ELECTORAL REVIEW OF ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

1   SUMMARY

1.1   This report outlines the timeline for the Electoral Review of Rochford District Council and the key elements that comprise the Review.

1.2   This report does not ask Members to make any decisions but contains information to keep Members up-to-date with the process.

2   ELECTORAL REVIEW

2.1   The Chair and Chief Executive of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) have met with the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to discuss the high level timeline for the Electoral Review.

2.2   The LGBCE have decided to undertake a review as 5 of the Council's wards have an electoral variance in excess of 10% from the average for the authority (based on October 2012 data). There are:-

- Barling and Sutton, Grange and Trinity wards that are over-represented; and

- Downhall and Rawreth and Rochford wards that are under-represented.

The full list of variances from the average for all wards is attached in Appendix A. The Review itself will cover the entire District.

2.3   The timetable is as follows:-

Stage	Date start	Date finished
Preliminary period	November 2013	July 2014
Preliminary meetings with Group Leaders, full Council, and officers	25 February 2014	
Council size decision by LGBCE	15 July 2014	
Stage 1 consultation starts - LGBCE seeks views on ward patterns	27 July 2014	29 September 2014
Tour by LGBCE	October / November 2014	
LGBCE analysis and deliberation of submissions on ward patterns	18 November 2014	
Draft recommendations for ward patterns issued by LGBCE for Stage 2 consultation	9 December 2014	16 February 2015
Tour by LGBCE	March 2015	
LGBCE analysis and deliberation on submissions received	14 April 2015	
Final recommendations for ward patterns published	5 May 2015	

2.4   The first key factor to determine will be:-

2.4.1   whether the Council retains the elections by third system, in which case the presumption made by the LGBCE will for a uniform pattern of 3 member wards, or

2.4.2   whether the Council opts for all-out elections every four years, in which case the Council would be able to retain a selection of 1, 2 and 3 member wards.

2.5   Should the Council wish to move to all-out elections, the Council would need to consult on the option. It would then have to pass a resolution at a Council meeting specially convened for the purpose by a majority of two-thirds of the Members voting on it. This work would need to be completed by March 2014 (see paragraph 2.6 below).

2.6   The next factor for the Council to consider will be the number of Members necessary to carry out business effectively having regard to the Executive decision – making arrangements, regulatory and scrutiny functions and the representational role of Councillors, both in terms of ward work and representing the Council on outside bodies. The LGBCE will expect the Council to consider this not just in the context of the Council's current arrangements but also likely future trends or plans for five to ten years hence. The Council will need to make a decision on this in March 2014 and will send views to the LGBCE. The LGBCE have made the point that in any submission, the arguments made must be evidence driven with a clear rationale.

2.7   The LGBCE have produced guidance that can be used to develop the rationale and this is attached in Appendix B. Officers will start the process of developing a submission based on this guidance.

2.8   To provide context for this the LGBCE will refer to the size of our 'Nearest Neighbours' as identified by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. Appendix C contains the LGBCE analysis of our 'Nearest Neighbours'.

2.9   The LGBCE will make a final decision on number of Councillors in July 2014.

2.10   There will then be a Stage 1 consultation in which the LGBCE will seek views about the warding arrangements. The Council will need to make a decision on this and submit views to the LGBCE by September 2014.

2.11   The LGBCE will then analyse all submissions received and will propose draft recommendations and these will be the subject of the Stage 2 consultation process from December 2014 to February 2015.

2.12   The LGBCE will publish its final decision in May 2015, after the General Election.

2.13   The LGBCE will be briefing all Members at the Council meeting on 25 February 2014. There will be a meeting with Group Leaders prior to this.

2.14   Officers will be starting the process of preparing the submission of information required by the LGBCE such as the current Electoral Register, the current electorate, the forecast of the electorate, political management arrangements, annual management letter from the external auditor, peer review report, performance statistics relating to planning and licensing functions etc. which will act as the evidence base for the review.

2.15   If Members wish to obtain further information about the review process, please go to:

LGBCE web site: www.lgbce.org.uk

LGBCE consultation portal: https://consultation.lgbce.org.uk/node

Electoral Review information: http://www.lgbce.org.uk/about-us/about-electoral-reviews

3   PARISH IMPLICATIONS

3.1   There are potential implications for the Parish/Town Councils in any changes to the warding arrangements for the Council. The Parish/Town Councils will be involved in the consultation processes carried out by the LGBCE.

4   RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

4.1   There are resource implications for the Council in terms of Officer time in producing the necessary information for the LGBCE.

5   RECOMMENDATION

5.1   It is proposed that Council **RESOLVES** to note the report.

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Background Papers:-

None.

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If you would like this report in large print, Braille or another language please contact 01702 318111.

