

DEMOCRACY AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

6 APRIL 2022

Report Title	Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) Review of Electoral Arrangements – Proposed Council Size
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Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	N/A

List of Appendices

- Appendix A – Draft Submission on Council Size
- Appendix B – Views of the Labour Group
- Appendix C – Views of the Green Alliance Group

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. This report sets out the proposals of the cross-party member/officer Boundary Commission Working Group which has been meeting to consider draft proposals for the Council's size as part of the first stage of review of electoral arrangements in North Northamptonshire.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. The Boundary Commission are undertaking an Electoral Review of North Northamptonshire Council.
- 2.2. The process requires the Commission to seek representation to assist its deliberations. On 16 November 2021 the Democracy and Standards Committee established a cross party member Working Group with relevant Officer support to formulate and consider recommendations for electoral

arrangements for North Northamptonshire and agreed an initial phase timeline.

- 2.3. The Working Group is now reporting back to the Committee its proposals as part of the first phase of the Review, which seeks to determine what should be the appropriate size of the Council in terms of the number of Councillors. The attached documents at Appendix A are the culmination of this review, with additional representations of the Labour and Green Alliance Groups at Appendices B and C.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. It is recommended that the Democracy and Standards Committee: -
- (a) Notes the work of the Member/Officer Working Group on the first phase of electoral arrangements for North Northamptonshire;
 - (b) Approves the completed background evidence and information contained in the council size template at Appendix A, for submission to full Council at its meeting on 26 May 2022;
 - (c) Approves a Council size number for recommendation to full Council, noting the Working Group's recommended figure of **99**, set out at the end of Appendix A.
 - (d) Notes the alternative options put forward by the Labour and Green Alliance representations at Appendix B and C respectively;
 - (e) Delegates to the Director of Governance and Human Resources in consultation with the Chair of this Committee to make any amendments to the submissions prior to consideration at full Council in the light of any further comments from this Committee and any minor/typographical changes;
 - (f) To confirm that the Working Group should continue to meet to address any queries or questions that the Boundary Commission may have regarding the submission, and to plan for, carry out and report to this Committee recommendations in respect of stage 2 of the Electoral review.

(Reason for Recommendations – To update the Committee on the work of the Member Working Group and to agree a submission to full Council.)

- 3.2. *Alternative Options Considered – The Working Group has considered, in detail, different options available to the Council in terms of keeping the Council numbers at the current size, reducing its number, or increasing it and the pros and cons of each. The background evidence base is accepted by all members of the Working Group. Interpretation of the evidence base in*

terms of a suitable final number does differ though, with the formal submission of the Group at Appendix A, and alternative options set out for consideration in Appendices B and C.)

4. Report Background

- 4.1. The template document at Appendix A largely sets out factual and contextual information about North Northamptonshire Council, its governance arrangements and structures, together with information regarding council area, the electorate, housing growth etc.
- 4.2. The summary at the end of Appendix A sets out the conclusions and recommendations of the Working Group. It has set out what it considers to be the key considerations in terms of future council size and proposes that North Northamptonshire Council should petition the Boundary Commission to agree to an increase to 88 councillors, i.e., 10 councillors to account for the additional workload referenced and that this will allow consideration by Council to appoint to new committees. The Working Group considered that a further case is evidenced for an increase by 11 Councillors to a final total of **99 councillors**.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1. The Working Group has considered the implications for the Council in reducing the councillor numbers below 78, keeping them at the current level, and also increasing them.
- 5.2. Whilst there has been agreement in terms of the background evidence and information contained in the council size template at Appendix A, a majority of the Working Group has proposed a total of 99 councillors for future council size.

Alternative views have been presented by the Labour Group (84 to 86 councillors) and Green Alliance Group (60 councillors), which are set out respectively at Appendices B and C to this report.

