

London Borough of Harrow Electoral Review 2018

LABOUR 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 Labour 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 Labour 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. Unusually, 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. 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. In 2016, the Council commissioned a peer review which recommended that the scrutiny arrangements should be refreshed. As a result, the Centre for Public Scrutiny worked with the Council on possible improvements, including councillors working more closely on organising and directing the scrutiny work programme. There is now a sharper focus on the importance of scrutiny demanding more from those councillors involved, particularly in many informal meetings of the Scrutiny Leadership Group.
- 3.2 In addition to Cabinet and Scrutiny mechanisms, there are a 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 has the required Health and Wellbeing Board in partnership with the CCG and Members are also involved in sitting on licensing panels determining applications for premises licences and taking related enforcement decisions. 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.

Demands on Councillors: Population, Deprivation, Diversity and Modernisation

- 3.3 The electorate at the time of the last review submission numbered 156,420 and this has now risen substantially to an estimated 192,843 in the year 2024 (see forecasts below). This is an increase in excess of 23% during which time the number of councillors has remained static. In addition to this significant volume increase, the Borough’s population has become much more diverse. More than 69 % of residents are now from minority ethnic groups (2011 Census); the 1999 electoral review submission reported that a “...quarter of Harrow’s residents are from non-white ethnic origin”. This has added significantly to the complexity of dealing with residents’ issues, particularly in relation to language barriers and the lack of familiarity with local services and how to access them. Councillors now have to provide a more varied and customised service for their constituents.

- 3.4 Harrow is one of 25 Local Authorities identified by the Department for Communities and Local Government as an area with high levels of need for English language provision. In 15.9% of households, English is not the main language of any occupants (10th highest ranking nationally and far exceeding the 4.3% national average). Moreover, the 2011 Census showed that 1% of Harrow residents are unable to speak any English at all, compared with 0.6% for London as a whole and 0.3% nationally (Inequality Report, 2016).
- 3.5 Housing is a big area for councillor involvement in casework. Over the past few years in Harrow, there has been an increase in the number of households approaching the Council for housing-related assistance – with the figure reaching 2,000 for the year 2014-15. Out of all 326 Local Authorities in the UK, Harrow is ranked as 24th most deprived for overcrowding and also ranks poorly (48th/326 Local Authorities in England - where 1st is the most deprived) in the 'barriers to housing' deprivation index. These cases are often complex with issues related to the benefits system which has been undergoing significant change in recent years, a process which still continues. Universal Credit, the Benefit Cap, employment support benefit changes, the Social Sector Size Restrictions and Personal Independence Payments have all impacted the issues raised by constituents. These involve liaison with other agencies, making the councillor's task in supporting residents more complicated and lengthy.
- 3.6 Harrow also has a large and growing child population. Harrow is ranked in the top quartile for 0-4 year olds in the UK: in 2011, 6.7% of Harrow residents (15,916) were children aged four and under, and projections for the 4-10 year age group are expected to increase from 20,864 children mid-year 2012 to 25,567 mid-year 2024 (Harrow Council, 2016). Children in large families are at the highest risk of living in poverty: 34% of children in poverty live in families with three or more children. This has increased the complexity of many cases related to family housing, benefits and income support.
- 3.7 Harrow shares the considerable pressures created by the country's ageing population. Harrow's population is ageing at a faster rate than average across the rest of Greater London and the proportion of residents aged over 65 and 85 is higher than the London average (Harrow Community Learning Strategy, 2015). POPPI data from 2015 suggests the number of people aged 65 and over would increase by 14% by 2020 and 29% by 2025. The biggest predicted increase is in people over 85 (26% increase by 2020). Councillors are therefore exposed to significantly more cases related to social care and health.
- 3.8 These factors have also impacted local community groups, charities and lobbying groups. Councillors are drawn into more liaison and discussion with these organisations as they seek assist residents suffering hardship.
- 3.9 While the advances in IT and the growth of social media have given councillors useful tools to carry out their representative role, it has also become much easier and quicker for constituents to contact their councillors. Whilst this is to be applauded, it has led to an increase in casework and an increasing dialogue around issues that matter to residents. Councillors are much more involved in drawn-out exchanges online, making it difficult to

manage casework and communications. There is a growing expectation that councillors will be “on tap” not just to deal with substantive casework, but also to comment on topical issues in their wards. Blogs and Twitter make communications easier, but they also expand their volume; as many councillors know, it is very difficult to keep the lid on this without risking loss of confidence among some residents and electors.

Staffing Support

3.10 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. While our staff do their best to provide appropriate support, councillors have had to do more and more for themselves; “self-service” is increasingly the default for councillors. We do more online research ourselves and no longer have staff who will chase casework for us. Our political group office staffing has declined by 33% in recent years.

