

Electoral Review Preliminary Stage - Council Size Submission

1. To consider the data gathering arrangements and a programme of work for the preliminary stage on council size of the electoral review of Wiltshire Council by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

Background

2. On 15 September 2017, Wiltshire Council was notified by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England ('the Commission') of its intention to carry out an electoral review of the Council in its 2018/19 work programme. This was because 25 of the 98 electoral divisions in Wiltshire had a variance from the average division greater than 10% and 2 had a variance of more than 30%. The last review of Wiltshire by the Commission was in 2008 in the run-up to the first unitary elections.
3. On 17 October 2017, Full Council established the Electoral Review Committee ('the Committee') to progress the review on behalf of the Council, and to formulate recommendations on any submissions to be made to the Commission during the review process. A link to the report can be found ([here](#)) and the Committee's terms of reference are attached at [Appendix A](#).
4. In response to the Council decision, the review has been identified as a major corporate project involving a project board at corporate director level supported by a project team of officers. This will co-ordinate the work directed by the Committee.
5. On 22 November, all councillors received a [briefing note 337](#) circulating the Commission's guide for councillors in taking part in the electoral review of Wiltshire Council. It outlined the process and timeframe for the review and gave links to the Commission's website including comprehensive technical guidance and council size guide.
6. On 28 November, the Lead Commissioner and review officers came to County Hall to deliver a briefing to all councillors and responded to questions. The presentation is attached at [Appendix B](#). The Commission's officers stayed on to informally meet with the appointed Committee members.
7. It is important for the Committee to recognize that there are two distinct

parts to the electoral review - council size (preliminary stage) running until March 2018 and consideration of division boundaries from May 2018 to March 2019.

8. This report therefore focuses on the work the Committee will need to do on council size under the preliminary stage.

Main Considerations

9. When making its judgement on council size the Commission consider three broad areas:
 - ***governance arrangements of the council and how it takes decisions across the broad range of its responsibilities.***
 - ***the council's scrutiny functions relating to its own decision making and the council's responsibilities to outside bodies.***
 - ***representational role of councillors in the local community and how they engage with people, conduct casework and represent the council on local partner organisations.***
10. The Council's submission on council size will need to set out the current arrangements and any plans for the future in respect of these areas. The Commission's technical guidance includes a guide on council size and within it sets out a number of questions and prompts for the Committee to consider. To make this easier, the project team have pulled the questions together in a table and this is attached at [Appendix C](#). Officers have started to populate it as a working document for discussion at the Committee's workshop on 20 December with factual information from the Constitution, new Business Plan and recent Independent Remuneration Panel. The Council's current governance arrangements are accessible on the website and best summarized at this point in the attached diagram at [Appendix D](#). The Business Plan 2017-27 summary table is attached at [Appendix E](#) to help identify future plans for change (with the full Plan on the website).
11. The Commission is seeking a submission ideally of around 10-12 pages and have provided a template of headings which is attached at [Appendix F](#). Examples of other council submissions are available on the Commission's website. Again, the workshop on 20 December would be a good opportunity to start to take a closer look at a few of the best examples.
12. The Commission has produced a generic table of information requirements for the start of the review set out at [Appendix G](#) which the project team is compiling with the support of officers from elections, spatial planning, corporate services, community governance and democratic services. In particular, the Committee will be interested in the electorate forecast based on population growth from housing development (covering 6 years from the start of the review). Information will be made available to the Committee as soon as possible and will be particularly helpful in calculating future electoral ratio and equality. The current electorate by division was included in the councilor briefing note referred to in

paragraph 5 above.

13. As noted in the Council report, this is a significant project requiring support from across the organisation that will place additional demands on the teams mentioned. Some direct project costs are available from the Council's enabling fund. The officers from the Commission very much favour a collaborative approach and are keen for us to share information as the project progresses. This will enable them to provide ongoing advice as we move through the process of developing our submission.
14. The Committee will initially need to determine a pattern of activity (formal meetings and workshops) for itself in order to achieve the deadline of making the Council's final submission by 15 March 2018. The following has therefore been provisionally identified and booked:
- 20 December – Committee workshop – Consideration of Data
 - 3 January – Committee meeting – Formulation of recommendations
 - 25 January – Committee meeting – Finalise recommendations
 - 7 February – Committee meeting – Finalise submission to Council
 - 20 February (or additional extraordinary) – Council meeting – Approve submission to Commission
15. There are prescribed phases of public consultation run by the Commission particularly under the electoral division boundaries stage. The Commission are also open to receiving submissions other than from the Council in respect of council size. They are keen to reach out and encompass all parts of the community. As a committee of the Council, the formal meetings of the Committee will be held in public to aid transparency and openness. Representatives of town and parish councils have been informed of the commencement of the review. The Committee may also wish to take a view on further publicity and communication.

Proposal

16. The Committee is asked to:
- note the actions taken to date (paras 3-6);
 - note the two distinct parts to the electoral review - council size (preliminary stage) running until March 2017 and consideration of division boundaries from May 2018 to March 2019 (para 7);

- consider the approach described above to developing the Council's submission on council size including the collection and presentation of data, working with the Commission's representatives and publicity (paras 9-13 and 15), and;
- determine the timetable of activity for the Committee to direct the project (para 14)

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Appendices

Appendix A – Committee's terms of reference

Appendix B – Commission's presentation to councillors

Appendix C – Commission's questions and prompts on council size

Appendix D – Council's current committee diagram

Appendix E – Council's Business Plan summary table

Appendix F – Commission's council size summary submission template

Appendix G – Commission's table of information requirements

Background Papers

Technical Guidance - <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/policy-and-publications/guidance>