

BOUNDARY REVIEW COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Boundary Review Committee held on Thursday, 8 April 2021 at 6.00 pm in Remote Meeting

Present: Councillors K T Blundell, C Cassar (Chair), N A Dugmore, E J Greenaway, V J Holt (Vice-Chair), A D McClements and R A Overton

In Attendance:

Josef Galkowski, Democracy Officer, Telford & Wrekin Council
Phil Griffiths, Project Manager, Telford & Wrekin Council
Anthea Lowe, Associate Director: Policy & Governance, Telford & Wrekin Council
Anna Plummer, Democracy Team Leader,
Kieran Robinson, Democracy Officer, Telford & Wrekin Council

Apologies: None.

BRC20 Declarations of Interest

None.

BRC21 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

BRC22 Borough Electoral Review

The Committee received a presentation on the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) review of electoral arrangements Council size submission from the Associate Director: Policy & Governance, Telford & Wrekin Council and the Project Manager, Telford & Wrekin Council. The presentation outlined the key dates for the submission, information about the 2020 electorate, the projected growth in electorate to 2027 and the different options available for members to consider in respect of the submission. For comparison, Members were informed that, in 2020, there were 133,197 electors in Telford and Wrekin, which meant that one councillor had 2,467 electors.

Option One: 54 Councillors

Option One would see no change in the number of Councillors at Telford & Wrekin Council. The Cabinet, Scrutiny and Regulatory functions and Partnerships would continue to work effectively at this number. However, this would also result in reduced representation for some existing communities so as to allow for new communities in areas with estimated substantial growth to be represented. Likewise, the elector ratio would increase to 2,629 which

could potentially affect a Councillor's representation of, and engagement with, communities.

Option Two: 55 Councillors

Option Two would increase the Council size by one Councillor. The Cabinet, Scrutiny and Regulatory functions and Partnerships would continue to work effectively at this number. However, this increase would be unlikely to fully accommodate the estimated substantial growth in electorate by 2027, in areas such as Lawley which was projected to increase by 6,000 electors and Priorslee. Furthermore, the elector to councillor ratio would be 2,581 which may not provide proper representation for areas with an expected substantial elector growth and could also mean a potential reduction in representation in existing communities.

Option Three: 56 Councillors

Option Three suggested an increase in the Council size by two Councillors. The Cabinet, Scrutiny and Regulatory functions and Partnerships would continue to work effectively at this number. 56 Councillors provided more scope to retain representation and community identity in all areas, included in those with predicted substantial growth. Likewise, the elector ratio in 2027 was projected to be 2,535, which was not dissimilar to the current elector ratio.

Members heard that this was the recommended option to propose in the submission, but there was no perfect scenario and that warding changes would be required to create equal representation. However, Option Three helped to preserve existing community identities, a manageable Councillor to elector ratio and future-proofed the issue beyond 2027.

Members noted that the elector per councillor ratio was relatively low compared to other local authorities of the same size, so therefore an increase to 56 would still result in a relatively low ratio. The Project Manager explained this might be the case initially, but also that the review needed to look beyond 2027, though wouldn't be directly referenced by the LGBCE, and that 55.5 was the median range for similar sized local authorities, therefore rounded up to 56 seemed accurate. The Associate Director: Policy & Governance added that to this pointing out that the LGBCE had said that Telford & Wrekin Council were towards the lower end of the range of ratios for Councils of a similar size, however the LGBCE also expected the submission to be future proof, in that they didn't expect to come back to the Council for another 10 years or so following on from 2027, therefore the submission needed to include sufficient flexibility for projected elector growth beyond that date.

Several members believed that the Council should remain at 54 Councillors, as this had worked effectively for some time. However, Members also noted officers' points that 54 Councillors would reduce community representation as communities grew and, therefore, accountability based on the projected elector growth. Members also noted that workload had increased, which had been emphasised by COVID-19. This led several members to favouring the proposed option of 56 Councillors.

Members were concerned that it was difficult to decide on a number of Councillors as the Council hadn't experience this before, but more notably were concerned about how it would affect warding arrangements. The Associate Director: Policy & Governance agreed it was a difficult task, but Councillors were only agreeing a number for the proposal, which the LGBCE may reject. Likewise, the LGBCE reserved the right to make small adjustments if they believed that a community would be negatively affected, or if disproportionate figures in ward sizes was created. The Associate Director: Policy & Governance followed this by highlighting the importance of the community stakeholder engagement list in order to ensure community identity was preserved across Telford & Wrekin.

The Associate Director: Governance & Policy went on to share the proposed questionnaire that would be sent to all Councillors in order to gain their insight into their workload, which would feed into the submission for the LGBCE.

Members asked for clarification on the question which related to outside bodies, as some members sat on several community groups. The Associate Director: Policy & Governance responded by saying this referred to bodies that individuals were appointed to as a Councillor, but this could be expanded to include groups Councillors sat on within their role as Councillor.

Members clarified that the questionnaire related to workload prior to COVID-19. The Associate Director: Policy & Governance agreed, and said that the accompanying email and letter would highlight this.

Members noted that a question regarding caseload did not have any suggested range above 20 per month but that they received a lot more than this, so asked for additional options. The Associate Director: Policy & Governance agreed to add more options for this question, as well as a free text box for members to input their own figure should they choose to do so.

RESOLVED – that;

- a) **officers be instructed to provide a draft submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to the Committee for approval, proposing a Council size of 56; and**
- b) **the circulation of the Councillor questionnaire to collect supporting information for the submission the Local Government Boundary Commission for England be approved.**

BRC23 Suggested Stakeholders

Members noted that the documents linked to this item contained dome details that were confidential. It was agreed that this item could be discussed in public without disclosing such details to allow an open and transparent discussion.

The document was broken down into a number of categories such as community groups, volunteers and email groups who are not part of a defined group, but have signed up to receive news about Telford and Wrekin. The Associate Director: Policy & Governance informed members that this was opportunity for members to shape the stakeholder list, as officers didn't know the wards as well as Members did and that the LGBCE had made it clear that they wanted to hear from the small groups, only Members may know of.

Members raised concern that some of the proposed groups did not relate to a specific area and therefore may not help develop a clear picture of community identity. The Associate Director: Policy & Governance responded by saying the LGBCE asked for suggestions for groups to contact, and although some of the proposed groups may not represent specific areas, the members of those groups will come from certain areas and therefore provided another opportunity to reach out to members of the community. Members were initially concerned that only a short period of time had been allowed for consultation but it was explained that this list was being collated for the LGBCE so that they could undertake consultation during the second stage of the process.

RESOLVED – that the list of consultation groups previously circulated for submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England be approved subject to any additions following comments from Members.

The meeting ended at 6:57pm

Chairman:

Date: Thursday, 22 April 2021