- 5.3. In considering the evidence provided, it is recommended that the Democracy and Standards agree a council size of 99 Councillors and the submission document for submission to full Council of 99 Councillors.
- 5.4. The only other option for this Committee is not to submit a view about Council size to Council and in turn the Commission, but this is not advised.
- 5.5. It should also be noted that Councillors, members of the public and other interested parties may also submit their own proposals, recommendations, and evidence to the LGBCE for consideration.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1. Following consideration by full Council on 26 May 2022, a submission will be presented to the LGBCE on behalf of the Council, which will be given consideration alongside any other representations. The LGBCE will then make a decision on council size, expected in August 2022.
- 6.2. In considering the next stage of the review - the ward areas, the Working Group would wish to look at warding numbers, pattern and size, to include effective, reflective, and convenient boundaries taking into consideration community identity, behavioural impacts, and physical barriers such as roads, rivers etc. and report back its findings and recommendations to this Committee.
- 6.3. The timeline for the remainder of the review is expected to be as follows: -

Timeline	LGBCE Activity
30 August – 7 November 2022	Invitation to submit warding patterns
7 February – 17 April 2023	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation
4 July 2023	Publication of final recommendations
Summer 2023	Draft order seeking to implement the recommendations
2025	Implementation of final recommendations

- 6.4. The electoral arrangements for West Northamptonshire Council will also be reviewed, however, the LGBCE will treat the two reviews separately.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1. Resources and Financial

- 7.1.1. The resources required to undertake the next stage of the review are available within the existing North Northamptonshire Member and staffing structure.
- 7.1.2. Technical expertise in the collation of statistical information, mapping and forecasts will also be required from colleagues in planning services.
- 7.1.3. The member/officer working group has representation from across the Council and a timetable of meetings will be agreed.
- 7.1.4. Specialist mapping software is available to assist with detailing proposed boundary changes. The electoral services team are currently investigating the estimated cost, and should a decision be taken to acquire the software it is anticipated the cost would be met from the existing Electoral Services budget.

7.1.5. Additional staff overtime costs may become payable in relation to attendance at evening meetings/briefings and to cover any additional hours required in the preparation of future proposals/ responses to recommendations.

7.2. **Legal and Governance**

7.2.1. The Council has delegated responsibility to the Democracy and Standards Committee the preparation of submissions on behalf of the Council to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England in relation to the governance of the area. The Committee may establish working groups to assist in informing the decisions of the Committee. A working group may be established by a resolution of this Committee.

7.3. **Relevant Policies and Plans**

7.3.1. The recommendations in this report support the Corporate Plan 2021-25 key commitment of **Connected communities**, in ensuring our communities are connected with one another so they are able to shape their lives and the areas where they live.

7.4. **Risk**

7.4.1. If the cross-party member/officer working group was not to continue, this could lead to a disjointed approach to the ongoing review resulting in limited options and evidence for the LGBCE to consider.

7.4.2. The existing Electoral Services Management Software contract is due to expire in August 2022. A procurement exercise is currently underway to source a new Electoral Management Software System. If an alternative supplier is selected this could have a negative impact on data processing and any mapping facilities that may have been procured to assist with the technical aspects of the review.

7.5. **Consultation**

7.5.1. Formal consultation on the draft recommendations and for future stages of the review will be conducted by the LGBCE as part of the statutory review process.

7.6. **Equality Implications**

7.6.1. There are no discernible equality implications arising from the contents of this report.

7.7. **Climate Impact**

7.7.1. No immediate environmental impact has been identified. When undertaking the review, the project team will consider the environmental and climate impact of the project, in line with the council's priorities in this area.

7.8. Community Impact

7.8.1. The primary objective of the review is to improve electoral equality across North Northamptonshire ensuring that each voter has roughly the same representation on the council.

6.7.2 Members of the community will have the opportunity to engage with the review process and submit their own proposals and comment on recommendations as part of the review process.

7.9. Crime and Disorder Impact

7.9.1. There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

8. Background Papers

8.1. [Democracy and Standards Committee – 16 November 2021](#) (item 10 refers)