

Open Report on behalf of Richard Wills, Executive Director for Environment and Economy

Report to:	County Council
Date:	19 December 2014
Subject:	Council size proposal for the Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Summary:

This report presents the working group's findings on the council size proposal to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).

Recommendation(s):

1. That Council consider the working group's findings and agree one of three options on council size, for recommendation to the LGBCE, in January 2015.
2. That Council approve the working group's recommendation to the LGBCE that its divisions remain single-member.
3. That the Council delegate to the Chief Executive, in consultation with Group Leaders, authority to determine the final form of the submission to the LGBCE, based on the council size number determined by the Council.

1. Background

1.1 This paper sets out what we would like the LGBCE to consider, in deciding how many council members we need to run effectively as a council, while providing electoral equality to the people of Lincolnshire.

1.2 A working group, comprising the group leaders or their representatives, has met to discuss the proposal and has taken into account: current division size, electorate numbers, councillors workload, transport links, comparison with statistical neighbours, committee structure and our relationship with other bodies (including parishes).

- 1.3 Where electorate numbers are concerned, the group considered the current situation, as well as that for 2015 (when the LGBCE start to consider our council size) and in 2021 (five years after the end of the review). The figures are based on the best knowledge we have at the time, from information provided by the districts. A more detailed explanation is appended to this paper. LGBCE will take this into account when it considers our council size and reserves the right to add or subtract one councillor from our recommended total number, to provide best fit.
- 1.4 Council should note that we cannot cross district boundaries to achieve electoral equality, so that any changes to our overall makeup need to be contained within district boundaries.
- 1.5 LGBCE must receive our recommendations on council size by the end of January 2015. They will then consider whether they accept the council's recommendations before consulting on division boundaries, following the general election in May 2015.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The main purpose of the review is to improve electoral equality across the whole of Lincolnshire County Council. The Commission's criteria state that the county needs to consider the electorate numbers from the end of the review (in 2016) and five years from that date (that is the predicted electorate in 2021.)
- 2.2 This size submission is the first stage amongst several in the process: it will be followed by public consultation on division boundaries, with the review complete in summer 2016. This stage seeks to set out the county council's views on size, to get the best electoral representation for the people of Lincolnshire, weighed-up against the working demands on our councillors and acting within the council's governance arrangements.
- 2.3 A working group of councillors with cross-party representation was established to consider council size and, the majority view was a preferred size of 75 county councillors. This represents a reduction of two council seats, from the current make-up of 77 members. However, the group also considered keeping 77 members or reducing to 71 members.
- 2.4 The consensus view of the group was that the council should also retain single-member divisions, to maintain the same level of member-accountability. They also felt that multiple-member divisions were not conducive to large rural areas as they could become geographically unmanageable. Council is asked to approve the inclusion of this recommendation in the submission to LGBCE.

3. The last review

- 3.1 The last review of the county council took place under the LGBCE's predecessor, the Local Government Commission for England (LGCE). They

began the review in September 1998 and finished it in November 1999, after extensive consultation.

3.2 LGCE found unequal electoral representation in 43 of the 76 divisions and predicted that by 2003, an unchanged make-up would mean that this situation would deteriorate further.

3.3 They recommended increasing the number of councillors from 76 to 77, in single-member divisions and changing the boundaries to enable this, in all except five of the existing divisions. This had the effect that 21 of the 77 divisions the number of electors would vary by no more than 10 percent from the county average, with only four varying by more than 20 percent. This was also set to continue with 26 divisions expected to vary by no more than 10 percent and only three divisions expected to vary by more than 30 percent from the end of the review.

4. Matters the submission will consider

4.1 The submission will need to be clear about the county's fast-growing population and the effect this will have on electoral numbers in future. Lincolnshire Research Observatory have followed the LGCE's guidance and predict overall electoral growth of 2.3%, from 522,709 in autumn 2014, to 565,247 in 2021. A divisional breakdown of the figures is appended to this paper.

4.2 LGCE will also consider our electoral make-up and the decision-making process, specifically the leader and cabinet model. As such, the submission will detail the various scrutiny, regulatory and sub-committees, along with external representation on external bodies. These are particularly important in helping the council to maintain effective partnerships with external organisations, which have an impact on its services and the way we deliver them.

4.3 We will also outline our position amongst statistical neighbours, noting the matters listed below in particular.

- Lincolnshire communities tend to be fairly dispersed with a low ratio of electors per hectare, at 0.94, meaning that the county is 13th among our family set of 16 statistical neighbours.¹
- We rank third on council size, as only Cumbria and Norfolk have a larger number of county councillors, with 84 each. We are however 12th, in terms of the number of electorate per member. The largest is Staffordshire with 10,695 electors per member and the smallest is Cumbria with 4,566, in comparison with Lincolnshire's 7,226 electors per member.
- A reduction would still put us above the mean average, of 66 members per council, amongst our statistical neighbours. As such, there is an argument

¹ Data from LGCE website <http://www.lgbce.org.uk/records-and-resources/local-authorities-in-england> summary table for all local authorities in England

that we could reduce the number of council members, based on our neighbours' experiences. A table, showing Lincolnshire's position amongst our statistical neighbours is appended to this paper.

4.4 LGBCE will also consider connectivity in the council, especially the restrictions of its road and rail network and the dispersed nature of its population. Allied to this is the members' relationship with the parishes, which range in number from 47 in Louth Wolds, to none in the urban areas.

4.5 It will also consider councillor workloads, including external and internal duties, as any change to council size is likely to have an effect on workloads, although we expect this to be an extra hour per week, per councillor, at most. Information to advise this process was collected and collated from member questionnaires during autumn 2014.

5 Conclusion

5.1 The working group agreed that Council should consider three scenarios concerning council size and the profiling, showing each of these, is appended to this paper. Council needs to consider:

- Option A, to maintain our current cohort of 77 members and redraw the boundaries to increase electoral equality. Under this option, the best spread would mean losing one divisional seat in Lincoln (from 10 to nine) and gaining one in South Holland (from nine to 10).
- Option B, to decrease the number of councillors by two, losing one seat in East Lindsey (from 15 to 14) and two in Lincoln (from 10 to eight) and gaining one in South Holland (from nine to 10), compared with the current situation. This would generate an estimated annual saving of £23,514.
- Option C, to decrease the number of councillors by six, losing two each in East Lindsey (from 15 to 13) and Lincoln (from 10 to eight), plus one each in South Kesteven (from 15 to 14) and West Lindsey (from 10 to nine), compared with the current situation. This would generate an estimated annual saving of £ 70,542.

6. Legal Comments:

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is undertaking an electoral review of the County. The council has until the end of January 2015 to make submissions as to council size. The Report sets out the recommendations of a working group set up to consider the issue.

The decision as to the council size to be submitted to the Commission is within the remit of the full council.

7. Resource Comments:

The recommendation has the potential to reduce the number of elected members serving the county council. In the event that such a reduction should take place there will be a potential modest saving in members' allowances and related expenditure of around £12,000 per annum per seat removed.

8. Consultation

a) Has Local Member Been Consulted?

Not applicable

b) Has Executive Councillor Been Consulted?

Yes

c) Scrutiny Comments

None

d) Policy Proofing Actions Required

There are no actions required.

9. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

10. Appendices

Appendix A: Methodology explanation for future electorate forecast

Appendix B: Forecast electoral figures

Appendix C: Position amongst statistical neighbours

Appendix D: Profiling, showing elector numbers for a council size of 77, 75 or 71 members

This report was written by Nigel West, who can be contacted on 01522 552840 or nigel.west@lincolnshire.gov.uk.