LGBCE – 2012 Electoral Variances from the District Average

Ashingdon & Canewdon	5%
Barling & Sutton	- 15%
Downhall & Rawreth	11%
Foulness & Great Wakering	- 10%
Grange	- 15%
Hawkwell North	6%
Hawkwell South	0%
Hawkwell West	- 2%
Hockley Central	4%
Hockley North	- 2%
Hockley West	- 1%
Hullbridge	8%
Lodge	- 3%
Rayleigh Central	0%
Rochford	15%
Sweyne Park	0%
Trinity	- 14%
Wheatley	- 2%
Whitehouse	- 2%

Council size

Helping you make the strongest possible case to the Commission
• A guide for local authority elected members and staff

About this briefing

The first part of every electoral review is a consideration of council size. The Commission's preference is to base its council size decisions on the consideration of locally-generated proposals which are underpinned by sound evidence and reasoning. This is as true of proposals for retaining existing council size as it is for proposals to change council size.

This briefing is designed to assist members and staff of local authorities who are preparing submissions to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on council size (the total number of councillors who represent the local authority) as part of an electoral review.

The note indicates the kinds of issues the Commission will consider in its deliberations on council size and should assist you in making the strongest possible representation to us.

Background

Before the Commission considers possible changes to ward boundaries, we will initiate discussions with the local authority about its views on council size and invite written evidence during a preliminary phase of the review.

Once we have considered the evidence provided to us during the preliminary stage, the Commission will hold a public consultation on council size to assess local opinion.

Following the Commission's consideration of the evidence received during the preliminary phase, and any views expressed to it during public consultation, we will publish a decision on the future size of the council before starting our work on ward or electoral division boundaries.

Preparing your council size submission

The Commission has no preconceptions about the right number of councillors to represent an authority. We do not compare authorities directly with each other, we have no targets or thresholds for council size, and we recognise that every local authority will represent local people and deliver services in different ways. We therefore make recommendations on the basis of the evidence we receive during the electoral review.

The Commission aims to recommend a council size that allows the council to take decisions effectively, manage the business and responsibilities of the council successfully, and provide effective community leadership and representation.

Whilst it might appear simplest to retain the current council size, the Commission does not consider this is, in itself, a compelling reason to maintain the existing arrangements. Similarly, an increase in council size due, for example, solely to reflect population growth or a reduction in numbers solely to achieve financial savings are both arguments that have previously failed to satisfy the Commission that such changes would promote

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effective and convenient local government.

Instead, the Commission will form its view about the right council size for an authority by considering three areas:

• We will look at the **governance arrangements** of the council and how it takes decisions across the broad range of its responsibilities.

• The Commission will look at the council's **scrutiny functions** relating to its own decision making and the council's responsibilities to outside bodies.

• We will also consider the **representational role of councillors in the local community** and how they engage with people, conduct casework and represent the council on local partner organisations.

The questions outlined below are the kinds of matters the Commission considers before reaching a decision on council size. In doing so, we recognise that each area has its own geographical, community and organisational characteristics.

Accordingly, some of the questions, and prompts, may not be appropriate to the circumstances of your council or the area you serve. You should think of them as a range of considerations that will help lead you to identify the appropriate number of councillors for your area. They are also intended to help you and present to us a clear reasoning for the number you suggest.

This is not an exhaustive list and the Commission will consider any further issues you wish to raise. We do not expect local authorities to provide lengthy responses to every question (or necessarily even respond directly to all of the questions) and you can set out your submission in any way you wish.

Finally, you should consider the questions not simply in the context of the council's current arrangements, but also likely future trends or plans. In every review it carries out, the Commission aims to ensure its recommendations remain relevant for the long term. As such, councils are advised to give consideration to Part Four of this guide (The Future) in its responses to all the other sections.

We hope these questions and prompts will help guide your thinking on this important issue.

Part One: governance and decision making

The Commission aims to ensure that councils have the right number of councillors to take decisions and manage their business in an effective way. We therefore look at how decisions are taken across the authority to assess the volume and distribution of responsibility amongst elected members and staff.

Leadership:

• What kind of governance arrangements are in place for your authority? Does the council operate an executive mayoral, Cabinet/Executive or committee system?

• How many portfolios are there?

• To what extent are decisions delegated to portfolio holders or are most decisions taken by the full Executive and/or Mayor?

• Do Executive (or other) members serve on other decision making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies?

• In general, are leadership and/or portfolio roles considered to be full time roles?

