

London Borough of Harrow Electoral Review 2018

CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL GROUP SUBMISSIONS – COUNCIL SIZE

Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England

22 June 2018



INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Council Size Submission by the Conservative Political Group on the Council

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In late 2017, the Local Government Boundary Commission informed the Council of its intention to conduct an electoral review of the Borough. Councillors were briefed by representatives of the Commission on 19 February 2018, since when members of the Conservative Group have been discussing the options for the future size of the Council and its warding arrangements. This submission represents our analysis of the position by reference to the Commission's review criteria and our view on an appropriate size of the Council to be implemented in 2022.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Harrow is an Outer London Borough in northwest London and approximately ten miles from central London. Covering 50 square kilometres (20 square miles) Harrow is the 12th largest borough in Greater London in terms of area. Historically, Harrow is renowned for its world-famous school and the former country retreat (now a hotel) of W.S. Gilbert of Gilbert & Sullivan fame. The former RAF Bentley Priory (now a museum) was the nerve centre for the Battle of Britain in World War II. There are several former villages within Harrow, including Harrow on the Hill and Pinner. Harrow is one of London's most attractive suburban areas and primarily a dormitory residential suburban area, with a relatively small amount of land and buildings devoted to employment and industrial activity when compared with other Outer London Boroughs. Harrow has a high proportion of green space and just over a quarter of the area (over 1,300 hectares) consists of open space. The Green Belt within Harrow covers just over a fifth of the borough's total area.
- 2.2 Harrow has one of the most ethnically diverse populations nationally. 69 per cent of Harrow's residents were from minority ethnic groups in 2011, where ethnic minority is defined as all people who are non White-British. Nationally, Harrow has the fourth highest proportion of residents from minority ethnic groups (ONS 2011 Census). Greater London Authority (GLA) Diversity Indices rank Harrow seventh highest nationally for ethnic diversity and second for religious diversity.
- 2.3 The last electoral review of Harrow was in 1999 and therefore reconsideration of the appropriateness of our electoral arrangements is overdue. We have had discussions between the two political groups formed following the election on 3 May 2018, but we have not been able to reach a consensus on our initial views about the appropriate size of the Council. It has therefore been decided that each political group will make its own submission to the Commission.

3. PROPOSAL

- 3.1 The Council operates a Leader and Cabinet model of governance. The Leader of the Council took office on 24 May 2018 and he has appointed 8 other Members to his Cabinet. The Cabinet has four “advisory panels” (Corporate Parenting, Traffic & Road Safety, Major Developments and Business Consultative) whereby non-executive Members can be involved in formulating recommendations for executive decisions and monitoring particular areas of service. These tend to meet quite infrequently. We have continued with the scrutiny arrangements which were in place in the previous Administration; these include an Overview and Scrutiny Committee with two sub-committees, one which focuses on Performance and Finance and the other on Health and Social Care. There are a limited number of regulatory and other committees which deal with non-executive functions outside the remit of Cabinet; these are the Planning Committee, Licensing and General Purposes Committee, the Governance, Audit, Risk Management & Standards Committee, and the Pension Fund Committee (and Pension Board with a separate statutory function). The Council also has the required Health and Wellbeing Board in partnership with the CCG. Members are also involved in sitting on licensing panels determining applications for premises licences and taking related enforcement decisions. This is a fairly standard structure in Leader and Cabinet authorities and, apart from the Cabinet advisory panels, there are very few meetings which are held for consultative purposes only. Of course, there are some specialist committees, such as joint overview and scrutiny committees across boroughs, and also a number of informal briefing/planning meetings which serve to prepare business for formal meetings, but this has always been part of best practice whatever the governance arrangements.
- 3.2 Since the last electoral review of Harrow Borough in 1999, the Council, indeed local government generally, has been through many changes which have altered the way we work and engage with local residents. The key changes which are relevant to the Commission’s review are as follows:

Functions of the Local Authority

- 3.3 The Council’s responsibilities have changed significantly since the last electoral review. In particular, the role of the education authority has been transformed with many schools no longer part of the local “maintained” sector, having converted to academies and reporting now to the Education Funding Agency. Councillors are now much less involved in decisions about the operation of schools. This is reflected in their representation on school governing bodies where the number of elected Members serving in that role has declined significantly. Also, many services have been outsourced and where, at one time, councillors were involved in operational and management decisions on those services, they now only have a role approving strategies, contracts and business plans, many of these being decisions taken annually or on longer timescales.

