

PENDLE BOROUGH COUNCIL: SIZE OF THE COUNCIL

Preliminary draft submission from Pendle Liberal Democrats and the Liberal Democrat Group on Pendle Council.

Proposal for a Council of 42 members.

This is based on the electorates as at the new register in December 2018. We will look at the expected changes in numbers in the next few years when making a final submission.

This would give an average number of electors per Councillor of 1586, subject to changes for growth. This is within the range of Districts generally and while it is more than at present in Pendle, is appropriate for the circumstances in Pendle. We are strongly opposed to a radical reduction in numbers to around 30.

COMMUNITY INTERACTION

There is a strong tradition and practice in Pendle of Councillor involvement with the local community, including with local community groups, residents informally, and liaison with Town and Parish Councils. It crucially includes the practice of strong Area Committees consisting of all local Councillors in an area, which we expect to continue.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COUNCIL IN MEETING THE NEEDS OF LOCAL RESIDENTS.

Pendle is a grouping of quite discrete local communities with, for the most part, clearly defined boundaries. This is reflected by the pattern of the five area committees which play a fundamental part in the Council's democratic structure and the development of projects. It is important that the pattern of representation, following changes to the size of the Council and ward boundaries, can continue, in order to reflect local communities,

In particular the continued operation of two of the area committees, which currently have only six members (Brierfield and Reedley, and Barrowford and Western Parishes) would become impossible if the total numbers were reduced below 40.

HOW MANY COUNCILLORS NEEDED TO RUN THE COUNCIL?

In a sense this is a "length of a piece of string" question. However, it has become clear that with the serious cuts in the number of Council officers, without commensurate cuts in the function of the Council (though there have been some), Councillors themselves are having to take on more work such as research, communication with the public and the organisation of projects on the ground. It is also important in Pendle, with its multitude of communities, to maintain a broad range of representation in decision-making.

THE NUMBER OF COMMITTEES

It will not be possible to reduce the number any more. Pendle is traditionally a task-based and problem-solving Council and it is inevitably that there will be requirements for new working groups and the like to carry out this work, even if not formal committees. This is likely to grow with the adoption of a committee system, replacing the former Executive which excluded more Councillors from decision-making.

PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

As in many areas over the past decades, as formal Council functions have reduced the demands of partnership working have expanded, and Councillors have found they have had to find the time and learn new skills for this work – and undertake a lot of work previously served up on a plate by council officers.

REPRESENTATION OF LOCAL PEOPLE AND CASEWORK

The demands of this work have not reduced in any way, probably the reverse, while the work has grown as it has become necessary to negotiate a plethora of agencies, some of which are not traditionally geared up to dealing with elected representatives! It all requires more initiative and often more time than was the case when most things could be sorted out simply by reference to an officer of the Council.

The use of new technology has made some tasks easier (email instead of a letter) but the development of social media has significantly increased demands on councillors' time and attention.

We will provide a more comprehensive submission with evidence before the final date for submission of views.

PENDLE BOROUGH COUNCIL

REVIEW OF COUNCIL SIZE

Further submission on behalf of Pendle Liberal Democrats (including the Liberal Democrat group on Pendle BC).

COUNCIL STRUCTURE AND AREA COMMITTEES

- 1. It is not sensible to decide on the total size of the Council without assessing the impact it will have on major structures of the Council.** Pendle has strong Area Committees so it is necessary to consider the effect that the number of Councillors will have on these bodies.
- 2. The areas covered by the five Area Committees in Pendle are not arbitrary.** They are designed to represent clear communities and the links between them. All the boundaries except one (Nelson/Brierfield which has already stretched into Nelson as far as is sensible – at the last boundaries review) do this very clearly indeed, to the extent that when they were established there was no dissent at all.
- 3. There is no other effective way of dividing up Pendle into areas in a way that will meet general acceptance, and any amalgamation of existing areas would meet with strong public resistance.**
4. Any significant reduction in the number of Councillors will make the composition of the area committees challenging (particularly if three-member wards are to be universally imposed). **However, we think that 42 members is the absolute minimum that will make any solution possible.**

The following numbers are based on the 2025 estimates provided by PBC.

TOTAL ELECTORATE: 68780.

Barrowford and Western Parishes: 8127.

Brierfield and Reedley: 8586

Colne and District: 18003

Nelson: 20523

West Craven: 13541

COUNCIL OF 42 MEMBERS

Average electors per Councillor: 1638

Number of electors in each area divided by 1638

Barrowford and Western Parishes: 4.96 (5)

Brierfield and Reedley: 5.24 (5)

Colne and District: 10.99 (11)

Nelson: 12.53 (13)

West Craven: 8.27 (8)

The numbers will have to be adjusted to account for 3-member wards, but this could be sorted by allowing two single-member wards in the very rural parishes in Barrowford & Western Parishes where they would be most appropriate anyway (and where there will be strong pressure for this). But that is an argument for the future...

