

ELECTORAL REVIEW OF NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL Submission by Nottinghamshire County Council on Council Size

1. Introduction

This submission sets out the Council's response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's (LGBCE) invitation to put forward a case for Council size.

The review has been triggered as a third of the Council's current divisions (18 out of 54) have an electoral variance of more than 10% from the average.

The Council's submission has been developed by a cross party working group of 7 Councillors. The Council's submission was approved by the Full Council at a meeting held on Thursday, 18th September 2014. **(TO BE CONFIRMED)**

2. Overview of Council Size Submission

The Council's submission endeavours to address, and support with evidence, the 3 broad areas contained in the LGBCE's technical guidance on governance arrangements, scrutiny functions and the representational role of Councillors in the local community.

The Council's electoral arrangements were last reviewed in 2002 -04 as part of a Periodic Electoral Review. That review increased Council size from 63 to the current Council size of 67 spread over 54 electoral divisions, based on the governance arrangements of the Leader/Cabinet and Scrutiny model operated at that time. This Council size places Nottinghamshire very much in the middle range, 8th out of its 15 comparator Councils. The size of comparator Councils ranges from 53 to 84.

At the last Council elections in 2013 the Councillor to elector ratio was 1: 9018. The electorate forecasts developed as part of this exercise suggest that by 2020 that ratio will be 1:9620.

3. Summary of the Council's submission

The approach adopted in the submission has been to follow the Commission's guiding principles and address them both in terms of current arrangements and likely future trends and plans.

An electoral review is sometimes a trigger for a Council to review its current governance arrangements. As will be noted from the submission, the Council has

recently reviewed its governance arrangements, deciding in May 2012 to move to a Committee system (as enabled by the Localism Act 2011). Councillors felt that this new system offered more transparent, accountable and democratic arrangements within which all Councillors could play an enhanced role. These arrangements have been kept under review on an ongoing basis and have been modified to ensure that the decision-making processes remain as efficient and effective as possible.

After considering the evidence, at its meeting held on 18th September 2014, the Council resolved to submit a case for a Council size of 67 Councillors on the grounds that:-

- the evidence supports the view that the Council has effective decision making processes in place;
- the Council has effective arrangements for the management and delivery of its business and responsibilities;
- the Council is able to demonstrate that it has extensive, effective and increasing involvement in community leadership and representation (this is particularly relevant in light of the Council's new Councillor led 'Redefining Your Council' transformational change agenda, within a context of ongoing financial restraint);
- it will ensure the Council retains sufficient capacity to deliver and enhance its performance in these areas and at the same time being able to respond to the challenges facing local government and the communities of Nottinghamshire whilst the electorate continues to increase.

Summary of Justification

A summary of the Council's justification for the submission is set out below:-

- (1) The most recent external assessments demonstrate that the Council performs well, for example the audit of the 2012/13 accounts issued an unqualified audit opinion. The Council requested a corporate peer review in 2012 which highlighted the progress which the Council was making with its significant change programme, whilst underlining the need for further progress to be made at pace. This review also highlighted the crucial role of Councillors in giving strong political direction around such change and the work of the Council overall.
- (2) Governance arrangements – the Committee system has provided a truly democratically accountable way of working, enabling Councillors to perform their roles more effectively, and is generally supported by the public at large.
- (3) Community leadership and partnership – Councillors' roles as community leaders and the need to work in partnership is expected to continue to increase. Such roles become even more important within the current financial

climate, with Councillors expected to consult communities around budget options, assist communities in accessing alternative funding streams and to develop more innovative ways of partnership working.

- (4) As noted in the submission, evidence is presented which indicates a growing complexity and volume of work facing elected Councillors. In addition, electorate forecasts show that by 2020 the Councillor: elector ratio will have increased by over 6% since the last Council elections. For these reasons, the Council is of the view that any reduction in current Council size could not be justified as it would lead to a further increase in the number of electors which each Councillor represents and present significant difficulties in servicing the current governance and representational arrangements referred to in appendix 1.
- (5) Whilst the workload and electorate increases could give rise to an argument for a larger Council size, it is the Council's contention that it would not be appropriate to do so as the increased use of modern technology (as noted in the detail of appendix 1) enables Councillors to absorb some of this increase without affecting efficient local government. In addition, any increase in size would give rise to some additional costs, which previous public consultation was clear would not be appropriate at a time of reducing budgets. For these reasons, therefore, the Council is of the view that the existing council size would suffice without seeking an increase as it enables Councillors to engage, represent and lead their communities as individual Councillors and to respond effectively to the electorate's concerns on emerging issues. On this basis, and subject to re-warding for electoral equality purposes, it is felt that the current allocation of Councillors between Districts is appropriate.
- (6) The future challenges to be faced in a period of austerity and financial restraint require a Council with the capacity to ensure it can continue to provide value for money services whilst fully engaging, supporting and leading its partners, community and voluntary bodies and the diverse communities within the County. The transformation agenda of the "Redefining Your Council" initiative, referred to in Appendix 1, captures and takes account of this requirement.

Further details in relation to the above are contained in Appendix 1 which addresses the LGBCE's key criteria for Council Size.

Attachments

Appendix 1 – Detailed submission

- Annex A – Committee Structure
- Annex B – List of Outside Bodies
- Annex C – Terms of Reference of Committees

- Annex D – Councillors' Divisional Fund – Application Form and Policy & Guidance
- Annex E – Scrutiny Committee Work Programmes