Workforce Issues

3.4 The Council's (non-schools) workforce has declined from 2,851 in the year 2009 to 2,029 at present, a reduction of almost 30%. In 2010, we had five Corporate Directors in the organisation; this reduced to four in 2014 and now to three in 2018. The Council has adjusted to both changes in the role of the local authority and considerable budget pressures. In the same fashion, councillors have had to adopt different approaches to their engagement with decision-making, with less involvement in operational decisions and adopting more strategic roles.

Governance Arrangements and Meetings

3.5 Part of the argument for the reform of local government through the introduction of executive arrangements via the Local Government Act 2000, was that decision-making was too diffuse and long-winded. The numerous committees which had characterised council governance were to be replaced by a more streamlined system where a small group of councillors (the executive or cabinet) would take the key Member-level decisions, with the remainder charged with a limited range of specialist roles (planning, licensing, standards, etc.) and/or holding the executive to account through a scrutiny process. As expected, the demands on Councillors to be in meetings at the Civic Centre have declined significantly. The electronic listing of committees and other bodies operated by the Council in 1999 suggests there were 50 or so of these; the equivalent listing for the present day numbers less than 30. A decade ago, there were 280 meetings recorded on the Council's online calendar/listing of meetings involving elected members; in 2017-18, there were only 129 in the equivalent listing.

3.6 It is clear, therefore, that the Council has significantly reduced the demand on Councillors to attend meetings during a period when our total number of Members has remained at the same level of 63. The following table analyses the meetings involved in the key committees/bodies of the Council's decision-making structure:

Committee	No. of Elected Members	Frequency of Meetings
Cabinet	9	11 times a year
Cabinet Advisory Panels <i>(incls.non-executive councillors)</i>	between 4 and 7 Members on each	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One panel meets four times a year• Two panels meet three times a year• One meets twice a year
Governance, Audit, Risk Management and Standards	7	5 times a year
Health & Wellbeing Board	5	7 times a year
Licensing and General Purposes Committee	15	Once a year – Members serve as a "pool" for licensing panels

Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its two sub-committees	9 5 (on each sub)	7 times a year The two sub-committees meet three times a year
Planning Committee	7	12 times a year
Pension Fund Committee	4	4 times a year
Pension Board	1	4 times a year

3.7 Multiplying the number of elected Members on each committee by the frequency of meetings, generates a total number of expected “attendances” of 267 each year. This implies an average attendance of less than seven meetings per year for each of the 54 non-executive councillors. Of course, this is simply the core group of committees and there will be a number of other meetings councillors will need to attend (eg. the ad hoc Licensing Panel hearings and many informal meetings). However, it does provide a clear indication that the burden of time in formal committees is less than it used to be.

Councillors’ Role within Scrutiny

3.8 Scrutiny has been a key part of the Non-Executive Members’ work since the last Boundary Review. In 2005 in addition to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, there were 5 sub-committees. There are now currently only 2. Furthermore, the frequency and number of scrutiny meetings have been drastically reduced. This is in addition to the decreasing number of Scrutiny Reviews taking place. This is in part due to the reduction in Scrutiny Officers at the Council. The Council used to employ several designated Scrutiny officers whereas now there are none and Scrutiny work has been merged into the Policy team.

Democratic Services and Members’ Support

3.9 The management of elected members comes under the remit of Democratic Services. This, like many other services, has faced cut backs owing to the changing nature and role of the Council. These reductions look likely to continue with proposals being put forward. This would also suggest a need for a reduction in Councillors.

The Representational Role of Councillors

3.10 This is an important part of a Member’s work and clearly it would be unwise to go forward with residents to councillor ratios which might create pressures in delivering an acceptable service. However, there have been significant changes in the how Councillors carry out this work over recent years. When the last review took place it was commonplace for casework to arise from face-to-face exchange at a surgery session in a local library or via a physical letter. This created a lot of work in just organising, duplicating, forwarding and tracking the casework. Now the vast majority of casework is now initiated online through email, social media or websites. Computer applications to store, track and organise casework have significantly lightened the burden of

this work. Equally, the availability of online options for residents to make enquiries of Council staff and to pursue issues, means that some residents do not as readily resort to involving their local councillors.

Group Offices

- 3.11 It is also important to note that the amount of support which members and Council groups receive has also been significantly reduced owing to both an increase in technology and the cuts to budgets. The 2016/17 Council budget cut funding to Political Office Support by £100,000 which roughly equates to £1,500 per Councillor. This has seen the number of group office staff substantially decrease. A reduction in the number of Councillors would result in the remaining Councillors being better supported to deal with casework.