COUNCIL OF 33 MEMBERS

Average electors per Councillor: 2084

Number of electors in each area divided by 2084

Barrowford and Western Parishes: 3.90 (4)

Brierfield and Reedley: 4.12 (4)

Colne and District: 8.64 (9)

Nelson: 9.85 (9)

West Craven: 6.50 (7)

As well as driving as coach and horses through the area committee system, these numbers are clunky anyway, and we suspect it will be difficult to draw ward boundaries that fit the area structure, which will make it rather meaningless. This will destroy the whole structure on which the Council is based. No reasons have been put forward as to why this should happen.

NOTE ON THE FIVE AREAS

Nelson is a historic and discrete town on its own with clearly understood boundaries.

Colne is a historic and discrete town on its own with clearly understood boundaries. The three parishes to the east of Colne have close traditional links with Colne. Trawden Forest was formerly a very small (in population) Urban District, and Laneshaw Bridge was formerly

part of the Borough of Colne – they both already share a ward with the eastern fringes of Colne.

Brierfield and Reedley mostly form the town of Brierfield which was formerly a separate Urban District and retains a clear identity.

West Craven consists of two towns and a couple of parishes which were formerly part of the West Riding of Yorkshire and retain a clear cultural identity as “The historic Yorkshire part of Pendle”. They are also geographically quite distinct.

Barrowford was a former Urban District; the “Western Parishes” consist of six parishes with a clearly different rural identity. Combining this area with any other would either be geographically clumsy (Brierfield) or ridiculous (Colne) or quite inappropriate in terms of settlement character and balance (Nelson or Brierfield).

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Owen, David

From: GREAVES, Lord [REDACTED]
Sent: 31 January 2019 11:30
To: Owen, David
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Pendle Borough Council: review of Council Size and Wards

Hello, David

Apologies for my delay in responding. Difficult week (including computer problems here!) but sorted now, I think.

We are happy for our draft submission to be used as our basic proposal since it covers the ground. In relation to some of your questions below:

Town and Parish Councils. Pendle is now completely parished (since 2012 I think) and there is a lot of interaction – much of it informal - between Borough and Town/Parish Councillors.

In the older smaller parishes in the rural areas it is common for the Borough Councillor to be a member of their Parish Council, and a long established practice for them to attend all their Parish Council meetings (which in one case is four meetings a month). In the case of the Old Laund Booth Parish for instance , the Borough Councillor for the coterminous single-member Borough ward is Chair of the Parish Council.

In the medium sized parishes often in the five former Urban Districts in Pendle there is quite a lot of dual membership and in any case it is normal for the Borough Councillors to attend and take part in discussion at the Parish/Town Council meetings. For instance in Barnoldswick and Earby it is normal for the Borough Councillors to also sit on the Town Councils.

In the newest large Town Councils in Nelson and Colne the same applies. For instance in Colne, of the 17 Town Councillors, seven are Borough Councillors, and two more used to be.

In recent years the Borough has transferred a number of very local services to Town and Parish Councils (for instance bus shelters, community centres, children’s play areas, Christmas decorations, various pieces of amenity land, public conveniences, local events) and is in the process of transferring the eleven parks in Pendle (it is hoped, anyway – I think three so far and another two close to agreement). This is actually resulting in more work for Borough Councillors due to the need for co-ordination and involvement in details, and project development, and this is likely to increase – these are areas where the knowledge and “clout” of Borough Councillors is proving vital).

Area Committees: each area committee consists of all the Councillors for that area – that is the statutory and practical basis for their existence. There are also co-opted (non-voting) members which include one member from each Town and Parish Council in the area. There is also considerable public involvement in area committees – members of the public can and do speak on items on the agenda, and can raise any other items in the Public Question Time at the start of the meeting. Area committees also convene separate informal meetings with groups of residents, local organisations, planning applicants on major schemes, owners of problem sites and buildings, the County Council, etc – the extent of this is variable from area to area but over the years has been very significant. There are also site visits for planning applications, as required.

The question of how many members each area committee needs covers two things: (1) the area they cover which is determined by “natural community areas” as far as possible – which is the evidently case in most of Pendle since it consists of a number of discrete towns and villages. (2) a minimum requirement for effective operation in terms of quorums, availability of members for extra-formal activities, credibility etc. The smallest in the past was Barrowford and Western Parishes with five members (before the last ward boundary changes) which just about worked. Our view is that three would not work.

Councillors and service delivery. It is not usually service delivery as such but research, enquiry, project development and promotion – that kind of thing. (However there is some direct delivery of services at local level – a classic example is Councillors taking the lead in organising groups of residents in regular litter and fly-tipping removal, as often as weekly – this happens for instance in Colne and Barnoldswick – and Councillor involvement in running community centres and in running events.) For instance Pendle used to have a team of “policy officers” who did all manner of research and project delivery. They have all gone, together with many admin staff. If this work is needed, Councillors are a “resource” and will often get directly involved.

I will send you some statistical stuff about area committees this afternoon.

I hope this helpful.

Yours sincerely

Tony Greaves (Councillor)

Lord Greaves
Liberal Democrat

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