> In looking at these matters, the Commission is trying to determine how work and responsibilities are distributed across the council. For example, how many councillors are involved in taking major decisions on behalf of the authority and what is the volume of those responsibilities? What does being a portfolio holder actually involve and what responsibilities are delegated to officers, other members of the council or other committees? Overall, want to assess the role councillors play at every level of decision making at the council.
>
> Evidence could be provided, for example, about the official/constitutional responsibilities of portfolio holders and/or a description of the day-to-day management of the council.

Regulatory:

• In relation to licensing, planning and other regulatory responsibilities, to what extent are decisions delegated to officers?

• How many members are involved in committees?

• Is committee membership standing or rotating?

• Are meetings *ad hoc*, frequent and/or area based?

• What level of attendance is achieved? Are meetings always quorate?

• Does the council believe that changes to legislation, national or local policy will have influence the workload of committees and their members which would have an impact on council size?

> Evidence of the level of delegation to officers of quasi-judicial and other decisions helps the Commission understand how many councillors might be required overall to deliver effective and convenient local government. You may wish to refer to the authority's policy on delegation and statistical evidence relating to the number of decisions taken bycommittees and/or individuals. This is an important issue for the Commission as filling committee places and being able to discharge regulatory responsibilities are relevant factors in determining council size.
>
> The Commission is also interested in evidence that demonstrates trends in the workload and what your expectations are for the future. Reference to changing national policies and frameworks may influence the level of work you will expect of elected

members in the future.

Demands on time:

• Is there a formal role description for councillors in your authority?

• Do councillors receive formal training for all or any roles at the council?

• Do councillors generally find that the time they spend on council business is what they expected?

• How much time do members generally spend on the business of your council?

• Does the council appoint members to outside bodies? If so, how many councillors are involved in this activity and what is their expected workload?

• Does the council attract and retain members?

• Have there been any instances where the council has been unable to discharge its duties due to a lack of councillors?

• Do councillors have an individual or ward budget for allocation in their area? If so, how is such a system administered?

The Commission is interested in the time and commitment pressures on elected members and how they might relate to the number of councillors required in the future to deliver effective and convenient local government. We are also interested know whether these commitments are increasing or decreasing.
Evidence to support views here might include any peer review activity undertaken recently or feedback provided directly by members. Similarly, member development programmes might be useful in illustrating your point of view.
The issues raised in Part One of this guide will help you to make a judgement on the number of councillors required to discharge decision making responsibilities in an effective way. This forms a useful starting point in your overall assessment on council size.

Part Two: scrutiny functions

Every council has mechanisms to scrutinise the executive functions of the council and other local bodies. They also have significant discretion over the kind (and extent) of activities involved in that process. In considering council size, the Commission will want to satisfy itself that these responsibilities can be administered in a convenient and effective way through the number of councillors it recommends.

• How do scrutiny arrangements operate in the authority? How many committees

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are there and what is their membership?

• What is the general workload of scrutiny committees? Has the council ever found that it has had too many active projects for the scrutiny process to function effectively?
• How is the work of scrutiny committee programmed? Is the work strictly timetabled?

• What activities are scrutiny committee members expected to carry out between formal meetings?

> Evidence might include the practical role members play in scrutiny work and the activities and time commitment given to projects or commitments on outside bodies. A description of the kind of support members generally receive from staff as part of committee work (e.g. preparation of reports) will be helpful to the Commission in understanding the impact of scrutiny on the overall number of councillors needed to deliver effective and convenient local government.
>
> The issues discussed in Part Two, combined with the conclusions you drew in Part One of your considerations should help identify number of councillors required not only to take decisions effectively but to ensure that the council is able to support its scrutiny functions and the other responsibilities councillors will have on bodies outside the council.

Part Three: representational role of councillors

The Commission understands that there is no single approach to representation and members will represent and provide leadership to their communities in different ways. However, we are interested in hearing about the extent to which members are routinely expected to engage with communities and how this affects workload and responsibilities. In particular, if the council has defined a role for elected members, the Commission would find that evidence interesting.

• In general terms, how do councillors carry out their representational roles with electors? Do members mainly respond casework from constituents or do they have a more active role in the community?

• How do councillors generally deal with casework? Do they pass on issues directly to staff or do they take a more in depth approach to resolving issues?

• What support do councillors receive in discharging their duties in relation to casework and representational role in their ward?

• How do councillors engage with constituents? Do they hold surgeries, distribute newsletters, hold public meetings, write blogs etc?

• How has the role of councillors changed since the council last considered how many elected members it should have?

• Has the council put in place any mechanisms for councillors to interact with young people, those not on the electoral register or minority groups or their representative bodies?

• Are councillors expected to attend meetings of community bodies such as parish councils or residents associations? If so, what is the level of their involvement and what role are they expected to play?

