



Cabinet

Tuesday, 9 February 2021

Electoral Review of Rushcliffe

Report of the Chief Executive

Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Borough Wide Leadership Councillor S J Robinson

1. Purpose of report

The Council has participated in a Review of Council Size as requested by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE). This report presents the Review for discussion before being presented to Council in March and submitted to the LGBCE.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet:

- a) endorses the Review of Council Size which proposes an increase in the number of councillors for Rushcliffe Borough Council to 46 councillors subject to Full Council approval in March 2021; and
- b) requests that the Chief Executive make arrangements for the Review to be sent to the Commission as the Council's draft submission subject to Full Council approval in March 2021.

3. Reasons for recommendation

- 3.1. The Review of Council Size required the Council to consider how many councillors are needed to effectively represent the electorate and govern the authority.
- 3.2. The Borough is anticipating growth of 18% over the review period of 2020-2027. This increases the average number of electors per councillor from 2,058 to 2,509 based on the current number of councillors.
- 3.3. However, this growth is not evenly spread across the Borough. When considered at a ward level there are much greater variances between wards. Therefore, the Council is recommending an increase of two councillor positions bringing the overall number of councillors for Rushcliffe to 46. This increase in the number of councillors brings the average number of electors per councillor to 2,400.

- 3.4. The increase has been recommended to meet the substantial growth in two particular areas of the Borough (the Fairham development and the Gamston / Tollerton development). Numbers of electors in these two areas are predicted to be between 3,500 and 4,000 in 2027 (with further growth continuing after that date) making these areas comparable in size to those which already have two ward councillors. Further details are provided in the submission.
- 3.5. This recommended increase is also in response to feedback from councillors who have already experienced significant growth within their ward and have reported the increased workload involved in dealing with new developments, new residents and the existing community.
- 3.6. The Council welcomes the second stage of the Review process which looks at the boundaries between wards to equalise (as far as is possible) the number of electors per councillor.

4. Supporting information

- 4.1. In September 2020, Council received a briefing from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England outlining the Review of the Council Size process and background to the review. The review process requires the Council to make a submission setting out its proposals for council size evidencing the reasoning and rationale for this. This report presents the draft Review of Council Size for consideration before it is forwarded to Council for approval in March 2021.
- 4.2. The Review document, based on a template provided by the Commission, covers:
 - The context in which the Council operates.
 - Strategic Leadership including its governance model, portfolios, and delegated responsibilities.
 - Accountability including internal scrutiny, statutory functions, and external partnerships.
 - Community Involvement including both community leadership and casework.
- 4.3. As well as an analysis of Council meetings (demonstrating how much time councillors spend representing the Borough in the decision-making process), a councillor workload survey has been undertaken. Amongst other findings detailed in the report, the survey responses from councillors suggested that their current workload was about right and that they felt the Borough Council had the right number of councillors for its current electorate.
- 4.4. The Review of Council Size document recommends that the number of councillors at Rushcliffe Borough Council is increased to 46. Consideration has been given to the affect of reducing the number of councillors (as has been done in the last two reviews) and increasing the number of councillors on the Council's ability to self-govern.

- 4.5. At present the number of electors represented by each councillor is 2,058 on average. There are five wards in which this differs by more than 10% (which is the Commission's trigger for a Review).
- 4.6. The Borough is anticipating growth of 18% over the review period of 2020-2027. This increases the average number of electors per councillor to 2,509 – an additional 451 electors per councillor. Whilst the Council is confident of its ability to continue to self-govern effectively despite this level of growth, Rushcliffe's councillors take their community leadership role very seriously. Therefore, the submission recommends an increase of two councillors taking the total number of councillors for Rushcliffe to 46. This increase in the number of councillors brings the average number of electors per councillor to 2,400.
- 4.7. The increase has been recommended to meet the substantial growth in two particular areas of the Borough (the Fairham development and the Gamston / Tollerton development). Numbers of electors in these two areas are predicted to be between 3,500 and 4,000 in 2027 (with further growth continuing after that date) making these areas comparable in size to those which already have two ward councillors. Further details are provided in the submission.
- 4.8. This recommended increase is also in response to feedback from councillors who have already experienced significant growth within their ward and have reported the increased workload involved in dealing with new developments, new residents and the existing community.
- 4.9. The Council appreciates that this growth is not evenly spread across the Borough. When considered at a ward level there are much greater variances between wards and a variance of more than 10% can be seen in twelve wards across the borough.
- 4.10. Therefore, the Council welcomes the second stage of the Review process which looks at the boundaries between wards to minimise the variance in the number of electors per councillor. This second stage of the process will take place over the summer of 2021 with any new ward boundaries being in place for the next Borough Council elections in May 2023.

5. Alternative options considered and reasons for rejection

- 5.1. The Review of Council Size has been triggered by current electoral inequalities in five wards. Growth within the Borough is likely to increase this to twelve wards. The attached Council Size submission considers a number of different sources of evidence to support the view that the number of councillors at Rushcliffe is increased to 46.
- 5.2. No action is not an option in this case.

6. Risks and uncertainties

- 6.1. Failure to ensure electoral representation is fair and equitable restricts the Council's ability to deliver services reflective of local need, demand and choice.

Disproportionate electorate to councillor numbers reduces capacity to ensure understanding of local representation and ensure it properly reflects community identity.

- 6.2. Five of the Council’s 25 wards currently show an electoral variance of 10% from the average. This is likely to increase to twelve wards by 2027 as a result of growth in certain areas of the Borough. Therefore, it is essential that a reasoned and justified submission on Council size is made by the authority at this formative stage. This will enable the Council to influence and inform the review process ensuring its proposals will provide sufficient councillors for effective and convenient governance and community leadership.

7. Implications

7.1. Financial Implications

An increase of two councillors would incur additional costs of approximately £11k per annum in Basic Allowances. Potentially there could also be an increase in transport and training costs. If approved this would be included within the revenue budget from 2023/24.

7.2. Legal implications

If approved by the commission, the electoral arrangements for Rushcliffe will be laid by draft order before Parliament in summer 2022. If made the order will come into force in 2023. Until such date, the existing ward boundaries and councillor numbers will continue in their current format.

7.3. Equalities implications

Adequate representation of the electorate is one of the primary drivers behind this review. The Council is satisfied that an increase of two councillors will address the anticipated growth in the Borough ensuring that electors are represented fairly and equitably.

7.4. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 implications

There are no Section 17 implications to this report.

8. Link to Corporate Priorities

Quality of Life	Fair, equitable, and responsive democratic representation is a key element of quality of life for our residents.
Efficient Services	By ensuring that each councillor represents a fairly equal number of electors, each councillor will have the best opportunity to deliver efficient and effective representation for their ward.
Sustainable Growth	Whilst the borough is expanding it is important to maintain fair, equitable, and responsive democratic representation
The Environment	

9. Recommendations

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- b) requests that the Chief Executive make arrangements for the Review to be sent to the Commission as the Council's draft submission subject to Full Council approval in March 2021.

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Background papers available for Inspection:	
List of appendices:	Appendix One – Review of Council Size submission document