

SUBMISSION TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND ON COUNCIL SIZE

Head of Service:	Amardip Healy, Chief Legal Officer
Wards affected:	(All Wards);
Urgent Decision?(yes/no)	Yes
If yes, reason urgent decision required:	Deadline for submitting is 31 March 2021
Appendices (attached):	1: Submission on Council Size

Summary

To approve the submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on Council size.

Recommendation (s)

The Council is asked to:

- (1) Approve the submission on Council Size, as set out in Appendix 1;**
- (2) Delegate to the Chief Legal Officer in consultation with the Chairman of Strategy and Resources and the Chairman of the Electoral Review Task and Finish Group any final changes to the Council Size Submission as may be necessary;**
- (3) Authorise the Chief Executive to submit the Council's Submission on Council Size to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.**

1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 The submission on Council Size requires the approval of Council before it can be submitted to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England ('the Commission').

2 Background

- 2.1 The Commission is an independent statutory body, whose 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:

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- 2.1.1 such arrangements are fair and deliver electoral equality for voters, and
 - 2.1.2 the arrangements help to deliver effective and convenient local government to citizens.
- 2.2 An electoral review process is an examination of a Council's electoral arrangements. This includes consideration of:
 - 2.2.1 the total numbers of councillors to be elected;
 - 2.2.2 the number of boundaries of wards or divisions;
 - 2.2.3 the number of councillors for each ward/ division and also the name of such ward or division.
- 2.3 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 Epsom and Ewell

- 2.1 In 2020 the Commission met with the Council to explain electoral review process, they also presented to full Council on the 14 July 2020. The Commission explained the four tests for an electoral review being required and that the Council met with three of those four, namely,
 - 2.1.1 legislation requires a review from time to time, normally 3-4 electoral cycles, which could mean anything from between 1-16 years. The last review for the Council was 22 years;
 - 2.1.2 electoral changes – and this is about how many people a councillor is representing. There are threshold tests which if exceeded can trigger a review. Two Wards in the Borough exceed those tolerances;
 - 2.1.3 a request – a review is asked for because of the changes locally. The Commission did request a review because of the inequality between certain boundaries. The Council agreed, however the review was delayed to avoid the 2019 election year.
- 2.2 The Commission also explained the approach in a Review:
 - 2.2.1 numbers: need to understand numbers in terms of how many councillors are needed for an authority to function;
 - 2.2.2 boundaries: once the numbers are known, then the boundaries need to be drawn up. The advice is to start with the Borough Boundary and then work inwards.

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- 2.3 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 forecasting date the Council is working on is 2027.

Process to date

- 2.4 In July 2020, the Strategy & Resources Committee established a cross-party Member Electoral Review Task & Finish Group. The role of the Task & Finish Group was to progress the Review and formulate recommendations to the Strategy & Resources Committee on any submissions to the Commission during the Review process. It also includes the carrying out a polling stations review at the completion of the Electoral Review process.
- 2.5 The Commission have a range of guidance on how a 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.
- 2.6 On the 16 March 2021, the recommendation of the Task & Finish Group to approve a draft submission on Council Size, was agreed by Strategy & Resources Committee. The Submission on Council Size requires Council approval before it can be submitted to the Commission. Therefore the Strategy and Resources Committee referred this matter on to Council.
- 2.7 The Commission undertake a review of the draft council size submission before it is finally submitted to them. This is to allow for any refinements or redirections which may be necessary, so as to ensure a submission meets the core requirements for a submission. The Council's draft has been reviewed by the Commission before its approval by Strategy & Resources Committee. The Commission confirmed the draft Submission was in order and felt no redirections were necessary.

Recommendation on Council Size

- 2.8 The recommendation is a reduction of the number of councillors from the current 38 to 35. A number of options were considered from staying the same to reducing the number. Although the final electorate projections for 2027 are to be confirmed, the current ratios for the Borough on 38 with an electorate of 63,193 is a ratio of 1:1662. With a reduction to 35 the ratio to electorate would be around 1:1805. This number is still lower than most other Councils in Surrey and lower than the CIPFA Nearest Neighbour Model, which the Commission use for benchmarking purposes as part of their considerations.

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- 2.9 For those Councils in Surrey who have completed an Electoral Review exercise, Council size was reduced. It was only in the case of Surrey Heath, the Commission agreed to increase by 1 (to 35) from the Council's submission. In terms of percentages, the submission on Council Size by each Council is set down in the table below:

Year of Review	Council	Council Size Change (Council recommendations)
2015	Woking	17 % reduction (36 to 30)
2015	Elmbridge	20% reduction (60 to 48)
2017	Surrey Heath	14% reduction (40 to 34)
2019	Reigate and Banstead	12% reduction (51 to 45)
2019	Runnymede	2.38% reduction (42-41)

- 2.10 The percentage reduction for the Council's Submission is around 7.8%.

Next Steps

- 2.11 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 Borough 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 mid-May to early July 2021.
- 2.12 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 5 October to the 13 December 2021. Once this second consultation exercise concludes, the Commission will then produce their Final Recommendations. This should be some time in February 2022.
- 2.13 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 March 2022 and to be implemented for May 2023.

3 Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

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3.1 Impact Assessment

3.1.1 The development of the submission has given weight to ensuring there is access by all residents to Councillors.

3.2 Crime & Disorder

3.2.1 There are no crime and disorder considerations associated with this report.

3.3 Safeguarding

3.3.1 There are no safeguarding implications associated with this report.

3.4 Dependencies

3.4.1 None

3.5 Other

3.5.1 None

4 Financial Implications

4.1 The annual member's allowance for 2020/21 is £3,781; the allowance is uplifted by CPI inflation each year. All else being equal, a reduction in member numbers could create saving.

4.2 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** None arising from the contents of this report.

5 Legal Implications

5.1 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 Borough for 2023.

5.2 **Monitoring Officer's comments:** none arising from the contents of this report.

6 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

6.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged: Effective Council.

6.2 **Service Plans:** The matter is included within the current Service Delivery Plan.

6.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:** n/a

6.4 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:** n/a

6.5 **Partnerships:** n/a

7 **Background papers**

7.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

Previous reports:

- Strategy & Resources Committee, 2 July 2020
<https://democracy.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=132&MId=1019&Ver=4>
- Council, 14 July 2020
<https://democracy.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=146&MId=1021&Ver=4>
- Strategy & Resources Committee, 16 March 2021
<https://democracy.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/documents/s19240/Submission%20to%20The%20Local%20Government%20Boundary%20Commission%20For%20England%20On%20Council%20Size.pdf>

Other papers:

- <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/how-reviews-work>