

## **Review of council size and electoral cycle**

### **The options.**

- 1. Option 1 - Do nothing with regards to Council size or electoral cycle**
  - 1.1 Councillors may decide that they do not wish to change either the Council size or the electoral cycle. However councillors could consider what their roles are in the future now that the Council is a commissioning council and that management structures and service delivery have and will change. They could consider the optimum size of the cabinet and other committees and the roles that members play. This may result in a consideration in reductions in size of cabinet or committee membership and also could inform a review of the member allowance scheme. In terms of officer and member resource this would be the easiest review to undertake as it could easily be accommodated into workplans. It would require a few member seminars and working groups to agree the necessary changes to the constitution and then submit findings into the next member allowance panel. Such a review would involve all members, the CEX, the democratic services team, Onelegal and a nominated officer to support the review process. It would not however produce the level of savings anticipated by members nor necessarily create a Council which is fit for purpose in a commissioning world nor enable the policy development stability which arises from four yearly cycles.
  
- 2. Option 2 - Change the electoral cycle without changing the council size**
  - 2.1 Under the Local Government and Public Improvement to Health Act 2007 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011) a district council in England that is subject to a scheme of elections by halves or by thirds may resolve that it is to be subject instead to the scheme for whole-council elections. The Council would need to consult as appropriate, make a formal resolution and publicise the scheme and notify the electoral commission. The Council would continue with two member wards unless the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) were requested to undertake a review to single member wards (see option 5 below). The first election under the new arrangements would be in whatever year the Council resolves to hold it, but it cannot be in the same year as a county council election. Given that many of the elections are now combined elections it is hard to estimate the savings that would be made by this approach. The Council would save some money and this is estimated as £100k over a four year cycle. This is based on a single election costing £160K as opposed to £130K every two years. Such a resolution would not require much member input apart from the debate at Council and officer input would be limited to CEX, elections team, Onelegal and the nominated officer drafting the report.
  
- 3. Option 3 - Change of Council size with current electoral arrangements**
  - 3.1 The Council could ask for the LGBCE to undertake an electoral review requesting a review of Council size which would result in ward boundary changes. This review would be based on the current electoral arrangements and would look to create two member wards. If however the

Council had already committed to a resolution to a four yearly election cycle then the review would consider single member wards or a mix of single, two and three member wards depending on warding arrangements and Council size. This along with option four would be the most intentensive of the options as it would require the council to fully consider the Council size, and then the warding arrangements. A reduction in the number of councillors would also require the Council to review the size of cabinet and committees and the political balance scheme. There would need to be a phased consultation process firstly on council size and then on warding arrangements. Such a review would require input from all members, the CEX, democratic services, Onelegal, elections team, planning team, GIS officer, communications team, strategy and engagement team, and a nominated officer to support the review process.

**3.2** The LGBCE will take note of submissions from the local authority and others in arriving at their recommendations. There is no guarantee however that the option as put forward by the Council to LGBCE would be accepted as their preferred solution.

**3.3** If the Council was to reduce the number of councillors then the members allowance panel would need to meet and assess the impact on the work of councillors both as ward councillors and cabinet and committee members. If such a review considered that the changes had not impacted on workloads and responsibility and allowances were kept at the same level then there would be savings. Each councillor is currently paid a basic allowance of £5066 and cabinet members get an additional allowance of £12930, so any reductions could result in savings particularly if combined with four yearly elections. If for example the council reduced to minimum number of councillors ie 30 members and a cabinet of five the savings would be £73,590 per annum.

#### **4. Option 4 - Change electoral cycle and council size**

**4.1** If the council were minded to undertake both reviews then the resolution to change the electoral cycle would need to be undertaken prior to the formal commencement of the review by the LGBCE. As such a resolution is within the remit of the Council it could be scheduled as a decision once the commencement date has been notified by the LGBCE. The savings would be as outlined in options two and three above and there may be a slight increase in the savings accruing from election costs resulting from reduction in RO fees and printing costs.

#### **5. Option 5 - Change the electoral cycle and create single member wards with no change to council size**

**5.1** The Council could make the resolution for a change to the electoral cycle as set out in 2.1 above and then request the LGBCE to undertake an electoral review for single member wards. This would be based on the current council size but would require ward boundary changes to accommodate the single member wards. This review would not save any more money than outlined in 2.1 above. However such a review would involve all members, the CEX, democratic services, Onelegal, elections team, planning team, GIS officer, communications team, strategy and engagement team, and a nominated officer to support the review process. As members had not raised this within the original motion or debate it is not thought that this would be an appropriate option

to pursue as it would not achieve all the outcomes which members desired.

## **6. Timelines and resource requirements for options three and four.**

- 6.1** The LGBCE indicates that most reviews last around 18 months and it is anticipated that if a request was submitted this year then it could be accommodated in 2014 workplans but the council needs to recognise that the LGBCE need to prioritise their reviews. They recognise that the review is a project, on top of the normal workloads of a Council but also advise that the most successful reviews are those where members and officers are fully engaged and resources are committed to supporting the review. The phasing of the work means that there will be periods of intensity over the 18 month period.
- 6.2** If members are minded to request a review then the Council would need to write to the LGBCE setting out the rationale as to why a review would be required. Their priority would be to those areas where there is electoral inequality so it would be important for the council to put forward a compelling case. There would therefore be a need for members to meet to consider the case for a reduction in Council size and how it would support economic and efficient local government and support the needs of the local communities.
- 6.3** In drafting this report officers have spoken to other councils who have recently gone through similar exercises. They have indicated that at times the workloads are intense. Planning officers will need to be involved to give an indication of levels of growth so that estimates may be made about growth on the electoral register and that these can be captured within any proposed ward boundaries to ensure that there is electoral equality across ward boundaries in the future. The Council will need to have access to good GIS support as they are able to assist in mapping numbers of electors and officers involved in devising potential ward boundaries indicate that this can be several weeks of intensive work.
- 6.4** It is anticipated that the elections team may require some additional resource to assist with the review as the Council will be implementing individual electoral registration in 2014 and this is already likely to stretch the teams current officer resource. It should also be noted that the call on GIS support (which is intended to be shared with FODDC from April) may also be stretched and we may need to consider whether additional support is required or what other work could be delayed in order to support the project. As members will be well aware the planning resource is already stretched and there will be a requirement for them to support estimates of electoral growth which needs to be detailed to ward level. Likewise the democratic services team and Onelegal will need to provide support to the project and consideration will need to be given as to how this is accommodated within other workplans. It would be prudent to assume that the Council may need to think about backfill or overtime for some teams and set aside an appropriate budget.
- 6.5** In beginning to consider proposals for the size of the Council, members will need to consider the governance model already adopted by the Council and the way in which the decision making process is operated. This includes

arrangements for the cabinet, overview and scrutiny, regulatory functions and the duties and time commitments currently expected of Councillors. Members will need to consider how this supports “Cheltenham Futures” when services may be delivered by other providers and the Council has more of a community leadership and partnership role.

- 6.6** In providing this evidence it will be necessary for the Council to articulate the current operations and the likely affect that a reduction in elected representatives may have on the electorate and the Council as a whole. In considering its appropriate Council size members must give consideration to the remits of the cabinet member portfolios and the time commitment required to undertake these duties, it must then give consideration to the cabinet size and the number of members that are required to effectively hold the cabinet to account via overview and scrutiny and their associated task groups. The Council also has regulatory committees and consideration will need to be with a smaller council as to whether these committees should be reduced in size. The LGBCE have indicated that they would not normally recommend a Council size of less than 30 councillors.