

Local Government Boundary Review – Council Size CONSERVATIVE GROUP Submission

<p>1. Managing the business of the Council: To what extent is council size influenced by the council’s decision-making process or, conversely, the decision making structure fitted around the council size?</p>	
<p>1.1 What is the overall structure of decision making? Do Councillors match the work to fit the time available to them, or stretch/shrink the time they spend according to how much work they want to/need to do?</p>	<p>We agree with the Council comments which are” The Council operates a Strong Leader/Cabinet model. The Cabinet is known locally as the Council Executive. This enables swift decisions to be made and provides clear accountability. However, it also provides fewer opportunities for a significant number of members to be involved in formal decision making. As a result, workloads between members in exercising Council functions/duties vary considerably, although their workloads in representing their individual wards are thought to be more consistent”.</p>
<p>1.2 Has the Council studied how much time their members spend on Council business?</p>	<p>In addition to council comments, we add “Independent Remuneration Panel Report to Council on 13 December 2012 following a full review in late 2012. Minute 309 for 2012/13 gives little information so need to refer to the original Report and Appendix 1 in the Council papers, agenda item 11. Council agreed to make no changes to the existing allowances. Heading 4 reasons for decision stated Para (a) “managing a contracting service and a reduced budget is more challenging and more time consuming than managing a stable or increasing budget” (b) “cuts in services/funding is likely to result in an increased caseload for many Councillors” and (c)in the current economic climate it may become even more difficult to recruit and retain Councillors of a sufficiently high calibre”. Heading 5 Paragraph 5 stated that “From the interviews previously undertaken by this panel and data collected by previous panels, it was noticeable that time spent by Members varied considerably across the sample, although many Portfolio Holders tended to spend considerable amounts of time on Council business” Paragraph 6 stated “Other Members also tended to spend a considerable amount of time undertaking constituency business”</p>

<p>1.3 What assessments have been made of how many members it needs to function effectively, particularly since the introduction of executive arrangements? In a hypothetical scenario where the council size was increased or reduced by 10%, how would you do things differently?</p>	<p>Whilst we agree with the first paragraph, “No formal assessments have been made although comparisons have been made with other districts of a similar size. The Strong Leader/Cabinet model always presents challenges regarding the formal role of non executive Members and the previous streamlining of Scrutiny arrangements has reduced the input of some members. The Council is however planning to have two Scrutiny Committees in the near future with the additional committee probably focussing primarily on external rather than internal matters reflecting the Council’s wider role in the community. If Council size were to be reduced by 10%, the Council may need to review the size and organisation of committees”.</p> <p>no decision has yet been made on whether to have a second Scrutiny Committee plus an Overview and Scrutiny Board although it is a priority for the Opposition group.</p> <p>Whilst we agree with the second paragraph, “Whilst no formal assessment of workload has been undertaken by the Council, the Leader of the Council has carried out an exercise on his member workload and this is appended to the report for information (Appendix 3). At the time of writing this submission details of the Opposition’s assessment of its members workload are not available but it is anticipated that this information will be included in any submission they may make to the Boundary Commission” we would add that Local Government Association has published research (LGA Councillor Census 2010) which shows that 20% of Councillors spend up to ten hours a week on Council business, a further 20% spend up to 20 hours with 45% on 30 hours and 15% giving more than 30 hours a week.</p> <p>We agree with the remaining paragraphs, “The adoption of the Strong Leader/Cabinet model together with associated increase in Member delegations, and streamlining of the Council’s decision making process would enable the Council to function with fewer Members. Council aims to hold the minimum number of committee meetings consistent with discharging it responsibilities. In the last year the Council had 75 formal meetings and back bench Members time was freed up to act in representing their electors. Given the planned growth of the Scrutiny function and the increased</p>

	<p>emphasis on community involvement, any planned reduction should be suitably limited. The deletion of one Member from the Council's size results in a marginal saving in Members' allowances/expenses of approximately £4,000; this is relatively small compared to the costs of reducing the number of Members to the point where there is poor democracy due to inadequate representation of the electorate and the likelihood of flawed decision making. The Council currently has 51 Members and excluding the Mayor and Deputy Mayor who are otherwise engaged in their year of office, only 4 do not sit on any committee or sub committee of the Council. The Council's arrangements however provide many opportunities for them to do so if they wished or were selected to do so by their Group Leader.</p> <p>Members and Officers are united in the view that the Council size should be an odd number to enable effective running of the Council and policy setting. There is evidence to show that "hung" councils and with the current political balance the Borough is more likely than most areas to be at risk of an equality of seats", but would stress that there are places on committees for the four Opposition members who were not placed on committees by their leadership, for whatever reason.</p>
<p>1.4 To what extent is the current council size a factor in determining the political management, scrutiny and governance arrangements or is it the other way round?</p> <p>1.5 If you had a free hand, are there any changes you would make to the political management, scrutiny and governance arrangements? If so, how might that impact on the number of councillors required.</p>	<p>We agree with the Council's comments, "The Council's Strong Leader and Cabinet decision-making process and scrutiny processes reflect the legislative position and local political choice rather than the Council size. The last review of boundaries in 1999 pre-dates the introduction of the current governance arrangements at Erewash and therefore could not take into account changes in workload arising from the revised model. Hence the Council's view regarding the viability of fewer Members.</p> <p>It is unlikely that the Council will adopt any revised cabinet/scrutiny arrangements (apart from the introduction of a further Scrutiny Committee) or consider returning to a committee style system of governance under the localism provisions.</p> <p>Consultation with members suggests that member workloads are manageable although they vary according to the role. It is true however that the roles and responsibilities of the Councillor have changed significantly over recent years with the increased emphasis on community involvement rather than attendance at formal</p>

