

<b>Local Members Interest</b>
N/A

## **Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday 13 September 2022**

### **Electoral Review - Stage 1 Draft Council Size Submission**

#### **Recommendation(s)**

I recommend that the Committee:

- a. Consider the progress on the County's Electoral Review
- b. Provide comments and feedback on the draft Council Size Submission, including the proposals to:
  - i. Retain the current council size of 62 Elected Members
  - ii. Request a single member per division review

#### **Report of Cllr Alan White, Leader of the Council**

### **Summary**

#### **What is the Overview and Scrutiny Committee being asked to do and why?**

1. The Committee is being asked to review the attached draft Council Size Submission which is due to be considered by Cabinet on 21<sup>st</sup> September. The Committee's comments will be reported to Cabinet at this meeting. The Submission is due to be considered by Full Council on 13<sup>th</sup> October. The Committee are asked to consider the progress on the County's Electoral review and provide comments and feedback on the draft Council Size Submission.

### **Report**

#### **Background**

2. In March 2022, the Local Government Boundary Commission initiated an Electoral Review of Staffordshire. The rationale for undertaking an Electoral Review is both due to our changing population which has led to electoral inequality, and the length of time since our last review.
3. The last Electoral Review was undertaken between 2010-12 and resulted in Staffordshire maintaining the existing council size of 62 Members,

with division boundaries being altered to address voter inequality and reflecting the identities and interests of local communities.

4. There are two key stages to an Electoral Review:

Stage 1 – which considers the Council Size

Stage 2 – which considers division arrangements

5. Stage 1 commenced in June 2022. The County Council is required to submit its Council Size submission to the Boundary Commission by 11<sup>th</sup> November 2022. As well as developing our Council Size Submission, the Boundary Commission ask for a range of supporting information to be submitted during Stage 1. This includes electoral registers, map files of various geographies, copies of every local order concerning divisions and parishes, and various governance documentation.

6. Stage 2 will commence in January 2023, when the Boundary Commission publishes its in-principle decision on council size. There will then be a 12-week consultation period for any interested organisation or individual to submit their proposals for division arrangements.

7. It is expected that the Commission will publish its final division arrangements recommendations in November 2023. The new division arrangements will be elected to in 2025.

### **Developing our Council Size Submission**

8. Even though this is a County Council Electoral Review, we are dependent on a significant amount of information from Staffordshire Districts and Boroughs to inform both our Council Size Submission and the Review in general, for example electoral registers. We have been working closely with our District and Borough colleagues since June 2022 to gain access to the required data and information, and to work with them to review and quality assure the information.

9. A cross-organisation Project Team has been established to oversee the County Council's input into the Electoral Review, with the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Corporate Services as the SLT lead. Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee are providing scrutiny and oversight to the Electoral Review process.

10. The Boundary Commission consider three key aspects when considering Council Size:

a. Strategic Leadership – how many Elected Members are required to give strategic leadership and direction to the authority?

- b. Accountability – how many Elected Members are required to provide scrutiny to the authority? How many Elected Members are required to meet the regulatory requirements of the authority?
  - c. Community Leadership – how the representation role of Elected members in the local community is discharged and how they engage with people and conduct casework.
11. The Boundary Commission recognise that there is considerable variation in council size across England, not only between different types of authority, but also between authorities of the same type. As such they aim to recommend a council size which is appropriate for the individual local authority.

### Electoral Forecasts

12. A key element of the Review is considering how the electorate is likely to change over the coming years. As such electoral forecasts up to 2028 have been produced for all polling districts, existing divisions and District and Boroughs.
13. The recommended Boundary Commission methodology has been used to calculate the electoral forecasts. This methodology reviews electorate figures for the past 3 years and then uses Office for National Statistics population data and forecasts to project forward electorate numbers. This produces a standard forecast; an adjustment is then made to reflect confirmed housing developments that will impact the electorate in particular areas between 2022 and 2028. This then produces a final electorate forecast for 2028.
14. The table below summaries the current 2022 electorate by District/Borough and how the electorate is projected to change by 2028. Appendix 2 presents summarised data for all existing divisions.

