

East Herts Council

Date of Meeting: 28th July 2021

Report by: Leader of the Council – Cllr Linda Haysey

**Report title: Council Size Submission to the Local Government
Boundary Commission for England**

Ward(s) affected: All

Summary

- To approve East Herts Council's submission on Council size to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

RECOMMENDATIONS that:

- (a) Approve the submission on Council Size, as set out in Appendix A.**
- (b) Council agree a delegation to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to make any final changes to the Council Size Submission as may be necessary.**
- (c) Authorise the Chief Executive to submit the Council's Submission on Council Size to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.**

1.0 Proposal(s)

- 1.1 That Council consider the report and accompanying appendix regarding the future size of East Herts Council.
- 1.2 The outcome of the review will be implemented for the 2023 Council elections.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England ('the Commission') is an independent statutory body responsible for conducting reviews of local authority electoral arrangements through an 'electoral review' process. It can also conduct reviews of the structure of local government, and the external boundaries of local authorities.
- 2.2 An electoral review is an examination of a council's electoral arrangements. This means:
 - 2.2.1 the total number of councillors elected to the local authority;
 - 2.2.2 the number and boundaries of wards or divisions for the purposes of the election of councillors;
 - 2.2.3 the number of councillors for any ward or division of a local authority; and
 - 2.2.4 the name of any ward or division.
- 2.3 The Commission's objectives include the provision of electoral arrangements that are fair and that deliver electoral equality for voters. The purpose of an electoral review is to examine the electoral arrangements of an area so as to ensure:
 - 2.3.1 such arrangements are fair and deliver electoral equality for voters, and
 - 2.3.2 the arrangements help to deliver effective and convenient local government to citizens
- 2.4 The aim of a review is to recommend ward boundaries where each councillor represents approximately the same number of voters. In turn ward boundaries are drawn up to reflect the interests and identities of local communities and promoting good local government.

Context for East Hertfordshire District Council

- 2.5 The Commission first met with the Leader and Chief Executive on 3rd July 2020. This was followed up with a presentation to the Group Leaders on 18th February 2021 and then an all Member briefing on 18th March 2021.
- 2.6 The Commission explained the reasons behind the electoral review being required, namely,
- 2.6.1 legislation¹ requires a review to be undertaken “from time to time”. The Council was last reviewed in 1998 and so it has been 23 years since the last review; the Commission felt this was a reasonable interpretation of ‘time to time’ and included the authority in its electoral review programme;
 - 2.6.2 electoral changes – this is about how many people a councillor is representing. There are threshold tests which if exceeded can trigger a review. Several wards have seen large increases in population since the last review was undertaken;
 - 2.6.3 Community interests and identities may have changed since the late 1990’s. The review allows the Commission to create ward boundaries that match the shape of communities across the district as they are now.
- 2.7 When calculating electorate numbers, there are a range of variables which need to be considered. The Commission’s forecasting tools help to provide an evidence base for these calculations. The wards will be based on a forecast electorate for 2027 to help futureproof the wards (again, this is legally required).

Process so far

- 2.8 The Commission have a range of guidance on how a

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/20/section/56>

Council Size Submission can be developed by Councils. However, there are a range of core matters a submission document must address. The process is designed in way so it starts with zero, and the numbers of councillors needed for a Council to function is built up.

- 2.9 Officers have been producing such things as a Geocoded Electoral Register, Current & Forecast Electorate numbers, Housing Development Data, Polling District Maps, Parish Electoral Arrangements etc. in order to aid the Commission in determining the suitable size for the Council.
- 2.10 The Submission on Council Size requires Council approval before it can be submitted to the Commission. A cross party group consisting of the four Group Leaders, along with an additional representative of each of their respective political Groups, met in June/July 2021 to agree a proposed Council Size number to present to Council.

Recommendation on Council Size

- 2.11 The recommendation is for the number of Councillors to remain unchanged at 50 as the minimum number to ensure effective governance.

Next Steps

- 2.12 After submission, the Commission will consider the Council's submission along with a range of other data. The Commission will make 'a minded to recommend' recommendation on the number of Councillors the Council should have. They will then open a public consultation exercise for information from people and groups across the District for opinions, comments and submissions, on where the Ward boundaries should be, the names for the Wards, and the number of Councillors for each Ward. It is expected this will run from 28th

September – 6th December 2021.

- 2.13 This consultation exercise will shape the Commission's draft recommendations for the new electoral arrangements. Once the Commission have considered all the submissions, they will put forward their draft recommendation report to a new public consultation exercise. This is expected to run from the 1st March to the 9th May 2022.
- 2.14 Once this second consultation exercise concludes, the Commission will then produce its Final Recommendations. This is currently scheduled for 2nd August 2022.
- 2.15 There is sometimes a small discretionary consultation on the final recommendations. Once concluded, the Final Recommendations will be put before Parliament. The Order is expected to be laid in the autumn of 2022 and to be implemented for May 2023.

3.0 Reason(s)

- 3.1 The submission on Council Size requires the approval of Council before it can be submitted to the Commission.

4.0 Options

- 4.1 To not make Council Size Submission. This is not recommended as it is a legal requirement for the Council's size to be reviewed by the Commission.

5.0 Risks

- 5.1 None

6.0 Implications/Consultations

- 6.1 The Commission consulted Group Leaders on 18th

February 2021, all Members on 18th March 2021 and
Towns and Parishes on 23rd March 2021.

Community Safety

No

Data Protection

No

Equalities

No

Environmental Sustainability

No

Financial

No

Health and Safety

No

Human Resources

No

Human Rights

No

Legal

No - There are no legal implications from making a submission to the Commission on Council Size, however, the final outcome of the Commission's consultation exercise and recommendations, will determine the number Councillors and the Wards for the District for 2023.

Specific Wards

No

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1 Appendix 1 – Council Size Submission

Contact Member

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As above