

Cheltenham Borough Council
Council – 25 March 2013
Review of council size and electoral cycle

Accountable member	Councillor Jon Walklett, Cabinet Member Corporate Services
Accountable officer	Andrew North, Chief Executive
Ward(s) affected	All
Significant Decision	Yes
Executive summary	<p>At the council meeting on 8 February the following motion was passed:</p> <p><i>“Therefore we request Cabinet to consider moving to a four yearly cycle of Borough Council elections as soon as possible. We also call on the Cabinet to explore how a reduction of councillors can be achieved. In the interests of the Cheltenham tax payers and for the good governance of the town we ask that a report be brought back to Council in March outlining the issues, challenges and timelines of achieving both changes.”</i></p> <p>The Chief Executive has spoken to group leaders along with the cabinet member corporate services. One Legal and the director of commissioning have also been involved in discussions about how such a review could be taken forward. Although it is evident that each of the political groups has a different standpoint there is an agreement that the first stage would be to set up a cabinet member working group which would consider what the council of the future will require in terms of its councillors and democratic process. This will then lead to consideration as to whether a change in electoral cycles and council size will be required to deliver this vision (ie form follows function). The group leaders have also considered issues around the process, timescales and options for changes to council size and electoral cycles and these are set out in an appendix to this report.</p> <p>If council are minded to set up a working group as proposed in this report then it would be imperative to engage all members in discussions and member workshops would thus be set up. The working group would report back to council in July along with a report under s4 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 setting out proposals on the future structure for the council.</p> <p>The expectation would be that the working group will set out their recommendations on the options and if (depending on the result of their deliberations) recommend a letter to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) for council approval setting out the rationale for a review.</p>
Recommendations	Council are asked to:

1. **Set up a cabinet member working group with terms of reference as set out in appendix 3**
2. **Request the working group to report back to council on 22 July setting out their findings and if appropriate a draft letter to the LGBC.**

Financial implications	<p>There are no financial implications arising from this report.</p> <p>Contact officer: Des Knight, Temporary Accountant GO Shared Services</p> <p>des.knight@cheltenham.gov.uk, 01242 264124</p>
Legal implications	<p>There are prescriptive procedures for dealing with electoral reviews and reviews of electoral cycles, arising primarily from the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 and Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Whilst the final decision in respect of an electoral review rests with the Local Government Boundary Commission and is brought in to effect by statutory instrument, the final decision in respect of the electoral cycle is made by a special meeting of Council (on a majority of at least two thirds of those present).</p> <p>Contact officer: peter.lewis@tewkesbury.gov.uk, 01684 272012</p>
HR implications (including learning and organisational development)	<p>The potential resource issues during the review have been addressed within the report. The review will presumably consider the impact of any changes on staff who currently support Councillors and elections. As these changes are likely to impact on the very same staff who are being asked to support the review there may be an engagement or morale issues which will need to be carefully considered and addressed.</p> <p>Contact officer: Richard.hall@cheltenham.gov.uk, 07801123276</p>
Key risks	As outlined in appendix 1
Corporate and community plan Implications	<p>The review has been identified within the council's corporate strategy for 2013/14. Effective governance arrangements are a key component for the delivery of the council's corporate objectives.</p>
Environmental and climate change implications	

