



## ELECTORAL REVIEW OF HART DISTRICT COUNCIL

### STAGE I - COUNCIL SIZE

#### SUBMISSION TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

#### RECOMMENDATION ON THE FUTURE SIZE OF THE DISTRICT COUNCIL APPROVED BY HART DISTRICT COUNCIL ON THE 25<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2010

1. Consideration of this issue has been based on three principles, which have been applied successively to produce the recommended result

#### **Principle 1: A presumption in favour of 3-member wards**

2. The Commission have indicated that they have a presumption in favour of 3-member wards in Councils such as Hart, where a third of the seats are up for election each year. This means that the total number of seats therefore needs to be divisible by three.

#### **Principle 2: Creating a council of a size which can function effectively**

3. The Council appears to function reasonably well at member level at present with 35 members.

4. Decreasing the number of members significantly would make it more difficult to allocate the various member positions ("offices") satisfactorily, such as Cabinet portfolios, committee chairmanships etc. Historically local elections in Hart have produced Councils that tend to be evenly balanced between the two main party groups, with only small majorities one way or the other. This means that the controlling group typically only has just over half the total number of members from whom to select office holders. Given that a proportion of members are inevitably not able to put additional time into their Council roles, reducing the overall number of members might make it difficult for an administration to fill member offices and thus perform effectively.

5. Increasing the number of members might lessen this risk. However, even at present it is not always easy for the political groups to find enough candidates with the time to make

a meaningful contribution to the Council. Increasing the number of seats might, therefore, increase the number of uncontested elections, or bring onto the council members who have difficulty finding the time to discharge their duties. Both these situations would be undesirable.

6. For these reasons it is recommended that the overall size of the Council should remain broadly the same as at present. Applying this conclusion to the outcome of Principle 1, that would suggest that in future the Council should consist of either 33 or 36 members.

### **Principle 3: Taking account of the main urban and rural communities in the district**

7. It is considered desirable that, so far as possible, the new warding arrangements should produce wards that do not cross the boundaries between the main urban and rural communities in the district. This implies that there should be urban wards and rural wards, rather than wards which are partly urban and partly rural.

8. The district consists of two main urban areas:

- The contiguous urban area of Fleet, Church Crookham and Elvetham Heath (Area 1)
- The contiguous urban area of Yateley, Frogmore, Darby Green, Blackwater and Hawley (Area 2)

9. Wrapped around these are the remaining, mainly rural, parts of the district (Area 3)

10. The projected electorates of these three areas in five years time are:

|        |        |
|--------|--------|
| Area 1 | 31,626 |
| Area 2 | 19,117 |
| Area 3 | 19,368 |
|        | -----  |
| Total  | 70,111 |

11. Conveniently, these figures equate almost exactly to a ratio of 5:3:3 (respectively) to each other. This implies that a total number of members divisible by 11 would allow the new ward boundaries to respect the different nature of these three areas – in other words, it would not be necessary to have any wards covering both an urban and rural area.

12. As already noted, Principles 1 & 2 taken together imply that the future council should have either 33 or 36 members. Principle 3 would suggest that 33, being divisible by 11, would give the best fit to the pattern of urban and rural communities within the district. Choosing a total of 36 members, on the other hand, would mean that some wards would have to cross the urban/rural boundaries.

### **Final Recommendation**

13. On that basis, it is recommended that the number of Councillors in future should be 33, made up of eleven 3-member wards, of which five would be in the urban area around Fleet, three in the urban north east of the district, and three in the rural rest of the district.