

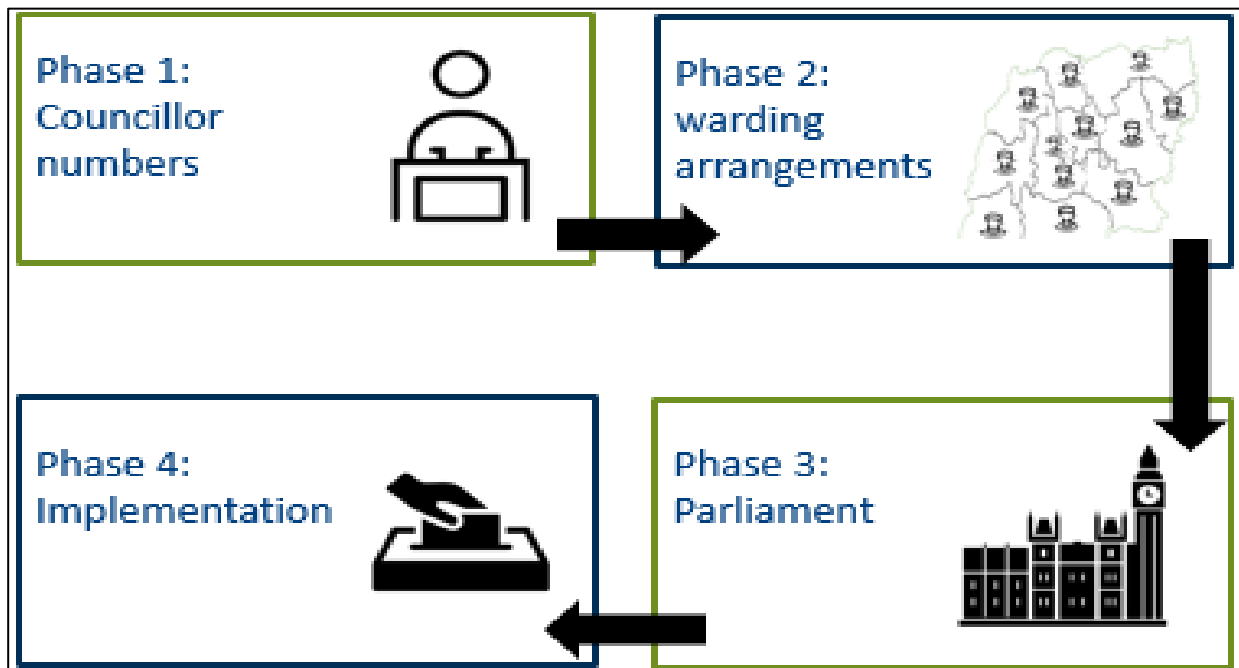
ELECTORAL REVIEW

Council Size Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England



I. BACKGROUND

- I.1. Last Autumn the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) announced an electoral review of Plymouth City Council. The LGBCE's statutory remit is to periodically review all local authority arrangements for local elections. The rolling review period is approximately 20 years and the Councils last electoral review was in 2001.
- I.2. The LGBCE is responsible for the electoral review however, the Council must:
- Prepare and submit a proposal on how many members the Council believes there should be in the future.
 - Prepare electorate forecasts, mapping and details of housing developments: these are expected to be five-year forecasts.
 - Prepare and submit a warding pattern during the first public consultation and respond to draft recommendations by the LGBCE.
- I.3. Additionally, the LGBCE expect the Council to support them in publicising the review, including by sharing details of interested parties and supporting meetings with community and residents' groups.
- I.4. The review will have four distinct parts:



- I.5. We are currently in phase one (councillor numbers). The key output from this phase is the Council's proposal on how many members the Council believes it needs in future, this is known as a council size proposal.
- I.6. Phase two is split into two distinct parts. The first will be a consultation on future warding arrangements, due to run from July to September 2024, during which the Council and other stakeholders will be invited to submit their views on how wards should be arranged. The second stage will be a consultation on the draft ward boundaries proposed by the LGBCE, which will run from January to March 2025.

2. COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION

2.1. The first phase of the review will determine the total number of councillors to be elected to the council in future. The LGBCE will make its judgement on Council Size by considering three broad areas:

- **Governance Arrangements** and how the council takes decisions across the broad range of responsibilities.
- **Scrutiny functions** relating to own decision making and the council's responsibilities to outside bodies.
- **Representational role of councillors in the local community** and how they engage with people, conduct casework and represent the council on local partner organisations.

2.2. Our draft proposal is that our council size should increase to 60 Councillors.

- This proposal is within the 'expected range' established with reference to LGBCE guidance and our CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) benchmarking group.
- We utilised Southampton's successful proposal as a benchmark where the guidance was not fully comprehensive to ensure our proposal is 'well evidenced'.
- LGBCE guidance suggests proposals meeting their two criteria are unlikely to be challenged.

2.3. **The key evidence** to support our case is:

- The increasing demands of our ambitious growth programme.
- Our housing led population forecast, which shows that an increase in Councillor numbers would sustain the current ratio of Councillors to residents ensuring future sustainability.
- The increasing volume and complexity of Councillor case work and time spent in meetings.
- The challenge of maintaining strong connections to a growing and tech savvy community, complicated by the communications preferences of the growing population of older people.
- The need for the council to reflect growing diversity in the city and to ensure a good work/life balance to attract Councillors from all walks of life.
- The relatively elevated levels of deprivation and age-related need across the city.

2.4. The submission has 6 sections and 7 appendices.

- The national and local policy context and how it has changed since the last review
- A profile of the local area including geographical and demographic data, reference to the council's level of ambition and a community pen portrait
- A description of our current council size and governance arrangements
- A description of our current scrutiny arrangements and the extent of partnership working
- A section covering community leadership which draws heavily on the recent member survey to ensure councilor voices are central to our case

- The appendices provide supporting evidence to points referenced in the submission.
- Finally, there is a summary section drawing together all the evidence to support our key arguments and making the final recommendation for a sixty-member solution.

2.5. The LGBCE have asked us to highlight key paragraphs on which our submission is based in a table; this is appended for information.

3. NEXT STEPS

3.1. In November 2022 full Council agreed to undertake a public engagement consultation on the issue of moving from the current electoral cycle of elections to 'whole council' elections once every four years. At its meeting in January 2024, full Council agreed that the electoral cycle consultation would run concurrently with the Boundary Commission (BC) consultation in relation to ward patterns, names and boundaries, as well as agreeing the consultation question proposed by Audit and Governance Committee.

3.2. The BC has now confirmed that it will not conduct its own consultation processes until such time as the Council has concluded its own consultation on electoral cycles and a decision has been made one way or the other by full Council as to whether to make a change. It has also indicated that we will need to submit an addendum report to the Council Size Submission updating the Boundary Commission on the outcome of the electoral cycle consultation and decision.

3.3. In light of the above, Council is now requested to approve the following:

- 1) To acknowledge that it is not possible to run the electoral cycle consultation and BC Ward consultation concurrently, therefore the BC should be informed of the electoral cycle consultation timetable accordingly so that they can propose their own revised timetable for their consultation processes;
- 2) To approve the Council Size Submission for the BC prior to submission on the 25 June, an addendum will be provided to the BC once the outcome of the electoral cycle is known;
- 3) It delegates to Audit and Governance Committee that they will review and finalise the consultation process and task officers with progressing the consultation exercise within an agreed timeframe.

