

Committee: Standards and General Purposes Committee

Date: 14 March 2019

Wards: All

Subject: Merton Electoral Review

Lead officer: Ged Curran, Chief Executive

Lead member: Councillor Stephen Alambritis, Leader of the Council

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Recommendations:

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1. The Committee is asked to agree the Council's draft council size submission to the Boundary Commission, set out in Appendix 1.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The Committee is asked to discuss and comment on the attached draft council size submission.
- 1.2. The last electoral review for Merton took place in 1999 which increased the number of councillors from 57 to 60 and resulted in the current pattern of 20 three-member electoral wards.
- 1.3. This report deals with stage one of the electoral review which is to agree the council's submission on council size and the forecast electorate for 2025. Following review by the Boundary Commission this evidence will be used to help determine future warding arrangements to be implemented in time for the next local elections in 2022.
- 1.4. The submission considers the effectiveness of current governance, scrutiny and representational arrangements as well as factors likely to impact on councillor workloads in future. It recommends reducing the number of councillors from 60 to 57 to maintain the effectiveness of current governance and partnership arrangements and to support the councillors' representational role in their wards.
- 1.5. The submission is supported by population projections showing that a reduction in the number of councillors from 60 to 57 would increase the electoral ratio from 2,529 electors per councillor in 2018 to 2,858 electors per councillor in 2025.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is undertaking a review of the London Borough of Merton's electoral arrangements. The outcome of the review will be implemented for the May 2022 council elections.
- 2.2. The review was initiated in October 2018 through a briefing to all councillors. The preliminary stage of the review will determine the future council size (the total number of councillors). The provisional decision on council size by the Boundary Commission will then inform the next stage of the review, which

will consider the size and numbers of wards, ward boundaries and the number of councillors to represent each ward.

- 2.3. This is a periodic electoral review as the last review of Merton Council was completed in 1999.
- 2.4. By the end of the preliminary stage of the review, the Boundary Commission expects the council and/or its political groups, to present the Commission with a case for a council size that they believe is right for their authority.
- 2.5. The Boundary Commission will form its view about the right council size for an authority by considering the three following areas:
 - the governance arrangements of the council and how it takes decisions across the broad range of its responsibilities;
 - the council's scrutiny functions relating to its own decision making and the council's responsibilities to outside bodies;
 - the representational role of councillors in the local community and how they engage with people, conduct casework and represent the council on local partner organisations.
- 2.6. The attached draft submission presents evidence in relation to each of those criteria and its proposal to reduce the number of councillors from the current number of 60 to 57. The Committee is asked to consider and comment on the draft submission.

Next steps

- 2.7. The deadline for council size submissions to the Boundary Commission is 29 March 2019.
- 2.8. The Boundary Commission will carry out two phases of public consultation. The first round of consultation, to be launched on 23 April 2019, will ask for proposals on new ward boundaries. The Boundary Commission will use responses to that consultation to draw up draft recommendations for new ward boundaries across the borough. They will hold a second round of consultation, to be launched on 1 October 2019, on those proposals asking for comments on the proposals and receiving alternative proposals.
- 2.9. The Boundary Commission will publish its final recommendations on 11 February 2020.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. Standards and General Purposes Committee is invited to discuss and comment on the draft submission.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. The Boundary Commission held a briefing for all councillors in October 2018.
- 4.2. The Leader of the Council has met with all Group Leaders to discuss the council size proposal.
- 4.3. The Merton Park Ward Independent Residents Group are in support of the Councils draft submission.

- 4.4. The Liberal Democrat Group have provided the following response: “The Liberal Democrat Group have reviewed the evidence and arguments put forward by the council recommending 57 councillors. We believe that the evidence put forward is comprehensive and reasonably robust and we support the analysis of the issues. However, on the basis of the report’s own analysis and further reasons to be set out in our own direct submission to the Boundary Commission, we feel this supports retaining 60 councillors.”
- 4.5. It is anticipated that the Conservative Group will also make a direct submission to the Boundary Commission, proposing a significant reduction in the number of councillors.

5 TIMETABLE

Stage	Review Stage	Council	LGBCE	Key Dates
Preliminary	Initial meetings	Leader, Chief Executive	Chair, Chief Executive	22 October 2018
	Officer Briefings	Council officers involved in review	Review Manager, Review Officer	31 October 2018
	Group Leader Briefings	Council group leaders	Lead Commissioner, Review Manager, Review Officer	
	Full Council Briefings	All councillors	Lead Commissioner, Review Manager, Review Officer	
	Community group Briefings	-	Review Manager, Review Officer	TBC
Council Size	Develop council size proposal	Council/groups	-	October 2018 – March 2019
	Commission Meeting – council size decision	-	Commission	16 April 2019
Warding patterns	Develop warding/division patterns proposal	Council / groups / public	-	23 April 2019 – 1 July 2019
	Commission Meeting – draft recommendations	-	Commission	17 September 2019

	Consultation on draft recommendations	Council / groups / public	-	1 October 2019 – 9 December 2019
	Commission Meeting – final recommendations	-	Commission	21 January 2020
	Final recommendations published	-	Commission	11 February 2020
	Order laid	-	Commission	April 2020
	Implementation	Council	-	2022

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. Currently, the members allowance budget covers allowances for 60 councillors. A reduction in the number of councillors to 57 would result in a decreased budget requirement of £26,000 based on the current allowances.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is a statutory body accountable to Parliament that conducts reviews of local authority electoral arrangements in England. It is independent of government and political parties, and is directly accountable to the Speaker's Committee of the House of Commons. Its statutory obligations are set out in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.
- 7.2. The Boundary Commission must from time to time conduct a review of the area of each council and recommend whether a change should be made to the electoral arrangements for that area.
- 7.3. In conducting a review the Boundary Commission must prepare and publish draft recommendations and before publishing such draft recommendations may consult such persons as it considers appropriate. Final recommendations will follow and are implemented by way of order made by statutory instrument.
- 7.4. In making recommendations the Boundary Commission must have regard to:
- 7.4.1 The need to secure that the ratio of the number of local government electors to the number of members of the London Borough council to be elected is, as nearly as possible, the same in every electoral area of the Council;
- 7.4.2 The need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities and in particular
- (i) The desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable, and
 - (ii) The desirability of fixing boundaries so as not to break any local ties and
 - (iii) the need to secure effective and convenient local government.
- 7.4.3 The Commission must have regard to any change in the number or distribution of local government electors in the area which is likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the making of the recommendations.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. The framework for carrying out the boundary review is set by the Boundary Commission for England and the purpose of the review is to ensure electoral equality in terms of representation for all Merton residents, a fundamental democratic principle.

- 8.2. The submission will be available to all residents through the Council's web site and on the Boundary Commission website. Community groups and individual residents will be able to make their own formal submissions on future warding arrangements should they wish or to comment on the Boundary Commission's recommendations.
- 8.3. The second stage of the review will seek to make adjustments to ward boundaries that reflect local communities and ensure that the numbers of electors in each ward are approximately equal in terms of the elector / councillor ratio.
- 8.4. Following the Boundary Commission Review the Council will need to consider changes to Polling Districts and Stations which will address more specific access issues. In addition analysis has identified that electoral registration is lower in certain areas and groups and specific activity will be carried out to address this going forward to ensure that all groups are encouraged to register and take part in the electoral process.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. There are no risk management or health and safety implications arising from this report.

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

- Merton Electoral Review – draft submission from Merton Council

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 12.1. None