



ELECTORAL REVIEW OF LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL Submission by Lancashire County Council on Council Size

Background

This submission is the Council's response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's (LGBCE) invitation to put forward a case for Council size.

The review has been triggered as approximately a third of the Council's current electoral divisions (29) have an electoral variance of more than 10% from the average.

The Council's submission has been developed by a cross-party working group of seven Councillors supported by key officers. The Council's submission was approved by the Full Council at a meeting held on 21 May 2015.

About Lancashire

Lancashire has a diverse population of around 1.18 million. There are wide variations in levels of income, wealth and health across the county. In more rural areas social exclusion exists side-by-side with affluence and a high quality of life. Several districts have small pockets of deprivation, but there are also larger areas of deprivation, particularly in east Lancashire, Morecambe, Skelmersdale and parts of Preston.

Lancashire County has 12 District Councils and neighbours the two unitary authorities of Blackpool and Blackburn with Darwen. There are six clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) in the council area with one in each of the unitary councils. A single constabulary and police commissioner cover the whole of Lancashire. There is a Health and Wellbeing Board and a Children's Partnership Board in the county council area. There are three main university campuses in the county and specialist agriculture and maritime college facilities.

Overview of Council Size Submission

The Council's submission sets out to address, and support with evidence, the three areas that the Commission uses to form its view about Council size. Those being governance arrangements, scrutiny functions and the representational role of Councillors in the local community.

The Council's electoral arrangements were last reviewed in 2003-04 in a Periodic Electoral Review. That review increased Council size from 78 to the current Council size of 84 single member electoral divisions, based on the governance arrangements, operated at that time of: a Leader and Deputy Leader and eight portfolio-holders making up a Cabinet of 10; five Overview and Scrutiny Committees and nine other standing Committees/Sub-committees undertaking non-cabinet functions.

Since then Lancashire's public sector landscape has become more complex and there has been a significant increase in the County Council's areas of responsibility and influence including; Public Health; Children's Partnership Boards; and major economic development activity through Lancashire Enterprise Partnership, three Enterprise Zones, and the Preston, South Ribble and Lancashire City Deal.

Out of its 15 comparator Councils Lancashire, together with three other councils, has the highest number of Councillors. Of those comparator Councils, current Council size places Lancashire 4th highest regarding number of electors per councillor.

Using the latest electorate figures for 2015 the Lancashire electorate is 879,847 with an average number of electors to each Councillor of 10,474. Based on Office for National Statistics (ONS) population projections, this is projected to rise to 10,629 by 2021 if council size remains at 84. In addition to using the ONS projections, additional housing growth, particularly in Chorley, Preston and West Lancashire, suggests a figure of around 11,500 additional electors overall across Lancashire by 2021. This would result in an average number of electors to each councillor of 10,766 if council size remains the same.

Summary of the Council's submission

The approach undertaken within this submission has been to follow the Commission's guiding principles document and consider them, both in terms of current arrangements and projected future trends and plans.

After considering evidence presented to it at its meeting on 21 May 2015, the Council considered that there was a case to remain at 84 Electoral Divisions and Members to reflect the evidence below. The Council recognises that this is very much a judgement call and the assessment is finely balanced:-

- It enables members to remain effective in their role as community leaders;
- It meets the need to maintain good, effective democratic accountability and representation;
- It recognises the Council's history of strong partnership working and the continuing need to work effectively with an increasingly wide range of organisations including: the Police & Crime Commissioner for Lancashire and Lancashire Constabulary; the six Clinical Commissioning Groups responsible for commissioning NHS services in Lancashire, together with one each in the two Unitary districts; the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership; the twelve District Councils and the 205 Parish and Town Councils; with neighbouring Councils and both the business and voluntary, community and faith sectors;
- The Council currently has a number of Councillors that appropriately and adequately reflects its geography and large population and effectively represents the complex demography and socio-economic conditions including pockets of high deprivation in Lancashire;
- The evidence supports the view that the Council currently has effective decision making processes in place to ensure full democratic accountability. This view was validated by a corporate Peer Review in October 2014, which confirmed that the Council's key governance structures are 'clear and appear to work well'.
- It will safeguard the Council in ensuring it has sufficient capacity to deliver and enhance its performance in the above areas.
- It will enable the Council to continue to respond to the challenges facing local government and the communities of Lancashire whilst the electorate continues to increase as identified in Appendix 1.
- It recognises the significant and numerous pockets of high population growth and large scale housing development particularly in the Buckshaw village area of central Lancashire.

The Council also supports the retention of single member electoral divisions only to continue to maximise accountability and geographic representation.

