

Public

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Electoral Boundary Review of Huntingdonshire

Meeting/Date: Council – 30th September 2015

Executive Portfolio: Executive Leader

Report by: Managing Director

Ward(s) affected: All

Executive Summary:

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has recently announced it intends to undertake an electoral review of Huntingdonshire District Council. The first phase of the review is for the Council to produce a submission to the LGBCE, which provides a rationale, backed up with evidence, for a proposed Council size.

The timescale for completion of this phase is very short. The Managing Director has convened a working group comprising representatives from the political groups to make recommendations on the number of Councillors the Council needs.

The Working Group has met on three occasions and concluded, on the basis of relevant information, that the Council should retain 52 Councillors in order to secure effective and convenient local government.

The Working Group's findings have been endorsed by the Standards Committee.

Recommendation:

To approve Huntingdonshire District Council's submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on Council size.

1. WHAT IS THIS REPORT ABOUT/PURPOSE?

- 1.1 This report provides Members with an opportunity to consider the Council's submission on the first phase of the review by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) of the number of Huntingdonshire District Council elected Members and its Wards. It also contains information on the process and timescale leading to completion of the review.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The LGBCE has recently announced it intends to undertake an electoral review of Huntingdonshire District Council. The first phase of the review is for the Council to produce a submission to the LGBCE, which provides a rationale, backed up with evidence, for a proposed Council size.
- 2.3 The timescale for completion of this phase is very short. The Managing Director has convened a working group comprising representatives from the political groups to make recommendations on the number of councillors the Council needs.
- 2.4 The Council's submission will need to be approved by the full Council. The Standards Committee has been consulted on the draft submission and has endorsed it. The Committee will be involved in subsequent phases of the review, which will lead to the adoption of revised Ward boundaries for the District.

3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED/ANALYSIS

- 3.1 With regard to the Council's size, the LGBCE will seek to put the Council's proposal into context by comparing it with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy *Nearest Neighbours* model. This is to ascertain whether an authority's proposal would mean its council size differs to a significant extent from similar authorities. Various pieces of information about the Council's *Nearest Neighbours* and the other districts in Cambridgeshire have been examined for this purpose.
- 3.2 As the Council's submission states, Huntingdonshire's proposal for 52 Members is mid-way between the upper and lower figures for the *Nearest Neighbours* and, with an electorate of 128,353, has strong similarities with the areas of a comparable size; namely Aylesbury Vale, Colchester, Braintree and South Cambridgeshire. There should be no objection to the Council's proposal on this ground.
- 3.3 Based on current electorate figures of 128,358, with 52 Councillors, each Councillor would represent an average of 2,468 electors, rising to 2,935 in 2021 (152,600 electors). Of the Councils in the *Nearest Neighbours* list that have completed a review since the start of 2014, Huntingdonshire has the highest councillor:elector ratio both now and at the end of the period covered by the review (in Huntingdonshire's case 2021).
- 3.4 As its primary consideration at this stage is effective and convenient local government rather than representation ratios, the Council's submission has taken into account various aspects of the *Nearest Neighbours'* structures, such as the size of the Cabinet, the Scrutiny function and working with external partners. As the Council has regularly reviewed its democratic structure, it has a close understanding of its requirements of the structure and

the size of the components of that structure. This point is emphasised in the Council's submission.

- 3.5 One of the key reasons for proposing to retain 52 Councillors is the magnitude of the growth predicted for the area. Demands on councillors have increased significantly since the last review in 2002. It has already been pointed out that Huntingdonshire councillors serve a greater number of electors than those at comparison authorities. Based primarily on the Council's own Housing Trajectory estimates, growth is likely to be greater in this area than many others. The demands on councillors will only increase further still. All parties are aware of the difficulties that currently exist in finding individuals to stand for election. It is argued that this should not be exacerbated as it would diminish the options available at elections.
- 3.6 These points are expanded on in the Council's submission, which is attached as an Annex.
- 3.7 When it comes to phase 2, options are generated through the review process. The LGBCE aims to build as many of its recommendations as possible on locally-generated proposals and, to that end, will gather as much information and undertake consultation. It will publicise the review and will ask local authorities, political parties, parish and town councils, community groups, residents' associations, other main stakeholders and local people to engage in the process.

4. KEY IMPACTS/RISKS? HOW WILL THEY BE ADDRESSED?

- 4.1 The risks are that equality of representation will not exist, that Members will not reflect the identities and interests of local communities and that the Council will not operate effectively. The purpose of the review is to reduce the likelihood of these risks occurring. To ensure the review is effective, it is carried out in accordance with prescribed procedures with an emphasis on consultation, reliance on evidence, openness, transparency and proportionality.

5. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 5.1 The Council's submission as part of the first phase of the review relating to Council size has to be completed by the end of September 2015. It is intended that in the second phase there will be public consultation between 27th October 2015 and 11th January 2016 on new electoral ward boundaries and further public consultation on the LGBCE's draft recommendations between 5th April and 31st May 2016. Once the recommendations have been finalised, a draft Order will be laid in Parliament for a period of 40 sitting days. Parliament can either accept or reject the recommendations. If accepted, the new electoral arrangements will be implemented at the next scheduled elections in 2018.

6. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN

- 6.1 Working with our communities - we want our communities to get involved with local decision making. In particular the objectives to:
- create stronger and more resilient communities, and
 - empower local communities.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Consultation on electoral reviews is prescribed in legislation. In the case of Huntingdonshire, there will be public consultation between 27th October 2015 and 11th January 2016 on new electoral ward boundaries and further public consultation on the draft recommendations between 5th April and 31st May 2016.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The primary legislation in this area is the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, which consolidates and amends legislation previously contained in the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1992 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. This legislation specifies the requirement to undertake electoral reviews and prescribes their procedures and parameters.

9. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The cost of the review will be met from existing resources.

10. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The review is required to have regard to:
- the need to secure equality of representation;
 - the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
 - the need to secure effective and convenient local government.

11 RECOMMENDATION

It is RECOMMENDED

that the Huntingdonshire District Council's submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on Council size is approved.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Local Government Boundary Commission for England – [Technical Guidance](#)

Local Government Boundary Commission for England – [Taking part in the Electoral review of Huntingdonshire District Council – A guide for councillors](#)

CONTACT OFFICER

A Roberts – 01480 388015