

**Local Government Boundary Review – Council Size
Submission**

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| Final Decision-Maker | Democracy and General Purposes |
| Lead Head of Service | Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy, Communications and Governance |
| Lead Officer and Report Author | Ryan O’Connell, Democratic and Electoral Services Manager |
| Classification | Public |
| Wards affected | All |

Executive Summary

This report sets out a recommended approach for the Council to complete its council size submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

Purpose of Report

Decision

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

That the approach and timetable outlined in section 2 be agreed and that the Head of Policy, Communications and Governance liaise with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman on questions that arise requiring Member input between now and the Committee meeting on 13 October 2021.

Timetable

| Meeting | Date |
|---|--------------|
| Democracy and General Purposes Committee | 27 July 2021 |

Local Government Boundary Review – Council Size Submission

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

| Issue | Implications | Sign-off |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Impact on Corporate Priorities | The boundary review indirectly impacts on all Council priorities by ensuring that appropriate democratic representation is in place and there is democratic equality for each elector in the Borough. | Democratic and Electoral Services Manager |
| Cross Cutting Objectives | The boundary review indirectly impacts on all Council objectives by ensuring that appropriate democratic representation is in place and there is democratic equality for each elector in the Borough. | Democratic and Electoral Services Manager |
| Risk Management | The report sets out a proposed plan for making the Council’s Council Size Submission to the LGBCE to manage the risk of a poor submission. All relevant risks are considered to be within the Council’s risk appetite. | Democratic and Electoral Services Manager |
| Financial | The proposals set out in the recommendation include a small amount of expenditure of less than £3k which will be managed from within existing budgets. | Section 151 Officer & Finance Team |
| Staffing | We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing. However, the need for additional staffing in Democratic Services is being kept under review in light of the significant programme of work coming forward this year and the possible implications of new executive arrangements going forwards. | Democratic and Electoral Services Manager |
| Legal | This work is part of the Local Government Boundary Review being conducted by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and aims to complete their template in accordance with their timetable. The review will be conducted by the LGBCE under | Legal Team |

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| | its powers in The Local democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 | |
| Privacy and Data Protection | No impact identified. | Policy and Information Team |
| Equalities | No direct impacts identified, however, one of the key aims of the boundary review is to ensure that there is equality for electors in their democratic representation. | Democratic and Electoral Services Manager |
| Public Health | None | Democratic and Electoral Services Manager |
| Crime and Disorder | None | Democratic and Electoral Services Manager |
| Procurement | The facilitated sessions will involve engaging with an external provider, initial contact has been made with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. Total expenditure is estimated to be less <£3k but this will be confirmed and proper procurement processes followed as appropriate. | Democratic and Electoral Services Manager |
| Biodiversity and Climate Change | None | Democratic and Electoral Services Manager |

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 This report sets out the next stage of work required in Maidstone's Local Government Boundary Review. A review is broadly set out in two stages:

- Stage 1 – Council Size Submission
- Stage 2 - Boundaries

2.2 The Council needs to submit its council size submission by December 2021, we agreed an extension with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) to December to time with an existing Council meeting. This submission has a significant dependency on the executive arrangements work (this impacts on a number of elements of the Council's submission), and a minimal dependency on the whole council elections work (whether the number of Councillors needs to be divisible by

three or not, and if the electoral cycle changes this can be adjusted by the LGBCE at a later date).

- 2.3 The Council needs to consider a variety of size options with considered rationale for its preferred size and the guidance on completing a Council Size submission is set out in **Appendix 1**. Any submission needs to be considered in the context of the authority versus the comparable authorities as identified by the LGBCE. The range of Council sizes for comparable authorities produces an expected range, this is set out at **Appendix 3**. Whilst those figures do not limit the Council, any size submission away from those ranges will need strong justification, and the further the departure the greater the justification required.
- 2.4 *"The Commission wants to see evidence that several different council size options have been explored together with the reasons why a particular figure has, or has not, been selected. This should be done irrespective of whether the respondent arrives at the same or a different number of elected members. The most persuasive submissions are those which, rather than considering whether the current number ought not to be changed, reflect on what number of councillors would be required if the council was being newly established."*
- 2.5 The work required to complete the submission can be broken down into key elements, the guidance on the main 'Council Size' element of the template is as follows:

"The Commission seeks to understand elected member requirements across three aspects:

Strategic Leadership

How many councillors are needed to give strategic leadership and direction to the authority?

Accountability

- 1. Scrutiny – how many councillors are needed to provide scrutiny to the authority?*
- 2. Regulatory – how many councillors are needed to meet the regulatory requirements of the authority?*
- 3. Partnerships – how many councillors are required to manage partnerships between the local authority and other organisations?*

Community Leadership

How the representational role of councillors in the local community is discharged and how they engage with people and conduct casework"

- 2.6 There are other key elements to the template to which are set out below as part of the approach proposed by officers on completing the form efficiently, whilst maximising Member input.