Governance Arrangements and Meetings

3.11 The introduction of executive arrangements via the Local Government Act 2000 was supposed to streamline local government decision-making and reduce the number of meetings councillors were involved in. However, the figures at Harrow paint a complex picture which is difficult to interpret. The high water mark in terms of the total number of meetings per year was in 2008 when there were 280 meetings recorded in the Council's electronic listing of committees. This was many years after the introduction of executive arrangements, so it is difficult to argue that the reduction was due to the new governance system. While the number of these meetings has since declined (129 in the equivalent listing for the year 2017-18), this is the same level as in 2001-02, so there's no clear case that the burden of formal meetings has declined since the last electoral review. Of course, this covers simply the core group of committees and there will be a number of other meetings councillors will need to attend. It is our impression that informal meetings now occupy more councillor time; this is partly due to the concentration of powers introduced through executive arrangements which tends to be balanced by more consultation, both within and between political groups, before formal decisions are taken.

3.12 Compared to 1999, councillors are now more heavily involved in partnership work with other public services and the third sector. The clearest examples are the joint work with the health sector, which finds its formal expression in bodies such as the Health and Wellbeing Board and the various health overview and scrutiny mechanisms, and liaison with the Police which involves attending safer neighbourhood panels. There are also lots of informal contacts and meetings related to these new and developing roles.

Electors-to-Councillor Ratios

3.13 The information available on the Commission's website includes the electors-to-councillor ratios for many authorities; these demonstrate substantial

variation between authorities. Harrow's current ratio is 2,863; this compares with 2,483 at the time of last electoral review. Given the forecasts above (an electorate of 192,843 in the year 2024), this ratio would increase to over 3,000, representing a 23% increase in the number of electors, let alone population, to be served by each of the 63 councillors.

- 3.13 One of the electoral reviews conducted by the Commission in recent years (Kensington & Chelsea) approved a ratio of 2,270 electors per councillor (estimated for the year 2018). This is a borough which, in tragic circumstances over the last year, has learned lessons about the building of strong relationships between elected representatives and their communities (cf. Centre for Public Scrutiny report on governance of the authority, March 2018). If a council with such a favourable electors-to-councillor ratio appears to have struggled in this respect, then how much more difficult would it be for councillors with larger populations to serve?

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 coterminous 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 produce 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 1.3 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. Due 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 are 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.
- 4.15 Two of Harrow's ward ratio figures seem to be on the low side for 2018, assuming that the estimated adult population figures are a reasonable estimate. These are Greenhill ward, with a ratio of 80.4 per cent and Harrow on the Hill ward, with a ratio of 88.7 per cent. Harrow on the Hill's figure is not of too much concern, given some areas will have lower registration rates and higher numbers of foreign nationals who may be ineligible to vote. The overall electoral variance in this ward is also currently acceptable. However, Greenhill ward's ratio is more concerning.
- 4.16 Greenhill ward is Harrow's town centre ward and is currently undergoing a big transformation. The town centre is part of the Harrow & Wealdstone Opportunity Area, as designated in the Mayor's London Plan. Being a town centre area generally means that the area is harder to canvass and there is a

more transient population. The new flagship and prominent residential developments currently under construction, and at the planning stages, in Harrow Town Centre are expected to result in a higher canvass in the area in the future. The estimated adult population figures for Greenhill ward for 2024 seem to adequately reflect the growing population in this ward. However, it would not be pertinent to apply the 80.4 per cent ratio to this larger population for 2024, so a 90 per cent ratio has been applied to this ward for 2024, resulting in an even greater electoral variance.

Other Factors

- 4.17 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 (IER) for this age cohort is not seen as problematical and therefore no adjustments need to be made for this cohort.
- 4.18 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.
- 4.19 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 Labour political group on the Council is of the unanimous opinion that the **number of councillors should remain at the present level of 63**. The last Boundary Review was conducted in 1999 and our comparison of the workload over the last 20 years outlined above suggests there is no good reason for a reduction in the number of councillors, indeed there are risks associated with stretching the work of Members even further.
- 5.2 In 2007, the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) said councillors reported spending an average of nearly 22 hours a week on council and party business. Any reduction in councillor numbers will lead to an increase in this workload. This will act as a deterrent to councillors coming forward to take on this important role in addition to their core work and family commitments.
- 5.3 It is our view that central Government will continue to impose new duties on local government. In the context of declining resources, this creates a real challenge. Inevitably, this must lead to a reduction in Council services, more community involvement in depleted services and extra burdens in terms of councillor involvement in providing support. We therefore urge the Commission to agree a Council size of no less than the current number of 63.

Harrow Labour Group
