

# North Yorkshire Council

## Executive

9 July 2024

### Council Size Submission to Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) Electoral Boundary Review

#### Report of the Assistant Chief Executive for Local Engagement

#### 1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Executive about the North Yorkshire Electoral Division Boundary Review and, in line with the first stage of the process, to seek Executive's approval to refer the recommendations of the Boundary Review Member Working Group (BRMWG) to Full Council to allow them to be submitted to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).

#### 2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 As part of the development of proposals for the new North Yorkshire Council, the council size (i.e. the number of councillors) and the boundaries for each division were agreed by the LGBCE for the first four years of the Council's existence. A full boundary review is now required to determine the arrangements for the next administrative term, from May 2027.
- 2.2 This report outlines work to date to develop a proposal for the size of the council, a forecast of electorate numbers in 2030, and a range of other evidence required by the LGBCE as the preliminary phase of the review. It seeks approval of the recommendations of the BRMWG, in order that they can be put before Full Council on 24 July 2024, and submitted to LGBCE.
- 2.3 Appendix A provides a forecast of the number of electors predicted in North Yorkshire by 2030, which represents a 7% increase on current electorate.
- 2.4 The BRMWG is recommending a council size of 89 members, with each member representing a division individually.

#### 3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 During the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) process, a streamlined approach was taken to the identification of the council size and the divisional boundaries for the new Council. This resulted in a council of 90 elected members and 89 divisions. It was agreed at that time that a full boundary review would be undertaken in the first cycle of the new organisation. The LGBCE contacted North Yorkshire Council in summer 2023 to initiate the review.
- 3.2 Reviews can be undertaken for a number of reasons, in addition to structural change of an authority. This includes:
- At the request of the local authority
  - Electoral imbalance, if either:
    - one electoral ward/division has a +/-30% variance with the local authority electorate average
    - or, 30% or more of the electoral wards/divisions have a +/-10% variance from the local authority average

- Time period since the previous review, which is normally around 12 and 16 years or every two to three electoral cycles

3.3 Whilst a review was always planned following LGR, the current arrangements have reached a level of imbalance that would trigger a review anyway. There are two divisions which have a variance of more than 30% (Cayton, Wathvale and Bishop Monkton), and 57% of divisions have a variance of more than 10%. This is outlined in Appendix B.

3.4 The Electoral Boundary Review process comprises a full review of all council electoral divisions. There are five key stages as follows. The timescales in brackets are indicative:

- Preliminary Phase – Information gathering and electoral forecasts (to July 2024)
- Phase 1 – Council size, i.e. proposals for the total number of councillors/electoral divisions (July 2024)
- Phase 2 – Consultation on draft proposals and divisional arrangements, i.e. proposals for revised boundaries and names of electoral divisions (August 2024 - May 2025)
- Phase 3 – Parliamentary approval of recommendations (Autumn 2025 - Autumn 2026)
- Phase 4 – Implement new electoral arrangements (May 2027)

#### **4.0 PRELIMINARY PHASE**

4.1 In preparation for the analysis required to develop new proposals, LGBCE require a substantial amount of information. This includes the following:

- Geocoded Electoral Register
- Current and Forecast Electorate
- Forecasting Methodology
- Housing Development Data
- Polling District Maps
- Polling District Review Report
- Parish Electoral Arrangements
- Parish Ward Maps
- Local Orders
- Governance Changes
- Stakeholder Database

4.2 Work has been underway since the new year to ensure this information is available. This information will be submitted to the LGBCE shortly after 24 July 2024, subject to Executive and Full Council approval of the electorate forecast and council size proposal.

4.3 The most significant element of work in the preliminary phase is the development of electorate forecasts. The forecasts needs to be five years beyond the end of the review, which is 2030. LGBCE provide guidance on potential approaches, although it is for the council to identify which approach is most appropriate. The council must provide both the forecasts and justification for the projections submitted.

4.4 The draft forecasts have been completed and once submitted to LGBCE are subject to their approval before being used as the basis of the Boundary Review. The forecasts predict a 7% increase in electorate to 517344 by 2030. The forecasts, at division level, are included in Appendix A. Based on the recommended 89 councillors (as described in 5.8), this would give an average division size of 5813 electors.

4.5 Executive is asked to approve the recommendation of these forecasts to Full Council, to allow their submission to the LGBCE. Executive is also asked to provide delegated authority to the Assistant Chief Executive – Local Engagement to make any required minor amendments

to the Electorate Forecast for greater accuracy, in consultation with the Chairman of the BRMWG, prior to its submission.

4.6 The draft forecasts have been produced using an electorate forecasting tool provided by LGBCE. This takes electorate data (at polling district level) for the last three years and, based on Office of National Statistics population estimates, forecasts likely electorate growth. Officers have then reviewed housing development data from Local Plan allocations and planning permissions for sites above 10 houses, mapped it to accurately identify in which polling district the development will be, before calculating the likely electorate figures associated with each development. As the population estimates within the forecasting tool must already have assumed some 'normal' level of housing growth, the additional housing figures have been reduced by 30% before being added to the forecasting tool's electorate prediction. This helps to reduce the likelihood of double-counting and avoid an over-inflated forecast. A detailed description of the methodology used is included in Appendix C.

