



## **Northamptonshire County Council**

### **Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on proposed Council Size.**

#### **Introduction**

This submission sets out the Council's view on the number of county councillors that are needed in order to support effective, efficient and accountable local democracy in Northamptonshire. The submission takes into account the political structure of the authority and the nature of the different roles that county councillors are required to undertake in order to deliver effective local government in Northamptonshire.

Northamptonshire County Council has operated executive arrangements in the form of a leader and cabinet system since 2001. In December 2008 the Council chose to adopt the revised executive leader and cabinet arrangement which underlined the council's commitment to this form of governance.

#### **The current structure of the Council**

The Council is currently composed of 73 councillors each representing a single-member division. Elections are held every four years and the next election will take place in 2013. Each councillor currently represents an average of 7137 electors.

#### **Full Council and non-executive committees**

The full Council meets a minimum of 6 times per year. The full Council has established a number of sub-committees:

- Audit Committee – the Audit Committee formally signs off the authorities accounts and oversees the audit function at the council. It meets around 5 times per year. It is chaired by an independent co-opted member and has five other county council members.
- Development Control Committee – the Development Control Committee deals with development control and planning applications. It meets around 7-9 times per year. It has 9 members
- Personnel Committee – the Personnel Committee has oversight of personnel issues and is responsible for the recruitment and discipline of chief and deputy chief officers. It meets around 4 times per year. It has 9 members
- Pensions Committee – The Pensions Committee oversees the pensions fund. It meets 5-6 times per year. It has 5 county council members.

- Standards Committee – The Standards Committee promotes and enforces the code of conduct. It meets around 4 times per year. It is comprised of 4 county council members and 4 independent members including the chairman.

There are also a small number of sub-committees and working groups that meet from time to time and which focus on specific matters.

### **The Cabinet (Executive)**

The Cabinet is currently composed of 10 councillors including the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council. The Cabinet meets collectively every month. It takes the majority of its decisions collectively although some non-key decisions are taken by individual cabinet members. The current Cabinet portfolios are:

- Leader of the Council and Community Leadership
- Deputy Leader of the Council and Business Intelligence, Performance and Democracy
- Health and Adult Social Services
- Infrastructure and Public Protection
- Children, Learning and Skills
- LGSS
- Community Services
- Finance
- Environment
- Customer Services.

### **Overview and Scrutiny**

The Council's Overview & Scrutiny provides ideas, challenge and debate that contributes to making Northamptonshire an excellent place to live and work. The Council has five scrutiny committees, which carry out this role by conducting scrutiny reviews into issues affecting the county, contributing to the development and review of policies, monitoring performance and holding decision-makers to account. The five scrutiny committees are:

- Customers, Communities and Education – this Scrutiny Committee is responsible for scrutinising issues and services in Northamptonshire relating to community development, the Voluntary & Community Sector, libraries and lifelong learning, education and schools, customer services and culture, heritage and sport. It is comprised of 11 county council members and 4 co-opted members. It meets 4 times per year.
- Environment, Development and Transport – this Scrutiny Committee is responsible for scrutinising issues relating to the environment, highways and transport, development and growth, waste management, flooding, protective services and community safety. It is comprised of 11 county councillors. It meets 4 times per year.
- Finance and Performance – this Scrutiny Committee is responsible for scrutinising issues relating to the development and delivery of Northamptonshire County Council's budget, corporate planning, corporate performance, LGSS and shared services and

corporate support services. It is comprised of 11 county councillors. It meets 4 times per year.

- Health and Social Care – this Scrutiny Committee is responsible for scrutinising issues and services in Northamptonshire relating to healthcare, adult and children’s social care and public health. It is comprised of 11 county councillors. It meets 4 times per year.
- The Scrutiny Management Committee – the Scrutiny Management Committee is responsible for managing and co-ordinating the Overview & Scrutiny Function at Northamptonshire County Council to ensure that it operates effectively and achieves its objectives. It is comprised of 9 county councillors – the Council’s Scrutiny Champion and the chairman and deputy chairman of each of the 4 scrutiny committees. It meets 6 times per year.

Each committee may establish additional working groups to carry out particular work. These usually operate on a task and finish basis.

## **Joint Committees**

The Council is involved with a number of joint committees, most notably the LGSS Joint Committee and the North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Committee. The LGSS Joint Committee is comprised of 3 councillors from this Council and 3 from Cambridgeshire County Council. It oversees the innovative LGSS venture set up by Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire county councils to provide business support services. Through LGSS, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire County Councils share services including finance, human resources, procurement, and legal services.

