

## COUNTY COUNCIL – 25<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2010

### AGENDA ITEM 6 – BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTORAL REVIEW

#### RESOLUTION

**“ That the Local Government Boundary Commission for England be informed that the County Council’s consultation response, with supporting evidence, on Council size, to apply from May 2013 is:-**

**1 That Option 4, outlined on page 27 of the Blue Book, should be pursued and that a Council size figure of 49 members, a reduction of 8 from the existing 57, is appropriate.**

The evidence in support of this is as follows:-

#### **Reduction in the number of members**

The Council considers that a reduction in elected county councillors to 49 would be appropriate because :-

- an average figure of 7750 electors per Division would maintain an acceptable level of democratic representation whilst remaining being below the national average figure for the English counties of 8800 electors per division.
- an 8 member reduction would represent a cost saving in excess of £100,000 per annum, including on costs. This contributes towards the level of cost savings we are having to achieve right across Council services, which includes significant staff savings
- whilst it is accepted that a reduction of 8 members would mean changes in the workload for other members, it is considered that a total of 49 members would still allow the Council to conduct its full democratic, representative, legal and advocacy responsibilities effectively and efficiently.
- in addition to County Councillors, the people of Buckinghamshire are also represented by other elected councillors, including district, town and parish councillors, to ensure adequate local representation for all individuals and communities in the County at all levels.
- The recent Bucks Debate has shown members of the public support reductions in central administration costs including a reduction in the number of elected members

**2 That the Council favours a return to all single member divisions thereby abolishing all the existing two member divisions.**

**The Council considers that it is appropriate to abolish all its existing two-member divisions because :-**

- Single member divisions improve accountability
- Single member divisions improve transparency
- Single member divisions assist the development of a **direct relationship** between the county councillor and the electorate and with local organisations.
- It is confusing to the electorate where the responsibility lies between the two elected members representing the division.
- One of the primary roles of elected members is to act as community leader or champion. The duplication of effort, in routine constituency work for each member in a two-member division, makes it more difficult for them to undertake this role successfully.
- Elected members in a two-member division invariably agree to split the electorate on a geographical basis, thus effectively recreating single member divisions.
- Notwithstanding any working arrangements highlighted in the point above, members, by principle, could represent twice the number of electors than they would in a single-member division.
- Individual members in two-member divisions can have different views about the same local issues and this can confuse the electorate
- In addition to the point above, electors can lobby both the members which can result in a fragmented approach

**The above will now form the Council's response to the Boundary Commission on Council size and will be sent to the Commission immediately after the Council meeting.**

## 6. ELECTORAL REVIEW OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### Introduction

At its last meeting on 23 September, I reported that the Local Government Boundary Commission had decided to undertake an electoral review of the County Council, the number of members, numbers of electorate per division and appropriate boundary lines. The County Council informed the Boundary Commission that it felt that the review was premature as the last review had only come into force from the County Council Elections in May 2005. However, the Commission have decided to proceed. Their reasoning is that, on the basis of the December 2009 electoral register, the Council meets one of their key criteria in that more than 30% of divisions have electoral variances of more than 10% from the average figure for Buckinghamshire County Council's divisions.

The Review formally started on 12<sup>th</sup> October and the Commission's timetable for the review is outlined at Appendix A to this Report.

The first thing that the Commission will consider is the appropriate Council size for Buckinghamshire County Council (ie the number of Councillors). We currently have 57 Councillors (including 10, two-member divisions) and the Commission wish to receive representations on what size is appropriate for the future. Bearing in mind that any changes will be effective from the County Council Elections in May 2013, the Council needs to form a view as to how many members it feels will be appropriate to best serve the community and to deal with Council business in the future. The Council's views on Council size need to be submitted by 22<sup>nd</sup> November but the Commission will extend their deadline to receive the Council's views from this meeting of the Council. They will be considered with all other views made. There is no "hierarchy" of comments and the Council's views will be objectively considered by the Commission with all other comments. The County Council's view will not take precedence over other views. The Commission have

made it clear that representations must be supported by robust evidence and not just based on assertion.

