

REPORT FROM: CORPORATE DIRECTOR

TO: COUNCIL

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ELECTORAL REVIEW- SUBMISSION ON COUNCIL SIZE

PURPOSE OF REPORT: To consider the submission on the future size of the Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That the Council confirms that the Stage One submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission be made on the basis of a new council size of 33 councillors.
- (2) That the Corporate Director, in consultation with Group Leaders, be authorised to finalise the submission and submit it to the Commission, and send a copy to all Members.
- (3) That the Corporate Director provide representatives of the political groups and parties with the data on electorate and population forecasts and any other reasonable assistance in making their own submissions.
- (4) That a report be submitted to the Council meeting on 26th March on the Council's Stage Two submission on new warding proposals.

Introduction

1. At the meeting on 4th July the Council confirmed its wish for a periodic electoral review to be carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBCE).
2. Whilst the Council asked LGBCE to undertake the review, it is 19 years since the last review and one was likely to be undertaken shortly to fulfil LGBCE's role in undertaking periodic reviews to ensure electoral equality.
3. LGBCE has now included the review in its programme and it will commence this month. It has set the timetable and fully expects that it will be completed in time for all out elections to be held in May 2020.

4. Representatives of LGBCE met in October with the Council Leader, Group Leaders, Chief Executive and Corporate Director. They also gave a briefing for all councillors and a briefing for parish and town councils during November.
5. The review process is undertaken in two distinct stages. Stage One is a consideration of the Council's future governance needs together with 5 year population forecasts from which LGBCE will determine a new Council size which allows the Council to take decisions effectively, to manage its business and responsibilities successfully, and provide effective community leadership and representation.
6. Once LGBCE has set this figure it will not be changed and will be the basis of the new warding pattern.
7. In Stage Two LGBCE will consider and make recommendations on new ward boundaries across which the new number of councillors will be distributed.
8. The remainder of this report deals with Stage One, in particular the question of the future number of councillors. The officer recommendation is a new council size of 33 councillors. The report also outlines the next steps.

Council size – rationale for reduction

9. The last review in 1999 led to a reduction from 51 to 49 councillors. Members will appreciate that the local government landscape and the role, responsibilities and work of the Council and the ways in which its services are delivered have changed very considerably since then.
10. In summary this includes:
 - The creation of the Leisure Trust
 - The transfer of the housing stock
 - The taking back of the highways agency by the County Council
 - The public/private partnership with Liberata
 - The reduction in the Council workforce over the period from over 700 to 230.
 - The establishment of a customer contact centre
 - The move to digital by default and online access to services
 - The creation of town councils for Nelson and Colne with a resulting increase in the number of local councillors by 41 to 183
 - The changing role and level of activity of all town and parish councils with their precepts now totalling c £1.8million
 - The transfer of a range of services and facilities from the Borough to town and parish councils
 - An extensive scheme of delegation of routine matters to officers
11. Most recently the Council moved from executive arrangements to a Committee system. The streamlining that accompanied this has reduced the number of committees, panels and working groups from 20 to 14.
12. At the same time the number of places on several of these was reduced with the net effect that there are now 106 places compared with 155 last year. This is a reduction in the average per councillor from 3.16 to 2.16. A council size of 33 councillors would bring this up to 3.21, just about the same as last year.

13. The streamlining has also reduced the number of scheduled meetings from 108 to 90. So far it has not proved necessary to organise additional meetings and it seems clear that committees can comfortably deal with the level of business.
14. Member appointments to outside bodies have remained steady over the last three years at 71 which averages out at 1.44 per councillor. A council size of 33 would increase this to just 2.15.
15. The above figures strongly suggest that 33 councillors would be able to cope with the workload and representational role. To help further the Council is in the process of providing Members with Microsoft Office 365 which will help them access emails and committee papers from a range of mobile devices giving them enhanced flexible working.

Council size – 5 year forecast

16. LGBCE will require the Council to supply data on the electorate from the just published December register as well as population forecasts to 2024. Initial consideration of Office of National Statistics figures and the evidence of recent rates of new house building suggest that the increase will be fairly small
17. Comparisons with Lancashire districts and the CIPFA Nearest Neighbours Group will provide context though they are not determining factors. It is noteworthy however that Pendle has the second largest Council size and also the lowest councillor:elector ratio of the sixteen councils in the CIPFA group.
18. As at September Pendle's councillor:elector ratio was 1:1348. With 33 councillors it would be 1:2001 and would be mid table in the CIPFA Group. The figures from the December register will be provided at the meeting.

Submission and LGBCE consideration

19. LGBCE expects the Council to put in an evidence based and well reasoned submission with a clear indication of what it considers should be the new number. A start on this has been made. Members will understand that in the time available it has not been possible to complete this and further work on it will be required following the decision at this meeting.
20. The decision on what new number to submit is clearly a matter for Members. When it requested the review the Council also expressed its wish to move to "no more than 30 councillors". It needs to be emphasised that a clear decision on this needs to be taken at this meeting so that the submission can be made by the deadline of 26th January.
21. A crucial factor in consideration of the number is that following public consultation the Council in September reaffirmed that its election cycle would remain as by thirds. LGBCE is therefore under a legal duty to look at a pattern of three member wards. It is possible for it to deviate from this in a particular location if there are very compelling reasons but it is highly unlikely. The effect therefore is that the new council size needs to be a multiple of three.
22. There is also an argument that the number should preferably be an odd number so that, theoretically at least, voting will not be tied in full Council minimising the need for use of a casting vote.
23. LGBCE stresses that in determining the new council size the sole criterion is what is right for Pendle Council. There is no set formula. It has published guidance prescribing the key factors in determining Council size. In summary these are:

- The Council's governance arrangements (decision making and regulatory committees)
- The Council's arrangements for scrutinising its decisions
- Councillors' representational roles in the community, casework, and representing the Council on partner organisations.

24. As stated above the decision on the new Council size is for Members. In considering LGBCE's guidance, the information set out above and also bearing in mind the Council's expressed wish when it requested the review, officers consider that the future size should be 33 councillors. This would be a reduction of just under a third on the current number of 49 and would lead to a pattern of 11 x 3 member wards.

Next steps and future timetable

25. The submission needs to be finalised and sent to LGBCE by 26th January. LGBCE will consider it alongside any other submissions from political groups or individual councillors.
26. It will announce in late February the new council size.
27. It will then start to look at proposed new wards and will invite submissions on this by 6th May. The Council will need to agree its submission on this at the Council meeting currently scheduled for 26th March.
28. LGBCE will issue its draft recommendations on the new wards and begin a public consultation on them from 30th July to 7th October. The Council will want to determine its representations on the draft recommendations at its meeting in September.
29. The final recommendations will be published on 3rd December.
30. Following the making of the necessary legal Order all out elections will be held in May 2020. County Council elections will be held in May 2021. Pendle's first one third elections on the new wards will take place in May 2022.

IMPLICATIONS

Policy:	The Council's policy is contained in the minute of the Council on July 4 th seeking an electoral review and a wish to move to no more than 30 councillors.
Financial:	There are no financial considerations arising directly as a result of this report. If the review results in a reduction to 33 councillors there will be a corresponding reduction in allowances (c£50,000) and potentially other small efficiencies from May 2020.
Legal:	The submission has been prepared in accordance with the advice and guidance provided by LGBCE.
Risk Management:	None arising directly from the report.
Health and Safety:	None arising directly from the report.
Sustainability:	None arising directly from the report.
Community Safety:	None arising directly from the report.
Equality and Diversity:	None arising directly from the report.