Appendix I: **TABLE OF KEY PARAGRAPHS**

Section	Key Paragraph	Page
Policy Context	Like most upper tier authorities, the most significant governance change Plymouth has embraced was a result of the Local Government Act 2000 when we moved to a Leader and Cabinet model.	3
	The Council actively sought a Level 2 Devolution Deal with government to form a Combined County Authority with Devon and Torbay, however the Council did not proceed as it was felt that the Deal on offer would not provide either the right level of additional funding or powers for Plymouth. As a result, we continue to liaise directly with government and its agencies, building relationships and exploring other avenues to unlock funding and other freedoms and flexibilities; this inevitably involves a high workload for senior Councillors as they manage complex briefs and maintain the necessary networks and stakeholders.	3
	The Council has carried out regular governance reviews since 2002.	4
Local Authority Profile	Plymouth is one of the largest cities on the south coast, with a population of approximately 264,700. With the backdrop of Dartmoor to the north, Plymouth lies between the River Plym to the east and the river Tamar to the west with both rivers flowing into the natural harbour of Plymouth Sound.	5
	Since 1967, the unitary authority of Plymouth includes the once independent towns of Plympton and Plymstock which lie along the east of the river Plym.	6
	The ward with the biggest population is St Peter and the Waterfront (17,700) whilst Plympton Chaddlewood has the smallest population (8,200). Budshead, Compton, Stoke, and Plympton St Mary wards have seen the greatest decline in population between 2011 and 2021. In contrast Plymstock Radford, St Peter and the Waterfront, Southway, and Moor View wards have seen population growth of between 9.7 per cent and 15.8 percent.	7
	Plymouth's population will continue to grow. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates that the city's population will be around 268,882 by 2030,	7
	The University of Plymouth is the UK's 15 th largest university, with more than 18,500 students. There are just under 22,500 people studying at Plymouth's three universities.	8
	The Armed Forces are an integral part of the history and heritage of Plymouth; the city has the second largest number of veterans in England, after Leeds.	8
	The population diversity within Plymouth is very slowly changing. In 2021, 94.9 per cent (248,727) of usual residents in Plymouth identified their ethnic group within the high-level 'White' category, a decrease from 96.1 per cent (246,509) in the 2011 Census. Whilst the proportion of these ethnic groups is only currently one third of those seen in England and Wales (circa 18%), the percentage increase in Plymouth, over the last 10 years is proportionally larger.	8
	There will be a notable change in Plymouth's age structure over the next twenty years. The over 65 age group is predicted to rise by 31.6 per cent between 2021 and 2043 (from 48,900 to 64,372). The over 75 age group is predicted to rise by 60.3 per cent. This rise will see Plymouth's over 75s increase from 22,800 to 36,550. The over 85 age group will see an 83 per cent increase (from 6,400 to 11,746) in 2043. Within this cohort, the number aged 90 or more is projected to double.	8

	The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019 is the current official measure of relative deprivation in England. Analysis of the IMD 2019 for Plymouth reveals that deprivation in Plymouth remains higher than the England average. At a local authority district level Plymouth ranks 64 th (out of 317) using the average score summary measure. This places Plymouth within the 20 per cent most deprived districts in England.	8
	The Plymouth City Survey 2022 found that just over one in five respondents (21%) agreed that the food they buy just doesn't last and they don't have money to buy more. This rises to over 30 per cent in wards such as Drake, Honicknowle and St. Peter and the Waterfront.	9
	Plymothians are proud of their heritage and natural environment and tend to have a strong affiliation with their local area. This is especially true of the wards on the east of the Plym which were outside the City's administration area until 1967. The areas of highest population growth are mostly in the wards with the highest levels of deprivation.	10
Strategic Leadership	Plymouth has 57 elected members, representing 20 wards, elected in thirds. 17 wards have three members, and three wards have two members.	12
	The Cabinet is the primary decision-making body of the Council. It is responsible for policies, plans and strategies which give effect to the budget and policy framework adopted by full Council.	12
	Full council meets six times per year, with extraordinary meetings when required. It approves the most significant decisions which impact upon the Council's Policy Framework and budget.	14
	The council operates several other committees ranging from centralised planning and licensing committees to service specific committees. A full overview of our committee structure is available in Appendix A	15
	Legislation places a limit of ten on the allowable number of portfolio holders/ cabinet members inclusive of the Leader and Deputy. These portfolio areas are determined by the Leader within the Leader's Scheme of Delegation and are summarised below.	15
Accountability	All the Overview and Scrutiny committees are politically proportional and currently are comprised of 11 members. Each committee meets at least quarterly.	19
	The Leader, Shadow Leader and relevant Cabinet Members are actively involved in key citywide partnership boards, the principal ones are listed below. Typically, they meet formally on a quarterly basis, members may attend more frequent meetings on an exceptional or "task and finish" basis.	25
	In addition to the key strategic partnerships there are several service-related improvement boards providing oversight of important council functions. These meet at least quarterly and may meet more frequently as required for the transaction of urgent business.	29
	The Council is a member of a number of national and regional networks used to make the case for Plymouth at a national level, influence policy development and share best practice.	29
	Several Cabinet appointments are made each year to bodies which have a link to the delivery of executive responsibilities.	24

