



## Report to Standards and General Purposes Committee

**Date:** 25 February 2021

**Reference number:** TBC

**Title:** Buckinghamshire Council Electoral Review: Council Size Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

**Relevant councillor(s):** Cllr Jonathan Waters

**Author and/or contact officer:** Nick Graham, Director of Legal & Democratic Services

**Ward(s) affected:** All

**Recommendations:**

1. To note the work of the Member Working Group set up by this Committee in July 2020 to consider its response to the first phase of the Boundary Commission's Electoral Review.
2. To approve the completed Council size template for submission to the Boundary Commission.
3. To approve the Working Group's Options paper and recommendation as to the appropriate Council size of 120 (one hundred and twenty) Councillors to the Boundary Commission
4. To delegate to the Director of Legal & Democratic Services in consultation with the Chairman of this Committee to make any amendments to the submissions to the Commission in the light of any further comments from the Committee and any minor/typographical changes.
5. To confirm that the Working Group should continue to meet so as to address any queries or questions that the Boundary Commission may have regarding the submission, and to plan for Phase 2 of the Electoral Review.

**Reason for decision:** To update the Committee on the work of the Member Working Group and to agree a submission to the Boundary Commission.

## **1. Executive summary**

- 1.1 The Boundary Commission wish to undertake an Electoral Review of Buckinghamshire Council. The first phase of that Review seeks to determine what should be the appropriate size of the Council in terms of the number of Councillors.
- 1.2 The process requires the Commission to seek representations to assist its deliberations. In July 2020 the Standards & General Purpose Committee (the Committee) set up arrangements for how the Council proposed to respond to the Boundary Commission's Electoral Review of the Council, establishing a Member Working Group and an agreed timeline. The attached documents are the culmination of the work of the Working Group.
- 1.3 The Committee are being asked to approve the completed template and Options paper with the recommendation that the Commission should approve a Council size of 120 elected Members.

## **2. Content of report**

- 2.1 The template document in Annex A largely sets out factual and contextual information about Buckinghamshire Council, its governance arrangements and structures and information regarding the electorate, housing growth etc.
- 2.2 In the Options paper (Annex B) the Working Group have set out what it considers to be the key considerations including the future agenda for the Council, its ambitions concerning the involvement of Members in the strategic direction of the Council, the Scrutiny and Regulatory functions, and the role of Members as leaders in their localities. Evidence is provided of comparator unitary Councils largely drawn from recent data, but also referencing the earlier Ernst & Young report and the Unitary proposal from the former Buckinghamshire County Council. There is then an analysis of workload on Councillors by reference to Council size – with the Working Group's argument that a smaller size could increase workload significantly and would involve a departure from its 'Member-led' ambitions.
- 2.3 Having considered their ambitions for Councillors in the new Council the Working Group have recommended a figure of 120 Members

### **3. Other options considered**

- 3.1 The only other option is not to submit a view about the Council size to the Commission, but that would be inadvisable.

### **4. Legal and financial implications**

- 4.1 This is an Electoral Review undertaken by the Boundary Commission. The basis of the Commission's decision will accord with their published criteria. The template and Options paper sets out the proposed recommendation that the Council will urge the Commission to adopt. A formal submission is required to the Commission who will take account of those submissions in their deliberations.

### **5. Corporate implications**

- 5.1 The decision of the Commission will clearly impact the democratic decision-making of the Council and the role of all elected Members. The submission to the Commission makes a number of assumptions about the future governance structure of the Council and the role of Councillors when fulfilling their role.

### **6. Consultation with local councillors & community boards**

- 6.1 In September 2020 all Members were invited to a presentation by the Boundary Commission who addressed various questions regarding the process and decision-making.

### **7. Communication, engagement & further consultation**

- 7.1 Members were sent a survey regarding the Electoral Review and asked to feedback their views on the time commitment required in undertaking the work of a Councillor. 98 responses were received.
- 7.2 Regular updates of by the Member Working Group have been made to the public meetings of the Standards & General Purposes Committee and the minutes of the working group have been available to all Members. Key stakeholders have been informed about the Commission's review, including towns and parishes and the business community.
- 7.3 The Boundary Commission can, but do not ordinarily, consult on this phase of the Review, but have an extensive consultation plan – informed by the Council – for phase 2 of the Review.

## **8. Boundary Commission decision**

- 8.1 It is anticipated that the Commission will consider their decision and make it known after the elections in May 2021. The decision will be either of the following: they accept the proposed number; or, they may accept a number as proposed by another group who makes a submission; or, they may seek further information from the Council. It is highly unlikely they will simply substitute a number without further reference to the Council.
- 8.2 Once a determination of the Council size has been made phase 2 of the work will commence. This will involve the drawing up of boundaries for the new wards. It is anticipated that this will commence from June 2021 and the work will be carried out during the Summer and Autumn of 2021.

### *Appendices*

- Annex A** Council size template
- Annex B** Options paper – with annexes

