



Council Size Submission

September 2016

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Introduction

In April 2014 Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council considered a proposal to change its electoral cycle from thirds to whole council elections. The proposal aimed to realise several benefits, not least the potential for greater political stability and a longer term view of policy implementation. The Council agreed to consult interested parties on this proposal via various methods between July 2014 and August 2014.

In November 2014 and after hearing advice from the Chair of the Local Government Boundaries Commission, the Council approved the establishment of a Committee with a remit to consider its future governance arrangements. The 'Governance Review Group' comprises five members of the Council, who have voting rights, and two independent members who do not.

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 Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).

With this in mind the Group focused its efforts on determining the appropriate future size of the council as this is the first stage of any such review by the LGBCE. Due to the fact that the matter of the electoral cycle was to be considered in parallel with the issue of the future size of the council the Group put forward a range of size options for consideration by Council.

At a special meeting of Council in November 2015, members voted to approve a move to whole borough elections once every four years. Furthermore, Council resolved that the number of elected members should be reduced from 60 and to be in the range between 42 and 48.

Summary of Proposals

This submission sets out the Council's proposal to move to whole borough elections once every four years. In addition it sets out the proposal for a reduction in the number of Councillors for Newcastle Borough Council in the range between 42 and 48.

When considering this, it is recognised that the number of councillors serving on the Council has a direct bearing on the pattern of wards. After full and careful consideration the Governance Review Group considered it more appropriate to leave the task of determining a pattern of wards to the Boundary Committee.

When determining these sizing proposals the Council has taken into account a number of factors:

- The workload of Councillors
- The analysis report from the LGA Peer Review undertaken in 2014
- The current electoral cycle and the approved move to whole borough elections
- Changes to the way services are provided by the Council
- The financial position of the Council – and of the Country as a whole
- The existing governance arrangements of the Council
- The way in which the council fulfils its scrutiny responsibilities

As part of this submission, the Council used an evidence based approach and has undertaken a survey of Councillors, gathering their views and experiences of their workload and time commitments.

District Profile

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council is one of eight districts in the County of Staffordshire and covers an area of approximately 81.5 square miles (21,106 hectares). At the time of the Census in 2011, Newcastle had a resident population of around 123,900, an increase of just 1.5% over the 10 years since the 2001 Census.

Newcastle is part of North Staffordshire conurbation and lies approximately halfway between Manchester to the north and Birmingham to the south. It is an attractive mix of rural villages and two main towns – Newcastle and Kidsgrove. Historically, the town's growth lay in commerce and in the development of its market. Pottery manufacture and mining have also been important to the borough's development.

The industrial base has changed significantly in the last century, with the closure of local mines and the development of the distribution and manufacturing sectors. The presence of the University at Keele, together with the development of its Science Park and new Medical School, and the growth in the hi-tech and research industries demonstrates the potential and vibrancy of the area.

Key issues for the district include:

- The overall population for Newcastle is projected to increase over the next 10 years with significant growth in people aged 65 and over (18% increase) and 85 and over (41% increase). This will present a long-term challenge to local service providers, not least primary and social care, housing services, public transport infrastructure and community safety.
- Newcastle under Lyme is characterised by significant variations in the level of employment, health, economic well-being, housing and overall living standards – the difference in life expectancy varies by nine years for men and seven years for women between the most affluent and deprived areas.
- The district has areas of considerable affluence but also has three wards that fall into the 10 percent most deprived in the country. There are also pockets of deprivation in the generally more affluent rural wards where there are challenges in terms of accessibility to facilities and services.
- We have low levels of unemployment and youth unemployment when compared to the national average. However, Newcastle has a higher number of adults with no formal qualifications when compared to the national average which may hinder economic growth in Newcastle in the future.
- Of the c52,000 residential properties within the Borough, over three quarters are owner occupied showing the preference for owner occupation. House prices vary greatly across the Borough with rural areas providing an opportunity to attract more affluent households into the Borough whilst simultaneously creating challenges to meeting local needs.

- Although the current provision of social housing is able to meet the majority of housing need there remains a lack of supported accommodation to address the needs of vulnerable groups, many of whom face becoming homeless.

Key Statistics (Census 2011)

Age Structure

17% aged 14 and under

65% aged between 15 and 64

18% aged 65 and over

Mean age 40.8

Households

Number of households	52,574
Average household size	2.3 people
Households with dependent children	25%
Households with one person only	31%
Households with 65+ only	9%
Single pensioners	14%

Ethnicity

95% White

1.2% Mixed

2.8% Asian or Asian British

0.7% Black or Black British

0.3% Other Ethnic Group

Rurality

The Borough of Newcastle is 76% rural, however only 20% of residents live in these areas. This equates to an average population density of 1.5 residents per hectare compared to the average across the Borough of 5.9. Population density varies in Newcastle between 59.5 in the most built up area and 0.8 in the most rural.