2.7 **Proposed Approach to Completing the Council Size Submission**

Below are extracts from the Council Size Submission Template (set out in full at **Appendix 2**). These cover what are considered to be the key parts of the template and next to each area of work is the suggested method of completion. Please note that the Committee will see the template several times as it is completed and will be able to feed into it as a whole.

2.8 **CONTEXT [to be started by officers but discussed at a facilitated session with Members]**

*"Your submission gives you the opportunity to examine how you wish to organise and run the council for the next 15 - 20 years. **The consideration of future governance arrangements and council size should be set in the wider local and national policy context.** The Commission expects you to challenge your current arrangements and determine the most appropriate arrangements going forward."*

2.9 **LOCAL AUTHORITY PROFILE [to be completed by officers]**

"Please provide a short description of the authority and its setting, in particular the local geography, demographics and community characteristics."

2.10 **COUNCIL SIZE [see completion method for each sub-heading]**

- Strategic Leadership [completed by officers via the information coming from the executive arrangements work currently underway]
- Accountability
 - Scrutiny [completed by officers via the information coming from the executive arrangements work]
 - Regulatory [completed by officers for elements that remain static, but informed by the executive arrangements work too]
 - External partnerships [completed by officers]
- Community Leadership [completed via facilitated session with Members]

All to be approved by DGP prior for submission to Council

2.11 **SUMMARY [Overall size submission to be covered at a facilitated session with Members, with officers to produce first draft for Committee comment and sign-off]**

"In following this template respondents should have been able to provide the Commission with a robust and well-evidenced case for their proposed council size; one which gives a clear explanation as to the governance arrangements and number of councillors required to represent the authority in the future."

Use this space to summarise the proposals and indicate other options considered."

2.12 Facilitated Sessions

The methods of completion reference three elements to be covered by facilitated sessions with Members – these are Context (focus on where the Council sees itself in 15-20 years’ time), Council Size (specifically Community Leadership), and Summary (focus on council size options and rationale, including those discounted). It is proposed that these areas can be covered in two all Member sessions with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny facilitating, the cost of this work would be <£3k, as follows:

Session 1 – Focus on Size Factors - Community Leadership and Context (15-20 years’ time)

Session 2 – Focus on Options - Summary (Council size options and rationale)

- 2.13 There are LGBR reports included in the work programme for 8 September 2021 and 13 October 2021. However, it is recommended that the 8 September LGBR specific report be removed and replaced with facilitated sessions with Members held prior to 13 October meeting. The 8 September meeting will be focussed on Whole Council Elections and more crucially for this work, the Executive arrangements, needed to inform the template. The timetable for the Council size submission template is therefore proposed as follows:

| Date | Activity | Outputs |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| 27 July 2021 to 1 October 2021 | Officers complete draft template Facilitated Session 1 Facilitated Session 2 | Draft template Outputs on community leadership, the Council in 15-20 years’ time, size options considered and rationale |
| 8 September 2021 | D&GP consider Executive arrangements | Executive arrangements, including Scrutiny and other governance impacts to input into the template |
| 13 October 2021 | D&GP consider outputs from sessions and template draft | Agreement to updated draft template and committee ownership of outputs |
| 13 October 2021 to 1 November 2021 | All Member briefing session | Feedback from wider Council membership |
| 10 November 2021 | D&GP sign off final template draft | Agreed template for Council (with delegation for minor tweaks and corrections as necessary) |
| 8 December 2021 | Council Meeting | Agreed submission to LGBCE |

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 Option 1 - The Council makes a council size submission using the approach outlined in section 2 of the report, or as amended by the Committee.
 - 3.2 Option 2 - The Council makes a council size submission on a radically different basis to that set out.
 - 3.3 Option 3 – The Council doesn't make a size submission and disengages from the Local Government Boundary Review process, this would result in the LGBCE agreeing a new size of Council with no Council input.
 - 3.4 Please note that Political (or other) groups may also make their own council size submissions (paragraph 20 of the guidance), however that is a matter entirely for each of those groups if they wish to do so.
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4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 Option 1 is recommended for the reasons outlined in section 2 as part of the option narrative.
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5. RISK

- 5.1 The approach outlined in this report is designed to manage the Council's risk of failing to produce a size submission on time and to the necessary quality to ensure a well thought through and appropriate Council size for the Council going forwards. This is crucial to ensure that the residents of Maidstone have an appropriate body of Members to represent them on the Council.

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 An update on the Local Government Boundary Review was last provided to the Committee in March 2021 and an all Member briefing was held on 22 March 2021.
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7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 The timetable set out at 2.13 sets out the next steps.
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8. REPORT APPENDICES

- Appendix 1: Council Size Submission Guidance
- Appendix 2: Council Size Submission Template
- Appendix 3: Extract from LGBR Briefing (Appendix 4: Council Size Expected Range)

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

<https://www.lgbce.org.uk/how-reviews-work>