	<p>meetings.</p> <p>Given the revised Governance Model adopted since the last review, the Council is satisfied that a Council size of 43, 45 or 47 would warrant serious consideration and probably still retain sufficient member capacity to meet challenges facing the Council under the national policy agenda but there is no consensus on which value in that range is best”.</p>
<p>1.6 How are decisions ‘cascaded’ down the structure? Is the balance between member decisions and officer delegated decisions effective? Is there any duplication of work?</p>	<p>We agree with the Council’s comments, “The Council has a clear definition and delineation between the decisions of Members and Officers to eliminate duplication and improve the communication of decisions of the Council. In the current process, officers are responsible for preparing reports to Council and the Executive on which Members base decisions and to recommend the delegation of any non executive decision to officers or other Committees.</p> <p>Executive decisions are recorded on the Committee Administration system and any forthcoming key decisions added to the Council Forward Plan. It is the responsibility of Directors and Service Managers to cascade decisions down to departments, teams and the wider public”.</p>
<p>2. Scrutiny of the Council, Outside bodies and Others</p>	
<p>2.1 What’s the structure? An overview and scrutiny committee, or several scrutiny committees? How do subjects get tackled – in Committee or Task & Finish Groups? How many subjects at any one time? What’s the time-span for a particular study?</p>	<p>See Appendix 2.</p> <p>Paragraph 1 – “The Council currently operates formal scrutiny arrangements, with one Scrutiny Committee to which are added Task and Finish Groups as appropriate”.</p> <p>We would add that the Scrutiny Committee has six meetings booked for the coming civic year but of course could meet more often if necessary.</p> <p>We agree with the remainder of the Council’s comments, “The Council is aware of the potential implications of the localism agenda and its forthcoming additional responsibilities, e.g. in the area of public health. The health and wellbeing agenda will have implications for decision-making, scrutiny and councillor skill sets and retaining</p>

	<p>sufficient member capacity will be essential to deliver the Council's statutory obligations. The Council plans to introduce a second Scrutiny Committee to deal primarily with external matters.</p> <p>In addition, although police authorities have been replaced by Police and Crime Commissioners, joint Scrutiny arrangements to hold police commissioners to account will impact on Councillor time and capacity. The Council is currently reviewing the appointment of members to joint bodies such as partnerships and outside bodies with a view to rationalising these appointments and refocusing member priorities. These changes should provide space to cope with the additional partnership responsibilities outlined above.</p> <p>Erewash as a whole was formed in the 1974 reorganisation of Local Government by the merger of three distinct councils. The area comprises two main towns and 13 rural parishes each with very distinct needs and views which do not always align. The people of these areas have strong views on their needs and require significant representation from their local Councillors, again adding to the evidence that although a small decrease in Members can be contained, significant representation should be retained”.</p>
2.2 Is Scrutiny just the Councillors doing meetings or do they take external evidence?	The Scrutiny Committee regularly takes external evidence when appropriate.
2.3 If the former, what do the members do between meetings?	We agree with the Council's comments, “Members are actively involved in Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups, of which there are often 1 or 2 running at any one time, with between 3 and 9 members involved in each group”.
2.4 How is the Council handling health scrutiny – who is involved? How much work do they do?	We agree with the Council's comments, “Health Scrutiny is not a statutory District Council function although the Council does have wider responsibilities with regard to general public health issues. Erewash Borough Council does expect to contribute at member level to scrutiny of public health at the County”.

<p>2.5 How many 'twin-hatted' members sit on outside bodies and how are conflicts of interest resolved?</p>	<p>We agree with the Council's comments, "The Council currently has member representation on 36 outside bodies. 7 of the Council's Members are also County Councillors, 18 are Parish Councillors and 2 of these are both a County and Parish Councillor.</p> <p>All Council members are required to sign the Council Members' Code of Conduct and to maintain an up to date register of their interests with the Council's Solicitor and Monitoring Officer, who provides members with ongoing advice and guidance on conflict of interest issues as they arise.</p> <p>Members are required to declare any interests at the outset of Committee meetings and, if a prejudicial interest in an item is declared, that member must leave the room while the item is discussed and must also abstain from any vote. If a complaint was received alleging a breach of the Code of Conduct, this would be referred for consideration by the Standards Committee. There is provision for the Monitoring Officer and Standards Committee to consider applications for a dispensation in certain circumstances. Nominations in response to requests for representation on outside bodies are proposed by the ruling group and can only be approved by Council. The register of Outside Bodies is reviewed regularly and representation limited to those organisations that are of strategic significance to the Council".</p>
<p>3. Representational Role: Representing Electors to the Council</p>	
<p>3.1 What sort of engagement is there between front-line councillors with electors? One-to-one when there's a customer complaint, or gathering</p>	<p>We would add that approximately one third of the electorate live in parished areas and it has been found that an active Parish Council creates additional work for its Borough Councillors, over and above the requirement for members to attend and report to their Parish Councils. The Parish Councils in Erewash meet on a regular basis and have</p>