Council Priorities

The Borough Council's vision is to "create a borough that is prosperous, clean, healthy and safe".

Our key priority is that the council works co-operatively with our customers, communities and partners to deliver high quality services to our residents. However there is also clear focus on the following three specific priority areas:

Creating a healthy and active community

We work with partners to make sure that residents and visitors are able to access a range of facilities and support activities that will enable them to improve their health and quality of life.

At the heart of our borough we want communities that are happy, vibrant and prosperous with good health and wellbeing.

We want to reduce health inequalities with a focus on those areas where the council can have the greatest impact. The Health & Wellbeing Strategy outlines our commitment and services offer, and supports development of leisure, cultural and community facilities in the borough.

Delivery of a new leisure facility in Kidsgrove is planned with commitment to a new swimming pool and facility for the area. With partners such as Staffordshire County Council and Sport England and others, we will work to attract funding to ensure residents and visitors are able to access a range of facilities and support activities that will enable them to improve their health and quality of life.

In the last twelve months the Newcastle Partnership has awarded over £233,000 from Public Health to benefit the people of the borough to support activities, nutrition and physical exercise. Working with partners, we want to continue to deliver high quality services to the most vulnerable, despite funding cuts and government reduction. By using information and feedback from service users and the community to identify issues and service provision gaps, we will develop the provision available, and so reduce health inequalities across the borough.

Creating a clean, safe and sustainable borough

We will improve the environment so that everyone can enjoy a safe, sustainable and healthy borough.

Residents consistently identify a cleaner and safer borough as a priority for them. In Newcastle we want people to feel safe wherever they are;- in their homes, neighbourhoods, parks and open spaces or when accessing towns, shopping centres and places of work.

We believe that effective partnership working is essential in improving outcomes for our communities and ensuring that our collective resources are used efficiently and effectively. Working with our partners in this time of austerity, we will continue to commission services and deliver initiatives to assist vulnerable residents and to contribute to preventative approaches which positively impact on improving health and wellbeing and community safety in our communities.

Our Operations team work hard to maintain high levels of cleanliness and environmental quality in our streets and green spaces. We work with local communities to identify issues and prioritise services and we support people in volunteering to take care of their

neighbourhoods and promote community pride in our borough as a great place to live, work and visit.

Create a borough of opportunity

In order to maximise investment and encourage enterprise and employment we work with partners to generate activities that will create opportunities for improving the wealth, prosperity and housing choices of our residents.

Both the Borough Council and our partners at Staffordshire County Council have now taken formal decisions agreeing to the regeneration of the Ryecroft area of the town centre and the creation of a public sector hub in Newcastle. To enable the wider redevelopment of the Ryecroft area, and to deliver all the benefits in terms of new jobs and a boost to the town centre economy, the Council will move out of the Civic Offices by April 2017 and to a new public sector hub working alongside our partners. This will encourage co-production working and improved conditions, which is offset by savings through energy saving and efficient accommodation.

Other opportunities gained by delivery of an effective, future proof Local Plan to enhance the housing offer and further development of the Borough, will be beneficial both economically and for the wellbeing of all. Support through improvements to the infrastructure of the borough would also help to provide the mechanism to promote business growth and attract residents to an area with growing employment opportunities.

A focal point will be the re-building of the hearts of our towns and villages, using successful approaches and expertise gained from other regeneration sites in the borough. The development of the area around Kidsgrove railway station/transport Hub area being one of the exciting opportunities which can benefit from this approach.

Funding for the Capital programme is essential to enable the continued delivery of quality services and ensure opportunities available within the borough are taken advantage of. Key to future plans and the availability of funds, is the successful implementation of the Asset Disposal programme, together with the development of a master plan for the greater Keele area.

We will continue to work with our partners to maximise investment and encourage enterprise and employment – generating activities that will create opportunities for improving the wealth, prosperity and housing choices of our residents.

Part One - Governance and Decision Making

"The Commission aims to ensure that councils have the right number of councillors to take decisions and manage their business in an effective way. We therefore look at how decisions are taken across the authority to assess the volume and distribution of responsibility amongst elected members and staff."

LGBCE Technical Guidance 2012

THE BOROUGH COUNCILLORS

Newcastle Borough Council currently has 60 councillors representing 24 wards across 21,108 hectares, with each ward represented by either two or three councillors. Elections to the Borough Council are held in three out of every four years with each councillor being elected for a four year term of office. In the fourth year, when the County Council elections are held, there are no Borough elections. The principal duty of councillors is to the community of Newcastle as a whole; however there is also an essential duty to the constituents of their ward, including those who did not vote for them.

The political balance of the Council for 2016/17 is 28 Labour; 21 Conservatives; four Borough Independents; three Liberal Democrats; two Newcastle Independents; and two UK Independence Party (UKIP) members.