	Plymouth City Council collaborates with various outside bodies to enhance its services and fulfil its responsibilities. These external organisations operate independently from the council and are embedded in local communities.	24
	Overall, there are ninety-five appointments / positions available to be allocated across fifty-seven councillors.	25
Community Leadership / Casework	In order to assist with the development of a robust council size submission and gain insight into councillors' community leadership and casework responsibilities, a member survey was issued to all councillors between 22 March 2024 and 10 April 2024.	33
	Respondents rate the most time-consuming activity (per month) as dealing with casework. Based on median scores the 'typical' councillor spends more than 16 hours a month dealing with casework.	39
	Based on median scores, each month, the 'typical Councillor' spends 6-10 hours in external meetings, 11-15 hours attending full council or council committee meetings, 1-5 hours attending Councillor training or briefing sessions, 6-10 hours attending internal meetings with officers or as part of a working group, 16-20 hours dealing with casework, 6-10 hours meeting with residents, 11-15 hours on other activities necessary to the role, 6-10 hours on party business and 6-10 hours preparing for meetings.	39
	Two thirds of Councillors said they spent more time on council business than they had expected when they were elected, and the majority tended to rely on specific council officers or the PA team for assistance.	40
	Two thirds of Councillors said the amount of time they spent on council business had increased throughout their time as a Councillor.	40
	When asked to identify the aspect of council business that had increased the most; the majority of respondents cited casework (overwhelmingly the most commonly cited), meetings and preparation for them, and correspondence especially via email, text and social media.	40
Summary	Overwhelmingly the key concern for 'backbench' members is the increase in complex councillor case work and commitments related to scrutiny and quasi-judicial Committees. The typical councillor deals with up to 30 casework enquiries per month and for senior councillors this can rise to over 50 casework enquiries per month, many of which will be highly confidential. Casework related to the cost-of-living crisis and housing need is seen as being particularly complex and increasing in volume. Every Councillor is a member of at least one Committee, with many having multiple roles, including serving as trustee or director of an 'outside body'.	43
	Overall members were broadly supportive of three member wards feeling this provided a good level of resilience at ward level when individual councillors were sick or otherwise unavailable for ward level work. The consensus was that the increases in ward population and changing demographics, especially an aging population that would require more support would increase the workload. More councillors were needed to help to fulfil commitments, including scrutiny and other committee meetings. There was a high level of concern about any potential reduction in the overall number of councillors, related to the increasing volume and complexity of casework, Committee work and demand for partnership working as well as the Council's growth ambitions.	43
	To provide a more accurate prediction of future growth we have developed a housing led approach, which compares our existing dwelling stock in 2023, with projected dwelling stock in 2030, considering the major strategic sites that are included in the Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan (JLP). This	43

	produces a slightly higher forecast of 203,976 electors in 2030 and an average of 3,579 electors per councillor. The housing led forecast also has significant implications for the spatial distribution of growth.	
	<p>Within this range we have considered three options:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A decrease in council size to 54 Councillors 2. Maintaining the current council size of 57 Councillors 3. An increase in council size to 60 Councillors 	44
Recommendation	Increasing the current Council size is recommended. Based on our housing led projection of the increase in our electorate in 2030, increasing our council size to 60 members would mean that the average number of electors per councillor would be 3,400. This figure is consistent with the current ratio of 3,451 electors per councillor ensuring future resilience is maintained.	45
	We therefore submit that the proposition that is the best fit to our evidence base and which provides some much-needed additional capacity, is to increase the council size to 60 councillors across 20 wards.	45