

Hastings Borough Council

Boundary review of the Borough of Hastings Borough Council Size Submission

July 2015

DRAFT

Boundary Review of the Borough of Hastings

Hastings Borough Council – Council Size Submission July 2015

1. Introduction

This document is submitted by Hastings Borough Council in response to the first stage of the Local Government Boundary Commission's (LGBCE) review of the Councils existing electoral ward boundaries, relating to Council size. The Commission is carrying out a simultaneous review of East Sussex County Council and the five districts and boroughs within East Sussex.

The preparation of this submissions was overseen and endorsed by a cross party group of members and was subsequently debated and overwhelmingly supported by the decision of Cabinet on the 6th July 2015 and will be passed onto the Full Council on 22nd July 2015.

The Commission will ultimately make recommendations to Parliament on the electoral arrangements for the six local authorities in East Sussex, namely:

- a) **Council Size:** the total number of councillors elected to each local authority
- b) The **boundaries of all the wards** (for each borough and district) and divisions (for the county council)
- c) The **number of councillors elected to each ward** and division
- d) The **name of each ward** and division

The new electoral arrangements will come onto effect from the next Hastings Borough Council elections in 2018, at the County Council elections in 2017 and other borough and district elections in 2019.

Reason for review

This review was triggered because Hastings Borough Council meets the Commissions intervention criteria due to electoral inequality. The Commission identified significant levels of electoral inequality between ward boundaries: 38% of the boroughs wards have an electoral variance greater than 10% from the average. Since the last review in 2001?, some borough councillors now represent many more or many fewer electors than other councillors. In addition, the Commission considered that Wealden District and East Sussex County Council also met the review criteria. Even though this review was triggered by only three councils, the decision was taken that it would be sensible to include all of the councils within the administrative area of East Sussex at the same time.

The electoral review is divided into two stages – the first phase considers our Council size and the number of members needed to ensure effective representation in terms of

- Governance and decision making
- Scrutiny and working with outside bodies
- Representational role of ward councillors

The second phase considers ward numbers, ward names and ward boundaries.

The first phase of the electoral review, and the subject of this report, is a consideration of council size (i.e. the number of councillors elected to the authority)

2. Background

a) Local Authority Profile

The administrative area of Hastings is approximately 12 square miles. The town is predominantly an urban area with a population of just over 90,000 people. Its history is shaped partly by its relationship to the sea, but also by its distance (60 miles) from London and the physical constraints of geography. The town has 8 miles of coastline and is surrounded by the mainly rural district of Rother, bordered by the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to the north, Combe Haven Valley to the west and Fairlight to the east.

In common with a number of coastal areas in the UK, Hastings has suffered from several discouraging economic trends in the recent past, a vulnerable and low wage mainly service sector economy, unemployment issues and significant levels of deprivation. The town's economic revival is a long term process and although significant advances have been made Hastings is still one of the most deprived Local Authority areas in England (19th most deprived out of a total of 326)*. Deprivation is widespread and this is reflected in the fact that, of the 53 Super Output Areas in Hastings, 15 of these neighbourhoods fall within the worst 10% in England and a further 9 rank in the worst 20% Furthermore, 12 of the town's 16 wards contain one or more of these neighbourhoods.* (Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2010).

In terms of the national road network, the primary access is the A21 from London and the A259 which runs along the coast. Rail services run along the coast to Brighton in the west and Ashford to the east, and there is a choice of service routes into London. A new link road connecting Hastings and Bexhill 'the Bexhill Hastings Link Road' is due to open later in 2015 and will create space and access for up to 2000 new homes in Rother, business developments and employment opportunities.

There are limits to the amount of land available for development and regeneration purposes within the town and outward expansion is constrained by protected landscape and countryside such as the Hastings Country Park and the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). We are aiming to make the best use of previously developed land in the urban areas for both residential and employment development purposes. We also need to work closely with neighbouring Rother District Council. Hastings, together with most of the neighbouring district of Rother, functions as a labour market or "Travel to Work Area" (TTWA). TTWAs are defined as areas in which the bulks (at least 75%) of the resident, economically active, population also work. Together, the Hastings and Rother area has one of the weakest economies in the south east and the future of Hastings will be increasingly related to what happens in neighbouring Bexhill.

b) Council priorities

The Borough Council has identified seven overarching priority outcomes:

- Economic & physical regeneration
- Cultural regeneration
- Intervention where it's needed
- Creating decent homes
- An attractive town
- A greener town
- Transforming the way we work

