

ELECTORAL REVIEW OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Submission to the Local Government
Boundary Commission for England**

Council Size

July 2014

INTRODUCTION

In July 2013, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) wrote to the Chief Executive of Cambridgeshire County Council, to advise that due to imbalance in the existing electoral divisions, it would be reviewing the electoral arrangements for Cambridgeshire County Council. The Commission invited the Council and/or political groups to submit council size proposals for its consideration by 3rd August 2014, as part of the preliminary stage prior to the commencement of the formal review.

This document presents the proposal for council size agreed by Cambridgeshire County Council, following the work of an all-party Electoral Review Working Group. The Working Group was convened by the Council's political group leaders to develop a draft submission to be submitted to full Council for formal approval. Proposals were shared with all Members throughout the process, and feedback encouraged. This included attendance at single party political group meetings and one to one sessions with individual Councillors.

The Working Group noted that at an early stage, the Chief Executive had written to the LGBCE following discussions with Members, to advise that the Council believed that the Electoral Review should be deferred, given the imminent introduction of new governance arrangements, coupled with the rapid housing development and associated population increases in parts of the county. The Council also raised concerns that the Commission's initial analysis of electoral imbalance was flawed as a result of the 2012 electoral canvass being taken earlier than usual, due to the Police and Crime Commissioner elections. This meant most students were missing from the register. At its inaugural meeting in March 2014, the Working Group noted these valid points, but also noted the LGBCE's response to those comments. It agreed to move forward and embrace the Review to produce a mutually beneficial result for the people of Cambridgeshire.

METHODOLOGY

The Working Group started by taking into account the LGBCE's guidance, including the statutory criteria, and also taking into consideration Member workloads e.g. the Council's governance arrangements, the number of meetings which Councillors have to attend, and the results of a recent Member survey. It then considered information on the Council Sizes of comparable Councils, and looked at a range of size scenarios for Cambridgeshire within that context.

GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The Council currently has 69 Members representing 60 Divisions, with nine Divisions being two-Member divisions. Elections are held every four years, with the next election taking place in 2017. Each Councillor currently represents an average of 6941 electors.

Following a change in the political makeup of the Council after the County Council elections in May 2013, Members took the decision to replace its existing Cabinet and Leader model of governance with a system of cross-party Service Committees. The Council adopted and implemented its new constitution with effect from May 2014. This replaces the previous Cabinet model of governance, which included five Overview and Scrutiny Committees, plus a Scrutiny Management Group. Those Committees provided challenge in the decision-making process, particularly for decisions made by the Cabinet. However, with the introduction of the Committee system, these overview and scrutiny

functions are no longer required. This is because the robust challenge they offer is now imbedded within the Service Committees, due to their cross-party nature.

The key meetings in the new political structure are outlined below:

Full Council – the full Council meets six times a year and comprises all 69 Councillors. It has overall responsibility for levels of spending (i.e. the annual budget) and for approving major policies.

Service Committees – there are five Service Committees: Adults; Children & Young People; Economy and Environment; Health; and Highways and Community Infrastructure, each comprising seventeen Members. These Committees are concerned with the Council's delivery of services to the people of Cambridgeshire, and they make decisions on most of the major decisions relating to those service areas.

General Purposes Committee – this Committee comprises seventeen Members, including all the Chairmen/women and Vice-Chairmen/women of the Service Committees, and co-ordinates the budget and policy framework. This Committee also makes decisions relating to the Council's property and assets, and has oversight of council-wide matters such as customer services.

Planning Committee – this eleven Member Committee determines planning applications on minerals and waste applications within the County, and planning applications for the Council's own developments (e.g. new libraries and school extensions). It meets most months, and Members also participate in site visits.

Audit and Accounts Committee - this seven Member Committee monitors the risk management, financial control and governance arrangements within the Council

Constitution and Ethics Committee and Hearings Sub-Committee – the Committee oversees the operation of the Council's Constitution, and the promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct among Members. The Committee has eleven Members. The Sub-Committee comprises three Members of the main Committee determines complaints on alleged breaches to the Members' Code of Conduct, and can issue sanctions to Members found in breach.

Pension Fund Board and Pension Fund Board Investment Sub-Committee – the Pension Fund Board includes six Members of Cambridgeshire County Council, in addition to representatives from Peterborough City Council, other employers and active and deferred scheme members. It sets the pension fund's objectives and determines and maintains appropriate strategies, policies and procedures. The Investment Sub-Committee comprises four Members and its role includes implementing the Fund's Investment Strategy and monitors asset allocation.

Staffing and Appeals Committee and Service Appeals Sub-Committee – this eleven Member Committee determines the remuneration policy for County Council employees and approves relevant proposals e.g. restructures. The Sub-Committee comprises three Members and determines appeals for a range of areas including Education Transport, Guardianship under the Mental Health Act, and complaints about curriculum and related matters.

Cambridgeshire Health and Wellbeing Board – this is established as a committee of the Council and focuses on promoting the health and wellbeing of Cambridgeshire's communities, including responding to consultations about commissioning plans issued by clinical commissioning groups.

