

Boundary Commission Rationale

The Labour Group in its submission has spoken to the majority of Councillors on Middlesbrough Council and this briefing should be taken as a fair reflection of that majority.

Deprivation

13 out of 23 wards in Middlesbrough are among the most deprived 10% of wards in the country. And 6 wards are among the most deprived 1% of wards nationally. Due to the seriousness of the deprivation in Middlesbrough it is essential that the area has enough Councillors to provide services and support to the people of the town. In many areas of Middlesbrough elected members provide assistance and help to those most in need. If the Council size is reduced by a significant amount a democratic deficit would develop leaving deprived communities without the requisite representation from elected members. To illustrate the scale of deprivation in Middlesbrough 'The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment' highlights where the main concerns and issues are:

- i. Middlesbrough has a rapidly aging population. By 2030 it is forecasted that the number of people aged 65+ will increase from 21,900 to 30,600. This will put a strain on Council services and require the Council to provide more care in terms of the elderly.
- ii. The gap in life expectancy between the most deprived and the least deprived wards in Middlesbrough is widening and is 14.8 years for males and 11.3 years for females. (compared to 12.4 years for males and 9.5 years for females between 2001 and 2005)
- iii. 34% of children in Middlesbrough live in poverty compared with 21% nationally and due to the economic situation the number of children living in unemployed or low wage households is increasing.
- iv. 25.6% of the working age population receive key benefits compared to 15.9% nationally and the number of people Not Engaging in Employment, Education and Training is 9.6% and is higher than the regional and national average.
- v. The number of households in fuel poverty is 14,199 making up 24.9% of households and is 5% higher than the national average. This is especially concerning in relation to the projected increase in the elderly population who would be most vulnerable.
- vi. About 3000 young people in Middlesbrough have a mental health need requiring intervention from a mental health professional. The report states that there is an indication of poor access to mental health services for young people. Life expectancy for people with mental health issues and learning and physical disabilities remains significantly lower than the general population.
- vii. Smoking, binge drinking and obesity remain major challenges in Middlesbrough; 30% of women still smoke during pregnancy; obesity

rates in Middlesbrough are higher than the national average; and 31% of the population of Middlesbrough binge drink.

- viii. Middlesbrough's teenage pregnancy rate is 28% higher than the English average.

In all of the examples of deprivation and need listed above the Local Authority either has a direct role in the provision of care; scrutinises local, regional and national policy on these and related issues; invests in local services, facilities and policies designed to deal with these issues; or has a consultative or partnership role with other local, sub-regional or regional actors in relation to them. Middlesbrough Council must have the necessary amount of local elected representatives to fulfil these functions.

Local Councillors on a ward level play a crucial representative role taking on casework on behalf of residents and the deprivation in Middlesbrough means that this representative role is even more important due to the scale, complexity and breadth of issues which Councillors face on a day to day basis. Setting the number of Councillors too low would have a seriously detrimental effect on the Local Authority's ability to perform these essential democratic functions and represent and work for the people of Middlesbrough.

There are several other key points which need to be made:

1. The new Health and Wellbeing Boards which will have a significant role to play in the provision of Health services in Middlesbrough and across the Tees Valley should have enough representatives to make sure the local authority is represented appropriately. We would recommend it should have at least 3 elected members from Middlesbrough.
2. An assumption has been made in the Council Submission that there are 113 places on Committees and that for each Councillor to sit on 3 Committees there would need to be a minimum of 40 Councillors plus the Executive Committee of at least 2 other elected members. We would contend that as the Mayor is permitted to appoint up to 9 Executive members any calculation of the required amount of Councillors on Middlesbrough Council should take into account that the Mayor can appoint 9 members to his Executive.
3. The Council's submission to the Boundary Commission bases its numbers upon a list of Council Committees. However several important Committees are missing from that list. They are: Works Council (10 Members), Corporate Health Safety Committee (10 Members), Corporate Parenting Board (13 Members), Family Placement Panel (1 Members), Older Person's Partnership (4 Members) Shadow Police and Crime Panel (numbers not yet known). Adding the membership of these Committees to the list means that extra Councillors would be required to fill the spaces on these Committees.

4. The submission also has a table of Council Committees (minus those listed in point 3) and how many places they will be reduced by. The submission provides no rationale for these reductions in places. It is not appropriate to delete places on committees without reasoning. It must be questioned whether the committees will operate as effectively following such a reduction.
5. Point 16 of the Submission says that "it is being suggested" that a reduction in the various committees may be implemented in future. It should not be the case that any reduction in council size be based on a hypothetical scenario. The Council's AGM includes no proposals for reducing the size or number of committees. This section also goes on to claim that such a reduction could "be implemented without reducing the quality and standards of work on those committees." There is no evidence advanced for this. Indeed, it could be advanced that in terms of committees such as the Corporate Parenting Board that there aren't *enough* members on the committee. Due to the serious nature of the cases and the complexity and detail involved in administering it reducing the committee's membership, should such a proposition be made, without any rationale to back it up is potentially dangerous and irresponsible.
6. In relation to the Standards Committee specifically the submission claims that "it is anticipated that the number of meetings of the various current Hearings Sub-Committees will reduce significantly". Again no evidence is proposed for this. In light of certain members of the Local Authority's past record the Standards Committee is rarely short of cases to investigate.
7. Due to changes in the government's Localism Bill local authorities will have far more responsibilities in relation to benefits whether this is in terms of benefit advice (i.e. making sure residents of Middlesbrough are claiming the correct forms of benefit that they are entitled to) or in terms of assisting the public to calculate whether they are receiving the right amount of benefit. These extra responsibilities will require significant extra training and councillor time.
8. Neighbourhood Planning will also mean that councillors will have a far greater role in planning within their ward. Neighbourhood Forums might be created to engage with the public and encourage them to develop local, ward-based planning strategies. Councillors will have to take a role on any such forums adding to their workload. Even without the creation of Neighbourhood Forums development plans will be created on a ward by ward basis designating where developments should occur and what forms they should take (i.e. housing, commercial); Neighbourhood Development Orders may be issued with residents being granted planning approval for developments ranging from housing extensions and shop fronts to 'green energy' proposals; Community Right to Build Orders would allow community

groups to identify land for small scale housing, commercial or community facility developments. All these new Neighbourhood Planning policies will add extra local ward-based casework and community engagement responsibilities onto councillors.

9. A suggestion has been made that Executive members should sit on Planning and Licensing Committees as this would mean the number of Councillors could be reduced further. This is problematic as any Executive member for Community Safety or Regeneration and Housing would have a significant crossover between their Executive brief and the business of Licensing and Planning respectively. It does not seem appropriate for those portfolio holders to sit on the Licensing or Planning Committees. The other Executive members would perhaps have less of a direct interest in the decisions of those committees as they relate to their Executive briefs. However, the entire Executive is responsible for the strategy and policy of the council as a whole and as such are responsible for departments which have multi-million pound budgets. Executive members should not sit on either Planning or Licensing committees as that would create a situation where, however indirectly, they would be able to take decisions on a committee of the council that could have a direct influence or impact on decisions of the Executive. Decisions on Licensing and Planning should be taken with legitimate Planning and Licensing concerns in mind not the agenda of the Executive.

Overall Recommendation

In conclusion, the Labour Group (the majority of Middlesbrough Councillors) accepts the council submission that the number of councillors should be set at 40 with 6 Executive members making a total of 46 councillors. The submission is thorough and detailed and has been scrutinised and accepted by the cross-party Overview and Scrutiny Board. It should also be noted that the Mayor can appoint 9 members to his Executive. 40 Councillors has been identified as the minimum amount of non-Executive Councillors necessary for the Local Authority to operate efficiently and successfully. Should a future Mayor wish to appoint 9 Executive members this would mean that a 46 member Council would be short of the necessary minimum number of non-Executive Councillors by three. It could be argued that 49 Councillors is the actual minimum number the council would require in those circumstances. However, a total of 46 fits with the current make up of the Council and the Executive and it would be the Labour Group's submission that that number is arrived at by the Commission.