

<b>Committee(s):</b> Ordinary Council	<b>Date:</b> 16 March 2022
<b>Subject:</b> Electoral Review – Council Size Submission	<b>Wards Affected:</b> ALL
<b>Report of:</b> Amanda Julian - Corporate Director (Law & Governance) and Monitoring Officer	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report Author:</b>  Name: Amanda Julian - Corporate Director (Law & Governance) and Monitoring Officer  Telephone: 01277 312500 E-mail: amanda.julian@brentwood.gov.uk	<b>For Decision</b>

### Summary

To seek the approval of Brentwood Borough Council (the Council) to advise the Local Government Boundary Commission England [LGBCE] that the Council, should in future be served by 39 Councillors.

### Recommendation(s)

**Councillors are asked to:**

**R1. That, in response to a request by the LGBCE, this Council agrees to inform the LGBCE that it wishes to see 39 Councillors elected to serve the Borough in the future.**

**R2. That the Council Size submission (Appendix A) providing the reasoning be submitted to the LGBCE.**

### Main Report

#### **Introduction and Background**

1. The LGBCE informed the Council last year that it intended to carry out an electoral review of the Council area. The reason for the review was they had not carried out an electoral review on the Council area for 21 years. Reviews are normally conducted every 3 to 5 years or on the request of the Council. The Borough has various wards over the variance of 10% meeting criteria for Electoral Inequality two being over 10%, Brentwood West and Brentwood North.

2. During this review the LGBCE will examine and propose new electoral arrangements for the Borough. These are:
  - a. The total number of councillors to be elected – being the Council size.
  - b. The name, number and boundaries of wards.
  - c. The number of councillors per ward to be elected.
3. The review is to enable the Council to shape our future. When determining Council Size it is an opportunity to decide how we represent our communities in the future. It also presents the opportunity to determine if our governance arrangements reflect our long-term ambitions.
4. LGBCE have made it clear that the outcome of the review is not predetermined and will consider carefully all the evidence submitted.
5. Representatives of the LGBCE met with the Council on the 22 July 2021, to determine the timetable. They aim to ensure that we have the right number of Councillors to make democratic decisions and manage the business of the Council in an effective and efficient way, with electoral equality and community identity preserved.
6. There are two distinct parts to the electoral review:
  - a. Council Size: before the LGBCE can re-draw ward boundaries, it will need to come to a view on the number of Councillors to be elected, but only after hearing the Council's views.
  - b. Ward boundaries will then be redrawn by the LGBCE to their criteria. They will lead on two phases of public consultation which the Council will be able to submit its own ideas and suggestions regarding the warding proposed.
7. This is the first part of the electoral review which looks at evidence to justify the suggested number of Councillors that the Council believes are needed to carry out the duties required. This is so, there is electoral equality for voters within the Borough. Whilst we can suggest a number it is ultimately for the LGBCE to determine.
8. A cross service officer lead group was tasked with preparing the data needed to show future predictions of how the electorate would grow between now and 2028, using the LGBCE tool kit and providing challenge data. The increase in electors would be 18.75%. Workshops and meetings have been held with

Councillors, using the LGBCE template as a guide to facilitate discussion. We concentrated on the three main areas highlighted by the template these being:

- a. The governance arrangements of the Council and how decisions are made.
  - b. The scrutiny function relating to how decisions are made and the Council's responsibilities on outside bodies.
  - c. How representational Councillor's role is in the community, how they engage with the community, casework and how they represent the council on local partnerships.
9. Detailed consideration has been given to the existing governance arrangements and the future needs of the Council, taking into consideration the strategic partnership and the continued working with ASELA and the impact these have on Councillor's time and interaction with the residents.
- a. Covering an area of 153 square kilometres, Brentwood is the ninth largest authority in terms of area but one of the smallest in terms of population. The Borough is 89% green belt which means those Councillors that hold seats in the more rural areas of the Borough spend a significant amount of their time responding to residents' concerns about enforcement matters, including planning and fly-tipping.
  - b. The Borough has higher than average educational achievements amongst its residents, with a higher-than-average salary, which result in greater participation in elections than the national average. There are several active residents' groups that regularly interact with the Council. Our residents know what they want and expect and regularly contact the Council.
  - c. Planning can be contentious especially with the Borough being largely green belt, the present system has been refined recently including providing all Councillor briefings on a regular basis for large developments to ensure all Councillors are aware of what is happening within the Borough. Enabling Councillors with local knowledge to speak at the Committee making use of local knowledge assists with the process.

- d. Councillors have indicated that they are spending more of their time on their representational role and believe that this will only increase with the local plan being found sound and the allocation of housing within the borough plus the strategic housing development programme.
10. Based on the predicted electorate and the review of the governance arrangements the conclusion was that there was a compelling case for 39 Councillors to be the Council size for the Borough. The detail of which is set out in Appendix A.

### **Issue, Options and Analysis of Options**

11. The workshops reviewed various iterations of Council Size ranging from 33 to 39, the challenge data indicated the number of residents eligible to vote in 2028 would increase by 18.75%.
12. Using the various profiles and data sets the Council determined that 39 would be the ideal Council Size to enable electoral equality and engagement with residents.

### **Reasons for Recommendation**

13. That 39 Councillors are needed to ensure the effective and efficient operation of this Council, given present and future demands.
14. It also complies with that the number be divisible by three to enable all electors across the Borough to have the same opportunity to participate in all elections.

### **Consultation**

15. No consultation is required as this stage.

### **References to Corporate Plan**

16. The increase will ensure that we develop our communities by providing equal opportunities for residents to have access to Councillors.
17. It will deliver an effective and efficient Council better able to represent the residents.

## **Implications**

### **Financial Implications**

**Name/Title: Jacqueline Van Mellaerts, Corporate Director (Finance & Resources) and Section 151 Officer**

**Tel/Email: 01277 312500/jacqueline.vanmellaerts@brentwood.gov.uk**

18. There will a slight increase in the budget for Councillor basic allowance by increasing by two Councillors.

### **Legal Implications**

**Name & Title: Amanda Julian, Corporate Director (Law & Governance) and Monitoring Officer**

**Tel & Email: 01277 312500/amanda.julian@brentwood.gov.uk**

19. There are no direct implications for the Council.

### **Economic Implications**

**Name/Title: Phil Drane, Corporate Director (Planning and Economy)**

**Tel/Email: 01277 312500/philip.drane@brentwood.gov.uk**

20. There are no direct implications.

### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

**Name/Title: Kim Anderson, Corporate Manager (Communities, Leisure & Health)**

**Tel/Email: 01277 312500/kim.anderson@brentwood.gov.uk**

21. When considering any decision that may affect residents the Council must have due regard to the s149 public sector equality duty. By increasing the number of Councillors there will be positive effect on the residents providing greater opportunities for residents to have access to the Council.

**Other Implications** (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

22. There are none.

## **Background Papers**

23. None.

## **Appendices to this report**

Appendix A: Council Size Submission document