Electoral Equality - Comparisons with Other Boroughs

- 3.12 The information available on the Commission's website includes the electors-to-councillor ratios for many authorities (see appendix). There is, of course, substantial variation between authorities and particularly between types of authority. However, given that the ratio for Harrow is currently 2,863, it should be noted that only eight of 32 London Boroughs have ratios below this level and all of the five London Boroughs in our comparator authority group have higher levels. In the electoral reviews conducted in London Boroughs over the last few years, it appears from the documents on the Commission's website that some of these ratios are anticipated to rise even to levels as high as 5,537 by the year 2021 (cf. Southwark Council's submission) and others (Bexley, Croydon) to over 4,000 by the year 2020.
- 3.13 It appears, therefore, that there is substantial headroom, including by reference to the Commission's decisions, for a reduction in the number of Councillors and therefore an increase in the electors-to-councillor ratio in Harrow.

Manifesto Commitments

- 3.14 At the 2018 Local Election all three major parties (Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Labour) had a manifesto commitment to reduce the number of Councillors.

4. DEMOGRAPHIC AND ELECTORATE ESTIMATES

- 4.1 Harrow currently has 21 three-Member wards. The borough's 21 wards are further broken down into 77 polling districts, with between two and five polling districts in each ward. Harrow's polling districts are unique boundaries and are not co-terminous with other geographical boundaries (such as Output Areas or Lower Layer Super Output Areas) which are commonly used for demographic and other statistical purposes.
- 4.2 For the 2018 Electoral Review Harrow is using the latest Greater London Authority (GLA) ward level demographic projections to produce an electoral

forecast for 2024. The use of population projections is one of the approaches recommended by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).

- 4.3 LGBCE guidance recommends that forecasts should be underpinned by sound evidence and should consider:
- a) Office for National Statistics (ONS) Sub-National forecasts
 - b) the impact of likely housing and economic developments
 - c) expected migration into and out of the authority
 - d) the expected difference between the number of adults in an area's population and the number of electors
- 4.4 Harrow's current registered electorate (25th April 2018) is 184,640, compared to a mid-2018 estimate of 194,948 resident population aged 18+ (GLA BPO Projection, May 2018), giving an average rate of 94.7 per cent electors to the overall adult population.

Greater London Authority Demographic Projections

- 4.5 In common with all the other London Boroughs Harrow Council does not produce its own population projections. These are produced annually on behalf of all the London Boroughs and the City of London Corporation by the Greater London Authority (GLA).
- 4.6 The GLA produces several different demographic projection variants, which fall within two distinct categories:
- trend-based projections, based on past trends in births, deaths and migration. These are akin to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Sub-National Population Projections (SNPP), and
 - housing-led projections, which also take into account future identified housing developments, largely identified by the local authority. These include the GLA's SHLAA-based (Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment), demographic projections and a Borough Preferred Option (BPO) projection.
- 4.7 In recent years Harrow Council has tended to veer towards the usage of trend-based projection because they were more akin to the ONS 2014-based SNPPs and also because the borough's population has been growing at a faster rate than the dwelling-led projections were suggesting, with net international migration being one of the key population growth factors, together with natural change (births minus deaths). However, the most recent ONS Mid-Year Population Estimates (MYEs), coupled with the newly released revised MYEs (published 22nd March 2018) are showing lower levels of population growth for the borough than the 2014-based SNPPs have been predicting. The GLA's latest short-term trend-based projection for Harrow (2016 Round) shows an overall borough population of around 264,700 for Harrow by 2024, with the BPO projection showing a slightly higher overall level of around 265,500.