Member Development and Training

Newcastle Borough Council signed up to the West Midlands Member Development Charter in February 2008 and was awarded the Primary Level in October 2010. The Council dedicates significant resource into providing development opportunities and training for elected members. A Member Training and Development Strategy was adopted in May 2009 and is reviewed every year. A copy of the Strategy is attached at Appendix A.

The training and development programme is managed by officers and is overseen by the Member Development Panel which consists of 9 councillors. The current membership comprises 4 Labour members, 3 Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat and one member from the Borough Independent Group.

As part of its work plan the Member Development Group liaises with appropriate officers within the Council to prioritise areas for development. One of the current priorities is for all members to be provided with a tablet in order to make mobile communication more accessible and to reduce reliance on hard copy committee papers. This priority supports the council's aim to improve agile working for both staff and members.

LEADERSHIP

Following the Borough elections in May 2016, when no political party gained overall control of the Council, a two-year working agreement was signed by the Labour Group and the Borough Independents.

Newcastle Borough Council operates under a Leader with Cabinet arrangement and has done so since 2000. The Leader is elected by Council at its annual meeting, holds office for a four year period and will appoint a Deputy Leader and other members of the Cabinet as they see fit.

The Cabinet consists of seven members each with responsibility for one of the following portfolios:

Policy, People and Partnerships – Cllr Elizabeth Shenton (Leader)
Finance, IT and Customer Services – Cllr Terry Turner (Deputy Leader)
Operational Services – Cllr Ann Beech
Communities and Social Cohesion – Cllr Tony Kearon
Leisure and Culture – Cllr Amelia Rout
Town Centres, Property and Business – Cllr John Williams
Planning and Housing – Cllr Kyle Robinson

Feedback from members outside the executive suggests that some councillors consider their role to be full-time; however many have work commitments outside of their role as elected member which means this is not possible. The roles of Leader and Deputy Leader are generally considered to be full-time.

A full scheme of delegations is maintained in the Council's Constitution and can be found here <http://moderngov.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=8553#mgDocuments>

THE MAYOR

Earliest records show that there has been a Mayor in Newcastle since 1318.

The Mayor is elected each year by Members of the Borough Council at its Annual Meeting, which is held towards the end of May. The Annual Council is referred to as the "Mayor Making" and takes place in the Council Chamber at the Civic Offices. At this meeting the Council will also appoint a Deputy Mayor who will deputise for the Mayor as and when required and appropriate. Both the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor will hold office for a period of one year. Whilst in office both will adopt a non-political role and have key roles and duties including:

Ceremonial Role

As first citizen of the Borough the Mayor represents the Borough at Civic functions both locally and nationally and fulfils all the traditional ceremonial functions of the Mayor. In any year it is usual for the Mayor to attend in the region of 350 engagements. The majority of these engagements occur within the Borough.

Chairing the Council Meetings

The Mayor and in their absence the Deputy Mayor, has the following responsibilities:

- To preside over meetings of the Council so that its business can be carried out efficiently and with regard to the rights of Councillors and the interests of the community
- To ensure that the Council meeting is a forum for the debate of matters of concern to the local community
- To ensure Councillors who are not members of the Cabinet and do not hold committee chairs are able to hold the Cabinet and committee chairs to account
- To uphold and promote the purposes of the Constitution and to interpret the Constitution when necessary
- To promote public involvement in the Council's activities
- To attend such civic and ceremonial functions as the Council and they determine appropriate
- To determine any matter referred to them requiring an urgent decision under the Urgency Procedure Rules set out in the Council's Constitution

- To be consulted on any matter where consultation with the Mayor is required under the terms of the Constitution.

In liaison with the Executive Director (Resources and Support Services) the Mayor's Secretary looks after the accounting side of the Mayor's Charity Fund. The practice is that any money raised by the Mayor for charitable purposes is donated to local charities of their choice. The Mayor may choose to raise money for one particular purpose and devote the whole of their fund raising efforts in that direction.

THE COUNCIL

The committees and sub-committees of Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council and their membership size are:

Council	All 60 members
Audit and Risk Committee	7
Licensing Committee	15
Planning Committee	15
Public Protection Committee	13
Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee	11
Active and Cohesive Communities Scrutiny Committee	11
Cleaner, Greener and Safer Communities Scrutiny Committee	11
Economic Development and Enterprise Scrutiny Committee	11
Finance, Resources and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee	11
Conservation Advisory Working Party	5
Employees' Consultative Committee	7
Grants Assessment Panel	9
Joint Parking Committee	4
Staffing Committee	11
Standards Committee	8

REGULATORY COMMITTEES

Newcastle Borough Council has four regulatory committees: the Audit and Risk Committee, the Licensing Committee, the Planning Committee and the Public Protection Committee.

