

AGENDA SUPPLEMENT (2)

Meeting: Electoral Review Committee
Place: North Wiltshire Room - County Hall, Trowbridge, BA14 8JN
Date: Thursday 11 January 2018
Time: 12.30 pm

The Agenda for the above meeting was published on 3 January 2018. Additional documents are now available and are attached to this Agenda Supplement.

Please direct any enquiries on this Agenda to Kieran Elliott, of Democratic Services, County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, direct line 01225 718504 or email kieran.elliott@wiltshire.gov.uk

Press enquiries to Communications on direct lines (01225)713114/713115.

This Agenda and all the documents referred to within it are available on the Council's website at www.wiltshire.gov.uk

6 **Electoral Review Update** (Pages 3 - 8)

At the request of the Electoral Review Committee Wiltshire Council staff were advised of the electoral review in global emails on 21 December 2017 and 2 January 2018, and invited to submit any comments.

Three responses were received as attached.

DATE OF PUBLICATION: 10 January 2018

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From: [REDACTED]
Sent: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: elercted members

Hello

More than the overall number which I am happy to leave to those better informed I would be more concerned about districts being fairly represented. I believe this is one of the reasons Salisbury folk feel so badly represented. Salisbury is on many fronts the jewel in the crown has very specific issues around parking traffic and a thriving tourist trade that needs to be nurtured, yet it is so badly under represented, other districts may suffer the same fate.

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Electoral Review

In relation to the total number of councillors, I would suggest between 75-85 would be sufficient – even if that adds some level of additional community work upon them it would not be a prohibitive amount, and given disparity of size of each ward at present some will already be handling such a level of work, and it leaves more than enough to undertake committee work as well.

Yours

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Electoral Review

Thank you for the opportunity for officers to submit views to the Electoral Review Committee.

The response below collates views from several officers who have a range of experience in local government in Wiltshire and elsewhere. On balance the consensus appears to be that there is a case for reducing the numbers of Wiltshire Councillors, for the following reasons:

Governance

It could be argued that the level of councillors agreed in 2009 (double the number of county councillors) was set at a cautiously high level. Notwithstanding this, there has in any case been significant changes in the public policy landscape since 2009, which should arguably have reduced demands on organisational governance. The Open Public Services White Paper of 2011 delineated services into individual, neighbourhood and commissioned services. As a result of this, many services have been de-municipalised and fall outside the direct locus of the council. Examples of this are:

- The growth in academies and free schools, which has reduced local government's role in education
- The abolition of police authorities and replacement with PCCs
- The combination of Dorset and Wiltshire fire authority and subsequent reduction in members on the FRA
- The abolition of Local Area Agreements which has streamlined partnership arrangements and simplified the associated bureaucracy
- The removal of Comprehensive Area Assessment which has simplified audit and improvement arrangements
- The Localism Act, which has empowered town and parish councils to take on an increasing number of neighbourhood services

The One Wiltshire [document](#) was agreed by full council in 2015, as part of discussions on devolution, and this asked the government to request that the LGBCE undertakes a review of the number of councillors for Wiltshire. This was in the context of an agreed review to update arrangements in Cornwall as well as plans to reduce the number of MPs that are elected. Wiltshire has already reduced the number of councillors in principal authorities in 2009 from 250 to 98 but increased devolution within Wiltshire to town and parish councils could enable this number to be reduced further, which would deliver savings without the quality of strategic countywide decision making being affected. This direction of travel is affirmed in the 2017 Business Plan.

There is potential to simplify the council's governance structure further in the event of a reduced number of councillors: e.g. reducing the number of cabinet member deputies (styled 'portfolio holders') would increase the number of councillors available for non-executive roles. While strengthening the resilience of the top team here in Wiltshire, there is an argument that the current structure of 26 executive councillors is at odds with the spirit of the legislation in the Localism Act, which limits cabinet to 10.

Part 11 of the constitution in place since 2009 also currently implies there will be eight full council meetings a year and monthly area board meetings – in practice there have been 4 full councils a year and quarterly area board meetings. There is some duplication in governance in other areas e.g. the Pension Board is separate from the Pension Committee and the Committee could easily undertake both roles (these boards have been merged in other councils where councillors have agreed to undertake the required CPD). Some of the quasi-judicial functions – whilst working well currently – could potentially be streamlined with fewer councillors on each committee or sub-committee or a smaller number of committees.

For area boards, there is already a precedent for area boards covering more than one community area where necessary (SW Wilts – Wilton, Tisbury and Mere – as well as the joint committee for Pewsey and Tidworth) so this should not be seen as an impediment to reducing the number of councillors.

