

Report to Extraordinary Council

21 July 2016

By the Head of Legal and Democratic Services

DECISION REQUIRED



**Horsham
District
Council**

Not Exempt

Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on the future number of Members for Horsham District Council

Executive Summary

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) informed the Council in April 2016 that it would undertake an Electoral Review of the District to deliver electoral equality for voters in local elections. The Commission assesses electorate data for each local authority annually and conducts a review where significant electoral inequality is found. In 2016, 32% of Horsham's wards have a variance of greater than 10% with little prospect of the variance correcting itself through development or population movements. The electoral review process will have two distinct parts a) council size and b) electoral ward boundaries. The council is required to respond to a) council size, only, in this report. The council must prepare its submission to the LGBCE in accordance with the following three criteria:

- Governance arrangements
- Scrutiny functions
- Representational role of councillors in the local community

This report is the summary of engagement with all Members of the Council through:

- One all member briefing from the LGBCE
- A survey of all members
- Two all-member seminars

The consensus from the programme of engagement with Members is that the Council will need more councillors from May 2019.

Recommendations

That Extraordinary Council is recommended:

- i) To approve the appended submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) on Council size and in doing so agree that the Council size be proposed at 47 councillors from May 2019.

Reasons for Recommendations

To provide the Council's response to stage one of the electoral review process by proposing the number of members that the council believes will be right for the authority from May 2019 to ensure appropriate levels of governance, scrutiny and community leadership for Horsham District Council.

Background Papers

1. The presentation and papers issued by the LGBCE to the member briefing on 27 April 2016
2. The summary of the outcome of the survey of all members
3. Presentations made to two all-member seminars on 31 May and 6 July 2016.

Wards affected: All wards

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Background Information

1 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) informed the Council in April 2016 that it would undertake an Electoral Review of the District to deliver electoral equality for voters in local elections. The LGBCE set out a timetable whereby the review will be undertaken in two distinct stages. The first stage considers council size, which will be concluded by the LGBCE in September 2016, the second stage considers warding arrangements which will commence in November 2016.
- 1.2 This report to extraordinary council concerns the requirement for the council to respond to the LGBCE, making its council size proposal only, by August 2016.
- 1.3 The LGBCE does not have the power to examine the external boundaries of the district nor to alter the external boundaries of parish councils. The commission does not take into account local political implications, and takes no account of parliamentary constituency boundaries which are the responsibility of the Boundary Commission for England.

2 Relevant Council policy

- 2.1 This council size proposal aligns with two Corporate Plan 2016-19 objectives:
 - Communities, support our communities; and
 - Efficiency, great value services

3 Details

- 3.1 The LGBCE set out three criteria to which the council must respond in making its proposal on council size to the commission. The three criteria are:
 - governance arrangements
 - Scrutiny functions
 - Representational role of councillors in the local community
- 3.2 A full engagement programme with members took place between April and July 2016. The LGBCE briefed members and officers on 27 April, a survey was issued to all members during May, and two member seminars were facilitated. The outcome of the engagement programme with members was to favour an increase in the number of members to 47. Appendix A provides the narrative considerations which form the submission to the LGBCE.

4 Next Steps

- 4.1 As guided by the LGBCE, upon consideration of the resolution of extraordinary council on 21 July 2016, officers will despatch the appended report and associated minute of council to the LGBCE in early August. The LGBCE timeline provides for the meeting of the commission to consider the proposal from the council in

September 2016. The outcome of that meeting of the commission will be announced by the LGBCE.

- 4.2 The LGBCE will open a Horsham Electoral Review section on its website. Preliminary discussions with ward members about their wards will be led by officers during August and September. The LGBCE has scheduled to commence its warding patterns public consultation on 27 September 2016. The consultation will close on 5 December 2016. The council has until 5 December 2016 to respond to the consultation and a meeting of council is scheduled for 19 October 2016.
- 4.3 The LGBCE will prepare its draft recommendations and make those recommendations available for public consultation on 7 February 2017 until 3 April 2017. Final recommendations are scheduled for publication by the LGBCE on 6 June 2017.

5 Views of the Policy Development Advisory Group and Outcome of Consultations

- 5.1 All members of the council have been consulted as described in 3.2 above. There was neither requirement nor expectation that the council should consult with any one other than its own members. The outcome of the consultation with members was to propose an increase in the number of members to 47 to the LGBCE.
- 5.2 There is no requirement in Part 3A (3) of the constitution for this matter to be considered by a policy development advisory group.

6 Other Courses of Action Considered but Rejected

- 6.1 A reduction in the number of members was not supported during the consultation with members, only two out of ten survey respondents supported a reduction and there was no support for a reduction in members at the subsequent member seminars. Retention of the same number of members (44) was considered but was not supported at the member seminars.

7 Resource Consequences

- 7.1 The proposal to increase the number of members to 47 would require the budget for members' allowances to be increased by at least £14,304 per annum (3 members at the current basic allowance of £4,768). This increase would have to be included within the budget setting process for 2019-2020.
- 7.2 The technical guidance published by the LGBCE states that the commission does not consider the financial implications that the council size proposal could have when it considers effective and convenient local government.
- 7.3 The Commission does not charge the local authority for the review.

8 Legal Consequences

- 8.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body established in 2010 by Parliament under the provisions of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

- 8.2 The LGBCE is responsible for undertaking this review following statutory considerations. This report and methodology follows the guidance provided by the commission.
- 8.3 Electoral reviews are a matter for Full Council. Close alignment with electoral matters specified in the Local Authorities Functions and Responsibilities Regulations 2000, and local government convention exclude Electoral Reviews from the responsibilities of the Cabinet.

9 Risk Assessment

- 9.1 Electoral review is not a corporate risk. The Corporate Risk Register is reported to the Accounts, Audit and Governance quarterly. Mitigation of any operational risk is provided by the assurance that the LGBCE is an independent body, created by statute, with a track record of delivering electoral reviews.

10 Other Considerations

- 10.1 Community representation, leadership and demands on member time were considered as part of this proposal. The governance arrangements of the council provide for members to offer public assurance and challenge around crime and disorder, human rights and equality and diversity matters.