To: **Members of the Electoral Review Advisory Group**

Councillors Gosling, Humphreys, Jenns, Melia, Osborne, H Phillips, Simpson, D Wright

For the information of other Members of the Council

For general enquiries please contact the Democratic Services Team on 01827 719221 via
e-mail – democraticservices@northwarks.gov.uk

For enquiries about specific reports please contact the officer named in the reports.

The agenda and reports are available in large print and electronic accessible formats if requested.

ELECTORAL REVIEW ADVISORY GROUP AGENDA

9 November 2023

The Electoral review Advisory Group will meet on Thursday, 9 November 2023 at 6.30pm in the Council Chamber at The Council House, South Street, Atherstone, Warwickshire.

AGENDA

1   **Evacuation Procedure.**

2   **Election of Chair.**

3   **Apologies for Absence / Members away on official Council business**.

4   **Disclosable Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests**

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AND DECISION
(WHITE PAPERS)

5   **Electoral Review – Future Council Size** - Report of the Chief Executive

Summary

This is a report to consult Members on the first stage of the Electoral Review – determining the number of councillors the Borough Council will have in future.

The Contact Officer for this report is Martyn Harris (719222).

STEVE MAXEY
Chief Executive

Report of the Chief Executive   Electoral Review – Future Council Size

1   Summary

1.1   This is a report to consult Members on the first stage of the Electoral Review – determining the number of councillors the Borough Council will have in future.

Recommendation to the Group

a   **That the contents of the report are noted; and**

b   **That Members provide feedback to officers on the draft Council Size Report at Appendix 1**

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2   Background

2.1   As reported to Executive Board on 19 July 2023, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBCE) is undertaking an electoral review of the borough, which will review and implement new proposals for the number of councillors and the shape, number and size of ward boundaries. The Council's ward boundaries were last reviewed in 1999.

2.2   The LGBCE has identified that a number of wards are now either +/- 10% of the average ward size and so the review will aim to re-draw ward boundaries to produce wards of equal size in future.

2.3   It is important to note, however that as part of this review, all ward boundaries could change, not just the areas which have been identified as either too large or small at present by the Commission.

2.4   The changes to the number of Councillors and new ward boundaries will take effect from the May 2027 Borough and Parish elections.

2.5   The first stage in the review is to determine the overall number of Councillors that the Borough Council requires, based on, for example:

- The role of members in future; based on the changing roles and expectations of elected members;
- The overall strategic aims of the Borough Council
- Changing resident needs and expectations

- The evolution of service delivery, though partnership working, new governance structures and digital working

2.6 The LGBCE make it clear in their guidance that there is no set formula or expectation for the number of Councillors that a council should have. In its guidance, it states:

"In the Commission's opinion, local government is as diverse as the communities it serves – providing leadership, services and representation suited to the characteristics and needs of individual areas. The Commission aims to recommend electoral arrangements, including council size, which are appropriate for the particular local authority."

3 **Making a recommendation on the number of Councillors going forward**

3.1 The Borough Council is a statutory consultee to the LGBCE review process and it is expected that, as an organisation the Council is best placed to make the arguments as to the appropriate number of councillors for North Warwickshire.

3.2 The Commission won't accept "status quo" arguments without evidence that the current number of Councillors will continue to be appropriate in future. There is also no set formula for how many Councillors there should be for a Borough of this size.

3.3 However – it may be helpful to note the table below, looking at the electorate and number of Councillors in some of our neighbour Councils:

Local Authority	Electorate	Number of Councillors	Electors per Councillor
North Warwickshire	**49,670**	**35**	**1419**
Nuneaton and Bedworth (post review)	100,289	38	2639
Rugby	82,492	42	1964
Stratford	105,172	41	2565
Warwick	108,099	44	2456
Tamworth	58,838	29	2029
Hinckley and Bosworth	87,897	34	2585

3.4 In terms of Councils with similar electorates – the comparison is as follows:

Local Authority	Electorate	Number of Councillors	Electors per Councillor
Boston	48,955	30	1632
Maldon	50,839	31	1640
Malvern Hills	62,230	69	902
Torridge	52,648	36	1462

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3.5 The table above does not include what the future electorate of North Warwickshire is likely to be. Members will be aware that there is significant population growth forecast in the next 5-10 years, which would likely increase the number of electors per Councillor significantly.

