

# Chichester District Council

**BOUNDARY REVIEW PANEL**

**26 February 2015**

**CABINET**

**3 March 2015**

## **Electoral Review of Chichester District: Proposal on Council Size**

### **1. Contacts**

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### **2. Executive Summary**

At its meeting in January 2015, the Cabinet approved for consultation a draft submission on council size, proposing a reduction in the number of councillors to 35 or 36, to be implemented for the district council elections in 2019. The response to consultation has been small but supportive. It is, therefore, suggested that the Council be recommended to approve the proposal and submit it to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England with a request that the Commission carries out an electoral review of the district.

### **3. Recommendation**

#### **RECOMMENDED TO THE COUNCIL**

**That the proposal on council size (Appendix 2), for a reduction in the number of councillors to 35 or 36, to be implemented for the district council elections in 2019, be approved for submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).**

### **4. Background**

4.1. On 20 March and 6 May 2014, the Boundary Review Panel and the Cabinet respectively discussed whether 48 members was still the right number of members for Chichester District Council. They concluded that, in view of the changes that had taken place since that number had been set in 2002, a smaller number was now appropriate, and recommended the Council accordingly.

4.2. On 20 May 2014, therefore, the Council resolved:-

- (1) That inclusion of an electoral review of Chichester District in the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's programme of electoral reviews be sought, with the objective of a significant reduction in the number of councillors by the 2019 elections, subject to confirmation by the Council after the 2015 elections that it wishes the review to proceed.

- (2) That the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive be authorised to meet representatives of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to discuss the process and a potential review timetable.
- 4.3. The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive met the Chairman, Chief Executive and Director of Reviews of the LGBCE in accordance with that second resolution on 9 September 2014. The Leader and Chief Executive explained the reasons for seeking a review, and the LGBCE representatives understood these, other councils having sought reviews for similar reasons. The LGBCE explained that the first stage in a review is for the Council to put forward a proposal on council size.
- 4.4. The LGBCE suggested that this proposal should be prepared by the current Council, before the 2015 election, so that it would benefit from the input of experienced members without needing to wait for the new Council to gain the experience and the opportunity to consider the matter. They suggested that the Council should carry out a “functional analysis” of all the work needed from councillors both in the council offices and in the community. This analysis should be forward looking, exploring the needs for the future, not now. Consideration of ward boundaries comes later in the Review, and should be ignored at this stage.
- 4.5. At their meeting on 14 October, the Cabinet set up a Task and Finish Group comprising Tony Dignum; Bruce Finch; Tony French; Robert Hayes; Eileen Lintill; Andrew Shaxson and Tricia Tull, to draw up a proposal on council size.
- 4.6. The Task and Finish Group carried out a PEST (political, economic/financial, social, technological) analysis of what the role of members will be from 2019 and the sort of member needed to fulfil that; and answered questions in the LGBCE Guidance about the tasks involved in that role (eg size and frequency of meetings, outside body membership, ward roles). They recommended a council size of 35 or 36 members, to be implemented for the district council elections in 2019.
- 4.7. On 6 January 2015, the Cabinet agreed that this proposal should be published for consultation with interested parties, including parish councils and West Sussex County Council, before being considered further by the Cabinet, with a view to a proposal being approved by the Council at its meeting in March 2015.

## **5. Outcome to be achieved**

- 5.1. An appropriate Council size, that would allow a future Council from 2019 to take decisions effectively, manage the business and responsibilities of the council successfully, and provide effective community leadership and representation.

## **6. Proposal**

- 6.1. The draft proposal on Council size (Appendix 2 to this report) is the version published for consultation after the last Cabinet meeting. It is substantially the same as that submitted to Cabinet by the Task and Finish Group, with minor modifications to take account of members’ comments. It is suggested that, as Cabinet approved it for consultation and that consultation has met with a supportive, albeit very small, response, it should be recommended to the Council for submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission.

- 6.2. At the meeting last September, the LGBCE also explained that the timing of the review proper would depend on whether the Council sought implementation as from the ordinary district election in 2019, or whether it wished to pursue the option of an additional “out-of-turn” election in, say, 2017 to bring the changes in early. An out-of-turn election would mean the Council elected in May has a short period of office and would require an additional election in the cycle. Even though this would be likely to coincide with another election (such as the WSCC election in 2017) it would still impose additional cost and disruption, not only on the Council but also on the political parties, councillors and the public. It is recommended that an ‘out-of-turn’ election should not be pursued.
- 6.3. The LGBCE has given notice to West Sussex County Council that it will be subject to a full boundary review in 2015. The County Council is likely to submit its own proposal on council size by June. Because district wards are sometimes used as building blocks for county electoral divisions, the LGBCE may see benefits in undertaking both reviews together or at least in close association.
- 6.4. If the Council approves the submission of a proposal on council size, the LGBCE will test its underlying assumptions and analysis, and then publish a ‘minded to’ decision on council size. Before starting the review, the LGBCE will require some information from the Council, most of which is readily available, except for a forecast of the district’s electorate in six years’ time, broken down to polling district level. The LGBCE provides a methodology for this which will require work from the Elections and Planning Policy teams. The formal start of the review will then commence with a general invitation to submit warding proposals based on the LGBCE’s conclusions on council size.

