

Briefing Note

Progress with Electoral Review

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Purpose

To update ward councillors on progress / work undertaken to date and the next phase of the review.

Background

The Council is in stage one of a review initiated by the LGBCE (the Commission) because of inequality of representation between wards. A review trigger threshold (more than 20% of wards have a variance of more than 10%) was reached upon publication of our December 2022 electoral registers.

There are various phases to the review, which are set out below. This update will focus on the first.

- Council Size and electorate forecasts (June '23 – February '24)
- Initial consultation on warding patterns (May '24 – mid July '24)
- Second consultation on warding patterns (November '24 – January '25)
- Consequential work (if required) such as Community Governance / Polling District Reviews (January '25 – December '25)
- All out elections to new wards (May 2026)

A Working Group comprising Councillors Marland & Hume, J Carr & Ferrans, and Geary & Andrews has met a number of times, to provide a steer to officers.

Electoral forecasts

Officers have been engaged in discussions with the Commission about the methodology for our overall forecasts and have secured agreement to use an alternative to the standard framework. We now forecast that our electorate in 2030 will be around 220,000 and are finalising data at a Polling District level, in consultation with the Working Group.

Council size

Our Council size submission should be evidence based and reflect the number of Councillors required to serve our governance arrangements and provide effective community leadership, as opposed to how many residents Councillors should represent. Notwithstanding this, there is an inevitable interest in the ratio of Councillors to electors and we are already at the higher end of the range when comparing to our CIPFA benchmarked authorities.

Our current ratio (based on December 22 electoral registers) is 1:3,456. The average for our benchmarked authorities is around 1:2,977. The Working Group considered the overall electorate forecast for 2030 in October and considered various scenarios.

| Scenario | Ratio |
|----------------|-----------|
| 57 (no change) | 1 : 3,859 |
| 60 (plus 3) | 1 : 3,666 |
| 63 (plus 6) | 1 : 3,492 |
| 66 (plus 9) | 1 : 3,333 |

Further meetings in November (after reviewing the Councillor survey results) and then in December show a consensus for a modest increase in Council size (either plus three or plus six). Officers are now at stage to draft a report to go to Council in January '24 for a vote on the Council's preferred size.

Next Steps

We have shared a draft Council size proposal with the Working Group and Commission to allow feedback prior to Full Council in January.

The commission will make a final decision on our Council size in mid March 24 which will then form the basis of their subsequent consultations on warding patterns.

There will be a Commission briefing for all Parish Councils in early May '24.