District	2022 Electorate	Electorate per Member	Variance from Staffs Average	Projected 2028 Electorate	Electorate per Member	Variance from Staffs Average	Electorate Increase
Cannock Chase	76,335	10,905	1.5%	82,339	11,763	0.9%	6,004
East Staffordshire	89,636	11,205	4.3%	102,913	12,864	10.4%	13,277
Lichfield	83,085	10,386	-3.3%	88,310	11,039	-5.3%	5,225
Newcastle	91,985	10,221	-4.9%	99,288	11,032	-5.3%	7,303
South Staffordshire	85,060	10,633	-1.0%	89,601	11,200	-3.9%	4,541
Stafford	103,538	11,504	7.1%	113,659	12,629	8.4%	10,121
Staffordshire Moorlands	77,104	11,015	2.5%	82,950	11,850	1.7%	5,846
Tamworth	59,280	9,880	-8.0%	63,583	10,597	-9.1%	4,303
<b>Staffordshire</b>	<b>666,023</b>	<b>10,742</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>722,643</b>	<b>11,656</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>56,620</b>

We are still working with Lichfield District Council on housing development data, to confirm the likely status of several potentially major developments by 2028.

The forecast electorate in this district may therefore be subject to a further increase prior to final submission.

### **Council Size Submission - Summary**

15. The draft Council Size Submission is attached in Appendix 1. This uses the Boundary Commission's preferred template and pulls together key evidence to support the proposed council size.
16. The Submission proposes that the County Council:
  - d. Retains the current council size of 62 Elected Members
  - e. Requests a single Member per division review
17. The evidence outlined in the Submission demonstrates that the current council size of 62 Elected Members supports the Council to efficiently and effectively undertake the three key aspects outlined in paragraph 16.
18. In developing the Council Size Submission, consideration has been given to an increase in Council Size to support improved community representation. However, to have a meaningful impact on reducing the elector to member ratio, a council size of between 70-80 Elected Members would be required. This would result in a significant increase in the cost of democracy and would also lead to significant challenges in developing division arrangements that effectively represented community identities.
19. The County Council's current electoral arrangements include two Divisions with two Elected Members. The Submission outlines that these arrangements do not provide the most efficient conditions for community representation. Representing a larger electorate presents difficulties, and it is acknowledged that it can be difficult to split casework, and for electors to easily identify who 'their Councillor' is.
20. As such, it is proposed that that County Council requests a single member per division review. However, it should be noted that single member divisions may not be achievable. The same request was made in 2010, however two dual divisions remained.

### **Stage 2 - Division Arrangements**

21. Once the County Council has submitted its Council Size Submission on 11<sup>th</sup> November, the Boundary Commission will then have five weeks to review the submission and decide on an in-principle council size. We

expect the Boundary Commission to announce this on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2023.

22. The County Council, and other interested parties including members of the public, have 12 weeks to submit their initial proposals for new division arrangements. These proposals will need to include where the boundaries lie between divisions, the number of Members for each division, and the names of divisions.
23. In formulating our division proposals, we will need to consider the Boundary Commission's three main criteria for considering new patterns of electoral divisions:
  - a. Electoral equality
  - b. Community interests and identities
  - c. Promotion of effective and convenient local government
24. During the preparation of our division proposals there will be a range of opportunities for Elected Members to input and shape the formulation of the proposals. We will ensure regular Member Briefing Sessions are arranged, alongside individual meetings to discuss specific division proposals. Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee will continue to provide scrutiny and oversight to the process.
25. Our division proposals need to be submitted to the Boundary Commission by 20<sup>th</sup> March 2023. The Commission will then have a further 12 weeks to analyse all the representations made and produce their draft recommendations. We expect their draft recommendations to be published on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2023. The Council will then have eight weeks to respond to the draft recommendations, prior to final recommendations being produced in November 2023.

### **Next Steps**

26. The draft Council Size Submission is due to be considered by Cabinet on 21<sup>st</sup> September and Full Council on 13<sup>th</sup> October.
27. The above timescales will ensure that that the Submission is approved and submitted in time for the Boundary Commission deadline of 11<sup>th</sup> November.

### **Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity**

28. Updates on progress with the Electoral Review have been provided to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 21<sup>st</sup> June and 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2022.

## **List of Background Documents/Appendices:**

Appendix 1 – Council Size Submission Draft

Appendix 2 – Electoral Forecast Division Summary

## **Contact Details**

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