The Commission have publicised the review and wish to receive comments from the public. In addition to briefing County Council members, they have arranged a briefing for Parish and Town Councils. This will take place on 17<sup>th</sup> November.

### **Comparative information**

The Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Commission, accompanied by their officers, visited Aylesbury last month and gave a presentation to members. They informed members that the current average number of electors per division for Buckinghamshire County Council is 6600. The average for the English Counties is 8800. At this time, the Commission is also undertaking reviews of Staffordshire, Surrey, Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire County Councils. For comparative purposes the details of these four County Councils is as follows :-

Gloucestershire – 80 members ; 10 dual divisions; average electorate 7350

Oxfordshire – 74 members ; 14 dual divisions ; 3 triple divisions ; average electorate 6668

Staffordshire – 62 members; 3 dual divisions ; average electorate 10656

Surrey – 80 members ; all single member; average electorate 10587

The last full electoral view of a County Council took place in West Sussex and resulted in the removal of all two member divisions.

### **Appropriate Council size for Buckinghamshire County Council**

The Council needs, as a first step therefore, to tell the Commission how many County Councillors it needs from May 2013 and why. Council also needs to form a view as to whether two-member divisions are still appropriate and, if so, how many are needed.

The Council will be interested to view the following table. Based on electorate figures, at the time of the June 2009 County Council Elections, the different average number of electors relating to potential number of members is as follows.

Based on a projected electorate figure for 2010 of 376,160, rounded

<b>Electorate per Division</b>	<b>Members</b>
5,000	75
5,500	68
6,000	63
6,500	58
7,000	54
7,500	50
8,000	47
8,500	44
9,000	42
9,500	40
10,000	38
10,500	36
11,000	34
11,500	33
12,000	31

The Commission will consider all representations on Council size, whether they be in favour of more members, less or the same and also on the two-member division options. The Commission would not, however, countenance a Council view that suggests leaving things totally as they are. They will expect change to at least bring number of electors more into line with an average for the County Council.

Once the Commission has taken a view on the appropriate Council size for Buckinghamshire, it will then proceed to take further views on where the boundaries should be drawn. Whatever, the boundaries will need to be co-terminous with district council boundaries and any

changes will not be allowed to stray outside of the current Buckinghamshire county boundary line. It should be noted that there are current electoral variations across the District Council areas and no doubt the Boundary Commission will be looking to ensure electoral equality both across the Districts and within the county. The Commission have also made it clear that they will not be able to consider any views on unitary government. That is outside of their remit.

### **Options on Council size**

#### **Option 1 ( Retaining 57 members, including two-member divisions)**

Members may consider that the current 57 member Council, with the existing 10 two-member divisions currently works well. Indeed it has only been in operation for five years and has taken time to bed in. If the Council favoured this view, then the Commission would at least expect the current boundaries to be re-drawn to provide for the electoral equality that is necessary. This could also increase or decrease the number of two-member divisions. In this instance, changes would have to be made to all boundaries not just those that have a high variation from the average for the County.

#### **Option 2 (Retaining 57 members without two-member divisions)**

Members may feel that they would wish to continue with 57 members, but would like to go back to single-member divisions. Evidence suggests that two-member divisions can possibly lead to confusion about representation.

#### **Option 3 (Changing the number of members including two-member divisions.**

The Council may feel that reducing the number of members is appropriate taking the figures outlined in the table above as a guide.

Although the Boundary Commission say that they don't take comparative data into account, as it is what works best for each individual council, a move towards the county average (of 8800) would have the effect of reducing the number of members.

#### **Option 4 (Changing the number of members without two-member divisions.)**

Another possibility is to recommend that the number of councillors should reduce but without two-member divisions.

### **Next Stages**

Appendix A outlines the further stages in the process. At the next stage, and once Council size has been determined, the County Council will be asked to make representations on potential new boundary areas.

Given time considerations, both political groups on the Council will be forming their own view on Council size and, accordingly, a recommendation will need to be tabled for consideration at the Council meeting.

### **RECOMMENDATION –**

**That the Council agrees an appropriate Council size for Buckinghamshire County Council with effect from the next County Council Elections in 2013 and makes its representations to the Boundary Commission**

**BILL CHAPPLE  
DEPUTY LEADER**