The Council's statutory scrutiny obligations for health and flooding, as set out in the relevant legislation, are discharged by the Health and Highways & Community Infrastructure Services Committees respectively.

Joint Committees – the Council also appoints to a number of joint Committees, including the Joint Development Control Committee (JDCC) for the Cambridge Fringes, the JDCC for Northstowe, the Local Government Shared Services Joint Committee and the Police & Crime Panel.

As well as undertaking roles within the political management structure outlined above, all Members attend other meetings, seminars and training events within the Council, as well as undertaking roles where they are appointed to represent the authority in its relationships with other bodies.

Informal Working Groups – Members also attend a number of informal working groups e.g. the Member Development Panel. Working Groups also play a part in the new Committee structure e.g. the Health Committee has already established two working groups, to look at the Commissioning of Older People's healthcare and the Mental Health Personality Disorder Consultation.

Representation on Outside Bodies – Members are appointed to a wide range of outside bodies covering a variety of issues, from regional strategic groups (e.g. flood risk management) to more local arrangements (e.g. quarry liaison groups).

Parish Councils – in common with other large County Councils with a mix of urban and rural communities, Members also play a vital role as a link to the Parish and Town Councils in their communities. The most rural division currently covers over twenty parishes, and whilst all Councillors are expected to keep in touch with their Parish/Town Councils, it can be logistically very difficult to do so, in terms of scheduling or meetings and travel time. The County Council acknowledged the significance of these meetings and attendance counts as an 'approved duty' for the payment of travel allowances.

ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF ALL COUNCILLORS

The Council's Constitution sets out the following roles and responsibilities for all Councillors:

- i) Collectively be the ultimate policy-makers and carry out a number of strategic and corporate management functions.
- ii) Contribute to the good governance of the area and actively encourage community participation and citizen involvement in decision making.
- iii) Effectively represent the interests of their electoral division and of individual constituents.

- iv) Respond to constituents' enquiries and representations, fairly and impartially.
- v) Participate in the governance and management of the Council.
- vi) Be available to represent the Council on other bodies.
- vii) Maintain the highest standards of conduct and ethics.

Independent to the Electoral Review, and prior to the implementation of the new Committee system, a Member Survey was undertaken in 2013 to look at Member allowances and workloads, particularly in the light of the new governance arrangements. The responses showed that Members' views varied on the importance attached to particular roles. Some respondents felt that the workload of the Committee chairmen and vice-chairman would be very significant and time-consuming, whilst other respondents suggested that these roles would be less onerous than those of Cabinet Members.

Other issues raised relating to workload, both in the Member Survey and at the Working group, were the increasing emphasis on the localism agenda and the growth in workload for Members representing divisions where new developments were planned. In particular, the recent announcement of the Greater Cambridge City Deal will have a significant impact on City and South Cambridgeshire divisions. The City Deal will involve £1 billion of national and local government funding invested in infrastructure, housing and skills, creating 45,000 new jobs.

CONCLUSION

Multi-Member Divisions

The Council considers that it is appropriate to abolish its existing two Member divisions. This is because single member divisions are more transparent and accountable, and give greater clarity to both the electorate and local organisations (e.g. Parish and Town Councils) as to where the responsibility lies. Two member divisions can cause confusion, especially where Members have differing views on local issues.

Council Size

The Council acknowledges that it is the most rapidly growing County in the country, with a population expected to increase, mainly by inward migration, by almost 9% between now and 2020. This brings with it numerous challenges which will increase Councillors' workload, associated with extensive development and major projects such as the City Deal to support the infrastructure required to sustain this development. It is also acknowledged that the increasing emphasis on localism and partnership working also has significant implications for Council size. The Council has also undergone significant internal governance changes, and whilst it is too soon to accurately quantify the impact of these changes, they may also lead to an increase in Councillors' workload.

However, owing to the current financial climate, the Council also faces an unprecedented reduction in its budget and resources, which must be acknowledged. With that in mind, the Working Party gave serious consideration to reducing the number of Councillors, which will result in savings. The Working Group noted that such a reduction would be in line with the outcomes of recent reviews of other two-tier county authorities.

Having weighed up these factors, the Council is minded to propose a reduction in the number of Councillors from 69 to 63. Of the various scenarios, this was considered to be the most workable, based on the options developed on possible division boundaries, based on single Member Divisions (see Appendix 1).

The table below illustrates how many Councillors would represent each District area under this proposed Council Size.

Table 1: Proposed number of Councillors between districts in 2020 and variance in electors for each scenario

	% of total electorate	63 members	Current
Cambridge City	19.5%	12	14
East Cambridgeshire	13.7%	9	9
Fenland	15.2%	10	11
Huntingdonshire	27.2%	17	19
South Cambridgeshire	24.4%	15	16
Total	100.0%	63	69

The Council does acknowledge that this will inevitably result in an increase in workload for some Councillors. However, it is considered important to acknowledge the overall financial pressures facing the Council and the need to examine all areas of expenditure to find potential contributions towards cost savings; this has had a major impact on service provision and led to significant staff savings. The Council believes that notwithstanding this reduction, the functions and business of the Council could continue to be fulfilled in an effective and transparent way, with a sustainable level of representation across the County to meet the expectations of communities and constituents.