Harrow's Ward Level Forecasts

- 4.8 Harrow is therefore proposing to use the GLA's Borough Preferred Option (BPO) population projection as the starting point for the ward forecast figures, which is a bespoke projection produced by the GLA for Harrow Council. This projection takes into account factors a to d as outlined in para 4.3 above.
- 4.9 This BPO projection was produced by the GLA in May 2018 (part of the GLA's 2016 round of projections) and is based on Harrow's Housing Trajectory, reported in the 2016/17 Authority's Monitoring Report, which is a statutory requirement. Harrow's Housing Trajectory follows guidance set out by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and tracks the provision of housing supply over the lifespan of the Local Plan (2009/10 and 2025/26). Harrow's Housing Trajectory takes into account the following factors:
- Net additional dwellings and non-self-contained units completed from 2009/10 to 2016/17
 - Projected net additional units to 2025/26, based on: developments under construction; developments which have not yet started, but where permission has been granted; sites where the principle of residential development has been accepted; and sites identified in the Site Allocations Local Plan and the Harrow & Wealdstone Area Action Plan and which are expected to be delivered (either wholly or in part) by 2024.
- 4.10 The trajectory also includes a schedule of large sites (10+ units) with and without permission, with an estimated proposed residential capacity and possible phasing of development. The sites information contained in the trajectory is supplied to the GLA at ward level for the purposes of producing a BPO projection.
- 4.11 Estimated completion rates are based on an annual individual assessment of all large sites proposing ten or more net additional units. For small sites, completion dates are estimated with regard to potential expiry dates, based on the presumption that all sites will be delivered. Owing to the number of small windfall sites which come forward each year any sites not built out are likely to be replaced by windfall developments.
- 4.12 The underlying information used in the BPO projection consists of total births, total deaths and total net migration. Births and deaths data include observed data for the period 2012-2015 which are obtained from the ONS and projected data for the period beyond. All migration data are based on outputs from the GLA population projections model. The BPO model uses a net change in dwellings forecast for each ward in Harrow to distribute population growth. Years 2012 to 2017 incorporate completions from the London Development Database, provided by Harrow Council.
- 4.13 The BPO projections give breakdowns by ward, year, gender and single year of age. For the purposes of the Electoral Review Harrow has taken the 2018 and 2024 estimated population figures for the population aged 18 and over for the 21 wards. These figures have then been compared to the 2018 electorate figures, based on the electoral register used for the May 2018 Local Government Elections, which is regarded as a good sound starting point for future electoral projections.

- 4.14 The ratio of electors to the estimated adult population in each ward for 2018 has then been calculated, with a borough average of 94.7 per cent. These ratios have then been applied to the estimated adult population figures for 2024 to give estimated electorate figures for the same year. Variance figures have then been calculated for 2018 and 2024, by taking the number of electors per councillor for each ward and comparing these numbers to the borough averages.

Other Factors

- 4.15 No separate provision has been made with regard to the number of attainers¹. The GLA population projections are all based on mid-year figures and generally most scheduled elections are held around this time. There should be only a negligible difference between the estimated adult population figures and the number of registered adult voters, as the 2018 electoral register is based on the electorate as at the end of April 2018 and mid-year figures show the position at the end of June. With no student halls of residence in the borough, Harrow does not have a significant student population, so Individual Voter Registration (IR) for this age cohort is not seen as problematical and therefore no adjustments need to be made for this cohort.
- 4.16 The number of electors per dwelling for all new conventional housing developments has been assumed to be two. This estimate has been based on the GLA's 2018 estimated 18+ population of 194,948 and 93,050 residential properties captured on Harrow's Local Land & Property Gazetteer (LLPG) as at 2nd May 2018, which gives an average of 2.09 adults per dwelling. As the LLPG includes some properties which are still under construction, this figure has been rounded down to two. Whilst the majority of new housing coming on stream over the next six years are flatted developments and may conceivably have lower occupancy rates, high house prices may counter this argument, as these new developments may not be affordable for the majority of single occupants. The 2011 Census showed that: Harrow had the second lowest proportion of one-person households nationally (22.6%); the second highest average household size of all local authorities nationally, at 2.8; and a high proportion of other household types (includes extended families) at 7.7 per cent, compared to 4.4 per cent for England & Wales.
- 4.17 Taking all these factors into account, an estimate of two adults per dwelling for new conventional housing developments is considered to be a reasonable assessment.

¹ Those who attain the age of 18 during the currency of the register

5. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 The Conservative political group on the Council believes that, in the context of the resource constraints in public service, Councillors themselves should give serious consideration to the scope to achieve efficiencies and budget reductions in local democratic arrangements. However, this should only be pursued where careful analysis reveals that there is no adverse impact on the role of Councillors and that residents will retain adequate democratic representation.
- 5.2 Taking into account all the information and issues set out above, it is the view of the Conservative political group on the Council that **a Council size of 55 councillors is appropriate**. The current registered electorate (25th April 2018) is 184,640 which would result in an electors-to-councillor ratio of 3,393 at this point, while on the basis of the electorate estimate of 192,843 in the year 2024 calculated by Council officers, the ratio would be 3,506. These are very modest ratios, well within the existing average range for London Boroughs and below those anticipated in reviews conducted over the last few years. In our view, this strikes an appropriate balance between avoiding any risk of overloading councillors in terms of their casework and representational role on the one hand, and securing sufficient councillors to engage effectively in the governance arrangements in place at the Council.

Harrow Conservative Group