Summary of Justification

A summary of the Council's justification for the submission is set out below:-

- The Council has recently undertaken a full review of its governance arrangements, including consideration of moving to a Committee system of administration. The review was carried out by a cross-party officer/member working group and included comparison with other local authorities. The Council overwhelmingly decided to maintain a Leader/Cabinet model of decision-making to best meet the requirements of the Council to function effectively and efficiently and support its service delivery framework to the community. The Council's Cabinet arrangements are supported by an "Executive Scrutiny Committee" which considers all key decisions to be taken by Cabinet and Cabinet Members before decisions are taken. Full details of the Council's Scrutiny Committees and other Committees are set out in detail in Appendix 1.

This supports the view that the current council size should remain the same to preserve the effective governance of the Council and the best arrangements to meet the requirements of the Council to effectively serve its Community. The Cabinet system continues to be reviewed to ensure all elements of the decision-making process are appropriate in terms of effectiveness and efficiency.

- Lancashire is a large County, with a complex geography and demography, and a wide range of different levels of social and economic need. In order to ensure that all parts and people in Lancashire are represented, it is necessary to maintain a council membership of 84 to absorb the increased workload to date and extensive housing development, population and electorate growth across the County as can be particularly evidenced at Buckshaw Village in Central Lancashire.
- Using recent external assessments the Council shows it performs well, for example:

The last organisational assessment was part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment in 2009 when Lancashire County Council received a 'Performs well' (3 out of 4) rating. Since then the authority has continued to receive good service assessment judgements including the following:

- Overall effectiveness of children's safeguarding services Good (grade 2) (2012). The council's child protection service is managed very well. The authority has a consistent track record of good and improving performance across nearly all areas of children's services.
- CQC Inspection Outcomes - Lancashire achieved an excellent outcome as a result of these inspections. Between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014 nine of the ten Domiciliary Services, all eight short

breaks services and also the Shared Lives Service were inspected and evaluated during an unannounced inspection. Full compliance was achieved with the exception of one service, for one standard only and this service has implemented an action plan and is awaiting re inspection on this standard.

- In addition the authority is seeking further development opportunities in the shape of regional sector-led peer reviews in both children's and adult's services (later this year) to identify additional improvements, along with a LGA Health and Wellbeing Peer Challenge as part of the Health and Wellbeing System Improvement Programme 2014-15.
- The Council requested a LGA Peer Challenge in 2014 which identified the current democratic and administrative arrangements, established following the elections in 2013, as creating a stable political environment for decision-making. It also highlighted strengths in the Council's work on economic development and work with public sector partner agencies.
- The future challenges to be addressed in times of austerity and reducing financial resources necessitate the Council to have the capacity to guarantee it continues to provide value-for-money services as well as engaging, supporting and leading its partners, community and voluntary bodies across the diverse communities within the County.
- Leadership and Governance arrangements – the appointment in 2014 of a new Chief Executive together with the minority Labour administration from 2013 has provided the cornerstone of the new way of working of the council. Scrutiny has been strengthened, and more councillors than before are more closely represented in decision-making arrangements.
- Working in Partnership with others – Councillors' roles as community leaders and the need to develop engagement with partnerships is expected to continue as the County Council develops its public service integration and potential development of a Combined Authority working with the LGA, Lancashire Council's and key partners. These roles will become even more important set against the current financial climate, with Councillors expected to play an integral part in the consulting of communities around budget options for example. Councillors will also be a vital part in the development of more innovative ways of partnership working. The major potential area for change is in the discussions currently in Lancashire around the possibility of creating a Combined Authority with District and neighbouring Unitary authorities. If such arrangements encourage greater devolution of powers from central government, the additional workload may be significant,

including the need for additional scrutiny or other arrangements to ensure accountability and transparency.

- Evidence suggests a growing volume of work facing elected Councillors. The latest LGA Census of Local Authority Councillors found that Lancashire County Councillors spend on average 25 hours per week on council/political business. In addition, the levels of devolution are unknown due to the uncertainty of the composition and therefore direction of the government that will be formed in May 2015. For these reasons, the Council believes that maintenance of the current Council size would be necessary to ensure the current governance and representational arrangements referred to in Appendix 1 would continue.

The scale of workload, predicted population and electorate increase supports the view that the Council size should be maintained given the large scale of predicted development in certain areas as particular evidenced at Buckshaw village in Central Lancashire.

The Council is of the view therefore that the existing council size is appropriate as it enables Councillors to actively represent and lead their communities as individual Councillors and to effectively respond to the electorate's concerns on evolving issues.

Further details are contained in Appendix 1 which responds to the LGBCE's criteria for Council Size.

Attachments

Appendix 1 – Detailed submission

- Annex A – Committee Structure
- Annex B – List of Outside Bodies
- Annex C – Terms of Reference of Committees
- Annex D – Local Member Grants -Guidance
- Annex E – Scrutiny Committee Work Programmes