The Audit and Risk Committee

The Audit and Risk Committee meets, on average, five times per year usually at 7.00 pm on Monday evenings at the Civic Offices. The Committee has 7 members (3 Labour, 2 Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat and 1 Borough Independent).

Audit and Risk is a standing committee and its membership is determined by Council at its first business meeting in May. Amongst other things, the Committee is responsible for:

- reviewing quarterly Internal Audit progress reports and the main issues arising from them
- monitoring the effectiveness of the Council's risk management arrangements
- reviewing the effectiveness of corporate governance arrangements
- approval of the Council's Statement of Accounts
- consideration of reports from external inspectors, for example the HSE

The Planning Committee

The Planning Committee sits on average every four weeks usually on Tuesday evenings at 7.00 pm at the Civic Offices. Amongst other duties, it meets to consider planning applications that have been submitted together with recommendations reported by the Head of Planning and Development. In addition, the committee will consider matters relating to the Council's building control function.

This is a standing Committee and has 16 members with the following allocation of seats: 7 Labour; 5 Conservative; 1 Liberal Democrat, 1 UKIP; 1 Borough Independent and 1 member from the Newcastle Independent Group. Membership is determined annually by Council at its first meeting in May. The Planning Committee is well attended and there are no occasions when the Committee has not been quorate.

It is not envisaged that any upcoming changes to planning legislation will have any significant impact on members or their time commitments to this committee.

Scheme of Delegated Authority – Planning

The full scheme of delegated authority is set out in the Council's constitution (see extract at Appendix B) and covers an extensive range of categories of planning and other matters which include:

- determining applications for planning permission, consent or approval where approval can be granted or refused in accordance with the policies of the approved development plan for the area, including householder developments;
- responding to consultations where there are no identified significant planning issues;
- the making of tree Preservation Orders and to control felling, topping, lopping and re-planting under such orders.

The Public Protection Committee

The Public Protection Committee meets around five times per year at the Civic Offices usually at 7.00 pm. The Committee has 13 members: 6 Labour, 5 Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat and 1 Borough Independent. Membership is determined by Council at its first meeting in May.

The Public Protection Committee has responsibility for discharging the powers and duties of the Council in relation to licensing and registration, excluding those matters which relate to the Licensing Act 2003 and the Gambling Act 2005 delegated to the Licensing Committee. The Committee also oversees issues that impact on public safety, including:

- Food Safety Control
- Infectious Disease Control
- Health Education and Promotion
- Home Safety
- Animal Welfare
- Pest Control
- Atmospheric Pollution Control

Matters relating to Hackney Carriage and Private Hire licences are dealt with by the Public Protection Committee or are delegated to the Chief Executive.

The Licensing Committee

The Licensing Committee meets to deal with all matters under the Licensing Act 2003 and the Gambling Act 2005 delegated from Full Council and the Council's policy relating to licensing.

The Committee has 15 members: 7 Labour, 5 Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat, 1 Borough Independent and 1 member from the Newcastle Independent Group. Meetings take place at the Civic Offices usually on Tuesdays at 7.00 pm. There have been no instances where the Committee has not been quorate.

Licensing Sub Committee

The Licensing Sub-Committee has 5 members, 3 of whom are Labour, 1 Liberal Democrat and 1 Borough Independent. The Committee generally meets 4 or 5 times a year and its main business is to determine applications for licences and permissions by and on behalf of the Council.

Scheme of Delegated Authority – Licensing

The full scheme of delegated authority for Licensing is set out in the Council's constitution (see extract at Appendix C)

TIME COMMITMENTS OF COUNCILLORS

There is a formal role description for Councillors as detailed in Appendix D together with role descriptions for Leaders, Cabinet members and Chairs of Committees and Scrutiny Committees.

A formal induction for new councillors is delivered following elections in May. All Chairs and Vice Chairs of Committees are encouraged to attend a chairing skills course and members who sit on regulatory committees are required to undertake committee specific training prior to attending their first meeting. Any such training is planned and delivered via the Member Development Strategy (Appendix A).

Around 100 meetings are held every year and there can be as many as 5 committee or working party meetings per week. The average number of committee positions per councillor is 3.6. During the period from 1st January 2016 to 31 July 2016 individual member attendance at meetings varied between 39% and 100% with an average of 81%.

In April 2015 a survey was sent out to all councillors, a copy of this survey and a summary of its findings are attached at Appendices E and F. 27 (45%) councillors completed the survey but not all answered every question.

Time commitments of councillors varied amongst the respondents with some attending 2 meetings a month whilst others reported attendance at least 10. Time spent preparing for these meetings also varied, from up to one hour to over three hours per meeting.

All respondents reported that they spent time dealing with constituent queries and casework and again this varied from up to 3 hours a week to as many as 20 hours.

Two thirds of those who responded hold surgeries for residents, some weekly, others monthly and others on an ad hoc basis.