While our focus remains the renaissance of our town and the delivery of quality services for local people, we recognise that this needs to happen against a backdrop of the most challenging financial position the council has ever faced. Over the next few years financial constraints will

force us to become a smaller council, prioritising a smaller number of key activities in the future. Our corporate plan priorities and targets have been drawn up recognising this new environment.

c) Demographic pressures

In 2013, Hastings had a population of 90,754 (ONS mid-year estimates. The population has tended to be younger than the rest of East Sussex and currently, we have an age profile more similar to the national picture. Based on the housing growth proposed between 2011 and 2028, the population is forecast to grow by 1.6%. At the same time a growth in the number of households is expected from 39,800 in 2011 to 43,000 in 2028 (an increase of 8.1%). This is a reflection of changes in how we live, with more people living longer and more people living alone. By 2028 there will be a greater proportion of older people, with particular growth in the post retirement age group (29.3% in 2028, compared to 21.6% in 2011). Although we need to plan now to provide the housing, health and social provision for older people, this does not mean simply accommodating projections, but requires a comprehensive strategy to make the area more attractive to younger people and people of working age.

With all this in mind, overall, there is likely to be an increased demand on Council services.

d) Previous boundary reviews

The last borough boundary review was undertaken in 2000. The review arose because at the time 9 out of the 16 wards in the borough, had an elector to councillor variation of more than 10% from the average for the borough.

The outcome of the review was that the number of members remained at 32; the number of wards stayed the same at 16, but the boundaries of all wards were modified.

As part of the review proposals the Council presented that it would prefer a system of elections by halves, instead of the system which was in place which provided for elections by thirds. Due to the limits of legislation at the time, which provided for either elections by thirds or whole council elections, this proposal could not be recommended to parliament by the Boundary Commission. The Councils election cycle change however, to elections by halves in 2002.

The 2000 review was undertaken by a Member Working Group and fully endorsed by the Council.

e) Developing this submission

The Councils Working Arrangements Group met on the 17th June 2015 to review the evidence and to formulate the basis of the Council's submission on Council size. Prior to this, a meeting was held with all members and the Boundary Commission on the 24th March, and a workshop-style discussion was held with all members on the 8th June 2015.

The draft recommendations for submission to the Commission were considered by Cabinet on the 6th July 2015, which forwarded its recommendations for consideration at Full Council on the 22nd July 2015.

3. The Proposal

At present, Hastings Borough Council has 32 elected members; the ratio of electors to members is within an acceptable range. (The total number of electors in a local authority divided by the number of councillors).

a) Forecast Electoral Growth

In 2012, the electorate is projected to increase to 66,497 in Hastings. The projections have been developed by ESCC on behalf of the East Sussex Electoral Review Working Group and have been calculated by dividing the number of electors in the 5-year period 2009-2013 by the population over 18 for the same period. The projections were produced by applying the electoral rates to the population aged over 18 for each year of the period 2015-2021.

Table 1 Electoral Estimates and Projections for Hastings, 2014 – 2021.

Ward	Estimates	Projected Electorate						
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Ashdown	4,420	4,755	4,788	4,869	4,884	4,908	4,912	4,924
Baird	3,436	4,070	4,077	4,095	4,091	4,087	4,079	4,122
Braybrooke	3,329	5,147	5,139	5,124	5,112	5,089	5,065	5,044
Castle	3,464	2,930	2,940	2,947	2,952	2,982	3,023	3,061
Central St Leonards	3,039	3,254	3,246	3,238	3,231	3,300	3,290	3,292
Conquest	3,761	3,837	3,990	4,089	4,085	4,086	4,082	4,077
Gensing	3,718	3,492	3,526	3,569	3,671	3,689	3,693	3,697
Hollington	4,081	4,410	4,474	4,531	4,628	4,733	4,773	4,802
Maze Hill	3,703	3,698	3,704	3,708	3,725	3,730	3,749	3,742
Old Hastings	4,029	3,810	3,819	3,836	3,840	3,847	3,863	3,866
Ore	3,428	4,951	4,975	4,977	4,960	4,941	4,966	5,027
Silverhill	3,009	3,685	3,727	3,747	3,838	3,837	3,832	3,848
St Helens	3,922	4,202	4,259	4,277	4,287	4,406	4,595	4,707
Tressell	3,179	3,579	3,644	3,714	3,749	3,754	3,754	3,788
West St Leonards	3,771	3,727	3,757	3,761	3,770	3,803	3,803	3,816
Wishing Tree	3,709	4,580	4,610	4,638	4,660	4,670	4,672	4,684
Hastings	57,998	64,126	64,674	65,120	65,484	65,861	66,152	66,497