> The Commission is interested in assessing what impact the number of councillors might have on the way local communities are represented. How much time do councillors spend on casework and ward activities in general and what support networks exist in the council to help them discharge their duties?
>
> You should now consider what impact the representational role of members of the authority has on the conclusions you drew in the first two parts of this guide. Your judgement should be a realistic reflection of councillors' roles in their communities and may, or may not, increase the number your came to after Part One and Part Two of this guide.

Part Four: the future

The Commission understands that the role of local authorities is constantly changing. In particular, changes such as the introduction of elected mayors in some parts of England have significantly altered the nature of decision making and role of elected members. Equally, many local authorities have not seriously considered the size of their council since the introduction of Executive/Scrutiny functions over a decade ago. We are aware that a number of local authorities have changed or intend to change their governance arrangements by reverting from executive and scrutiny models to committee administrations. The pace of change for authorities is likely to continue into the foreseeable future. That is why you should consider future trends and developments when coming to conclusions on council size.

In Parts One - Three, we set out a number of questions about how the council and councillors currently operate. If proposing a change in council size, we would also be interested in knowing what changes might be made to current arrangements, which might affect the number of councillors needed.
In particular:

Localism and policy development

• What impact do you think the localism agenda might have on the scope and conduct of council business and how do you think this might affect the role of councillors?

• Does the council have any plans to devolve responsibilities and/or assets to community organisations? Or does the council expect to take on more responsibilities in the medium to long term?

Service delivery

• Have changes to the arrangements for local delivery of services led to significant changes to councillors' workloads? (For example, control of housing stock or sharing services with neighbouring authorities).

• Are there any developments in policy ongoing that might significantly affect the role of elected members in the future?

<u>Finance</u>

• What has been the impact of recent financial constraints on the council's activities? Would a reduction in the scope and/or scale of council business warrant a reduction in the number of councillors?

• If you are proposing a reduction in the number of councillors for your authority, to what extent is this a reflection of reduced activity of the council overall, an anticipation of efficiency plans or a statement to local people? Or none of these things?

> The Commission aims to recommend electoral arrangements – including council size – that will deliver convenient and effective local government for the long term. It is therefore important that the overall number of councillors you propose will be right for your authority in the future. It could mean that the number you put to the Commission is different from the analysis you built up in the first three parts of this guide. Provided you have firm evidence and a strong rationale for such a difference, the Commission will give it serious consideration.
>
> The Commission is interested in hearing firm plans for the future and evidence of trends that may affect the number of councillors required. Observations on possible developments are less likely to be persuasive.

Further reading

You may find it helpful to read the Commission's technical guidance on electoral reviews which covers our policy towards council size and the rest of the electoral review process. This can be found on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk/guidance-policy-andpublications/Guidance

The Commission also produces guidance aimed at members of the public who wish to engage with the electoral review process. This is also available on our website.
The Commission publishes all submissions it receives throughout an electoral review. Our website therefore includes previous examples of council size submissions made by local authorities across England. Our staff will also be able to advise you on previous submissions that you might find interesting.

LGBCE 'Nearest Neighbours' comparison

Authority Name	Number of Wards/ Divisions	Council Size	Total Electorate at 16/10/2012	Electors per Councillor	Area (Hectares)	Density (Electors per Hectare)	County Council Name	Electoral Cycle
Blaby	18	39	74,714	1915.74	13,047	5.73	Leicestershire	Whole
Castle Point	14	41	67,536	1647.22	4,508	14.98	Essex	Thirds
Eastleigh	19	44	97,815	2223.07	7,978	12.26	Hampshire	Thirds
Fareham	15	31	90,052	2904.90	7,424	12.13	Hampshire	Halves
Havant	14	38	94,664	2491.16	5,533	17.11	Hampshire	Thirds
Lichfield	26	56	80,747	1441.91	33,130	2.44	Staffordshire	Whole
Maldon	17	31	48,098	1551.55	35,878	1.34	Essex	Whole
North Devon	27	43	76,476	1778.51	108,590	0.70	Devon	Whole
Ribble Valley	24	40	46,128	1153.20	58,315	0.79	Lancashire	Whole
Rochford	19	39	66,367	1701.72	16,949	3.92	Essex	Thirds
Rushcliffe	28	50	87,570	1751.40	40,924	2.14	Nottinghamshire	Whole
Sedgemoor	23	48	90,436	1884.08	56,436	1.60	Somerset	Whole
South Ribble	27	55	86,347	1569.95	11,296	7.64	Lancashire	Whole
Teignbridge	25	46	103,381	2247.41	67,387	1.53	Devon	Whole
Tewkesbury	22	38	66,642	1753.74	41,442	1.61	Gloucestershire	Whole
Wyre	26	55	86,405	1571.00	28,256	3.06	Lancashire	Whole