



## OFFICER REPORT TO COUNCIL

### SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL – ELECTORAL REVIEW COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION

#### **KEY ISSUE/DECISION:**

To approve Surrey County Council's (SCC) submission regarding future council size, as part of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's (LGBCE) electoral review process.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

1. An electoral review is an examination of a council's electoral arrangements. This means:
  - the total number of councillors elected to the local authority;
  - the number and boundaries of wards or divisions for the purposes of the election of councillors;
  - the number of councillors for any ward or division of a local authority; and
  - the name of any ward or division.
2. The LGBCE conducts an electoral review of a council for four reasons:
  - At the request of the local authority; or
  - If the local authority meets the Commission's intervention criteria:
    - a) If one ward has an electorate of +/-30% from the average electorate for the authority
    - b) If 30% of all wards have an electorate of +/-10% from the average electorate for the authority.
  - If sufficient time since the last review (periodic review)
  - As a result of significant structural change
3. SCC is being reviewed as it has been 12 years since the last review in 2010.

#### **PHASES OF THE ELECTORAL REVIEW:**

4. The electoral review has two distinct phases;
  - *Council size*: before they re-draw division boundaries, the Commission will come to a view on the total number of councillors to

be elected to the council in future. The commission will come to a conclusion on council size after hearing the council's (and/or councillors') views during the preliminary phase.

- *Division boundaries*: this is the second phase of the review where the commission will re-draw division boundaries so that they meet certain statutory criteria. The council will have an opportunity to put forward its suggestions for division boundaries as part of the review's consultation process.

#### **DEVELOPING SURREY'S COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION:**

5. A cross-party Member task group has been established to lead SCC's response to the Electoral Review. The task group consists of the following Members:
  - John O'Reilly (Conservative) – Chair
  - Amanda Boote (Residents' Association/Independents)
  - Jonathan Essex (The Green Party)
  - Will Forster (Liberal Democrats)
  - Tim Hall (Conservative)
  - Nick Harrison (Residents' Association/Independents)
  - Robert King (Labour)
  - Hazel Watson (Liberal Democrats)
6. In order to assist the group in formulating a submission, a Member survey was conducted. The purpose of the survey was to gather information on the time commitment required of the councillor role and factors that affect casework, workload and community engagement. The survey was distributed on 25/7/22 and closed on 11/9/22 (7 weeks). 38 Members (47%) responded.

#### **THE SUBMISSION:**

7. The LGBCE provide a template for councils to use when making their submission. The LGBCE asks councils to demonstrate that they have considered different council sizes as part of their submission.
8. SCC's draft submission (as developed by the task group) is attached as **Appendix A**.

#### **SUBMISSION CONCLUSION:**

9. The submission comes to conclusion that the council size should remain at 81 Members. It states:
10. *To conclude, the council has considered the following council size options:*

### **Increase number of councillors**

11. The task group noted that compared to the council's CIPFA 'nearest neighbours' comparable local authorities, SCC has one of the smaller councillor per population ratios. This, combined with the recent trend towards reducing numbers of councillors at other councils and the financial implications of increasing the number of Members, meant that the council did not explore this option in detail.

<b>County</b>	<b>Population size</b>	<b>Councillors</b>	<b>Population ratio</b>	<b>Percentage of population</b>
Cambridgeshire	678,600	61	11,125	1.64%
East Sussex	562,750	50	11,255	2%
Essex (not including Southend and Thurrock)	1,500,000	75	20,000	1.33%
Hampshire (not including Portsmouth and Southampton)	1,400,000	78	17,949	1.28%
Hertfordshire	1,200,000	78	15,385	1.28%
Kent	1,600,000	81	19,753	1.23%
Oxfordshire	725,300	63	11,513	1.59%
<b>Surrey</b>	<b>1,200,000</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>14,815</b>	<b>1.23%</b>
West Sussex	858,852	70	12,269	1.43%

### **Reduce number of councillors**

12. Reducing the number of councillors at a time when the electorate is projected to grow would result in a much larger councillor to resident ratio, which could have a detrimental impact on effective democratic representation. It would also increase the workload of councillors, potentially making it more difficult to attract people from diverse backgrounds to stand for election.

13. It is also felt that reducing the number of councillors is not in line with the council's strategic objective to empower communities. Councillors are integral to the delivery of this ambition, and the council is working with Members to strengthen their roles as community connectors and facilitators.

14. The council also recognises the national trend towards devolution to local authorities. Reducing the number of councillors could impact effective governance at SCC if Members did not have the capacity to take on potentially complex new responsibilities.

**Number of councillors stays the same**

*15. The council therefore recommends to the LGBCE that the council size should be maintained at 81 councillors. This enables the current model of local governance to function effectively while allowing Members enough time to fulfil the range of representational and community leadership roles. It also helps mitigate against the impact of electorate growth whilst ensuring that the council is sufficiently resourced to take on additional responsibilities that could be secured through future devolution opportunities.*

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

That the Council approves the Electoral Review Council Size Submission, ahead of it being sent to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).

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**Sources/background papers:**  
None

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