Source: 2014 estimates are from the data supplied by the district/boroughs in 'Electorate Matrix for CEDs sub-district projections 19.01.2015'

Projections have been calculated by applying the electorate rates to the ESCC sub-district projections run by using POPGROUP Forecast Models (March 2015)

The borough average number of electors per councillor is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the borough by the total number of councillors representing them on the council. At present, each councillor represents a borough average of 1,812 (57,998 divided by 32), which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 2078 by the year 2021 if the present number of councillors is maintained (66,497, the 2021 forecast electorate, divided by 32).

b) CIPFA Family and other LGBCE review outcomes

The current composition of Hastings Council is 32 Members covering 16 wards. When our Council size is compared to our nearest neighbours' authorities as set out by CIPFA, we share similar characteristics.

Table 2 CIPFA family data

Local Authority & Total Population	Number of members	Number of Wards	Review	Change
Thanet 138,000	56	23	2001	Increased members by 2 & reduced wards from 27 to 23
Great Yarmouth 97000	39	17	2001	Increased members by 4 & wards by 7
Shepway 109,000	30	13	2013	Reduced members by 16 & 4 wards by 4
Gosport 83,000	34	17	1999	Increased members by 4 & wards by 3
Lincoln 94000	33	11	Current review	-
Ipswich 134,000	48	16	2000	No change
Eastbourne 98,000	27	9	Current review	-
Worthing 105,000	37	13	2001	Increased by 1 member & 1 ward
Worcester 99,000	35	15	2001	Reduced by 1 member & increased 3 wards
Barrow-in-Furness 67,000	36	13	2005	Reduced 2 members
Preston 139000	57	22	1999	Increased 3 wards
Scarborough 107,000	50	25	1998	Increased 1 member and 3 wards
Dover 110,000	45	21	2000	Reduced by 11 members & 10 wards
Waveney 114,000	48	23	2001	Increased by 2 wards
Hyndburn 79,000	34	16	1999	Reduced member by 12 & wards by 1

Source: Population statistics estimate 2013, ONS

The most recent review undertaken within our CIPFA family was in 2013 at Shepway Council – this saw a reduction in both member numbers and wards to achieve electoral equality, to 30 members and 13 wards. Within our CIPFA family, member numbers range from 27 across 9 wards to 57 members across 22 wards. , so with 32 members and 16 wards we are at the lower end of this range; and there are only 2 other local authorities with less than 32 members.

c) Hastings Borough Council governance and decision making arrangements

The Local Government Act 2000, introduced a fundamental change to the way in which Councils political management arrangements were to – and now – work. Hastings Borough Council moved from a traditional Committee System to that of a Cabinet/Scrutiny style of governance, adopting the ‘strong leader model’ to stream line and make decision making processes more effective and accountable.

The Cabinet which currently has representatives from both parties is responsible for the strategic management of the authority within the budget and policy framework agreed by Full Council. Of the eight Cabinet members (6 Labour and 2 Conservative) each member from the majority group has a portfolio of responsibilities related to council services. Cabinet is the main decision-making committee of the Council; it makes recommendations to Full Council, for example on the adoption of the budget

Full Council, approves the authorities budget , corporate plan and policy framework and meets quarterly to consider draft policy documents, the outcome of scrutiny reviews and to discuss other matters of significant interest. The Annual Council also appoints Members to serve on Committees. A number of other committees are required to fulfil a range of other responsibilities. The following table provides the list of current Council committees and the number of members serving on each one.

Table 3: HBC Committee membership

Committee	Number of Borough Councillors
Schedule A	
Annual Council	32
Council	32
Cabinet	8
Audit	5
Council Appointments	5 (as & when required)
Standards	5 (as & when required)
Employment/HR	4 (as & when required)
Environment & Safety	5
Overview & Scrutiny	14
Planning	10
Licensing	15 (4 for each meeting, as & when required)
Schedule B	
Museums	10
Charity	3
Discretionary rate relief	9 (as & when required)
Working Arrangements Group	7
Member training & Develop Group	4
Total Committee places	100

No changes to the current governance structures are currently planned.

d) Overview and Scrutiny

The Borough Council also has two Scrutiny Committees which meet quarterly, with the power to investigate policy issue and question members of Cabinet, commission reports, invite outside experts to give evidence and make recommendations to the Cabinet and Full Council. Scrutiny works alongside Cabinet to help make sure the Council is delivering services efficiently and effectively and that the Council is responsive to the needs and opinions of the Boroughs residents and organisations.