<p>views about policy from the whole community? If the latter, how?</p>	<p>no vacancies. They are also represented at the Borough/Parish Liaison Forum and are members of the Derbyshire Association of Local Councils.</p>
<p>3.2 What is the structure of local area committees. What are their responsibilities? Is membership limited to councillors? – is it open to district councillors or co-option from the wider community?</p>	<p>We would add that Councillors are expected to attend their Community Forums and generally do so. There is a Lead Member allocated to each Community Forum as part of their portfolio to enable them to be a direct conduit between residents and the executive and to exchange views and information with residents.</p>
<p>3.3 Do Councillors fix day-to-day problems by taking them to officers or by representing elector issues as policy views in meetings of the Council?</p>	<p>We agree with the Council's comments, "Councillors use a range of routes to resolve day to day problems: by researching and keeping abreast of local issues providing support and advice, picking up on 'hot spots' and raising them with officers and/or portfolio holders and by feeding recurrent problems into policy/operational/tasking groups", but would stress that very little practical ongoing clerical support is provided for Councillors which means that they have to do all their own clerical work, writing letters, meeting preparation etc. All members do however have a laptop and Lead Members and certain others have a mobile phone. There is no wi-fi in the Council Chambers which means that members cannot use the latest technology but have to rely on paper-based reports during meetings etc.</p>
<p>3.4 How does the Councillor engage? Surgery, newsletter, blog, public meetings, or not at all?</p>	<p>Councillors engage a great deal with residents through surgeries, in touch newsletters and by attending public meetings, such as the Bath Street Traders, Joint Chambers of Trade, etc</p>
<p>3.5 Are Councillors "go-betweens" between clients/customers/electors and paid service staff to fix service delivery complaints?</p>	<p>Yes, because of the good reputation of many Councillors, residents will often approach them rather than go direct to Officers. A snapshot of outstanding items on 23 February 2013 for the Leader showed 9 current items of Wilsthorpe ward work being dealt with, and whilst perhaps not necessarily typical, it does give an indication of the volumes dealt with by active Councillors.</p>

4. Representing the Council in the community	
4.1 Does the councillor go to meetings of community bodies, parish councils? If so, how many? What for? Do councillors feel obliged to go to meetings of each individual parish council in their respective divisions or is it to meetings of "clusters" of parishes? Where the former, is this an effective use of an elected members time?	We agree with the Council's comments, "Members manage their meeting commitments in communities, including Parish Council meetings, supporting each other to ensure attendance and effective use of their time. The Borough has 13 parishes, community forums and numerous community, residential and business organisations which are attended by councillors dependent on the nature of the business being discussed. (Also see comments under 3.1 regarding attendance at parish meetings", but would stress that all 18 Parish Councillors are expected to attend every Parish Council meeting and in general do so. They are expected to report back on Borough Council activities as well as doing their own Parish ward work.
4.2 Does the Council attract candidates and retain members?	We agree with the Council's comments, "The Council has a good record of attracting candidates and retaining members. 7 members have served the Council for at least 25 years since the Council was first formed in 1974. The May 2011 local election attracted 126 Candidates, and all 51 seats were contested. There is however significant turnover of elected members at each election with typically approximately 25% standing down or not being re-elected at any one election" but feel that the heavy workload existing already must have an influence on the numbers standing down although we have no evidence.
4.3 What happens when a Councillor is absent? Formal taking on of responsibility by other elected members, informal contact point for electors, or nothing? (Maybe different in multi-member wards).	We agree with the Council's comments, "Members at Erewash have informal arrangements within their political groups to ensure a substitute Member attends formal meetings and other events. The Councillors have excellent attendance figures with average attendance at meetings of the Council and Committees being 91%", but would add that there are no arrangements in the Council Constitution for front-line Councillors to cover the roles of Executive members.

<p>Do front line councillors take the strain of, for example Executive members whose time maybe limited?</p>	
<p>4.4 Do Councillors learn and develop on the job or in formal training?</p>	<p>We agree with the Council's comments, "The Council is committed to Member Development and post the May 2011 election, as for the 2007 election, delivered a comprehensive induction programme comprising structured events on the role of the Councillor, Planning and Licensing training, Media and Communication, and a range of other necessary introductory information. Members have also received training on the role of Scrutiny by INLOGOV (Birmingham University) and chairmanship training as appropriate. Training is not limited to the immediate aftermath of an election.</p> <p>The Council is a Member of the East Midlands Member Development Network and Members are advised of Countywide training and conferences by the Democratic Services Team on a regular basis.</p> <p>Financial provision is included in the Council's Annual Revenue Budget for Member development and this is supplemented by resources made available by political parties which also encourage individual Councillor development".</p>
<p>4.5 Has the Council experienced any statutory or other failures because there weren't enough councillors? Are Councillors bored or "inventing" work to do?</p>	<p>We agree with the Council's comments, "No service failures have been experienced on the grounds that there were not enough Councillors to undertake their statutory roles including decision making and community representation.</p> <p>There is no evidence to demonstrate this. In interviews with the Independent Remuneration Panel, Members appeared to be fulfilled and very busy discharging their statutory functions and representing their wards. A recent survey by the Conservative Group on the Council disclosed that the average time commitment of an Executive Member was 39 hours per week with the corresponding figure for a 'back bencher' being 13.5 hours. The latter is an average however and Chairmen, particularly of Planning, have commitments of 28-30 hours per week. Whilst some</p>

	members would like to increase the time spent on Council business, they are restricted by working commitments”.
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BOUNDARIES REPORT – CONSERVATIVE SUBMISSION Part 2

In addition to the Appendix 3 of the Officers Report of 7 March 2013, we would also like to stress that whilst **paragraph 3.19 of the Report** is good as far as it goes it does not show the impact of the increase in the Borough's electorate by 2018. We accept the Officers figures which give a projected electorate of 88,370.

