

Submission to Local Government Boundary Commission

Special Committee

Date: 25 August 2010

Author: Director of Law and Democratic Services

Parish / Wards Affected: All

Purpose

- To receive and consider a draft Submission by the Council as its contribution to the Local Government Boundary Commission's consultation on Council size being undertaken as part of its Electoral Boundary Review of Swindon.

Recommendation

Special Committee, on behalf of Full Council, is requested to authorise the Director of Law and Democratic Services to

- Submit to the Local Government Boundary Commission the Council's response to the Commission's consultation on Council size, which has been endorsed by the Corporate Governance Review Working Group
- Make such amendments and corrections to the Council's Submission as may be deemed necessary prior to dispatch.

1. Reasons

- 1.1. On 15 June 2010 the Local Government Boundary Commission (the Commission) gave notice that it would undertake a review of Swindon's electoral arrangements since two criteria were met for such a review; namely, a ward with a variance of more than 30% from the average, and 30% of wards having a variance of 10% or more.
- 1.2. As part of the process, outlined by Max Caller, Chair of the Boundary Commission, to all Councillors on 15 July 2010, the first stage of consultation by the Commission seeks evidence on the existing governance structures to build a case for how many councillors the Council needs. A submission on that issue is required by 30 August 2010. Once the Commission has determined how many councillors there should be, the next stage of the consultation will occur from 28 September to 20 December 2010, which relates to the setting of ward boundaries.
- 1.3. Attached as Appendix 1 is the draft submission to be considered by the Corporate Governance Review Working Party and any changes will be reported to Special Committee.

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2. Detail

- 2.1. A review has been conducted by Council Officers of how the Borough's existing governance arrangements operate, the number of committees, their workloads, the Members' representational role and the Member commitment needed to fulfil their obligations.
- 2.2. In addition, a survey was undertaken of all councillors, to which 33 Members responded, which sought to determine actual workloads and provide an understanding of the time being committed to serving the community by being an elected member. The survey revealed that councillors were typically spending between 26 and 37 hours a week on council-related business, although there were some spending far more than that.
- 2.3. Informal discussions were held with some councillors to obtain a steer on the size of Council that would be acceptable. The general impression was that 59 would be realistic. Discussions have been on the basis of the current electoral arrangements of elections by "thirds" and there are no current proposals to change this arrangement.
- 2.4. From the above information a submission has been drafted, which is attached as Appendix 1. The draft submission details the current cabinet-leader form of executive, how the overview and scrutiny function is discharged and how the regulatory committees operate. In addition to this it notes the large number of external appointments for which councillors are required. The draft submission also notes the role played by councillors in their wards as "community champions".
- 2.5. The draft submission notes the large commitment by the Borough to joint working with public sector partners to pool resources under the Section 75 agreements. Consideration is also given to the need for councillors to serve on boards, committees and other governance bodies to provide accountability for this spending.
- 2.6. All of the above supports the case for 59 councillors, which is the *status quo*. No suggestion is made about how any wards should be altered, as this will form the phase two consultation. The deadline for submitting views to the Commission is 30 August 2010.

Alternative Options

- Special Committee could choose not to make a submission and leave the response to Party Groups, individual councillors or third bodies. However, there is no reason why the Council itself should not express a view which may well be more persuasive if it is cross-party.

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Stephen Taylor on (01793) 463012 here or Email staylor@swindon.gov.uk.

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- Special Committee could choose to recommend a reduction in the number of councillors, but that would necessitate a reduction in the number of committees and participation in outside bodies.
- Special Committee could choose to request more councillors, however there would need to be a strong case to show that there was sufficient work for all the members in the governance structures. The final report on Stoke-on-Trent, where there was such a request, shows the difficulty of justifying an increase.

Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- There are no immediate financial or procurement implications of this report that are not covered within existing budgets.

Legal / Human Rights Implications

- All legal and human rights implications are dealt with in the body of the report.

Links to Corporate Plans and Policies (in particular to Swindon 2010 Promises)

- Effective governance arrangements are central to a successful modernised and transformational council being able to deliver the Council's corporate plans and policies.

Consultees

- The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

Background Papers and Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Draft Submission: Electoral Review of Swindon Borough Council: Size and warding arrangements