Scrutiny

The four main scrutiny committees could be reduced in size by a third without impacting on decision making or proportionality and free up more councillors to take part in task groups, which have undertaken some excellent work in the past. Equally, councillors could be empowered by the OSMC to act as rapporteurs in future. A smaller ratio of executive to non-exec councillors could enable a higher proportion of councillors to play a positive role in providing accountability and undertaking discrete reviews.

Representational Role

Devolution remains a key priority in the 2017 business plan. There are currently 253 parish councils in Wiltshire (compared with 213 in Cornwall, which has a larger population) and significant transfers of assets and services have already taken place with further packages planned. Devolution of services such as parks, toilets, land and other assets and services to parish and town councils, the voluntary sector and other bodies means that reduced service provision should reasonably equate to a lesser number of Wiltshire councillors. As such, it would be expected in the forthcoming consultation that many town and parish councils will support having a lower number of Wiltshire Councillors as a sign of their own relative importance and increasing number of functions.

The large number of town and parish councillors means that Wiltshire division councillors are well supported by a network of community representatives, in addition to structures such as area boards which enable engagement with a large number of partners and members of the public to take place at one regular event. Alongside this, there is officer support in the form of community engagement managers (who work alongside each of the 18 area boards) which can help address casework matters. Further devolution of certain functions and funding to area boards will enable local issues to be addressed more directly and efficiently at a local level.

Considering this structure and a comparison with the amount of time that councillors in other authorities spend on council business could be helpful. Figures from the census of councillors in 2013 appear to indicate that Wiltshire councillors spent 3 hours less a week (26.6) on all council business than the average of councillors in other new county unitaries (Northumberland, Durham, Shropshire and Cornwall average 29.8 hours). This is perhaps surprising given the other councils have more councillors per elector. A new national census of local authority councillors is due to be undertaken by the LGA shortly so this could help inform thinking with more up to date figures but the 2013 figures appear to indicate scope for a reduction in numbers of councillors without increasing workloads above the average elsewhere.

In the meantime, applying the newly proposed Cornish ratio of electors to elected in Wiltshire would result in 74 councillors. This could be considered a minimum level of reduction in councillors given the similar functions and the greater level of devolution that has taken place in Wiltshire (and its associated efficiencies). If a further proportionate reduction was made reflecting the apparent gap in councillor workload with other county unitaries, this would result in 9 fewer councillors – delivering a total number of 65 councillors for Wiltshire.

Finally, a smaller number of councillors as proposed could have many side benefits, including –

- Supporting councillors as strong leaders of place – and continuing to attract a strong calibre of candidates for divisions and council leadership
- Further empowering first tier councils to take on and deliver services
- A reduction in councillor allowance bill (saving £1.6m in basic allowances over 4 years)
- Avoiding uncontested divisions and increasing the plurality of candidates on offer (a significant number of divisions had only two candidates to choose from in the 2017 elections - reflecting the often considerable amount of arm twisting that needs to be undertaken by political parties to obtain candidates for 98 divisions – particularly in less winnable areas).

Source: LGA National Census of Local Authority Councillors (2013)

A6 No. hours/per week spent on council business

	Wiltshire		County unitaries	
	No.	%	No.	%
<=5	1	2.3%	0	0.0%
6-10	1	2.3%	4	3.0%
11-15	6	13.6%	6	4.5%
16-20	9	20.5%	30	22.7%
21-25	4	9.1%	18	13.6%
26-30	12	27.3%	29	22.0%
31-35	3	6.8%	10	7.6%
36-40	5	11.4%	17	12.9%
41-45	0	0.0%	6	4.5%
46-50	1	2.3%	8	6.1%
50+	2	4.5%	4	3.0%
Base (respondents)	44	100.0%	132	100.0%
Average no of hours	26.6		29.8	

County unitaries

Cornwall
 Durham
 Northumberland
 Shropshire

A7 How time spent (decimalised)

	Wiltshire		County unitaries	
	No.	%	No.	%
Attendance at council meetings, committees, party meetings, etc.	9.3	33.9%	11.5	39.0%
Engaging with constituents, surgeries, constituent enquires, etc.	7.6	27.4%	8.2	27.8%
Working with community groups	5.8	20.9%	5.6	19.1%
Other e.g. external meetings, seminars, training, travel related to council, etc.	6.3	22.8%	5.3	17.9%
Base (respondents)	44		135	
Average no of hours	27.5	100.0%	29.5	100.0%

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