1. Background

- 1.1** Council on 8 February considered whether the council should reduce the number of councillors and also the frequency of elections. In response to this request the group leaders along with the cabinet member corporate services have spoken to the Chief Executive to consider the options and implications of undertaking such a review. The council has a number of options it could consider and these are set out in appendix 2.
- 1.2** There was a view that the council was in danger of identifying a solution without fully thinking through how Cheltenham Borough Council might operate in the future. As more services are delivered through different patterns of delivery and all public sector bodies are working more collaboratively and the government's drive for community budgets it is important to align the council's thinking about what the the Council should be like to maximise its effectiveness and what this means for councillors and the democratic process. The role of the councillor as a community leader will (for example) become even more important in these new and more complex delivery and partnership arrangements and consideration needs to be given as to what this means in terms of workloads for councillors and for the cabinet.
- 1.3** It is proposed therefore that a working group be established to consider the issues and work with the Chief Executive to ensure alignment with a review of the officer culture, processes and structures which he is leading and is calling "Cheltenham Futures". This programme is in recognition that we have made significant progress on commissioning services from other providers with the result that the directly employed portion of the council's business employs around half as many people as three years ago. The Chief Executive is aiming to rationalise the senior management structure and right size the organisation to the requirements of a commissioned organisation, to deliver further efficiency savings and to sustain an organisational culture that will deliver the future vision and outcomes of the council.
- 1.4** The terms of reference for this group are set out in appendix 3. It is proposed that as this is a cabinet member working group that it is chaired by the cabinet member corporate services but each of the group leaders or their nominees are represented on the group.
- 1.5** In developing the thoughts the working group will hold a member workshop(s) to ensure that all members are engaged in the debate. It is anticipated that there will be a phased approach to the work, and once consideration and clarity is established on the functions for the council then it will be easier to consider whether the current council size and electoral cycle support or hinder these functions. It will also enable members to give further consideration as to the way in which the council wishes to engage in neighbourhoods and how these can be aligned to councillor representation.
- 1.6** Group leaders are minded that if there were to be changes to electoral cycles or council size then these should be implemented as quickly as possible so would ideally look to the May 2016 elections. Given the timescales for the LGBCE review they are mindful that the working group will need to prepare a report for the council on 22 July setting out their findings. Should they recommend that the council size is reviewed they will also present a draft letter for the LGBCE setting out the rationale for the review. One of the first tasks therefore of the working group will be to set out its workplan and how it will achieve this deadline.

2. Reasons for recommendations

- 2.1** Setting up a working group will enable a considered debate on this important issue for the council. The reasons for changing the existing election cycle and or the size of the council needs to be considered carefully and within the context of the strategic direction of the council.
- 2.2** It was also evident that in initial discussions on the matter that there are divergent views about

whether the council should change its electoral cycle and council size. This is such an important matter to the council and the people of Cheltenham it requires careful consideration and any final recommendations on the way forward ideally should have cross party support as it will impact on all current and future councillors.

3. Alternative options considered

3.1 In discussing the options the group leaders and cabinet member corporate services were mindful of other options such as a principal area boundary review and also the potential of unitary councils at some future date. It was agreed that the working group when discussing the options consider them within this national and local context which may impact on the timing of the review.

3.1 Consultation and feedback

3.2 As outlined in the report, the views of the group leaders were sought in developing this report back to council.

4. Performance management –monitoring and review

4.1 The working group will set their own work plan and it will be incumbent on working group members to feedback to their individual groups. There will also be a member workshop so that all members are able to engage in the process.

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Appendices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Risk Assessment 2. Review of Council size and electoral cycle options 3. Terms of reference for cabinet member working group
Background information	n/a

The risk				Original risk score (impact x likelihood)			Managing risk				
Risk ref.	Risk description	Risk Owner	Date raised	Impact 1-5	Likelihood 1-6	Score	Control	Action	Deadline	Responsible officer	Transferred to risk register
1.	If there is no cross party consensus to any recommendations arising from the working group it may make it difficult to implement changes	Andrew North	March 2013	3	3	9	R	The working group will enable members to explore the options and consider the outcomes and impacts of any changes	July 2013	Andrew North	Corporate risk
2	If the review is not well structured it could result in significant officer time	Andrew North	March 2013	3	3	9	R	Workplan and resource requirements should be agreed at first meeting of the working group Work would be on a phased basis so it can be proportionate to outcomes.	April 2013	Jane Griffiths	Commissioning
3	If the public do not understand what is being proposed because the council and political parties have failed to communicate effectively then there is a reputation risk to the council	Andrew North	March 2013	3	3	9	R	Working group to agree key messages Group leaders to put out joint press statement	March 2013	Jane Griffiths	Corporate

Explanatory notes

Impact – an assessment of the impact if the risk occurs on a scale of 1-5 (1 being least impact and 5 being major or critical)

Likelihood – how likely is it that the risk will occur on a scale of 1-6

(1 being almost impossible, 2 is very low, 3 is low, 4 significant, 5 high and 6 a very high probability)

Control - Either: Reduce / Accept / Transfer to 3rd party / Close