

CABINET - 10TH DECEMBER 2020

**Report of the Head of Strategic Support
Lead Member: Councillor Morgan**

Part A

ITEM BOUNDARY REVIEW – COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION

Purpose of Report

To present a submission for the first stage of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) electoral review for recommendation to full Council.

Recommendations

That it be recommended to Council:

1. To approve the submission appended to this report as the Council's submission to the LGBCE regarding Council Size, which supports the continuation of the current number of 52 councillors.
2. To give delegated authority to the Chief Executive and the Head of Strategic Support, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to make minor typographical amendments and corrections to the document prior to submission if required.

Reasons

1. To agree a submission to the LGBCE as part of stage 1 of their review concerning council size.
2. To allow for any minor errors to be corrected before the document is submitted.

Policy Justification and Previous Decisions

The consultation phase of stage 1 of the LGBCE ends on 2nd February 2021, and therefore if the Council wishes to make a submission it needs to agree it before that deadline.

Implementation Timetable including Future Decisions and Scrutiny

Any recommendations made by Cabinet will be considered at the full Council meeting on 18th January 2021.

Report Implications

The following implications have been identified for this report.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Risk Management

There are no specific risks associated with the decision Cabinet is asked to make.

Key Decision: No

Background Papers: None

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Part B

Background

1. The electoral review by the LGBCE is an examination of the Council's electoral arrangements. This means:
 - the total number of councillors elected to the Council;
 - the number and boundaries of wards or divisions for the purposes of the election of councillors;
 - the number of councillors for any ward or division of a local authority; and
 - the name of any ward or division.
2. At the first stage of the review is for the LGBCE to decide how many councillors should be elected to the Council in the future. They will base this decision on the evidence they receive from the local authority itself (ie. the submission appended to this report), and any other respondents who have made a representation. They will take a view on the council size by considering four factors:
 - The governance arrangements of the Council;
 - The Council's scrutiny functions;
 - The representational role of councillors;
 - Future trends and plans for the Council.
3. Having consulted with the Leaders of the two main political groups, officers have drafted the appended submission on the basis that the Council should retain the current number of 52 councillors.
4. For information, the timetable for the Council Size stage of the review, and the subsequent Warding Patterns stage, are set out below:

Council Size

| Activity | Involvement | | Key Dates |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| | Council | LGBCE | |
| Develop council size proposal | Council Political Groups | Officers will be available to answer any technical queries on making a submission. | Until February 2021 |
| Submission of council size proposals | Council Political Groups | Officers will acknowledge receipt of submissions. | 2 February 2021 |
| Commission Meeting: Council Size | Not required | Commission | 16 March 2021 |

Warding Patterns

| Activity | Involvement | | Key Dates |
|---|---|--|---|
| | Council | LGBCE | |
| Consultation on warding patterns | Council Political Groups General Public | Run consultation, collate & analyse responses. | 23 March 2021 - 31 May 2021 |
| Commission Meeting: Draft Recommendations | Not required | Commission | 17 August 2021 |
| Consultation on Draft Recommendations | Council Political Groups General Public | Publish draft recommendations. Run consultation, collate & analyse responses. | 31 August 2021 - 8 November 2021 |
| Commission Meeting: Final Recommendations | Not required | Commission | 18 January 2022 |
| Publication of Final Recommendations | Not required | Commission | 1 February 2022 |

Appendix

Council Size Submission

APPENDIX

The
Local Government
Boundary Commission
for England

Charnwood Borough Council

11 Appendix

Submission from Charnwood Borough Council

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How to Make a Submission

1. It is recommended that submissions on council size follow the format provided below. Submissions should focus on the future needs of the council and not simply describe the current arrangements. Submissions should also demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been considered in drawing up the proposal.
2. The template allows respondents to enter comments directly under each heading. It is not recommended that responses are should unduly long; as a guide, it is anticipated that a 15 to 20-page document using this template should suffice. Individual section length may vary depending on the issues to be explained. Where internal documents are referred to URLs should be provided, rather than the document itself. It is also recommended that a table is included that highlights the key paragraphs for the Commission's attention.

About You

3. The respondent should use this space to provide the Commission with a little detail about who is making the submission, whether it is the full Council, Officers on behalf of the Council, a political party or group, or an individual.

This submission is from Charnwood Borough Council, and was agreed at a full Council meeting on 18th January 2021 (TBC).

Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only)

4. Please explain the authority's reasons for requesting this electoral review; it is useful for the Commission to have context. *NB/ If the Commission has identified the authority for review under one of its published criteria, then you are not required to answer this question.*

Not applicable.

Local Authority Profile

5. Please provide a short description of the authority and its setting. This should set the scene for the Commission and give it a greater understanding of any current issues. The description may cover all, or some of the following:
 - Brief outline of area - are there any notable geographic constraint for example that may affect the review?
 - Rural or urban - what are the characteristics of the authority?
 - Demographic pressures - such as distinctive age profiles, migrant or transitional populations, is there any large growth anticipated?
 - Are there any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead?

The Borough of Charnwood sits centrally between the cities of Leicester, Nottingham and Derby, in the north of the county of Leicestershire. The estimated population of the Borough was 182,643 (2018), and based on ONS projections will rise to 207,000 by 2031. It borders Melton to the east, Harborough to the south east, Leicester and Blaby to the south, Hinckley & Bosworth to the south west, North West Leicestershire to the west and Rushcliffe in Nottinghamshire to the north. It is named after the Charnwood Forest, much of which is contained within the borough.

The administrative centre of the Borough is located in Loughborough, which is the Borough’s largest town and its main commercial centre, and which is also the location of the highly regarded Loughborough University. Other notable settlements in the Borough include Shepshed, Syston, Birstall and Thurmaston.

Charnwood Borough Council itself comprises 52 Councillors who are elected to represent residents in the 28 current wards across the Borough. Council policies setting out how services are delivered are decided by Councillors.

Most major decisions are taken by the Cabinet, which is made up of Councillors from the majority political party. There are ten Cabinet Members, including the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council.

The Council’s Corporate Strategy for 2020-24 sets out what the Council will be doing over the relevant four years to make Charnwood a stronger and more vibrant place for people to live, work, visit and invest in:

https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/files/documents/charnwood_borough_council_corporate_strategy_2020_2024/Charnwood%20Borough%20Council%20Corporate%20Strategy%202020-24%20FINAL%2027.02.20.pdf

Council Size

6. The Commission believes that councillors have three broad aspects to their role. These are categorised as: Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulation and Partnerships), and Community Leadership. Submissions should address each of these in turn and provide supporting evidence. Prompts in the boxes below should help shape responses.

Strategic Leadership

7. Respondents should provide the Commission with details as to how elected members will provide strategic leadership for the authority. Responses should also indicate how many members will be required for this role and why this is justified.

| Topic | | |
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| Governance Model | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i> ➤ <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i> |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>If the authority runs a Committee system, we want to understand why the number and size of the committees you have represents is most appropriate for the authority.</i> |
| | Analysis | The Council operates under the Executive model, and currently has a Cabinet of 10 members. This governance model is well embedded, and it is anticipated that there would be no change to this if the proposal for a continued Council size of 52 members is adopted. |
| | Key lines of explanation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How many portfolios will there be?</i> ➤ <i>What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</i> ➤ <i>Will this be a full-time position?</i> ➤ <i>Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?</i> |
| Portfolios | Analysis | <p>The current Cabinet portfolio responsibilities are as follow:</p> <p>Leader: Strategic Relationships, Investments and Development, Regeneration, Communications and Inward Investment.</p> <p>Deputy Leader: Council Tax, Business Rates, Revenues and Benefits, Property Services and Building Control.</p> <p>Lead Member for Planning: Development Control, Conservation & Landscape and s106 Agreements.</p> <p>Lead Member for Loughborough: Loughborough Markets & Fairs, Museums, Town Centre Management, Town Hall, Loughborough Public Conveniences, Arts & Culture, Open Spaces, Grounds Maintenance and Engineering.</p> <p>Lead Member for Community Support & Equalities: Community Safety & Neighbourhood Management, Community Grants, Equalities, Children & Young People, CCTV, Sports & Recreation, Leisure Centres, Waste and Waste Education.</p> <p>Lead Member for Private Housing: Refugee Resettlement, Housing Options, Allocations & Lettings, Housing Needs, Empty Homes and HMO Licensing.</p> |

