The Local Government Boundary Commission for England

LANCASTER CITY COUNCIL

Council Size Submission

LANCASTER CITY COUNCIL

Contents

How to Make a Submission

1. It is recommended that submissions on council size follow the format provided below. Submissions should focus on the future needs of the council and not simply describe the current arrangements. Submissions should also demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been considered in drawing up the proposal and why you have discounted them.

2. The template allows respondents to enter comments directly under each heading. It is not recommended that responses be unduly long; as a guide, it is anticipated that a 15 to 20-page document using this template should suffice. Individual section length may vary depending on the issues to be explained. Where internal documents are referred to URLs should be provided, rather than the document itself. It is also recommended that a table is included that highlights the key paragraphs for the Commission's attention.

About You

3. The respondent should use this space to provide the Commission with a little detail about who is making the submission, whether it is the full Council, Officers on behalf of the Council, a political party or group, or an individual.

This submission is made by Lancaster City Council's Council Business Committee on behalf of the full Council.

Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only)

4. Please explain the authority's reasons for requesting this electoral review; it is useful for the Commission to have context. *NB/ If the Commission has identified the authority for review under one if its published criteria, then you are not required to answer this question.*

Not applicable.

Local Authority Profile

5. Please provide a short description of the authority and its setting. This should set the scene for the Commission and give it a greater understanding of any current issues. The description may cover all, or some of the following:
    - Brief outline of area - are there any notable geographic constraints for example that may affect the review?
    - Rural or urban - what are the characteristics of the authority?
    - Demographic pressures - such as distinctive age profiles, migrant or transient populations, is there any large growth anticipated?
    - Are there any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead?

Lancaster City Council's strapline is 'promoting City, Coast and Countryside' because the district has all three. The historic city of Lancaster, the beauty of Morecambe Bay and the many rural areas including Silverdale, designated an area of outstanding natural beauty with neighbouring Arnside in South Lakes.
The ONS estimate for the 2018 mid-year population is: 144,246. The same source gives the age profile of residents as roughly similar to the average for England and Wales. There are two universities based in Lancaster so the City of Lancaster has a large student population in addition to those housed on the Lancaster University Campus.
The Council works closely with South Lakeland District Council and Barrow Borough Council, having formed a joint committee. Recently the three Councils have resolved to explore local government reform and devolution, including the development of a high-level case for a new unitary council for the area comprising the three districts.

The Context for your proposal

Your submission gives you the opportunity to examine how you wish to organise and run the council for the next 15 years. The Commission expects you to challenge your current arrangements and determine the most appropriate arrangements going forward. In providing context for your submission below, please demonstrate that you have considered the following issues.

- When did your Council last change/reorganise its internal governance arrangements and what impact on effectiveness did that activity have?
- To what extent has transference of strategic and/or service functions impacted on the effectiveness of service delivery and the ability of the Council to focus on its remaining functions?
- Have any governance or capacity issues been raised by any Inspectorate or similar?
- What impact on the Council's effectiveness will your council size proposal have?

The Council operates a Cabinet and Leader and has done since this became an option in the early 2000s. However, changing to a Committee System has been raised (see 'Governance Model' below for details'). In addition to this, there is the possibility of change as outlined above, as it appears that the government is keen to encourage unitary authorities. So there may be changes in the next few years, but any changes are impossible to predict at this stage.

Council Size

6. The Commission believes that councillors have three broad aspects to their role. These are categorised as: Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulation and Partnerships), and Community Leadership. Submissions should address each of these in turn and provide supporting evidence. Prompts in the boxes below should help shape responses.

Strategic Leadership

7. Respondents should provide the Commission with details as to how elected members will provide strategic leadership for the authority. Responses should also indicate how many members will be required for this role and why this is justified.

Topic		
Governance Model	*Leader and Cabinet*	Cabinet has been composed of 8 or 9 members over the last few years. Currently 9 including the leader. In November 2019, Council passed the following resolution: *This council believes that it might make better use of the skills of all its councillors and improve the democratic accountability of decision making by ceasing the current leader and cabinet model of governance and implementing a committee system. Council will establish a Working Group, with membership in balance, to investigate the best way to introduce a committee system of governance, taking into account the experiences of other councils. The investigation will lead to a detailed, legally and constitutionally sound proposal to be presented to full Council for consideration on or before its meeting in September 2020. That proposal will set out a future programme for implementation of any change to the system of governance.* A working group was established and has met once, however work was suspended in March/April due to officer resources being directed towards the COVID-19 response. A site visit was planned to an authority which had implemented a Committee system; this could not go ahead due to COVID restrictions.
	Analysis	**There is currently a Cabinet model in place and has been since that model was first introduced in the early 2000s. Nothing has changed in that respect since the Commission's last review of the Council in 2012/13, when it determined that 60 Councillors was the appropriate number. Therefore 60 Councillors is the number the Council feels will be required going forward.**
Portfolios	Current Portfolios	9 Portfolios:– Leader of the Council Deputy Leader, with particular responsibility for coordinating the council's response to the climate emergency across all portfolios