By reducing the number of Members to 47 we get an electorate per member of 1 to 1890 in 2018 compared to the current ratio of 1 to 1691. This increase of 199 electors together with a reduction of 4 Councillors is equivalent to an increase in everyone's workload of almost 12%. There are some Members especially those with Special responsibilities or who try to combine serving our residents with a full time job or child care, who would struggle to cope with a 12% increase in workload. We do not accept bullet point 5 in paragraph 3.20 as we feel that it would be hard for some Members to cope at 47, but would be extremely difficult if numbers fell below that figure.

We would add to **Appendix 2** of the report regarding **Council Executive** that in addition to formal meetings of the Executive, the members meet weekly to discuss and consider the various portfolios. These are important meetings which enable the Council's decision making process to run effectively and efficiently. They normally take 2 hours and are followed by Leadership meetings where the Leader and Deputy meet the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief executive and these meetings can take between 1 and 3 hours depending on the agenda. There is also preparation time which can be considerable. Executive Members also meet the Directors and senior staff on a regular basis (usually weekly depending on the needs at the time) prior to reporting back to the Executives weekly meetings.

As regards **scrutiny functions** we would stress that our scrutiny committee also covers the role of Crime and Disorder Scrutiny, which adds to the workload of that committee. There are six formal meetings of the full scrutiny committee booked for the next civic year. Should a second Scrutiny Committee, plus Overview and Scrutiny Board be set up, then there would likely be one or other of the scrutiny committees every month plus quarterly Overview Boards to distribute and control the agendas. In our view the final sentence of the paragraph on the **Audit Committee** is incorrect in that Audit is more than just "loosely" part of the scrutiny umbrella but a very important part of the whole scrutiny process.

The comments on **Other Committees and Meetings** regarding there being no set dates for meetings of the Bramcote Crematorium Joint Committee is incorrect in that a programme of dates is published in advance each year, usually 4/5 p.a. plus Officer's briefings (Chairman and Vice-Chairman alternate between Erewash and Broxtowe) before each formal meeting plus Open Days and Services each year which Committee members generally attend. The budgeted income for 2013/4 for the Crematorium is over £1.3 million pounds. Members therefore have to make financial decisions which involve extra time to reflect the extra responsibility and care needed. The Long Eaton Townscape Heritage Initiative steering group also meets on a regular basis and the members of this committee also have to make financial decisions which impact on the Council's resources, and this also takes extra responsibility and care. The Long Eaton THI is coming to an end, but a bid has been submitted for a similar Initiative for Ilkeston which is expected to be successful and will involve similar Member engagement next year.

In addition to the 36 formal **Appointments to Partnerships and outside bodies** referred to in **Appendix 2** which are made at Annual Council, there are a number of other bodies and committees which Councillors attend, for example Benefits Improvement Board with Officers 4/6 meetings pa (1 Lead Member), Long Eaton and Ilkeston Joint Chamber of Trade 3/4 a year in addition to individual Chamber meetings (all Lead Members), Digital Derbyshire 6 a year (1 Lead Member), Ilkeston Family Practitioner PPG (1 Lead Member), Police Safer Neighbourhood Panel meetings, Forbes Hole Action Group (1 Member), several residents Associations, and Community Centre management committees, School governorships. Members also attend various Conferences such as CIPFA (Finance Lead Member), Local Govt Association (3 Lead Members), Crematorium Annual Conference (1 Lead Member), and Planning School (3 Members).

We would also mention the Local Strategic Partnership which is active and meets regularly with the secretariat provided by the Council. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the LSP are both Executive Members.

Turning to **Appendix 3** of the Report of 7 March 2013

The **penultimate paragraph** refers to the increasing percentage of the elderly in Erewash up 12.8% between 2009 and 2015. These figures also appear on page 7 of the Erewash Resident Characteristics produced by the Local Strategic Partnership (see www.erewashlsp.org.uk) the elderly tend to be more willing to contact their local Councillor and often have more complex needs. An increase in pensioner numbers will increase Member workloads, but a precise figure is not possible.

This paragraph also refers to ethnicity taken from the ONS figures, but it is also possible to look at figures provided by the Electoral Register 2010 and page 16 of the LSP report referred to above shows that there were 967 non-UK born on that electoral register in Erewash. There are 49 different countries represented in these numbers. Whilst the numbers are not large they are increasing. In 2001 the national census showed that 98% were “white” in Erewash but by 2009 this had fallen to 95.2%. The percentage of non-whites in Erewash has continued to rise in common with the rest of the country and this increase in diversity does add to Councillors workloads because of the need to communicate with and understand the needs of diverse communities. We have two members (Kewal Athwal and Abey Stevenson) of Indian extraction but the remaining 49 are white British. There is a need to recruit further members of ethnic minorities and this of course would be made harder if the total number of Councillors fell too far.

