

Item No. 7.1	Classification: Open	Date: 8 July 2015	Meeting Name: Council Assembly
Report title:		Electoral Review – Council Size	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Chief Executive	

RECOMMENDATION

1. That council assembly note the report from the Electoral Review Working Group on council size.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) was established by Parliament under the provisions of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. One objective of the Commission is to provide electoral arrangements for English principal local authorities that are fair and deliver electoral equality for voters. To do this, the Commission conducts electoral reviews. These are reviews of the electoral arrangements of local authorities: the number of councillors, the names, number and boundaries of wards and electoral divisions and the number of councillors to be elected to each.
3. Electoral reviews are initiated primarily to improve electoral equality. This means ensuring, so far as is reasonable, that for any principal council, the ratio of electors to councillors in each electoral ward or division, is the same.
4. When an electoral variance in representation across a local authority becomes notable, an electoral review is required. There are three criteria that trigger this review including where more than 30% of a council's wards have an electoral imbalance of more than 10% from the average ratio for that authority. In Southwark 9 out of 21 wards currently have a population variance of more than 10%. The Commission has therefore determined that Southwark Council is required to undergo a review of ward boundaries which will be implemented for the next full council elections in May 2018.
5. The review is scheduled to begin in August 2015 and be completed in July 2016. Ahead of the formal review, the Commission has invited the council to make a submission about the size of the council. The Commission has asked for a final submission by 15 July 2015 and will make a decision about the number of elected members in Southwark by 18 August 2015.
6. The commission will not consider the pattern of wards until a decision is made on the size of the council. Following a decision on size, the Commission will then consider the number of wards, ward boundaries, and number of members in each ward and the names of wards. The Commission have advised that the new wards can be a mix of one, two or three member wards.
7. After consultation on ward patterns, the Commission will publish and consult on

draft recommendations. Final recommendations will be laid before Parliament in October 2016.

8. The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 provide most of the rules which the Commission must follow in conducting a review. The Act requires that the Commission must make recommendations to parliament that have regard to:
 - a. The need to secure equality of representation
 - b. The need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
 - c. The need to secure effective and convenient local government.
9. The Act also states that the Commission should take into account any changes in the number and distribution of electors that is likely to take place within the five years following the review. They will therefore consider the council's population forecast.
10. The Commission are clear that local government is as diverse as the communities it serves, providing services, leadership and representation tailored to the characteristics and needs of individual areas. Their aim in an electoral review is to recommend arrangements, including a council size, which is right for the local authority in question.
11. The Commission are unwilling to apply strict mathematical criteria for council size or impose nationally a formula for its calculation. However, this approach means that it is important that they receive well-reasoned proposals which clearly demonstrate the individual characteristics and needs of each local authority area and its communities and how its circumstances relate to the number of councillors elected to the authority.
12. The review is an opportunity for Southwark to consider how many councillors it needs, having regard to the political management arrangements, regulatory and scrutiny functions and the representational role of councillors, both in terms of their ward work and representing the council on external bodies.
13. The Commission will take a view on the right size for Southwark by considering three areas:
 - the governance arrangements of the council, how it takes decisions across the broad range of its responsibilities, and whether there are any planned changes to those arrangements;
 - the council's scrutiny functions relating to its own decision making and the council's responsibilities to outside bodies, and whether any changes to them are being considered; and
 - the representational role of councillors in the local community and how they engage with people, conduct casework and represent the council on local partner organisations.
14. The Commission want council size proposals that reflect not only the council's current arrangements, but also likely future trends or plans.
15. The council should also identify whether there are any other local factors which would affect how many members are needed in the council.
16. The Commission will take submissions from different groups, but have advised that they particularly welcome the council's view on the optimal number of

members. The Commission will be interested in the justification that the council offers for any recommendation that we make.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

17. Cabinet on 17 March 2015 set up a working group of members to report back to the Leader with recommendations on council size. The working group was made up of members from all three parties represented in Southwark (3 Labour, 2 Liberal Democrats, 1 Conservative)
18. The working group has considered the questions which the Commission raised which consider the number of members required for effective governance, representation and scrutiny, as well as future changes which could impact on the number of members required in the borough. The working groups findings are presented in the attached report (see appendix).
19. Cabinet agreed that before the leader takes a decision on the council's submission, that the report was brought to council assembly.
20. Council assembly are asked to note the report from the working group.

Policy implications

21. The working group has been asked to consider the existing constitution, and details within it about committee size and makeup. If the council is to change the number of councillors, how the council forms committees, cabinet and other panels and bodies may need to change. The working group has considered the legal requirements on the council in terms of functions it has to perform.
22. The Council Plan sets out the council's values and priorities. The council is committed to being open, honest and accountable and also to promote value for money. The report of the working group demonstrates the council's commitment to provide value for money whilst also ensuring that the council can continue to be open, honest and accountable.

Community impact statement

23. Changing the number of councillors in Southwark and the make up of wards could have an impact on the representation of people in the borough. The working group has considered the impact that changing the number will have on the diversity of people who stand for election and serve as members.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Director of Legal Services

24. The report notes that the work of the electoral review working group established by cabinet on 17 March 2015 and the report of the working group.
25. As an executive function, the decision to submit a response rests with the cabinet; however the report notes the decision maker will consider any comments by council assembly before final submission.

Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services

26. The strategic director of finance and corporate services notes the recommendation and that there are no financial implications arising from this.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Electoral Review of Southwark – Report to Cabinet	Southwark Council, 160 Tooley Street London SE1 2QH	Chris Page 020 7525 7259
Link: http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s52557/Report%20Boundary%20Review.pdf		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Electoral Review Working Group – Draft Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Eleanor Kelly, Chief Executive	
Report Author	Chris Page, Head of Cabinet Office	
Version	Final	
Dated	18 June 2015	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Legal Services	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services	Yes	Yes
Cabinet Member	Yes	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	18 June 2015	