## **7. Alternatives that have been considered**

- 7.1. The alternative, of delaying formulation of the proposal on Council size until after the 2015 election, was considered and rejected by the Cabinet in October.
- 7.2. Various other numbers of members could be put forward. However, the initial objective was a “significant reduction in the number of councillors”, otherwise the time and effort involved in the second (and more potentially contentious) stage of re-drawing ward boundaries cannot be justified. The proposed size of 35 or 36 members is based on the analysis carried out by the Task & Finish Group and no alternative proposition has been put forward in the consultation process.

## **8. Resource and legal implications**

- 8.1. The main costs will be the time of members and officers in the later stages of the review, if the LGBCE agrees to proceed. These costs will be met within existing budgets. The project will be managed by the Member Services Manager under the direction of the Chief Executive and the Head of Finance and Governance Services.

## **9. Consultation**

- 9.1. Members were invited on 3 December to comment on the draft by email and via the Members Bulletin Board. An email discussion ensued, which mainly considered whether more could be done to recruit employed people as councillors, and whether the larger wards resulting from the proposal would

result in councillors becoming remote from the electorate or having unmanageable workloads. Amendments to the draft were made as a result.

- 9.2. The amended draft was sent by email on 9 January to West Sussex County Council, all parish councils and meetings, and to five political parties (Conservative, Liberal Democrat, Labour, UKIP and Green), inviting responses by 20 February 2015. At the same time, responses were invited through the “Current Consultations” page of the Council’s website.
- 9.3. At the time of writing, response have been received from five parish councils (Bepton, Fishbourne, Kirdford, Milland, and Wisborough Green) and the Chichester Conservative Association. All are supportive. Full details are set out in Appendix 1. Any further comments received will be reported orally.

## 10. Community impact and corporate risks

- 10.1. The report to Cabinet on 6 May 2014 set out in detail the potential impact and risks of carrying out a review. These impacts and risks do not apply to this stage of preparing a proposal on council size, because the LGBCE will make its own decision on whether the proposal is underpinned by sound evidence and reasoning. The LGBCE may decide either to proceed with a review or not to proceed.
- 10.2. It is possible that the May 2015 elections may change circumstances. A new Council may wish to withdraw the request for a review or make a different proposal on council size. A new Government may wish to initiate a structural re-organisation of local government.
- 10.3. If a review proceeds, the impact is likely to be that ward sizes will increase and include larger populations and, in rural areas, more parishes. Some reviews have divided councils, usually on party political lines, with the result that there is a submission from a minority political party alongside the Council’s official submission. The LGBCE recognises that its recommendations may have local political implications, but that is not a factor it takes into account. When ward boundaries are considered, there is the potential for controversy and objections. The LGBCE tries to use parishes as building blocks for district wards. It can neither create nor abolish a parish council, nor change its boundaries. However, it may create or change the boundaries of parish wards. This is most likely to impact on the larger settlements, especially Chichester City and Selsey, which are already divided into wards. Most rural parishes are not divided into wards, although there are two exceptions: Harting and Stedham with Iping. Similarly district wards are sometimes used as building blocks for county electoral divisions.

## 11. Other Implications

<b>Crime &amp; Disorder:</b>	None
<b>Climate Change:</b>	None
<b>Human Rights and Equality Impact:</b>	None
<b>Safeguarding:</b>	None

## 12. Appendices

- 12.1. Appendix 1: Responses to Consultation.
- 12.2. Appendix 2: Proposal on Council size

### **13. Background Papers**

None

### How many councillors will Chichester District Council need in 2019?

#### Responses to consultation

##### Parish Councils

###### Bepiton

“Bepiton Parish Council supports CDC's proposals to reduce the number of District Councillors for the reasons set out in your note.”

###### Fishbourne

“Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposal which was discussed at the January meeting of Fishbourne Parish Council.

“We would like to congratulate the PEST Team on the clear analysis of the changing situation facing District Councils. Apart from agreeing to the report and its conclusions, at this stage we have specific comments on just three paragraphs:

7.3 The difficulty of recruitment to both District and Parish councils is unlikely to change overnight and our recent experience with Neighbourhood Planning has clearly indicated the need for the fixed short term Task and Finish Group which is advocated in this paragraph. As far as Parish Councils are concerned, this may ultimately require more flexibility in the regulations under which parish councils operate.

7.8 When the time comes to consider the re-drawing of boundaries, local knowledge will be vital in order to avoid unintended outcomes. One example is the possibility of merging parish councils into a larger ward. In some cases, this may work well, but along the villages of the Solent strip, for example, there is the risk that this could lead unintentionally towards the sort of "coalescence" which the District's Local Plan and the emerging Neighbourhood Plans are seeking to avoid.

10.5 We have one additional suggestion to make concerning members' workloads. Our recent experience with Neighbourhood Planning suggests there is much to be gained from relevant Parish Councillors having direct contact with CDC officers rather than going through an intermediary. Outcomes are reported back at PC meetings so that there is feedback to all councillors including the District Councillor.

“We hope these initial thoughts will be of interest.”

###### Kirdford

“Thank you for your e-mail of the 9th January. This was considered by the Parish Council at its last meeting when it was agreed that it supported the suggestion of having a reduced number of District Councillors.”

**Milland**

“Milland Parish Council understands the reason for the proposed reduction in the number of councillors. It supports this change.”

**Wisborough Green**

“Having considered this proposal and sought the opinion of our District Councillor, Josef Ransley, I can confirm that Wisborough Green Parish Council has no objection.

**Chichester Conservative Association**

“Many thanks for sending these papers to CCA for comment. The Association supports the proposals in principle and has no specific comment at this stage. “