The figures in the **final paragraph** of Appendix 3 which refers to areas of deprivation in the Borough are taken from both the LSP resident characteristics referred to above and also from the IMD data for Erewash Lower Super Output areas on www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/indices2010. Due to the nature of the residents’ multiple problems they generate considerably more enquiries and ward work for their local Councillors.

Councillor Chris Corbett
Chairman
Erewash Conservative Councillors Group
25 March 2013

It is our view that a sustainable and efficient number of Members would be 47 for the reasons sets out in the Borough Council's and our earlier 2 part submission. We would however also add the following:

1.Councillor workloads /committees

1.1At the time of our previous submission it was thought that 4 or 5 (Labour) Members did not sit on any Council committees and just attended Full Council meetings. Following a further review we have been able to ascertain that only one Councillor is not on a Committee (Cllr Mrs M Booth) and Cllr J Booth is on the Rate Relief Determination Panel which has not needed to meet this civic year. All other Councillors are on a Committee which has met (see EBC Website –Councillors). Three Labour Councillors are on 2 Committees (G Birkin,H Griffiths,F Phillips)and one (J Wilson) is on 3. There are therefore opportunities if inactive Members wish to join a Committee. Should Council size fall, it is our view that the cut will affect the whole wide range of active and inactive Members and it cannot be assumed that those least involved will disappear.

1.2 In our view any reduction in size will adversely affect the quality and wide range of experience at present among the 51 Councillors. This broad range of knowledge is particularly needed on the following Committees:

1.3Standards – This consists of 9 Councillors and 8 independent members. Council chose to retain our Standards Committee in this format even though the rules had changed and it no longer had any real teeth, because of the confrontational nature of Erewash politics. The Hearings and Assessment Sub-Committees made recommendations or decisions on 56 complaints received between the start of the civic year 2011/12 and the end of March in 2012/13, plus two which were withdrawn.. (Confidential Report dated 31.5.12 to Standards Committee) In addition the full Standards Committee met 5 times during that period. Because of the complicated and sensitive nature of standards complaints considerable work is involved for both Officers and Members. We take the view that this Committee warrants experienced and knowledgeable members and a sizeable cut in council numbers would reduce the pool available, so reducing the quality of decisions.

1.4General Purposes Committee – This consists of 9 Councillors and gets to the heart of the Council as it is responsible for Personnel, Democratic Representation and the Constitution amongst others. There is likely to be a further restructuring of the Council as financial restrictions bite and the GP Committee will be heavily involved. This Boundaries Review will be completed before 2015 and it is difficult to forecast the future as far as 2018 but consideration of the number and make-up of scrutiny and other committees after May 2015 and indeed the future of Erewash as a two-tier Authority falls within the GP Committee remit. We take the view that this Committee also requires considerable expertise and knowledge. Included in the membership are several with a considerable number of Council service (K Miller 14 years, Mrs M Orchard 32, R Parkinson 40, T Moloney 35, F Phillips 23, Mrs P Phillips 19years). Again, a sizeable cut in Council numbers would adversely affect the pool of expertise available so reducing the quality of decisions.

1.5 Scrutiny Committee. It should be borne in mind that Labour had boycotted scrutiny over recent years until the start of this civic year, so reducing the amount of work and number of scrutiny meetings at that time. In addition to the formal committee meetings, there are a number of less formal Task and Finish Working Groups. For example the Concurrent Functions working group did a great deal of work on this important subject for Parish Council funding and reported back on progress so far to Scrutiny on 30 August 2012.

On that date a work programme of 1. Concurrent functions, 2. decline in town centres, 3. income generation, 4. Stanton regeneration and job creation, 5. tendering process of Parish Councils and health and safety, and 6. performance management quarterly reports was agreed. It can be seen from this that scrutiny already has a busy and demanding work programme which involves more than just formal committee meetings. The next meeting of the Regeneration Task and finish working group is set for mid-May when there will be presentations by various organisations (Chambers of Trade, shopkeeper groups, etc) to the group on their ideas for spending a regeneration pot of £250,000 provided in this year's budget. All members of scrutiny are members of this working group, which is set up like this so that it is less formal and not restricted by bureaucratic requirements. This single working group creates a great deal of work on its own both for Officers and members in organisation and resident liaison. Proposals from Labour for extra scrutiny committees will clearly increase workloads, see their submission Table 2 and paragraphs 6.3 and 6.6 If they had their way in May 2015 then we would suggest that more Councillors would be needed, not less, to fill their committee structure.

1.6 The Audit Committee is an important part of scrutiny and our Constitution grants it powers relating to the Annual Accounts. For this reason, the Committee membership includes a qualified accountant (T Holbrook) and small businessmen (S Bilbie and A Stevenson). Again we could lose this expertise if numbers are reduced too drastically.

1.7 Licensing and Public Protection Committee with Panel and Drivers Panel. This Regulatory committee or its panels meet regularly. The Licensing Panel 4 times this calendar year, the Drivers Panel 4 times this civic year and the full Committee 3 times this civic year. Training is required for this and other regulatory bodies. The meetings vary in length and are occasionally cancelled as much of the work is reactive following Public House Licensing changes and applications, etc from taxi drivers. We submit that it is much more efficient to programme meetings where possible then cancel them than have to try to obtain Officer and Member availability on an ad hoc and urgent basis.

