

For Publication

Local Government Boundary Commission Review – Council Size Submission

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	23.02.21
Cabinet portfolio:	Governance
Directorate:	Corporate

1.0 Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To recommend to Council the draft Chesterfield Borough Council submission on Council size to the Local Government Boundary Commission as part of the full review of electoral boundaries within the borough.

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 That Cabinet recommends to Council the draft submission on Council size to the Local Government Boundary Commission as part of the full review of electoral boundaries within the borough.

3.0 Reasons for recommendations

- 3.1 To actively engage in the Local Government Boundary Commission review by submitting a proposal for Council size that ensures our governance arrangements support the Council's needs and ambitions but also reflect our communities with the principle of locking in electoral fairness for the future.

4.0 Report details

4.1 Background

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is a parliamentary body established by statute to conduct boundary,

electoral and structural reviews of local government areas in England. The Commission is independent of government and political parties. It is directly accountable to the Speaker's Committee of the House of Commons.

- 4.2 An electoral review examines and proposes new electoral arrangements for the whole local authority. These are:
- The total number of councillors to be elected to the council: council size
 - The names, number and boundaries of wards
 - The number of councillors to be elected from each ward

The review is likely to have implications for the whole local authority not just areas with high levels of electoral inequality.

- 4.3 The Commission has a statutory duty to review every English local authority 'from time to time'. It has been over 20 years since the last electoral review for Chesterfield Borough. In addition, since the last review in 1998 due to an uneven pattern of housing numbers and population growth across ward areas, there are now a number of wards which are either plus or minus 10% from the average elector ratio. These include St. Leonards at plus 23%, Hollingwood and Inkersall at plus 17%, Loundsley Green at minus 12% and Barrow Hill and New Whittington at minus 13%.

- 4.4 The review seeks to adjust electoral ward boundaries to correct the current inequality but will also consider forecasts of future elector numbers.

- 4.5 Stage 1 of the review concentrates solely on Council size and does not at this stage consider where ward boundaries will ultimately lie. Ward numbers and boundaries will be considered and consulted upon during stage 2 of the review.

- 4.6 The outcome of the review, including Council size is not pre-determined. The Commission will only take decisions after giving careful consideration of the evidence. There is no national formula or template, each case is considered on its own merit. The Commission will however make its judgement on Council size by considering three broad areas:
- Governance arrangements of the council and how it takes decisions across the broad range of responsibilities

- Scrutiny functions relating to its own decision making and the council's responsibilities to outside bodies
- The representational role of councillors in the local community and how they engage with people, conduct casework and represent the council on partnership organisations

4.7 Proposed Council size

A draft submission based on the template provided by the Commission is attached at Appendix 1. The recommended councillor size is based on officer opinion taking into account available evidence. The Council is actively encouraged to review the evidence and come to a different conclusion if it sees fit. The Commission will also accept submissions from individuals and political groups.

4.8 The draft submission recommends reducing the Council size from 48 to 40. There are several factors influencing this recommendation including:

- Mainly in-house service provision including managing just under 9,000 council homes, an industrial and commercial property portfolio of £130 million, innovation centres, sport and leisure facilities, two theatres, two museums, tourist information centre and markets
- Extensive strategic economic, community and operational partnership structures requiring significant councillor engagement
- Chesterfield is the North Eastern Derbyshire sub-regional centre for the night-time economy, shopping and access to key health services. It is also a sub-regional centre for employment, commerce and industry providing over 52,000 people with employment, 21,000 of whom are daily inbound commuters
- These factors increase the workload for the Executive Cabinet and key committees including Planning, Licensing, Appeals and Regulatory and Employment and General when compared to other districts of a similar size
- Chesterfield is a relatively compact urban borough with just two areas being parished
- In comparison our nearest neighbour group authorities, Chesterfield Borough Council has a low number of electors per councillor
- Taking into account the highest estimated future electorate size in 2030 – 88,000, 40 councillors would give an elector per councillor number of 2,200. This is in line with the majority of our nearest

neighbour group (compact large town/small city authorities) in their 2019 counts

- Striking the balance indicated within the equality impact assessment to not significantly further exacerbate barriers to becoming a councillor
- Like many local authorities Chesterfield Borough Council has financial challenges and reducing Councillor numbers would provide a significant saving to the Council's general fund