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| | | <p>Lead Member for Public Housing: Repairs & Investment, Tenancy Management, Supported Housing, Rents & Income Management, Leaseholders and Lifeline.</p> <p>Lead Member for Business Support: Regulatory Services, Parking, Env Health, Street Management, Licensing, Tourism and High Street Recovery.</p> <p>Lead Member for Transformation: Carbon Neutral by 2030, ICS, Customer Relationships, Organisational Development & Improvements and Emergency Planning.</p> <p>Lead Member for Strategic Support: Democratic Services, Audit & Risk, Legal Services, HR, Electoral Services & Land Charges.</p> <p>Currently relatively few decisions are delegated to Cabinet Lead Members, and therefore most executive decisions are taken collectively by the Cabinet.</p> |
| <p>Delegated Responsibilities</p> | <p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i> ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i> |
| | <p>Analysis</p> | <p>The Council's constitution sets out delegations to officers, which generally include day-to-day matters.</p> <p>Currently few major decisions are delegated to individual councillors, although recently the Council has started to invest in commercial properties, and the decision making for these purchases has been delegated to the Leader (or in his absence, to the Deputy Leader).</p> |

Accountability

8. Give the Commission details as to how the authority and its decision makers and partners will be held to account. The Commission is interested in both the internal and external dimensions of this role.

| Topic | |
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| Internal Scrutiny | The scrutiny function of authorities has changed considerably. Some use theme or task-and-finish groups, for example, and others have a committee system. Scrutiny arrangements may also be affected by the officer support available. |
| <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How will decision makers be held to account?</i> ➤ <i>How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be?</i> ➤ <i>How many task and finish groups will there be? And what will their functions be? What time commitment will be involved for members? And how often will meetings take place?</i> ➤ <i>How many members will be required to fulfil these positions?</i> ➤ <i>Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority.</i> ➤ <i>Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.</i> |
| Analysis | <p>The Council currently operates 4 scrutiny committees: the Scrutiny Commission, which has overall responsibility for the scrutiny work programme and which carries out Cabinet pre-decision scrutiny, and three committees which focus on specific operational service areas. During the ongoing pandemic only the Scrutiny Commission has been meeting.</p> <p>The Scrutiny Commission can also set up ‘task-and-finish’ scrutiny panels to review specific issues or topics of concerns or public interest, and there have been a number of these in recent years.</p> <p>A separate Scrutiny Call-in Committee, consisting of the Chairs and Vice-chairs of the 4 standing scrutiny committees, meets when required to consider any call-ins of Cabinet or officer decisions that are submitted in accordance with the Constitution.</p> <p>There is a standing Budget Scrutiny Panel which meets annually during the budget setting period to understand, review and comment on the Council’s developing budget proposals. This Panel will meet during the pandemic.</p> |

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| Statutory Function | | This includes planning, licencing and any other regulatory responsibilities. Consider under each of the headings the extent to which decisions will be delegated to officers. How many members will be required to fulfil the statutory requirements of the council? |
| Planning | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i> ➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?</i> ➤ <i>Will executive members serve on the planning committees?</i> ➤ <i>What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?</i> |
| | Analysis | <p>The Council has a single Plans Committee consisting of 13 councillors, which meets approximately once a month to consider major applications, applications which are referred to them by ward councillors, and applications which officers consider may be particularly controversial. Approximately 95% of applications are determined by officers under delegated powers.</p> <p>There are currently no plans to change these arrangements.</p> <p>It is accepted practice that Cabinet Members do not also sit on the Plans Committee, although there is no constitutional prohibition preventing this.</p> <p>The time commitment for Plans Committee members includes preparing for and attending the monthly committee meetings, as well as participating in regular training update sessions. Prior to each Plans Committee meeting officers also normally arrange for committee members to undertake collective site visits, though this process is currently suspended during the ongoing pandemic.</p> |
| Licensing | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year?</i> ➤ <i>And what will be the time commitment for members?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?</i> |
| | Analysis | <p>The Council usually has approximately 6 licencing panels a year, which meet on an ad-hoc basis.</p> <p>Panel members are drawn from the Licensing Committee, which has a membership of 15 councillors.</p> |

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| Other Regulatory Bodies | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What will they be, and how many members will they require?</i> ➤ <i>Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.</i> |
| | Analysis | <p>Other committees and their membership are summarised as follows:</p> <p>Appeals & Reviews Committee (5 members)</p> <p>Audit Committee (6 members, plus Independent Chair)</p> <p>Member Conduct Committee (7 members, plus up to 3 non-voting parish councillor members)</p> <p>Personnel Committee (7 members)</p> |
| External Partnerships | | Service delivery has changed for councils over time, and many authorities now have a range of delivery partners to work with and hold to account. |
| <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Will executive members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies?</i> ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in this activity? And what is their expected workload? What proportion of this work is undertaken by portfolio holders?</i> ➤ <i>What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?</i> |
| Analysis | | <p>The Charnwood Community Safety Partnership is chaired by a councillor, who is not currently a Cabinet member.</p> <p>A number of councillors are appointed to external bodies, including local charities, consultative groups, and community organisations. These appointments vary in nature and workload, with some being allocated to Cabinet members based on their portfolio responsibilities, and others being allocated to ward councillors where the body operates within their ward.</p> |