1.8 Planning Committee consist of 13 members and has met 12 times so far this year to deal with applications which are not able to be decided at Officer level. Considerable training is needed to be able to serve on this committee and it requires a considerable degree of availability as there is a "planning bus" in the afternoon before each meeting. The length of meetings do vary but can go on for a number of hours as it is the controversial applications which end up before the Committee. More work is anticipated for the Planning Committee in future years as our core strategy is approved with large scale house building anticipated. For example, an outline application has now been received for the Stanton site for 1,950 dwellings plus industrial and commercial properties. This will be dealt with by the Planning Committee and will involve a great deal of time and consideration. Once the outline

permission is granted individual areas will come before the committee for detailed approval for many years. We anticipate more work for this committee because of this and other new house building projects. HS2 will be passing through and alongside Erewash and will again involve much work before it finally operates in 2033.

1.9 Other small Committees meet as needed but still require Member representation.

1.10 A significant proportion of Member time, especially for Lead Members, is spent on responding to emails and other secretarial work. Apart from support for the Mayor via the Civic Support Officer, only minimal organisational and secretarial support is provided for anyone. The Leader and Deputy Leader have Blackberries and Lead Members and 4 Committee Chairmen have ordinary mobile phones. All Members have laptops or computers plus black and white printers. An increase in support is unlikely to be given the financial pressures. No Political Assistants are provided.

2.0 The future of Erewash Borough Council

2.1 It is difficult to see the future with any certainty but we are told that there will be no change to our two-tier arrangements at least until after May 2015. We have therefore worked on a continuation of the status quo. However, undoubtedly there will be continued financial pressures with appropriate restructuring and more efficient working by means of joint ventures and possible outsourcing becoming necessary. Erewash has not done a great deal of this to date apart from the Bramcote Bereavement Services Joint Committee with Broxtowe Borough Council, but discussions are on-going on joint waste proposals and investigations into the future of some technical departments and leisure services will no doubt be held, but no decision is likely in the near future. We are part of several Joint bodies such as the Joint Planning Advisory Board and Digital Derbyshire.

In any case our view is that the Committees referred to above will still be needed just as much as now, although their precise role may change as perhaps they will put more emphasis on scrutinising outside bodies rather than internal functions.

3.0 Conclusions

3.1 We accept the amended Council estimate of future electorate at 88,954 and note that this increase further adds to Councillor workloads and so supports our submission for a low reduction in Council size. If we go for 47, this increase in workloads will be in the region of 12%, not easy but sustainable.

We still feel that a number of 47 Councillors would provide efficient, effective and sustainable Local Government for our electors.

Much of the comments from both ourselves and Labour would support a continuation of the same number of Councillors, but we feel that it is important to demonstrate that Councillors should also do more at these difficult financial times for our electors. The budget savings of a reduction of 4 Members at £4,040 pa will not have a great impact on the Council's overall budget, but it is the gesture that is important.

Councillor Chris Corbett
Chairman
Erewash Conservative Councillors Group
16 April 2013

CONSERVATIVE COUNCILLORS GROUP COMMENTS ON

Labour Group Submission on future Council size

We would comment on the Labour submission, which we feel reads more like a manifesto or wish-list, as follows, using their Part Headings and our own paragraph numbers for ease of reference:

1 Introduction

1.1 It appears from paragraph 1.3 that the Labour submission began with the premise of 2,000 electors per Councillor and then worked backwards to calculate the number of Councillors they prefer. The comments in paragraph 1.4 re the number and make-up of wards is not appropriate at this stage in the process and should be ignored.

1.2 Paragraph 1.5 refers to “a reduction in the number of council meetings, bodies and committees” as justification for reducing the number of councillors by 8. This contrasts with Table 2 and their comments which we shall deal with in **part 6**

2. Key considerations

2.1 As in their paragraph 1.3 their comments in this Part (last sentence in paragraph 2.3, and paragraph 2.6) appear to be based on a desire to reduce the number of wards in differing areas of the Borough and not, as we feel it should be, on the best result for the people of Erewash. Table 1 is of no importance at this stage in the process and should be ignored. We do however agree with the projected total of 88,370 electors for 2018.

3. Role of Council and Non-Executive Councillors

3.1 Paragraph 3.3 gives an incorrect number for non-Executive Members who sit on committees. The correct figure is calculated by

Total number of Councillors 51

Less Executive (Lead) Members 5

Less Mayor and Deputy Mayor 2 (we take the view that these roles should be removed from the political arena)

Total 44. NOT 41 It may be that they are referring to their paragraph 5.4 which is dealt with later and is also wrong.

4. Councillor's role within Erewash

4.1 We would agree with paragraphs 4.1 and 4.2 first sentence which support our recommendation for a smaller reduction in Councillors.

4.2 The second sentence is not supported by any evidence, see our comments on this appendix later. Their figures in any case only refer to “back-bench” Councillors and do not allow for the much longer hours worked by Lead members and all the Committee Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen.

4.3 Whilst their assertions regarding difficult urban wards may be true in part, there is also a competing argument for more rural areas. In any case, once again, this is not a

matter for this stage of the process. However this does support our argument for a smaller reduction in Members than that suggested by Labour.

4.4 Their paragraph 4.5 is not applicable.

4.5 We would question the assertion in paragraph 4.7 that reducing the number of Councillors by 8 would really save the Council so much money. Their proposals to increase the number of Special Responsibility Allowances by creating two extra scrutiny committees which potentially creates 2 Chairmen and 2 Vice-Chairmen total (£3,520 +£1,171 +£3,520+£1,171) £9,382 pa would immediately eat into these savings. In terms of the overall budget of the Council such figures are really very small and in our view it is much more important to have an efficient and effective Councillor arrangement than worry about relatively small amounts.

4.6 In our view, the final sentence of paragraph 4.8 is simply wrong. As Conservatives we have always had sufficient candidates to fight every seat. We would also argue that a reduction in Councillors would tend to reduce the total quality, skills and knowledge of the body of elected Councillors rather than increase it.

5. Council bodies and committees at present

5.1 Paragraph 5.4 incorrectly states that there are currently 5 elected members who do not have a committee place and attempts to use this as a justification for reducing the number of Councillors. According to the Council's website under Councillors, and using the published minutes of the Annual Council on 3 May 2012, it is possible to establish that all Labour Councillors, except Councillor Michelle Booth are on a Committee although admittedly the Rate Relief Determination Panel (John Booth) has not met. Labour did not appoint to Scrutiny and Audit at that Annual meeting but did later during the civic year. Even if there were 5 elected members not on any committee, that would not be because there was a current lack of committee places available as stated in the second line of paragraph 5.4. According to the Council website Labour Councillors G Birkin and H Griffiths are on both Planning and Scrutiny, Councillor J Wilson is on Planning, Scrutiny and Licensing, and Councillor F Phillips is on Audit and General Purposes. We would submit that it should not be assumed that if the number of Councillors should fall then those disappearing are those not on any Committee, but it is much more likely that the whole range of active and less active Councillors would be affected.

5.2 Paragraphs 5.5 and 5.6 states that a significant amount of Officer time is linked to servicing committee meetings. We would agree which is why we are surprised at Labour proposals to increase the number of committee meetings. We feel an increase in such Officer time increases the risk of adverse effect on service delivery which we are all trying to avoid.

5.3 Paragraph 5.7 infers that the cancellation of some meetings supports the need for fewer elected representatives. We would argue that the cancellation of meetings of such as Licensing and other Quasi-judicial committees would reflect the existing efficient use of time by Officers and members. It is surely better to be prepared for demand-led committees in case of need and then cancel rather than to organise them on an ad-hoc basis when it would be more difficult to organise Officer and member availability. Thus making the Council less efficient.

5.4 When reading paragraph 5.8 about the small number of scrutiny meetings in 2011/12 it should be remembered that Labour boycotted all scrutiny meetings until the current civic year, so they did not refer any items to scrutiny, thus reducing the workload. This has now changed and regular Committees and Task and Finish Groups are now being held.

5.5 Paragraph 5.10 refers to Appendix 3 which we comment on later, but we would say that it was a legal requirement to hold that Licensing Committee at that time as it was mandatory to approve the Gambling Act Statement of Principles by the following week, the 31st January. The members of the Committee had ample opportunity to study the Statement and it was non-controversial so it would have been inefficient and a waste of resources to prolong the meeting unnecessarily. See Minute 337 of 2012/3. The Audit Committee, which incidentally was held on Tuesday 26th February 2013 and not the 28th as stated, did last 31 minutes and that does not seem unreasonable when you consider that there were 3 noting Reports tabled and no other decisions to be made.

5.6 Paragraph 5.12 is correct in that there were a relatively large number of public questions in the civic year 2011/12 as a result of proposals to build on green field sites in the Borough as part of the core strategy (these proposals were changed following consultations). However, the facts taken from the Green Minutes Book covering Council meetings over the last 12 months show:

8 March 2012 No public questions
3 May 2012 (Annual Council) No public questions
21 June 2012 No public questions
11 October 2012 (Extraordinary meeting) No public questions
11 October 2012 (Ordinary meeting) No public questions
13 December 2012 6 public questions on varying subjects
24 January 2013 No public questions

We would argue that a smaller number of Councillors, with a resulting reduction in experience and ability, would, if anything, reduce the quality of debate and the quality of the answers to public questions rather than improve it. It should be remembered that there is every opportunity for all Councillors to ask questions of the Leader or Lead Members at Full Council on subjects such as those raised by residents and this does happen from time to time.

5.7 Paragraph 5.16 refers to Standards Committee to which we refer in our paragraph 6.3 We would like to think that the number of standards complaints will fall in the future, as we are now recording all Full Council meetings but there is no guarantee that this Committee's workload will fall

6. Proposed Council Bodies and Committees"

6.1 The current Executive is in fact 5, not 6. Paragraph 1.5 refers to "a reduction in the number of council meetings, bodies and committees" as justification for reducing the number of councillors by 8.

This suggestion contrasts with Table 2 in paragraph 6.3 which proposes an increase of future committee memberships. Paragraph 6.6 says two of the new scrutiny committees of 15 members would meet 6 times a year, plus a crime & disorder committee of 7, presumably just once a year although that is not specified. Even on this basis that would be 13 formal scrutiny meetings compared to the present arrangement of one scrutiny of 6 times a year (one of those meetings being to discuss crime & disorder). An increase of 7 meetings a year. There is also no mention of any arrangement for controlling the split between the various scrutiny meetings. When we had two scrutiny committees we also had an Overview & Scrutiny Board made up of the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the scrutiny committees to decide the workloads

and subjects and this met every three months. This does not appear to have been considered and would add further to the number of meetings.