4.9 Timetable for the review

Council Size	
Submission of Council size proposals	4 March 2021
Commission meeting: Council size	20 April 2021
Warding patterns	
Commission led public consultation on warding patterns	27 April 2021 – 5 July 2021
Commission meeting: draft recommendations	21 September 2021
Commission led public consultation on draft recommendations	5 October 2021 – 13 December 2021
Commission meeting: Final recommendations	15 February 2022
Order	
Order laid	Summer 2022
Order made	Autumn 2022
Implementation	May 2023

The potential impact of the May 2021 elections and associated Purdah period has been raised with the commission. This may alter the timescales for the public consultation on warding patterns slightly.

5.0 **Alternative options**

5.1 Alternative options including a Council size of 48, 45, 42, 38 and 37 are considered within the proposal attached at Appendix 1.

6.0 **Implications for consideration – Council Plan**

6.1 An effective decision making structure, which is based on a democracy, underpins the Council's ability to fulfil its Council Plan commitments.

7.0 Implications for consideration – Financial and value for money

- 7.1 The impact of the Council's budget and value for money for residents was considered as part of the proposal. Reducing the Council size from 48 to 40 would save £49,000 per annum in basic allowances plus potentially a further £26,000 from special responsibility allowances, supplies and services and staffing.
- 7.2 The medium term financial plan reported to Cabinet in February is based on the existing arrangements. No budget savings have been included from the review.

8.0 Implications for consideration – Legal

- 8.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is a parliamentary body established by statute to conduct boundary, electoral and structural reviews of local government areas in England. The Commission is independent of government and political parties. It is directly accountable to the Speaker's Committee of the House of Commons.

9.0 Implications for consideration – Human resources

- 9.1 The development of the proposal was led by officers from the Corporate Directorate with input from the Senior Leadership Team and the Economic Growth Directorate. The next stages of the review will require extensive further input from these teams to promote and encourage engagement in the Commission's consultations on warding patterns and to develop Chesterfield Borough Council's consultation responses.
- 9.2 Following the Commission's final recommendations an assessment will be made regarding the resources required to implement the governance and electoral changes in preparation for the May 2023 election and launch of the new arrangements.
- 9.3 An assessment will also need to be undertaken regarding the future committee administration, member support requirements and impact on electoral administration before making any recommendations on staffing resource changes.

10.0 Implications for consideration – Risk management

Description of the Risk	Impact	Likelihood	Mitigating Action	Impact	Likelihood
Delays to the timetable impacting on May 2023 elections and Council preparedness.	M	M	<p>The potential impact of the May 2021 elections and associated Purdah period has been raised with the commission. This may alter the timescales for the public consultation on warding patterns slightly.</p> <p>The Local Government Boundary Commission have a tried and tested approach with a timetable that can be flexed to respond to significant challenges.</p>	M	L
Council do not agree to the recommend Council size proposal.	L	M	<p>Pre-Council engagement with political groups.</p> <p>Process enables alternative submissions by the Council, Officers, political groups and individuals.</p>	L	L

11.0 Implications for consideration – Community wellbeing

11.1 The proposal on Council size takes into account the role of the Executive in supporting community wellbeing, committee activities, key associated partnerships and the role of ward councillors in supporting their communities.

12.0 Implications for consideration – Economy and skills

12.1 The proposal on Council size takes into account the role of the Executive, committees, partnerships and ward members in supporting the economy and skills agenda.

13.0 Implications for consideration – Climate Change

13.1 The proposal on Council size takes into account the role of the Executive, committees, partnerships and ward members in supporting the climate change agenda.

14.0 Implications for consideration – Equality and diversity

14.1 A full equality impact assessment is attached at Appendix 2. This will be submitted as part of the Council’s proposal to the Local Government Boundary Commission.

14.2 Concerns are raised that a significantly smaller Council size could further exacerbate existing barriers to a number of protected groups becoming or remaining as Councillors.

Decision information

Key decision number	1011
Wards affected	All

Document information

Report author
Donna Reddish – Service Director – Corporate
Background documents
These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when the report was prepared.
None
Appendices to the report
Appendix 1 – Chesterfield Borough Council – Council Size Proposal
Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment