

This submission is made for and on behalf of Bromsgrove District Council's Labour Group in response to the Boundary Commission's invitation.

## **Introduction**

The Leader of the Council called in the Boundary Commission to re-evaluate the size of the membership of the Council.

The commission will note that this electoral review was started with the predetermined favouring of single member wards as proposed by the Leader of the council.

In addition the commission will note that this pre determination towards single member wards has been done with no evidence to suggest residents currently suffer from multi member representation or would favour single member representation.

The Council was notified that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) intended to conduct an electoral review of the district council. The aim to decide the size and to implement single member wards.

Preliminary discussions have taken place with boundary commission officers and a seminar held for members of the Council.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2012 an Extraordinary Meeting of Bromsgrove Council was held and a *'BOUNDARY REVIEW MEMBERS REPORT ON PROPOSED COUNCIL SIZE'* was put to the meeting for discussion. The outcome of the discussions were that political parties would put their own submission to the Boundary Commission before 5<sup>th</sup> March 2012

A further meeting will be held with Leaders of the political parties on March 5<sup>th</sup> 2012.

## **Approach to Developing Proposals**

During the process of drawing up the response to the preliminary consultation, it became clear that there was evidence that the current ratio (electorate 73,500) per councillor is 1885 with Charford Councillors ratio being 2372 a leftover from the previous review.

The Members representing Charford have commented on the difficulties presented by such a large electorate. Furthermore councillors who are at work have also commented on the difficulties of coping with 1800 and above electorate.

In addition it is an opportunity to re-balance the ratio between members giving far better representation to the electorate.

Between now and 2018 the number of planned dwellings (including the Cofton site) is 2,344.

Regulatory functions are served well at the Council consisting of 13 members on Planning and 13 members on Licensing.

Audit Board consists of 7 members and recently has not been functioning as effective as it should (meetings adjourned/cancelled).

The present size of 39 members has led to the Council's Overview Board being abolished and merged into one with the Scrutiny Board creating an Overview and Scrutiny Board.

The Performance Management Board was also abolished with the Overview and Scrutiny Board picking some of its work up.

Although arguments were put forward that the Council never had the capacity to facilitate three boards many members found it difficult to find the time to sit on boards and few ever participated in scrutiny exercises. Moreover evidence shows there were not many task groups that finished on time or at all.

The low number of 39 members has meant that a great deal of pressure and work has been put on retired members or those who are able to be flexible at their place of work. An increase in size of members would reflect a truer representation of members on boards and committees.

In 2002 the LGCE (page 23 point 32) stated in its conclusions that they remained “satisfied that the statutory criteria would best be met by a council size of 39”. And that a councillor/resident ratio increase of 7 from 1766 to 1773 gave local residents adequate representation.

We believe that the electoral review in 2002 minus the electoral arrangements for Charford Ward have helped to provide satisfactory local government. Therefore the Labour group believes a councillor/resident ratio of 1800 with a 10% each way surplus would offer residents excellent representation and reflect pressures on councillors in and outside the council house and predicted population growth.

With the serious shortage of dwellings created over the years in the district of Bromsgrove the figure of 2,344 dwellings could easily be overtaken bringing more and more pressure on working councillors. The ratio needs to be reasonable inasmuch as the member can cope with the number of residents and keep in employment.

If the ratio is not workable then it is feared members of Bromsgrove District Council will be made up of those retired, own business, in flexible employment or wealthy enough not to work.

## **Conclusion**

We have serious concerns regarding the poor performance of the role of scrutiny and the lack of participation by the majority of members.

Also that the consequences of the last review left Charford Councillors representing an electorate some 24% greater than the average ward. Putting a greater demand on those already representing a deprived area.

If the size is less than 43/44 then it will limit those available to become councillors, excluding many members of the public participating in local government.

The ratio of residents to members is key in ensuring the member can cope with the demands of the electorate as well as keeping themselves in full employment.

We believe these concerns can be addressed by our proposals.

## **Proposals**

1. That the ratio be 1800 per member.
2. Estimate population by 2017 is 78,790 with a ratio of 1,800 would mean the size of the Council would be 43/44.