3.6 In order to maintain the electorate: councillor ratio at an appropriate level of approximately 1:1400, officers are recommending that the number of Councillors is increased.

3.7 Officers have made suggested arguments within the Council size document attached at Appendix 1. **In summary, there is a recommendation to increase the number of Councillors on the Borough Council from 35 to 39 in total.**

3.8 This is a draft recommendation – and the attached appendix is in draft format. Officers are seeking the views of members on this proposal.

... 3.9 As outlined in Appendix 1, the main reason for this suggested increase is due to:

- The unprecedented residential development in the Borough, forecast in the next 5-10 years, leading to a potential 20-25% increase in electorate
- The changing role of elected members since the last electoral review, leading to an increase in volume and complexity of casework undertaken by members
- The role of members in leading and shaping place, as well as representing residents. The proposed council size outlines the rural nature of the Borough over a large geographical area, with members being responsible for managing change throughout North Warwickshire, from residential development to the impact of HS2.

4 **Role of Members**

4.1 The draft Council size submission at Appendix 1 sets out a brief summary of the role that members at the Borough Council play at present and also makes some suggestions for what, going forward the role of members will be.

4.2 As per the recommendations, officers require a further steer from members and would ask for consideration of the following questions to help develop the rationale for the proposed increase in council size.

4.2.1 Representational Role:

- What level of casework do you currently have to deal with?
- Has the nature/complexity of the casework you are involved in changed?
- Are expectations from residents about your availability different than in the past?
- Are you contacted more/less frequently, via phone, email and/or social media?
- Has the number of Councillors who are double/triple hatted in terms of County/Borough/Parish Councillors changed?

4.2.2 Governance and Decision-Making Role:

- Have you been appointed to attend more Committees/Working groups?
- Has the number of meetings you attend increased?
- Have you been given more responsibility (e.g. spokesperson/chair/special responsibility allowance) than previously?
- Has the nature of meetings changed (e.g. more partnership working?)
- Have you been appointed to a larger/fewer number of outside bodies by the Council?
- Has the financial/scrutiny/accountability aspect of your role changed?
- Does the council's responsibility as a housing provider/managing the HRA involve additional input from members compared to a non-HRA authority?

5 Needs of the Borough's Residents

5.1 The review of council size also needs to reflect that the needs of the Borough's residents will have changed since the last review (in 1999), and therefore the role of the Borough Council and councillors will have changed:

5.1.1 Needs of Residents:

- Are residents more or less reliant on borough council services than at the time of the last review?
- Are residents presenting to the council with more complex problems, leading to involvement from a number of agencies?
- Are key challenges around housing/homelessness leading to an increase in customer contact and casework for members?
- Are there other areas of concern for residents that are producing pressure from a capacity/budgetary point of view that the council is trying to improve?

6 Conclusion

6.1 There are a number of factors (as exemplified by the questions at paragraph 4 and 5 above) that can influence the council's submission on how many councillors there should be in future. As per the recommendations, officers are seeking input from members on whether they support an increase in the number of councillors or not, and also which arguments members would like included in the report.

7 Report Implications

7.1 **Finance and Value for Money Implications**

7.1.1 There will be a small cost to the Borough Council in responding to the review, which will be managed within existing budgets.

7.1.2 Should LGBCE's decision be to increase the number of councillors, there would be a small increase in the budget for members' allowances.

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7.2 **Legal Implications**

7.2.1 Any legal implications that arise as part of the Council's submissions on Council size or ward boundaries will be addressed at the appropriate time when reports come forward to Council. As these reports are at draft stage at this point, there are no specific legal implications related to this report.

7.3 **Environment, Climate Change and Health Implications**

7.3.1 There are no foreseen implications

7.4 **Risk Management Implications**

7.4.1 There are no foreseen implications

Links to Council's Priorities

7.5.1 Appropriate and equitable arrangements for democratic representation and governance are clearly a very high priority for any Council.

The Contact Officer for this report is Martyn Harris (719222).

Background Papers

Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D

Background Paper No	Author	Nature of Background Paper	Date

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The
Local Government
Boundary Commission
for England

Council Size
Submission: Template

North Warwickshire Borough Council

Contents

How to Make a Submission

It is recommended that submissions on future governance arrangements and council size follow the guidance provided and use the format below as a template. Submissions should be treated as an opportunity to 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 and why you have discounted them**.

The template allows respondents to enter comments directly under each heading. It is not recommended that responses be 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.

'Good' submissions, i.e. those that are considered to be most robust and persuasive, combine the following *key success components* (as set out in the guidance that accompanies this template):

- Clarity on objectives

- A straightforward and evidence-led style

- An understanding of local place and communities

- An understanding of councillors' roles and responsibilities

About You

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, a resident group, or an individual.

This response has been developed by officers and overseen by a group of members from each political group on the council.

The Council established an Electoral Review Advisory Group, which developed this response, before it being approved by the Council's Executive Committee and Full Council.

The Context for your proposal

Your submission gives you the opportunity to examine how you wish to organise and run the council for the next 15 - 20 years. **The consideration of future governance arrangements and council size should be set in the wider local and national policy context.** The Commission expects you to challenge your current arrangements and determine the most appropriate arrangements going forward. In providing context for your submission below, please demonstrate that you have considered the following issues.

- When did your Council last change/reorganise its internal governance arrangements and what impact on effectiveness did that activity have?

- To what extent has transference of strategic and/or service functions impacted on the effectiveness of service delivery and the ability of the Council to focus on its remaining functions?
- Have any governance or capacity issues been raised by any Inspectorate or similar?
- What influence will local and national policy trends likely have on the Council as an institution?
- What impact on the Council's effectiveness will your council size proposal have?

North Warwickshire Borough Council (NWBC) operates a "Committee System" of governance and has done for the last 15 years. This involves a small number of committee managing different aspects of the work of the council, with committees reflecting the political balance of the council.

In May 2023 following the local elections, the council moved to "no overall control", with the conservatives being the largest group, but without an overall majority on the council.

Members consider that the current system of committees allows for a more consultative approach to decision-making, something that will be further explored under the current political balance. Officers keep members informed of upcoming policy developments and areas of concern via a range of committees. Member-officer relations are good and both officers and members have different, clearly separate roles.

The committee system, by its nature, involves a greater number of councillors in decision-making, and this does therefore have an impact on the number of councillors required to operate this system, especially compared to neighbouring authorities with smaller cabinet-style executive arrangements.

As explored further below, the council proposes to increase the number of councillors in future. From a governance perspective, members in future will continue to play the same role within the committee system, however the pace of change in the borough in terms of residential development and other changes will require greater oversight from councillors – a role that only elected members can play.

Local Authority Profile

Please provide a short description of the authority and its setting, in particular the local geography, demographics and community characteristics. This should set the scene for the Commission and give it a greater understanding of any current issues. The description should cover all of the following:

- Brief outline of area - are there any notable geographic constraints 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 transient populations, is there any large growth anticipated?
- Community characteristics – is there presence of "hidden" or otherwise complex deprivation?
- Are there any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead?

Further to providing a description, the Commission will be looking for a submission that demonstrates an understanding of place and communities by putting forth arguments on council size based upon local evidence and insight. For example, how does local geography, demographics and community characteristics impact on councillor casework, workload and community engagement?

North Warwickshire Borough Council's vision is:

"Protecting the rurality of North Warwickshire, supporting its communities and promoting the wellbeing of residents and business."

Which highlights the fact that the county district of North Warwickshire is, at heart a rural district set in the middle of England. The borough itself is stretches from the edge of Coventry in the South, to Tamworth in the North and from Leicestershire in the East and the edge of Birmingham in the West.

North Warwickshire is a recognisable community with a distinctive sense of place. It is connected to but separate from the wider West Midlands area as well as the East Midlands.

In terms of key infrastructure features, the Borough is dominated by the A5, which cuts the borough in half between East – West and the M6 toll road and M42 in the West of the Borough. The Borough is also affected by Phase One of HS2 at Coleshill and Water Orton. The West Coast Mainline also passes through the borough, between Nuneaton and Tamworth.

The area does not benefit from any significant UK, regional nor EU regeneration regimes, and therefore the council is the key driver in terms of regeneration, in past and future bids to national levelling up and other funds.

Rural Nature

North Warwickshire is a rural Borough with over 50 settlements, covering 110 square miles.² The Borough has an open rural character which is unique compared to many of the surrounding urban areas. Settlements range in size from Atherstone, and Mancetter, with a population of 10,000 to small hamlets

Atherstone with Mancetter, Coleshill and Polesworth with Dordon are the three market towns, which provide the majority of services to the surrounding villages and hamlets.

Local requirements have changed as the residents of the countryside have changed in recent years. There are many people who live in the smaller settlements and the countryside, who have difficulty accessing services/facilities and affordable housing. In many communities, there is ongoing conflicting requirements for additional housing, whilst protecting the rural character of these smaller settlements. As the local planning authority and with the council retaining control of its own housing supply, the borough council has a major role in dealing with these issues.

Agriculture is a major influence on the character of the Borough. A thriving rural economy is important to the Borough. Members have a recognised role in not just representing constituents but also managing the large, rural area and acting as custodian of place as well as its people.

Demographic pressures

Community characteristics
Some communities in the borough have a former mining legacy. The Borough had a number of mines and there are still ex-mining communities in need of assistance, in particular with the standard of housing and access to skills, training and access to better health care.

The Council recognises that there are clear links between issues of poor health, obesity and open space/recreation provision, education and the skills gap, rural transport and isolation and that the borough council and councillors have a leadership role in these areas

From the residents perspective, there are significant public concerns to ensure the impacts of residential development and new transport infrastructure are mitigated, and residents look to the council to do this. There is public concern to maintain the provision of local services that are vital to community life, whilst recognising that there are limited council resources reflecting a small and rural population.

Council Size
The Commission believes that councillors have three broad aspects to their role. These are categorised as: **Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulatory 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
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. **Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

Topic		
Governance Model	*Key lines of explanation*	➢ *What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?* ➢ *The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?* ➢ *If the authority runs a Committee system, we want to understand why the number and size of the committees you propose represents the most appropriate for the authority.*

		➤ *By what process does the council aim to formulate strategic and operational policies? How will members in executive, executive support and/or scrutiny positions be involved? What particular demands will this make of them?* ➤ *Whichever governance model you currently operate, a simple assertion that you want to keep the current structure does not in itself, provide an explanation of why that structure best meets the needs of the council and your communities.*
	Analysis	Click or tap here to enter text.
Portfolios	*Key lines of explanation*	➤ *How many portfolios will there be?* ➤ *What will the role of a portfolio holder be?* ➤ *Will this be a full-time position?* ➤ *Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?*
	Analysis	Click or tap here to enter text.
Delegated Responsibilities	*Key lines of explanation*	➤ *What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?* ➤ *How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?*
	Analysis	Click or tap here to enter text.

Accountability

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. **Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

Topic	
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.
Key lines of explanation	➤ *How will decision makers be held to account?* ➤ *How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be?* ➤ *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?* ➤ *How many members will be required to fulfil these positions?* ➤ *Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority.* ➤ *Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.*

	Analysis	Click or tap here to enter text.
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	*Key lines of explanation*	➢ *What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?* ➢ *Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?* ➢ *Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?* ➢ *Will executive members serve on the planning committees?* ➢ *What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?*
	Analysis	Click or tap here to enter text.
Licensing	*Key lines of explanation*	➢ *How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year?* ➢ *And what will be the time commitment for members?* ➢ *Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc?* ➢ *Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?*
	Analysis	Click or tap here to enter text.
Other Regulatory Bodies	*Key lines of explanation*	➢ *What will they be, and how many members will they require?* ➢ *Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.*
	Analysis	Click or tap here to enter text.
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.
Key lines of explanation		➢ *Will council members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies? In doing so, are they able to take decisions/make commitments on behalf of the council?* ➢ *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?* ➢ *What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?*
	Analysis	Click or tap here to enter text.

Community Leadership

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? The Commission also wants to see a consideration of **how the use of technology and social media by the council as a whole, and by councillors individually, will affect casework, community engagement and local democratic representation. Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

Topic		Description
Community Leadership	*Key lines of explanation*	➢ *In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?* ➢ *Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?* ➢ *How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?* ➢ *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?* ➢ *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?* ➢ *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?*
	Analysis	Click or tap here to enter text.
Casework	*Key lines of explanation*	➢ *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?* ➢ *What support do members receive?* ➢ *How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?* ➢ *In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?*
	Analysis	Click or tap here to enter text.

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

Click or tap here to enter text.

Summary

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 governance arrangements and number of councillors required to represent the authority in the future.

Use this space to summarise the proposals and indicate 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.

Click or tap here to enter text.