## 5.0 PHASE 1 – COUNCIL SIZE

5.1 During the first stage of the review, the LGBCE decides on the number of council members required to enable the council to undertake effective decision making, to discharge its business and responsibilities successfully and to provide for effective community leadership and representation. The LGBCE seeks to understand elected member requirements across three aspects:

- Decision Making – how many councillors are needed to give strategic leadership and direction to the authority.
- Accountability and Scrutiny – how many councillors are needed to provide scrutiny, to meet regulatory requirements and to manage partnerships between the local authority and other organisations.
- Effective Representation – how the representational role of councillors in the local community is discharged and how they engage with people and conduct casework.

5.2 The council should submit a recommendation as to the size of the council at the next election, based on the considerations above. As the review process will have a significant impact on how the council operates and how councillors work, a Member Working Group was established to ensure the process was led by and fully informed by the views of existing Councillors. The group's role is to lead on the preparation of the Council's submission, and to coordinate and involve other members in the development of recommendations to Executive and Full Council. The members of the group are as follows:

	<b>Councillor's Name</b>	<b>Political Group</b>
1	Cllr John Weighell (Chairman)	Conservative
2	Cllr Sam Gibbs	Conservative
3	Cllr Mark Crane	Conservative
4	Cllr Heather Phillips	Conservative
5	Cllr David Staveley	Conservative
6	Cllr Caroline Goodrick	The Conservative & Independents Group
7	Cllr Philip Broadbank	Liberal Democrats
8	Cllr Steve Shaw-Wright	Labour
9	Cllr Andy Solloway	North Yorkshire Independent
10	Cllr Kevin Foster	Green Party
11	Cllr Alyson Baker      Substitute	Conservative
12	Cllr Nigel Knapton      Substitute	Conservative
13	Cllr. Peter Lacey      Substitute	Liberal Democrats

5.3 The Working Group has considered each aspect identified by LGBCE in developing its Council Size submission, as well as considering the draft electorate forecasts. Given that

the council has only recently been formed, and arrangements have been tested over the course of the first year of operation, this has been useful in identifying what has worked well so far. However, it also means that there is not a long historical body of evidence upon which to base the case for one particular approach over another.

- 5.4 The Working Group considered the membership of committees and the workload associated with other duties of councillors. Given the large geography of the council, there is a need for some decision making to locality based and there must, therefore, be enough councillors to ensure appropriate representation at a locality level. Appendix D is Council Size Submission document which lists the committees of the council. It was recognised that there are no currently plans to significantly alter the approach to committees, and that arrangements have generally worked well since vesting day of the new authority.
- 5.5 The Working Group also considered the ways of working for Members and representation of local communities. It was recognised that as a unitary authority, it was a different experience for Members compared to previous County and District or Borough roles. Again, the varied geography means that some more urban divisions are small in area, but with significant amounts of casework around regeneration, development and transport. Conversely, the more rural divisions can have extremely sparse populations, but small settlements can increase the number of individual community meetings that a member is expected to attend. Parish council meetings, in particular, can be extremely time consuming, with some Members associated with 15+ parishes. Meetings can often be on the same evenings, making it logistically impossible to attend all.
- 5.6 Members determined that their preference would be for an odd number of councillors, as this would help to ensure a clear majority in any election.
- 5.7 Members discussed whether each division should have one or more members representing it. Currently, 88 divisions have one member, and one division has two members. The Working Group concluded that given the opportunity to realign divisions for electoral equality, it would make sense for the divisions to have equal representation. Given the required number of divisions across the geography, this could not feasibly be more than one per division. Executive is asked to approve the recommendation to Full Council that a single member division review is requested from LGBCE.
- 5.8 On the basis of the above considerations, the Member Working Group voted to recommend a council size of 89 members. Executive is asked to approve this recommendation and refer it to Full Council.
- 5.9 It should be noted that political or other groups/individuals may present their own submission to the LGBCE either alongside or as an alternative to the Council's formal submission.

## **6.0 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

- 6.1 As above, Councillors have been consulted via the Member Working Group. This has provided cross-party input to the development of recommendations.
- 6.2 In addition, the LGBCE will consult on potential division patterns from August to November, then again on a final recommendation in 2025. Residents, members, organisations and political parties may all submit suggestions to LGBCE who will consider these when drawing up the model to be put to parliament.
- 6.3 Although both phases of the consultation will be published, promoted and delivered by LGBCE, the council will provide a stakeholder database to ensure that a broad range of views are invited.

6.4 The council will also seek to create awareness of the review locally, encouraging engagement with and participation in the consultation using a variety of communication channels to maximise reach. A proactive media release will be issued following the general election and again ahead of consultation going live in August.