Almost two thirds of respondents said that they produce newsletters for their constituents and reported that the time commitment to complete these could be from around an hour to up to 2 days, dependent on content. Of the 25 respondents who answered a question regarding social media, only 7 said that they engaged with their constituents in this way.

Around half of respondents had held public meetings in their constituency in the last year and 85% reported that they had conducted estate walkabouts during that period. Nearly all respondents regularly met with constituents in their homes.

In terms of commitments to other council business almost all reported that they spent at least three hours a week attending other meetings, such as attending town and parish council meetings, in their capacity as a borough councillor. Some reported spending as many as 20 hours per week attending such meetings.

Councillors have the support of the Member Services team and, as part of the Member Development Strategy regularly review their Personal Development Plans which enables them to identify any training and support requirements.

GOVERNANCE REVIEW – LGA PEER REVIEW 2015

In December 2014 the Council invited an LGA Peer Review team to conduct a review of its democratic decision making structures. The review team produced their findings in January 2015 and a copy of the report is attached at Appendix G.

The review was commissioned as part of a wider organisational drive for further efficiency. It was specifically designed to help the council look at the way in which its various committees and panels are organised and identify options to consider for the future.

The Peer Review reported their assessment that the democratic decision making arrangements at the council demand a lot of time from both members and officers. This arises from the extensive array of formally constituted committees and panels. The review team noted that the number of committees and committee positions is very large when compared with similar districts and borough councils that the team benchmarked. They noted that there were well over 100 meetings per year and that the number of committee positions per councillor is 3.6, compared to an average of 2.6 amongst comparator councils.

The key recommendations of the peer review were as follows:

- merge the Public Protection and Licensing Committees
- merge the Audit and Risk and Standards Committees
- merge the Active and Cohesive Communities and Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committees
- review the continued need for the Staffing Committee
- review some of the legacy arrangements, such as the Joint Parking Committee and Conservation Advisory Working Party, and whether the council should continue to service these bodies.

Other issues raised by the review group included:

- consideration of the scheme of delegation to individual Cabinet members - which could speed up decision-making.

- a review of the scheme of delegation to officers with a view to increasing the levels of delegation (the review group identified that the levels of delegation to officers seems low compared to many other authorities)
- the reintroduction of a Member's Bulletin which used to be issued on a regular basis. The bulletin was specifically for information items and it is felt that the reintroduction of this communication could cut down on the number of reports taken to committees.

These recommendations were considered by the Member Development Panel, the 5 scrutiny committees and the Audit and Risk Committee. Feedback was somewhat varied and was included into a report to Council together with recommendations which echoed many of the findings of the Review Group.

At its meeting in July 2016, Council received the report and resolved to disband the Joint Parking Committee, the Member Development Panel and the Asset Policy Committee with immediate effect and to disband the Governance Committee on completion of its current work programme.

It was also agreed that the Audit and Risk and Standards Committee be merged. The decision on the Review Group's recommendation to disband the Staffing Committee has been deferred pending further discussion.

Three existing committees will now be established as member/officer working groups under the support of the relevant Executive Director.

Responsibility for member development will be added to the remit of the Constitution Working Group and will be retitled the Constitution and Member Support Working Group. This Group will give consideration and make recommendations on the scheduling of meetings to make best use of member and officer time.

Part Two - Scrutiny Functions

“Every Council has mechanisms to scrutinise the executive functions of the Council and other bodies. They also have significant discretion over the kind (and extent) of activities involved in that process. In considering Council size, the Commission will want to satisfy itself that these responsibilities can be administered in a convenient and effective way through the number of Councillors it recommends.”

LGBCE Technical Guidance 2012

The Council operates 5 thematic scrutiny committees. Each has their own Chair and Vice Chair who are appointed by Council. Members are drawn from outside the Executive (Cabinet) and seats are allocated to achieve political balance.

There should be at least 2 ordinary meetings of each scrutiny committee in every year, however most meet between 4 and 6 times. The quorum for scrutiny meetings is 4 persons.

Within their terms of reference scrutiny committees should focus their attention on the Council's corporate priorities as set out in the Council plan. Members should achieve an understanding of relevant policy frameworks which will allow them to assist in policy development and also to review and scrutinise decisions and actions taken in connection with their committee's designated remit.

Each committee reviews and manages its workload via individual workplans which can be influenced by requests from both Council and Cabinet for review of particular areas of Council activity, or the activities of other organisations operating within the Borough.

Scrutiny committees are able to establish ad-hoc working parties or focus groups to investigate specific topics on behalf of the committee on a time-limited basis. Members are expected to carry out work between meetings, for example site visits, consultation and report preparation. The workload of the scrutiny committees is manageable and there have been no instances where there have been too many active projects for them to function effectively.

Key decisions of the Cabinet (or those delegated to officers or members by Cabinet) are subject to being called-in by scrutiny and are dealt with in accordance with the flow chart shown in Appendix H.