		Environmental Services Sustainable Economic Prosperity Planning Policy Housing Arts, Culture, Leisure and Tourism Finance Communities and Social Justice The Council used to have Cabinet Liaison Groups which acted as a sounding board for Cabinet members to help them with decision making in their portfolio area. These were replaced in 2019 with Advisory Groups and there are several in existence, run by the Cabinet Members. These new Groups tend to include more representation from the public.
	Analysis	**A cabinet of 8 or 9 members has proved to be the choice of leaders over the last few years. Cabinet's engagement with the public has increased since May 2019 with the introduction of the new Advisory Groups. We also have a Financial Resilience Group and Capital Strategy Group, led by Cabinet members (both are decision-making bodies); these were both introduced since the 2019 elections. Nothing significant regarding numbers of Councillors has changed regarding portfolios since the Commission's last review of the Council in 2012/13, when it determined that 60 Councillors was the appropriate number. Therefore 60 Councillors is the number the Council feels will be required going forward.**
Delegated Responsibilities	Scheme of Delegation	The Leader has currently delegated a financial limit of £200,000 to the Chief Executive and £150,000 to the Directors, however any decision over £50,000 should be taken in consultation with the relevant Cabinet member. Individual Cabinet Members may make decisions without a financial limit, however any decision by an Individual Cabinet Member over £150,000 requires consultation with the relevant Cabinet member. The Council's scheme of delegation can be viewed in full here in the Council's Constitution in Part 2, Section 7 http://www.lancaster.gov.uk/the-council-and-democracy/about-the-council/lancaster-city-council-constitution
	Analysis	**The current financial limits were set during a full review of the Council's Constitution in 2018/19, so have been considered very recently. The delegations do not appear to warrant an increase or**

		decrease in Council size, therefore 60 Councillors is the number the Council feels will be required going forward.

Accountability

8. Give the Commission details as to how the authority and its decision makers and partners will be held to account. The Commission is interested in both the internal and external dimensions of this role.

Topic	
Internal Scrutiny	The scrutiny function of authorities has changed considerably. Some use theme or task-and-finish groups, for example, and others have a committee system. Scrutiny arrangements may also be affected by the officer support available.
Key lines of explanation	Portfolio holders attend scrutiny meetings to respond to questions from the Committee. There are two scrutiny bodies, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) and the Budget and Performance Panel (B&PP). B&PP specifically looks at matters to do with the Council's performance and financial matters. The OSC looks at other internal and external issues. Each body has nine members in political balance. The OSC does carry out task and finish work on particular issues from time to time. There are usually no more than two task and finish groups in action at one time. Scrutiny bodies and functions have changed very little since the Council was last reviewed in 2012/13. Consideration has been given to merging the two bodies, however this was not felt to be appropriate as the workload for both has been steady and it was felt that merging both would lead to more frequent or longer meetings and there would be no real gain. Pre-scrutiny is recognised by Officers and Cabinet as an integral part of the Scrutiny function now – it comprises of the 2 Scrutiny Chairs, 2 Vice Chairs and an annually appointed Pre-Scrutiny Champion. It provides Scrutiny the opportunity to question Cabinet reports before the Cabinet meeting and therefore has prevented a number of call-ins.
Analysis	**Scrutiny has changed little since the last LGBCE review, however there has been consideration of change. The number of members engaged in scrutiny activity has not changed since the Commission's last review of the Council in 2012/13, when it determined that 60 Councillors was the appropriate number. Therefore 60 Councillors is the number the Council feels will be required going forward.**

