

1. **REPORT TITLE**                      **Governance Review Sub Committee - Update**

**Submitted by:**                      **(The Monitoring Officer)**

**Portfolio:**                              **(Policy, People & Partnerships)**

**Ward(s) affected:**                      **(All)**

**Purpose of the Report**

To update Council regarding the work undertaken by the Governance Review Sub Committee.

**Recommendations**

**(a) That the timescales for the Sub-Committee be extended until 30<sup>th</sup> November 2015.**

**(b) That a final report containing recommendations on ward boundaries, council size and the electoral cycle be submitted to the Council meeting on 25th November 2015.**

**Reasons**

Following the publication of the electoral register in March 2015 it was clear that the Council had met at least one of the criteria required to trigger a review by the Boundary Commission. This report seeks to increase the timescales originally agreed for the Governance Sub-Committee in order for a final report to be submitted to Council in November of this year taking into consideration the fact that there will now certainly be a review of the current boundaries.

1. **Background**

On the 26 November 2014 Full Council agreed to establish a Governance Sub Committee to look at the electoral arrangements of the Council (the remit of the group is attached as Appendix A). The establishment of this Sub-committee was for a time limited period from 1 December 2014 to 30 September 2015. The Sub-committee comprises 7 members, 5 of whom are members of this Council with full voting rights, 2 will be independent with no voting rights. At the time of writing this report there is a vacancy for an independent member.

1.1 The first meeting of the Sub-Committee took place on the 9 March 2015; the main focus of this meeting was to receive a presentation from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) which was provided by Max Caller, Chairman of the LGBCE and Joylan Jackson, Chief Executive of the LGBCE.

1.2 Members from the Commission provided an overview of the options that were available to the authority in terms of an electoral review. The Commission acknowledged that currently this authority with 60 members was at the top of the range when compared to our 'CIPFA nearest neighbours group'. They reported that in relation to reviews recently undertaken with authorities within this family group, there had been a reduction in Council size of up to 10%.

1.3 Since March the Sub Committee has met on two occasions and has discussed a number of issues in relation to this review. The main issues that need to be considered and agreed upon are council size and the electoral cycle.

1.4 In relation to determining council size the Sub Committee sanctioned a questionnaire that was sent to all Members just prior to the election in May 2015. The results of this questionnaire have been collated and will be used to help the Sub-committee determine options and proposals around

council size. In addition work has begun to profile and cost out various scenarios in relation to council size and ward patterns, this work will be reviewed by the Sub Committee at its next meeting which is scheduled for the 17 September 2015. Members of the Sub Committee will then report back to Group Leaders in order to seek the views of their Members before making its final report.

#### 1.5 **Timescales**

The Sub Committee has made good progress with the remit which has been set but the original timescale for a report to come back to the Council has been challenging. It is for this reason that the Sub Committee is requesting the timescale to be extended and for a report to be brought to the November meeting of the Council.

#### 1.6 **Boundary Committee review**

Since the Governance Sub Committee commenced their work there have been further developments in that the Council has now hit the trigger points for the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) to automatically undertake an electoral review.

1.7 Contact has been made with the (LGBCE) to confirm timescales for a review and it is anticipated that they will address the Council in the autumn of 2015, with a view to work commencing in March 2016.

1.8 Before the Council engages with the LGBCE, a decision will need to be made regarding council size and the electoral cycle as any review carried out will use these as a starting point for the ward structure e.g. elections by thirds will initiate a three members per ward structure.

1.9 If the Council wishes to put proposals to the LGBCE ahead of a review then it will need to have determined the above at a Special Council meeting convened for this purpose in sufficient time. The work which the Sub Committee is doing places the Council in a strong position to be able to make proposals to the LGBCE provided that this is completed within the proposed timescales.

1.9 It is proposed therefore that the Governance Sub Committee continue to look at and review options/scenarios in terms of council size, warding patterns and electoral cycles at their meetings throughout September and October. There will then be the opportunity for discussions with Group Leaders and also an opportunity for discussion at the political Group meetings before a final report is presented to Council in November 2015.

#### 1.10 **Proposed next steps**

The Sub Committee will meet again in September to review proposals regarding the council size, pattern of wards and electoral cycle. During October there will be time for the outcome of this work to be considered by all Members and arrangements will be put in place for the political Groups to consider these proposals during October. These discussions will help shape the final report of the Sub Committee which will be considered by the Council at its meeting on 25 November 2015.

1.11 Assuming it is able to agree proposals developed by the Sub Committee, the Council will be in a strong position to make representations on a preferred model to the LGBCE in advance of it commencing a review.

1.12 This timetable would also permit the Council to move ahead with a Special Meeting to confirm its preferred approach for council size and electoral cycle at an appropriate time, following adequate consideration and, if appropriate, consultation.

2. **Issues**

**Membership of the Committee**

In accordance with the provision set by the Council the Sub Committee appointed two independent members. Bryan Carnes and Howard Davies have been appointed and worked with the Sub Committee. Howard Davies was a Programme Manager with the Local Government Association (LGA) but retired in early July. Due to changes in the roles of staff at the LGA his successor is not able to take on this role. The Monitoring Officer has considered some suitably experienced people with the Sub Committee but at the time of writing this report it has not been possible to confirm the preferred person.

3. **Proposal**

(a) That the timescales for the Sub-Committee be extended until 30th November 2015.

(b) That a final report containing recommendations on ward boundaries, council size and the electoral cycle be submitted to the Council meeting on 25th November 2015.

4. **Reasons for Preferred Solution**

As the Council has already triggered the criteria for a boundary it is considered vital that steps are taken as soon as possible to enable the Council to prepare and submit a proposal to the LGBCE as soon as the review commences.

5. **Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

- creating a cleaner, safer and sustainable Borough
- creating a Borough of opportunity
- creating a healthy and active community
- transforming our Council to achieve excellence

6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, states that a district council currently subject to election by thirds or halves may resolve to change to whole elections under section 34 of the Act. Under the same Act, the council may not resolve to move from election by thirds to election by halves.

Section 24 of the Localism Act 2011 amends the timetable for changing English district Council's electoral scheme, enabling a council to choose when their electoral cycle can change and removes the provisions which state that Councils may pass resolutions to change their electoral schemes only in certain permitted periods.

The Local Democracy, Economic Development & Construction Act 2009 provides details regarding requests by the Local Authority for a review for single revised electoral areas.

7. **Financial and Resource Implications**

Reviewing Council size and Electoral Cycle will help to deliver cost savings to this Council. Various models are being costed at present and the options will be presented to the Governance Review Sub-committee before being presented as part of a full report to Council in November 2015.

8. **Major Risks**

A full risk assessment will be completed prior to the report being submitted to Full Council in November 2015.

9. **Key Decision Information**

This is not a key decision

10. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

Report to Full Council on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2014

11. **List of Appendices**

Appendix A - Remit of governance Review Sub Committee