The 5 scrutiny committees and their areas of responsibility are as detailed below:

HEALTH AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny has 11 members: 5 Labour, 4 Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat and 1 Borough Independent. The Committee has responsibility for overseeing a wide range of health and wellbeing topics, including:

- Commissioning of and provision of health care services
- Staffordshire Health and Wellbeing Board
- University Hospital North Staffordshire (UHNS)
- Health Improvement
- Alcohol and drug issues
- Health organisations within the Borough
- North Staffordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)
- Staffordshire County Council Public Health
- Combined Healthcare and Stoke and Staffordshire NHS Partnership
- Health issues affecting older people
- Strategy development at district and County level

ACTIVE AND COHESIVE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There are 11 members of this scrutiny committee, 5 Labour members, 4 Conservative, 1 Borough Independent and 1 member from the Newcastle Independent Group. The Committee is responsible for the following themes:

- Arts Development
- Britain in Bloom
- Cemeteries and Crematorium
- Children and Young People
- Safeguarding Board, Children's Centre District Management Board/Community and Learning
- Community Recreation
- Cultural Development
- Health Improvement
- Leisure Facilities
- Museum
- Sports Development

CLEANER SAFER AND GREENER SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

This committee has 11 members, 5 Labour, 4 Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat and 1 Borough Independent. The committee considers matters related to the following subjects:

- Anti-Social Behaviour Orders
- Civil contingencies
- CCTV
- Community Cohesion and Safety
- Community Safety and Section 17
- Decriminalised Parking Enforcement and On-Street
- Parking
- Emergency Planning
- Older People
- Highways and transport (Operational)
- Streetscene – Litter, Grounds Maintenance, Parks and Gardens
- Street and Community Wardens
- Buses and Concessionary Travel and Taxis
- Car Park Management
- Climate Change, Sustainability and Energy Efficiency
- Environmental Health
- Flooding and Drainage
- Recycling and Waste Management

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERPRISE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

This scrutiny committee 11 seats and representation is as follows: 5 Labour, 4 Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat, 1 Borough Independent. Topics covered by this committee include:

- Building Control
- Design and Heritage Champion
- Economic Development
- External Regeneration Funding
- Housing and Homelessness
- Inward Investment/Marketing
- Land and Property (Asset Management)
- Local Enterprise Partnership
- Planning Policy and Development Control
- Transport Strategy and Policy (Planning)

FINANCE, RESOURCES AND PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Finance, Resources and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee has 11 members; 5 Labour, 4 Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat and 1 Borough Independent. The remit of the committee is as follows:

- Communications and consultation
- Council structure and democracy and constitutional review
- Customer contact and customer service centres
- Neighbourhood and locality working
- Partnerships: Newcastle Partnership Strategic Board
- Performance management and monitoring
- Revenues and benefits
- Risk champion
- Accountancy
- Budget
- Capital and revenue expenditure
- Efficiency savings
- Financial monitoring
- Health and safety champion
- Human Resources
- Information and communication technology
- Procurement champion
- Treasury management
- Workforce development
- Co-operative Council

Part Three – Representational Role of Councillors

“The Commission understands that there is no single approach to representation and members will represent and provide leadership to their communities in different ways. However, we are interested in hearing about the extent to which members are routinely expected to engage with communities and how this affects workload and responsibilities. In particular, if the Council has defined a role for elected members, the Commission would find that evidence interesting.”

LGBCE Technical Guidance 2012

Eight of the borough’s current councillors are also County Councillors, 3 of whom have Cabinet or Shadow Cabinet responsibilities. Also, 21 councillors are serving on either Kidsgrove Town Council or on one of the borough’s 9 parish councils. Feedback from individual members indicates that they can spend up to 20 hours per week attending meetings in their role as borough councillors outside of ordinary council business. These meetings include parish and town council meetings, residents’ groups, Locality Action Partnerships and other multi-agency meetings.

In addition to these local commitments, councillors are also called upon to represent the Borough at wider regional and national forums. For example, the Leader is our representative at the Local Government Association and a member of the Cabinet has been invited to become involved with the Local Government Information Unit.

OUTSIDE BODIES

Each year, the Council appoints Councillors to a wide range of outside bodies. These include Management Committees of Borough- and County-wide organisations and also voluntary organisations serving the community.

The workload associated with the appointments varies, though would normally involve the attendance of the Councillor at between 4 and 6 meetings a year at different venues in the County. The number of appointments to each group is normally determined by the needs of the body concerned and varies between 1 and 4 Councillors. A current list of assignments to outside bodies can be found at Appendix I.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

The Newcastle Partnership is the borough’s local strategic partnership. The Partnership represents the different sectors in the Borough and plays a vital role in bringing together a range of organisations with a shared purpose through co-operative and co-ordinated joint working that will improve the social, economic and environmental wellbeing in the Borough.