The North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Committee is a joint committee established by Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough and East Northamptonshire Councils, together with the County Council. The committee is made up of 3 elected members from each planning authority and is responsible for agreeing the Joint Core Spatial Strategy and other joint planning policy work, but has no development control powers.

## **The role of councillors at Northamptonshire County Council**

The Council’s Constitution sets out the following role of all councillors:

- Collectively, in meetings of the Council, be the ultimate policy-makers and carry out a number of strategic and corporate management functions;
- Contribute to the good governance of the area and actively encourage community participation and citizen involvement in decision making;
- Represent their communities and bring their views into the Council’s decision-making process i.e. become the advocate of and for their communities;
- Deal with individual casework, act as an advocate for constituents in resolving particular concerns or grievances and respond to constituents’ enquiries and representations, fairly and impartially;
- Balance different interests identified within the electoral division and the area of the Council as a whole;

- Participate in the governance and management of the Council and be involved in decision-making;
- Be available to represent the Council on other bodies; and
- Maintain the highest standards of conduct and ethics.

Additionally, the Council agreed a role description for all councillors. This has been used to promote a better understanding of the role of county councillor in Northamptonshire.

The purpose of the role is defined as:

#### Community Champion

- To represent the interests of local people in relation to all public services, regardless of who provides them;
- To be a leader, champion and advocate for your community and county;
- To engage the community in two-way communication so you can represent their views and aspirations and champion their cases; and
- To work with the appropriate people from either the Council or partner organisations in order to try and build solutions and understanding.

#### Governor of the County Council

- To contribute to the governance of the Council and undertake any positions of special responsibility as appropriate.

#### Corporate Parent

- To act as a champion and advocate for the children in the county to whom the Council has a duty to act.

The principal responsibilities of the role are defined as:

- To promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of your community and the county, at a local, regional and national level.
- To champion local democracy and community involvement in local government by helping the Council to understand and focus on its role within local communities, and using your judgement to try to reconcile the needs of your constituents with Council policy.
- To participate in the decision making process at the Council and to understand and communicate the impact of such decisions on both your community and the county.
- To contribute to the work of any outside body to which you are appointed and to report to the Council as appropriate.
- To act as a signpost for your constituents to services provided by or on behalf of the County Council and to other public service providers.
- To participate actively in learning and development opportunities and to understand your role in how the Council works.
- To maintain the highest standards of conduct and ethics in your role as a County Councillor. To demonstrate an understanding of equal opportunities and other people's behavioural, physical, social and welfare needs.

- To ensure that reasonable care is taken at all times for the health, safety and welfare of you and other persons, and to comply with the policies and procedures relating to health and safety for the County Council.

## **Council Size**

A working group of councillors with cross-party representation was established to consider the issue of council size. It was attended by councillors from the Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Labour groups and a consensus was reached on a proposed reduction in council size from the present figure of 73 councillors to between 56 and 59 councillors. The Council considers that this proposal would be appropriate because:

- There are currently 521,254 electors in Northamptonshire and 73 county councillors, giving an average of 7,140 electors per councillor. A reduction in the number of councillors to 56 to 59 would result in an average of between 9,308 and 8,835 electors per councillor;
- This figure of electors per councillor is higher than at present but is still lower than, or comparable to, the current number of electors per councillor in some of the larger (in terms of population) divisions such as Danesholme (10948), Road (9067) and Kettering Rural (8976) and would be broadly comparable to the average number of electors per councillor in English county councils (currently 8800);
- A reduction of between 14 and 17 councillors would have an impact on the workload of councillors but it is felt that 56 to 59 councillors would still enable the council to carry out its responsibilities effectively and efficiently because;
  - a maximum of ten councillors are required to form a Cabinet;
  - the Council has a small number of regulatory committees, each with a relatively small membership. The current regulatory committee structure could be maintained with a reduction in the overall number of councillors; and
  - although the Council's Overview and Scrutiny arrangements are currently based around four thematic committees, the arrangements in place lend themselves to flexible ways of working and could be maintained with a reduction in the overall number of councillors;

Additionally the membership of all committees could be reduced if necessary.

- A reduction of between 14 to 17 councillors would result in savings likely to be in the region of £150k per annum;
- Recent changes in local government, with a stronger emphasis on localism and partnership working has implications for council size, as do the Council's executive governance arrangements. The increasingly strategic nature of the Council, the emergence of bodies such as the Health and Wellbeing Board and Police and Crime Panels and the level of growth in the county also have implications that have been taken into account in determining the optimum council size.

## **Conclusion**

Taking into account the above issues, it is the Council's view that a council size of between 56 and 59 councillors, all representing single member divisions, would be appropriate. This has been agreed by the three main political groups on the Council.