Table 2 current membership adds up to 59 whereas their future membership adds up to 69 an extra ten positions irrespective of the number of meetings which would need to be filled.

This is a further argument for more Councillors being needed which contrasts with their suggested reduction of 8.

6.2 Paragraph 6.5 says General Purposes and Standards Committees should only meet on an ad hoc basis in order to free up time for Officers and Councillors. We would argue against this.

They are both important Committees which should be programmed into the Civic diary of meetings, to ensure efficient working and member and Officer availability. Standards and General Purposes Committees are open to non-Executive members only.

6.3 The Standards Committee includes 9 Councillors and 8 independent members and we would argue that it would be extremely difficult for Officers to organise Standards meetings on an ad hoc basis. The Labour suggestion is 5 Councillors, but there is no mention of independents. We would argue that, especially on matters such as Standards, a wide range of experience is needed and this knowledge and experience would be diluted if the number of Councillors on the Committee fell from 9 to 5. The inference is that standards only meet rarely, but because of the regrettably confrontational nature of Erewash politics, the Standards Committee is actually very busy. As evidenced by a Confidential Standards Committee report of 31 May 2012 which listed the complaints dealt with during the Civic Year 2011/12 and during the first period of 2012/13. The various Hearings and Assessment sub Committees made decisions on a total of 56 complaints plus two more withdrawn. Many of these complaints involved considerable investigation and Officer and Member time and whilst these were decided by Sub Committees the full Committee also met five times in addition during that period.

6.4 The General Purposes Committee currently 9 Councillors is missed off Table 2 completely but would still be needed. The Council's Constitution Part 3 pages 24 -28, paragraphs GP1 to GP27 is evidence of the need and importance of this Committee which deals with Personnel matters, Democratic Representation, Constitutional matters, and other matters such as the appointment of the Independent Remuneration Panel, use of the coat of arms, consents and various miscellaneous matters. Whilst it only meets when needed, we submit that it is much better for the efficient running of the Council that meetings are programmed in the diary and then cancelled if there is no business than otherwise, which is inefficient as arranging availability of Officers and Members would be time-consuming and difficult. Should Labour get their wish to increase the number of Scrutiny Committees then it will be the General Purposes Committee that will be charged with dealing with that. As with all Councils, there is likely to be further restructuring of the Council staffing, and this will also fall within the GP Committee's remit. As with Standards, a wide range of experience and knowledge of the working of the Council would be needed to deal with this and any reduction in overall numbers would reduce that expertise. Decisions and recommendations made by the General Purposes Committee are very important as they can affect the very heart of the Borough Council (the staff and the Constitution), hence the importance we attach to it. This is reflected by the individuals selected by

both Parties which include those with the longest periods of service (eg Parkinson and Moloney both over 20 years)

7. Electoral representation and Ward Boundaries

7.1 We feel that the paragraphs 7.1 to 8.3 and also 9.2 are not matters for this stage of the Review process and should be ignored. We would dispute some of the figures in 7.2 in any case but that is not a matter for this paper.

8. Appendices

8.1 We would not argue with Appendix 1, although we cannot trace their final one, the War Memorials Trust.

8.2 We would question some of the information provided, for example Mrs McGraw states she spends 2 hours a week on Council meetings and yet she has only attended 7 meetings this Civic Year, 6 of which were Full Council meetings. I suspect her figure is an exaggeration. However Cllr F Philips says he spends 3/5 hours a month on Council meetings (ie say 1 hour a week) and yet he has attended 16 meetings this civic year. So I suspect he has underestimated for some reason. Councillor Mrs Pidgeon does not give any times. Councillor A Phillips gives 15 hours a week and that is probably reasonable as Leader of their Group and he attended 18 meetings so far this civic year. In our experience it usually takes much longer than one hour per Council meeting to read, prepare and attend. The meeting figures are found by searching Councillors attendance figures and entering the period 4 May 2012 to 31 March 2013. In conclusion we find the figures unreliable and of no value to their argument.

8.3 Appendix 3 does not appear to add anything to the argument as they appear to have been selected at random and could mean anything, but we have dealt with them in our paragraph 5.5.

9. Conclusions

9.1 We would agree with paragraph 9.1 on the considerations to be taken, however the recommendation in paragraph 9.2 appeared to be based on the number of wards rather than the considerations in 9.1. Paragraph 9.3 again demonstrates that the Labour argument is based mainly on elector numbers and wards, which are matters for the next stage of the process not this one.

9.2 Their final argument to reduce the number of councillors is largely based on their proposals to reduce the number of council committees and yet their Part 6 and Table 2 argues in favour of more Council committees.

9.3 On studying the Labour Submission we find it is muddled with competing arguments for more Committees and yet fewer Councillors. It seems to be begin with the premise that 2,000 electors per Councillor is a good number and they then debate the number of wards and then they work from there. Much of their argument supports our contention that whilst a small reduction in Councillors of 4 to 47 is justifiable, a fall to 43 would be a step too far and seriously affect the efficiency and effectiveness of Local Government in Erewash.

16 April 2013

Cllr Chris Corbett .Chairman of Erewash Conservative Councillors Group