The Leader of the Borough Council Chairs the Partnership and the Deputy Leader acts as Vice Chair. This arrangement is mandated in the Partnership’s constitution. Meetings take place 2 or 3 times per year and last for around 2 hours.

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council has committed to becoming a co-operative council and wants to work with partners towards making Newcastle-under-Lyme a co-operative Borough. At the heart of this is a commitment to locality working.

Locality Action Partnerships (LAPs) represent the Newcastle Partnership's established infrastructure for the delivery of locality working and offer communities access to a range of partners to address and deliver against local needs and priorities. There are nine LAPs in the Borough, which are made up of a range of partners from the public, private, community and voluntary sectors with an interest in their local area.

Whilst attendance at LAPs is not a requirement of members, all but 16 regularly attend their local meetings. Three councillors are LAP Chairs and a further 3 are Vice Chairs. Meetings generally take place every 6 weeks at a time and venue to suit the needs of the particular community in question, and usually last for 2 hours.

Historically, officers in Member Services have liaised directly with local schools to organise events connected to Local Democracy Week. Several schools engage with this programme every year with pupils getting involved with various activities including 'Leader for a Day', 'Chief Executive for a Day' and 'Councillor Question Time'. More recently, schools have fed back to us that Local Democracy Week falls too early into the new school year and this often makes it difficult for schools to engage. As a result, activities are programmed in as and when schools request them.

Results of the survey completed by councillors referenced earlier in this submission show that the amount of time individual councillors spend engaging with their communities varies as does the manner in which they carry out this engagement – whether this is via local surgeries or by attending public meetings.

As already discussed in Part 1 of this submission, there is a formal role description for councillors which details the key purpose and duties of members. In addition to the duty to effectively represent the Borough Council to the local community and vice versa, there is also a clear requirement for councillors to engage effectively with other organisations, including Parish and Town Councils and the County Council.

Over the last decade significant advances in technology mean that residents are increasingly able to find out information they may historically have relied on their councillor for. The use of the internet has replaced the need for many residents to contact the council directly and this in turn has increased the ability to 'self-serve'. Indeed the Council has invested in 'electronic' government to enable residents to access our services through the web and to communicate with us effectively by email. Whilst few councillors reported that they interact with constituents using social media or via blogs, there is a desire for increased usage of this kind of communication moving forward.

The Borough Council operates customer contact centres in both the Guildhall in Newcastle town centre and also in Kidsgrove Town Hall. The Police service have a presence at both of these locations, as do staff from social care. Residents are able to contact staff regarding building control issues at the Guildhall and several voluntary sector organisations also deliver services from the location.

The Council Offices now houses staff from the Police service and the local healthcare trust. This co-location makes it significantly easier for residents to access information and services than previously was the case. Development of the new public sector hub over the next 18 months will result in services being even more streamlined with access to many public services under one roof.

Part Four – The Future

“The Commission understands that the role of local authorities is constantly changing. In particular, changes such as the introduction of elected mayors in some parts of England have significantly altered the nature of decision-making and role of elected members. Equally, many local authorities have not seriously considered the size of their council since the introduction of Executive/Scrutiny functions over a decade ago. We are aware that a number of local authorities have changed or intend to change their governance arrangements by reverting from executive and scrutiny models to committee administrations. The pace of change for authorities is likely to continue into the foreseeable future. That is why you should consider future trends and developments when coming to conclusions on council size.”

LGBCE Technical Guidance 2012

FINANCE

Like all district councils across the country, the Borough continues to face the prospect of operating within a severely challenging financial environment. Further large decreases in general government funding means that the council must review the services that it provides and its approach to value for money to keep council tax increases as low as possible.

The Council plans its finances over a 5-year rolling programme in its Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). This longer-term view is designed to highlight at an early stage where the Council may have financial challenges and the level of resources it is likely to have available beyond the current financial year.

This helps to identify future issues in order that a timely and planned approach can be taken to address a shortfall in resources, a reprioritisation of spending or indeed where additional resources are available, where they should be invested. The MTFS has identified significant shortfalls over the next five years which need to be addressed.

A Budget Review Group was established in 2012 comprising the Council Leader, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, IT and Customer Services, the Chief Executive and the Executive Directors. The Group oversees all aspects of the budget preparation process. A service challenge process was conducted by the Group in 2012 which led to the setting up of a project called Newcastle 2020 which commenced at the end of 2013.

The project consists of a number of different work streams which include: financial modelling of services with significantly reduced resources; income maximisation and methods for reducing bureaucracy. In addition a number of options are being developed which aim to assist the council to sustain services in light of reduced funding. These include demand management, self-service delivery, procurement efficiencies and cost sharing with partners and other organisations.

Efficiencies have been realised in the form of a review of vacant posts within the Council, together with a number of service restructures following the departure of senior staff and a number of flexible retirements.