In addition to the quarterly meetings overview and scrutiny undertakes a number of in-depth reviews per year. This work is undertaken through the formation of working groups / task and finish groups which consist of smaller number of members and the involvement of local groups and organisations where appropriate.

The member time commitment for scrutiny has become more involved and demanding of members time since its initial set up in 2000.

There are a range of other committees that deal with regulatory or quasi-judicial functions including planning, licensing, employment and environment and safety. All committees are appointed annually by Full Council. A full programme of meetings is timetabled for the year, although additional special meetings can be arranged.

e) Representatives on partnerships and outside bodies

Borough councillors sit on a wide range of partnerships and external bodies as part of the Councils partnership working arrangements. These appointments come with a range of obligations and responsibilities that enable members to contribute effectively to the bodies concerned.

Members currently represent the Council on 14 partnerships (20 seats) and 9 bodies (9 seats).

f) Members Representative Roles

All members were invited to complete an on-line survey as part of the process to inform this review. Of the 30 members that were invited to take part, 28 (93%) completed the survey. Many members considered that the nature of their role has changed and continues to evolve. Members advised that they spent up to 7 hours a month in Council meetings (67%) and 79% spending up to 7 hours a month in non- formal council meetings (task & finish groups etc.). In addition, 91% spend up to 7 hours a month in partnership and external body meetings.

Members casework and time spent dealing with ward issues has increased in recent years, as has residents expectations with regard to the wide spread use of social media and the ability to contact members via email. This coupled with the demographic nature of the borough, as previously described often means that when residents do get in contact with members they are experiencing a number issues and requests for support.

Members commented that they considered their roles had changed to the extent that

- They felt they needed to be more accessible and play an active role as a community leader.
- That reduction in staffing levels across the authority had meant that members needed to do much more ground work that may have been undertaken by officers in the past.
- There were high expectations from residents that councillors would communicate electronically and that more instant responses to enquiries are expected.

- There was genuine concern that any reduction in member numbers would have detrimental impact on the structure of the Council and officers and the ability of member's to serve local residents.

g) Deprivation and low electoral registration

Hastings is the most deprived borough within the County, and the 19th most deprived borough within the England. During the discussions with members they were keen to highlight that rather than just representing the electorate in their wards, they actually represent the total population, and that this particularly significant in areas of deprivation. Often casework from ward residents experiencing deprivation are complex, and involve a number of issues. Whilst electoral role registrations for example, in Gensing and Central Sat Leonards are only at 68% (over the 5 years from 2009 to 2013) compared to a 94% average for the County, caseload levels are high, there are a number of resident's forums and ward meetings which generate significant workloads. Members consider that any reduction in member numbers would affect their ability to manage their responsibilities effectively.

Low electoral registration rates do not therefore reflect low levels of demand on member's time; often it is the opposite case, and with the projected increase in population and electorate there is no case for reducing the number of borough members in Hastings.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, and in light of the above the borough Council considers that a **Council Size of 32 members Across 16 wards should remain unchanged.**

A Council of this size enables it to take decisions effectively, manage its business and responsibilities in a timely and successfully while providing essential community leadership and representation, provide social value to the electorate, while reflecting the changing nature of the organisation and to meet the demands of the future.

In summary, the justification for Hastings Council Size to remain the same is:

- To be able to respond to the changing face of local government
- In recognition of the importance of the role of members as community leaders and place shapers
- The need to maintain good, effective democratic accountability and representation – the Council must retain sufficient member capacity to run an effective Cabinet and Scrutiny process and its regulatory arrangements
- The importance of working effectively with a wide range of organisations including the Police, the Clinical Commissioning Group responsible for commissioning NHS services and tackling health inequalities, the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), our neighbouring local authorities in East Sussex and the County Council, local businesses, the academies and schools within the borough, and the voluntary and community sector, and local social housing providers.
- To ensure the size of the Council retains enough capacity to enable change to the roles and responsibilities of Members and reflect the need to respond to any local implication of national policy initiatives

Appendices if needed

Members Survey Findings

List of cabinet appointments - committees, working groups, partnerships and representative bodies.