## **7.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

7.1 The Member Working Group considered a range of possible numbers of councillors, ranging from significant reductions to significant increases.

7.2 The Group concluded that a large reduction in the number of Councillors would:

- Risk increasing the workload beyond a reasonable amount. This could create a barrier for any potential candidate from maintaining employment alongside being a councillor, which might reduce the opportunities for younger people to stand for elected office. It was also noted that many people have caring responsibilities and creating a larger workload could prevent people from balancing the different responsibilities, with carers disproportionately more likely to be women.
- Create much larger divisions. This would be problematic for sparsely-populated rural areas, as to achieve electoral equality, the geographical area would need to be huge, and this wouldn't be conducive to Members being visible and available to communities. It could make it logistically impossible to attend face-to-face meetings given the travel time required.
- Save money from Member allowances and expenses, but that these savings would likely be reduced by the need for greater officer support to deal with casework and the increased workload in general.

7.3 The Group concluded that a small reduction in the number of Councillors would:

- Have limited impact on workload or division sizes overall.
- Would marginally reduce costs from Member allowances and expenses.

7.4 The Group concluded that a large increase in the number of Councillors would:

- Significantly increase the costs of Member allowances and expenses.
- Run counter to the principles of the LGR Case for Change, providing reduced efficiency.
- Risk creating more Members than are needed for the operations of the authority, with the possibility of less agility in decision-making and more challenge in reaching consensus on issues.

7.5 The Group concluded that a small increase in the number of Councillors would:

- Have limited impact on workload or division sizes overall.
- Would marginally increase costs from Member allowances and expenses, which runs counter to the principles of the LGR Case for Change.

## **8.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 The recommendation of 89 Councillors, if implemented, would very slightly reduce the cost of allowances and expenses. No additional financial implications have been identified.

## **9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is empowered to review the electoral arrangements of the Council as per the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. The legislation states that 'the total number of members of the council' forms part of an authority's electoral arrangements. The Commission refers to this as 'council size'. The legislation does not set out how many members each authority should

have. It is the Commission's responsibility to determine the appropriate number of councillors for each authority. The Commission will always recommend a council size that, in its judgement, enables the council to take its decisions effectively, to discharge the business and responsibilities of the council successfully, and provides for effective community leadership and representation.

- 9.2 Section 57 of the 2009 Act provides that the Council may request the LGBCE to make recommendations as to single-member electoral area. It further provides that the LGBCE must have regard to this request in making its decision. Further if it does not grant the request for single member divisions, it must notify the Council of the reasons for departing from such a request.

## **10.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 An EIA screening has been undertaken, at Appendix E. No significant impacts were identified based on the recommendations, although the Member Working Group noted that had an option for a significantly reduced number of councillors been recommended, this could have had an impact on age, sex and those with caring responsibilities. This is based on the limited ability of younger councillors to undertake a greater workload whilst balancing other employment, and for those with caring responsibilities who are disproportionately more likely to be women.

## **11.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 A climate change impact assessment has been undertaken, at Appendix F. No direct impacts have been identified based on the recommendations.

## **12.0 PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 It is not envisaged that the recommendations will have significant performance implications. However, in considering the recommended number of councillors, the Member Working Group considered the ability of the council to work effectively and efficiently in the discharge of its duties. Achieving the balance of the appropriate number of councillors for the committees and outside bodies, the workload of members in their communities and efficiency of the decision-making process was at the heart of the discussion and fed into the recommendations.

## **13.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 13.1 The approval of the Council Size submission document will ensure the council's structure and key strategic priorities are taken into consideration during the review, and support the current and future electorate population with fair and equal representation across the county when implemented.
- 13.2 The submission of an accurate electoral forecast will support future electorate equality, and the supplementary information will allow the LGBCE a full perspective on the implications for North Yorkshire when identifying their proposals.

## **14.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 14.1 Executive is asked to refer this report to Full Council, recommending that Full Council approve:
- i) The submission of a formal request to the LGBCE for a single member division review, as part of subsequent phases of the Electoral Boundary review process.
  - ii) The 2030 Electorate Forecast for submission to the LGBCE.



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| iii) | The Member Working Group's recommendations within the draft Council Size Submission document (Appendix D) for a council size of 89 members.   |
| iv)  | The submission of all required information to the LGBCE.  |
| v)   | Delegated authority to the Assistant Chief Executive – Local Engagement to make any required minor amendments to the Electorate Forecast for accuracy, in consultation with the Chairman of the BRMWG, prior to submission. |

**APPENDICES:**

Appendix A – Electorate Forecast 2030

Appendix B – Current Electoral Variance

Appendix C – Forecasting Methodology

Appendix D – Draft Council Size Submission

Appendix E – Equalities Impact Screening

Appendix F – Climate Change Impact Assessment

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2 July 2024

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Note: Members are invited to contact the author in advance of the meeting with any detailed queries or questions.