Community Involvement

9. The Commission understands that there is no single approach to community leadership and that members represent, and provide leadership to, their communities in different ways. The Commission wants to know how members are required to provide effective community leadership and what support the council offers them in this role. For example, does the authority have a defined role and performance system for its elected members? And what support networks are available within the council to help members in their duties?

| Topic | | Description |
|----------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Community Leadership | Key lines of explanation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?</i> ➤ <i>Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?</i> ➤ <i>How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?</i> ➤ <i>Are there any mechanisms in place that help councillors interact with young people, those not on the electoral register, and/or other minority groups and their representative bodies?</i> ➤ <i>Are councillors expected to attend community meetings, such as parish or resident's association meetings? If so, what is their level of involvement and what roles do they play?</i> ➤ <i>Explain your approach to the Area Governance structure. Is your Area Governance a decision-making forum or an advisory board? What is their relationship with locally elected members and Community bodies such as Town and Parish Councils? Looking forward how could they be improved to enhance decision-making?</i> |
| | Analysis | <p>The only area committee in operation is the Loughborough Area Committee, which includes the 20 councillors whose wards include areas either wholly or partly within the town of Loughborough. it is a consultative committee (ie. it does not have any decision making powers), and meets twice a year.</p> <p>Councillors undertake their ward work in a variety of ways, including local newsletters, surgeries, attending town and parish council meetings within their wards, and by using social media. Within the unparished area of Loughborough, ward councillors may attend local residents and community association meetings.</p> |
| Casework | Key lines of explanation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How do councillors deal with their casework? Do they pass it on to council officers? Or do they take a more in-depth approach to resolving issues?</i> ➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i> ➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i> |
| | Analysis | <p>Councillors take individual approaches to dealing with their casework (ie. the Council does not operate a casework management system).</p> |

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| | | <p>Councillors can, and do, access support and advice from officers in relation to individual cases, depending on their nature and complexity.</p> <p>The nature of casework varies from ward to ward, depending for example on whether it largely rural, or includes some of the more deprived areas of the Borough.</p> |
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Other Issues

10. Respondent may use this space to bring any other issues of relevance to the attention of the Commission.

The Council undertook a community governance review of the whole Borough in 2018, which made some amendments to parish council boundaries, including creating two new parish council meetings.

Summary

11. In following this template respondents should have been able to provide the Commission with a robust and well-evidenced case for their proposed council size; one which gives a clear explanation as to the number of councillors required to represent the authority in the future. Use this space to summarise the proposals and indicate any other options considered. Explain why these alternatives were not appropriate in terms of their ability to deliver effective Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulation and Partnerships), and Community Leadership.

Charnwood Borough Council proposes that its number of councillors should remain unchanged at 52.

The executive model of governance (with a Cabinet) is well established at the Council and has proven to work well. Changing the number of councillors would potentially mean that the current established and effective governance and committee structures would need to be reviewed and amended, and the Council does not see any justification for that.

When the previous boundary review for Charnwood was undertaken in 2002, it recommended retaining the then current number of councillors at 52. In the 18 years since then, there have been significant increases in the population size of the Borough and the number of electors. The Council recognises that this has had an impact on the casework of its councillors, and this will continue as the local population and electorate continues to grow in the future.

The Council recognises that the number of electors per councillor continues to increase: as referred to within the report of the last review, in 2001 there was an average of 2,342 electors per councillor, with a prediction that this would rise to 2,423 by 2006. In December 2018, the average was 2,549 electors per councillor.

However, in light of the current challenging financial situation facing the Council, we do not consider that an increase in the number of councillors can be justified because it would result in budget pressures to fund additional allowances and councillor support, and the Council is facing ongoing financial pressures, which have been made more acute by the pandemic.

Equally, although it could result in some potential financial savings, we do not consider that a reduction in the number of councillors can be justified as the casework of our councillors has increased in line with our ongoing population growth, which is set to continue. Reducing the number of councillors could therefore result in increasing demands in terms of the time commitment required to adequately fulfil the elected member role, which could negatively impact on the ability to attract people to stand for election in the future.