electoral boundary review has been come about due to there being an electoral inequality across some of our wards; meaning that some councillors represent far fewer or far more electorate.
25. Organisational consequences - the members survey and review of our current governance structures, clearly demonstrates that there is a high work demand on members and any reduction is only likely to increase the demands on their time.
26. Local people's views - The review process includes 2 stages of public consultation where local people's views will be sought - this is carried out by the LGBCE.
27. Anti-poverty - the boundary review has no direct impact on increasing poverty in the Borough, but will help to ensure that there is a fair and equitable electorate to member ratio across all our wards, and thus some of the towns most deprived communities will continue to be well represented.

Appendix 2 – Propose Timetable, Boundary review – East Sussex 2015

Outline timetable Stage	Date
Establish local project team	January 2015
Workshops / briefings (on Council size) / data review	May – June 2015
Draft proposals for council size	10 July 2015
Feedback from LGBCE on draft	
Final proposals for council size	7 August 2015
Commission consideration of council size	15 September 2015
Publication of council size decision and start of consultation on warding/division patterns	22 September 2015
End of consultation on warding/division patterns	30 November 2015
Commission consideration of draft recommendations	February 2016
Publication and consultation on draft recommendations	15 March 2016
End of consultation on draft recommendations	16 June 2016
Commission consideration of final recommendations	August 2016
Publication of final recommendations	September 2016

Wards Affected

Ashdown, Baird, Braybrooke, Castle, Central St. Leonards, Conquest, Gensing, Hollington, Maze Hill, Old Hastings, Ore, Silverhill, St. Helens, Tressell, West St. Leonards, Wishing Tree

Policy Implications

Please identify if this report contains any implications for the following:

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness	Yes
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	No
Risk Management	No
Environmental Issues	No
Economic/Financial Implications	No
Human Rights Act	No
Organisational Consequences	Yes
Local People's Views	Yes
Anti-Poverty	Yes

Additional Information

Appendix 1 - Member Survey details

Officer to Contact

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