Whilst the reduction in the Council's funding has not led to cuts in front-line services it is recognised that the organisation is much leaner in terms of the size of its workforce and as a consequence has had to find ways to work more efficiently. In contrast, until now, there has

not been a similar rationalisation of the size of the Council. It is anticipated that a reduction in the number of members in the range being considered could realise savings of between £40,300.00 and £60,500.00.

SERVICE DELIVERY

The Council has recently brought its waste and recycling service in-house. The scheme has been completely overhauled and has involved the purchase of a new vehicle fleet and investment in new waste receptacles. Whilst this is a major capital investment for the Council, it is envisaged that the changes will realise around £500,000 per annum in savings and will provide additional income from the sale of recyclable materials.

During the next 12-18 months the Council will have moved out of the current Civic Offices and will be based at the new Public Sector Hub which is currently under construction. We will be joined in the new building by partners from the Police and the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Partnership NHS Trust. The move to a purpose-built multi-agency hub will mean that service delivery will be even more streamlined and our residents will have access to services that are simple to access and economical to deliver.

LOCALISM AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT

As part of the Borough's commitment to co-operative working we are keen to empower our communities to take the initiative to develop and improve community facilities to better meet their needs.

A number of developments are being considered which will support this co-operative aim. For example, it is envisaged that we will look to implement a programme which will enable community management of allotments. Also, considerable work is already on-going to enable existing Community Centre Management Committees to take on the leases for their buildings and begin to run the facilities themselves for the benefit of the community.

ELECTORAL CYCLE

In November 2015, the Council resolved to move to a system of all-out elections once every four years. The rationale behind this decision was based on the belief that the move would not only be more cost effective but would also achieve political stability and enable longer-term view of policy development.

As discussed in Part 1 of this submission, following recommendations from the Peer Review Group the Council is in the process of disbanding some of its formal Committees. In addition, there are plans to merge other Committees and for three existing committees to be established as member/officer working groups.

In September 2014 the Borough electorate stood at 97,558 which, given a Council size of 60 means that the number of electors per councillor is 1,626. When compared to our 'nearest neighbours' Newcastle has the largest council size and one of the lowest elector:councillor ratios

In proposing a reduction in the number of elected members, there is an acknowledgement that work will be undertaken to streamline the Council's committee structure. As a result it is considered that a total of 44 Councillors will be sufficient to run the business of the Council.

Conclusion

In a report to Council on 25 November 2015 reference was made to the views of the two independent members of the Governance Review Group:

'We believe that at 60, the current council is too large. Moving to a size of council in line with similar authorities should be proposed by the Council at the start of any LBGCE review. We support the range of council size which has been recommended by the Committee but would urge you to a number at the lower end of this range. In suggesting this we are aware of the implications for the size of the electorate within individual wards and in the context of the evidence we have heard, consider a number in the low forties to be sound for the needs of the Council and the community'.

The Council has taken into account a range of factors and evidence in the compilation of this submission. It has concluded that a reduction in the current number of Councillors from 60 to 44 would be appropriate based on the following reasoning:

1. Changes to the electoral cycle

In November 2015, Council resolved that Newcastle would move to all out elections every 4 years. During the consultation period prior to this resolution, feedback from members indicated that they feel that currently the Council is permanently in 'election mode'. This obviously places demands on Councillor's time in terms of campaigning and of itself draws time and energy from delivering on the expectations of the community. In practice, in any year in which there is an election, in the following year there is a relatively short time internally for the actions mandated through the election to be implemented and in which to progress major policy initiatives.

The change to all out elections will not only provide increased political stability and longer term policy development, but will also ease the burden on members in terms of their workload.

2. Governance Arrangements

It is envisaged that the changes and improvements planned to the Council's governance arrangements will decrease the workload of Councillors in terms of their time commitment to attending formal meetings. Planned improvements with regard to how information items are communicated to members will also reduce the size of agenda, reducing the length of meetings.

3. Workload and Working Practices

It is anticipated that the changes to the electoral cycle, together with changes that have been, and will be, implemented with regard to governance arrangements, will mean a reduced workload for elected members.

The Council has invested in its approach to electronic government and is focused on ensuring that residents are able to access information freely via the internet and can 'self-serve' many of our services, reducing the reliance on contacting councillors for routine queries.

4. The financial position of the Council

In proposing a reduction from 60 to 44 Councillors, the Council has acknowledged how reduced central government funding has impacted on the way in which it delivers its services. It is appropriate that the Council's should consider how the structure of its governance arrangements should reflect these changes. Whilst not the primary reason for the proposed reduction in Council size, the potential financial savings that could be realised

cannot be discounted, particularly given the measures that are to be implemented to further reduce the workload burden for elected members

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council recommends to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England that the council size be reduced from 60 to 44 councillors, effective from May 2018.