Statutory Function		This includes planning, licencing and any other regulatory responsibilities. Consider under each of the headings the extent to which decisions will be delegated to officers. How many members will be required to fulfil the statutory requirements of the council?
Planning	*Key lines of explanation*	15 Member Committee on political balance. This was reduced in size from a 20 Member committee in May 2012. We have 13 scheduled meetings per year plus site visits where necessary. Meetings tend to be long in duration. Often over 3 hours. As well as the planning committee the council also has a local plan review group.
	Analysis	**The number of members engaged in Planning decision-making has not changed since the Commission's last review of the Council in 2012/13, when it determined that 60 Councillors was the appropriate number. Therefore 60 Councillors is the number the Council feels will be required going forward.**
Licensing	*Key lines of explanation*	There are 8 scheduled meetings of Licensing per year and there are 10 members on the Committee on political balance. In 2019 two separate bodies – Licensing Regulatory Committee (9 Members) and Licensing Act Committee (15 Members) – were merged into one Licensing Committee of 10 Members. Licensing Sub-Committee meetings of 3 Members deal with individual licenses and in 2018/19 there were 5 sub-committee meetings convened.
	Analysis	**The change last year (described above) has reduced the number of Members involved in licensing matters. Although this was a reduction in the number of Councillors determining Licensing matters, it is not felt to have a significant bearing on council size, therefore 60 Councillors is the number the Council feels will be required going forward.**
Committees	*Key lines of explanation*	Other committees of 7 Members are Personnel Committee with 3 scheduled meetings per year (Personnel Committee also meets with Unions as a Joint Consultative Committee); Audit Committee with 4 scheduled meetings per year; Appeals Committee (usually tree preservation order appeals which meets on an ad hoc basis) Council Business Committee, which meets 3 times or more per year and Standards Committee which has 2 scheduled meetings per year but has extra meetings when necessary.
	Analysis	**These committee sizes are unchanged since the last Boundary review and the number of meetings is very similar. Small changes are not felt to have a bearing on council size, therefore 60 Councillors is the number the Council feels will be required going forward.**
External Partnerships		Service delivery has changed for councils over time, and many authorities now have a range of delivery partners to work with and hold to account.

Key lines of explanation	There is a shared service, established in 2011, with Preston City Council for revenues and benefits and the joint committee for Revenues and Benefits comprises the Leaders and the Finance Portfolio Holders for each Council. A Joint Committee between Lancaster City Council, South Lakeland District Council and Barrow Borough Council was established this municipal year to move forward joint working and the Council is investigating the possibility of a Unitary Council being formed from these three existing Councils.
Analysis	**The shared service for Revenues and Benefits was in place before the last Boundary review. There is a focus now on working with neighbours in Cumbria as well as Lancashire. There is nothing that would suggest that an increase or decrease in the number of Councillors would be appropriate since the Commission's last review of the Council in 2012/13, when it determined that 60 Councillors was the appropriate number. Therefore 60 Councillors is the number the Council feels will be required going forward.**

Community Involvement

9. The Commission understands that there is no single approach to community leadership and that members represent, and provide leadership to, their communities in different ways. The Commission wants to know how members are required to provide effective community leadership and what support the council offers them in this role. For example, does the authority have a defined role and performance system for its elected members? And what support networks are available within the council to help members in their duties?

Topic		**Description**
Community Leadership	*Key lines of explanation*	The Council does not have area Committees. The Council does not employ any political assistants or other staff to assist with ward work; each Councillor engages with their constituents in their own way, using their own methods, surgeries, newsletters, social media, etc. Not all the district is parished but, where parish councils exist, City Councillors usually attend parish meetings in their wards, although that is their choice. Several members are "dual hatted". For example, Morecambe Town Council has 26 Councillors 12 of whom are also City Councillors.
	Analysis	**There is no prescribed method for Members to carry out their role as Community Leaders. Most of the district is parished and there are a number of 'dual hatted' Councillors. This is the same position as during the last review and nothing has changed which would indicate that a higher or lower number of Councillors is appropriate.**
Casework	*Key lines of explanation*	Councillors deal with their casework themselves, there are no political assistants or other support staff to do this for them. Some are very active on social media and reach out to their constituents using new technology.

	Analysis	**It is impossible to generalise about how casework is tackled. Each Councillor has their own methods of engaging with their constituents and resolving the issues that they raise. This situation has not changed since the Commission's last review of the Council in 2012/13, when it determined that 60 Councillors was the appropriate number. Therefore 60 Councillors is the number the Council feels will be required going forward.**

Other Issues

10. Respondent may use this space to bring any other issues of relevance to the attention of the Commission.

None identified

Summary

11. 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 number of councillors required to represent the authority in the future. Use this space to summarise the proposals and indicate any other options considered. Explain why these alternatives were not appropriate in terms of their ability to deliver effective Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulation and Partnerships), and Community Leadership.

Whilst there do appear to be indications that there will be change ahead for Lancaster City Council, at this point any change is not certain, nor are timescales. Since little has changed in terms of Governance or Scrutiny or decision-making bodies since the Commission carried out its last review in 2012/13, the Council would request that the number of Councillors remains the same as the number determined at that time. Therefore this submission is for the Council size of 60 to remain unchanged.