


7 December 2023

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| Report of | Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer | Author | Andrew Weavers  282213 |
| Title | Electoral Review of the City of Colchester | | |
| Wards affected | All | | |

1. Executive Summary

1.1 This report requests Full Council to approve the submission of an evidence base document to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England as part of the first phase of the electoral review of the City of Colchester.

2. Recommended Decisions

2.1 To approve the submission of the evidence base document attached to this report to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

2.2 To note that the Council's political groups will be making their own submissions on council size to the Commission.

2.3 The Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer be delegated to make any necessary changes to the evidence base document following its submission to the Commission following consultation with the Leader of the Council and Group Leaders.

3. Background Information

3.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body responsible for determining the electoral arrangements of local authorities across England. Each year, the Commission calculates the level of electoral inequality arising in each local authority area to establish whether there is a need for an electoral review.

3.2 Electoral inequality arises if electors are either over or under-represented by their councillor(s) when compared with average levels of representation across the authority. Under the criteria adopted by the Commission, either of the following conditions are considered to warrant a review if the imbalance is unlikely to be corrected by foreseeable changes to the electorate within a reasonable period:

- Any local authority with an electoral division or ward that has an electoral variance of 30% or over. This mean a division or ward having 30% more or fewer electors per councillor than is average for the council as a whole.
- Any local authority where more than 30% of divisions or wards have an electoral variance of over 10% from the average for that authority.

3.3 In October 2022 the Commission wrote to the City Council stating that the electoral data supplied to the Commission (on 1 December 2021) indicated that:

- 6 of the 17 (35%) electoral wards had a variance of greater than 10%
- One of the electoral wards had a variance of over 30%

and accordingly, the Commission would be commencing an electoral review of the City of Colchester in 2023. The proposals contained in the last review of Colchester came into effect in May 2016.

- 3.4 The first stage of an electoral review is for the Commission to invite the Authority and its political groups to agree proposals regarding Council size. This comprises the number of councillors to be elected to the Council. For Colchester this is currently 51 councillors. This figure was agreed by the Commission as part of the previous electoral review and was reduction from 60. The size of the Council must be divisible by 3 to reflect the fact that the Council elects by thirds.
- 3.5 The Commission's Council Size Submission Guidance states that broadly speaking a view will be taken on council size for an Authority by considering three areas:
- **Strategic Leadership** – how many councillors are needed to give strategic leadership and direction to the Authority?
 - **Accountability**
 - Scrutiny – how many councillors are needed to provide scrutiny to the Authority?
 - Regulatory – how many councillors are needed to meet the regulatory requirements of the Authority?
 - Partnerships – how many councillors are required to manage partnerships between the local authority and other organisations?
 - **Community Leadership** – how the representational role of councillors in the local community is discharged and how they engage with people and conduct casework.
- 3.6 The Commission aims to ensure that its recommendations remain relevant for the long term and will recommend a number that delivers effective and convenient local government well after the completion of the review.
- 3.7 The areas mentioned above are addressed in the completed evidence base document attached to this report which is a Commission template. This document has been informed by:
- Briefings given by the Commission to all Councillors, Group Leaders and officers;
 - Meetings with Group Leaders; and
 - Feedback from a Councillor survey.
- 3.8 Discussions have been on-going between the political groups on Council size, but no consensus has been possible. Consequently, Full Council is not being requested to agree a council size submission on behalf of the Authority, instead each of the political groups will make their own submission to the Commission on council size.
- 3.9 The Council Size Submission is required to be evidence based and the attached document provides evidence in response to the issues relating to governance which the Commission will consider as part of the review.

3.10 The second stage of the review will be a public consultative process by the Commission regarding proposed warding patterns. This will commence in June 2024 and which will result in whole council elections in May 2026 on the revised warding pattern.

4. Proposals

4.1 That the attached evidence base document be agreed and submitted to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

4.2 If following the documents' submission to the Commission any amendments are required the Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer be delegated to make any necessary amendments following consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Group Leaders.

5. Strategic Plan References

5.1 The electoral review forms part of the council's governance arrangements which in turn forms parts of the Council's commitment to delivering modern services for a modern city which underpins the Council's Strategic Plan vision.

6. Publicity Considerations

6.1 Details of the review process will be published both on the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and the Council's websites.

7. Consultation Considerations

7.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England will, as part of the second phase of the review undertake a formal consultation with the public and stakeholders regarding warding patterns which will commence in June 2024.

8. Financial, Community Safety, Health and Safety, Risk Management, Equality, Diversity, Human Rights and Environment and Sustainability Implications

8.1 No direct implications.