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Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities

10 January 2019

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities – Cllr A S Khan

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Deputy Chief Executive, Place

**Ward(s) affected:**

All

**Title:**

Petition – Reduce the number of Councillors in each ward

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**Is this a key decision?**

No

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**Executive Summary:**

The Council has received an e-petition signed by 24 people calling for a reduction in the number of councillors and to hold elections once every four years. Electoral arrangements are set out in law and subject to oversight by certain national bodies and this report sets out the context and factors that would need to be considered should any changes be proposed.

**Recommendations:**

The Cabinet Member is requested to:

- 1) Consider the detail in the report and determine what action if any should be taken in response to the issues raised in the petition.

**List of Appendices included:**

None

**Background papers:**

None

**Other useful documents**

None

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?**

No

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?**

No

**Will this report go to Council?**

No

**Report title:** Petition – Reduce the number of Councillors in each ward

## **1. Context (or background)**

- 1.1 The Council has received an e-petition with 24 signatures entitled “Reduce the number of councillors in each ward” and stating: *“There are 18 local wards in Coventry and 54 councillors. We want the council to reduce the number of councillors in each ward from 3 to 2 and hold elections once every 4 years instead of the current cycle. This will save money and make the council more efficient.”*
- 1.2 Electoral arrangements are set out in law and subject to oversight by certain national bodies. This report sets out the context and factors that would need to be considered should the Council wish to consider seeking any changes to the number of councillors and/or change the pattern of elections.

## **2. Options considered and recommended proposal**

### **2.1 Reducing the numbers of councillors in each ward**

2.1.1 Local authorities have no powers to alter the number of councillors. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is the independent body responsible for carrying out electoral reviews. An electoral review is an examination of a council’s electoral arrangements covering:

- the total number of councillors elected to the local authority;
- the number and boundaries of wards or divisions for the purposes of the election of councillors;
- the number of councillors for any ward or division of a local authority; and
- the name of any ward or division.

2.1.2 The Commission is responsible for setting its own work programme and may consider carrying out a review of a council for two reasons:

- at the request of the local authority; or
- If the local authority meets the Commission’s intervention criteria:
  - a) If one ward has an electorate of +/-30% from the average electorate for the authority
  - b) If 30% of all wards have an electorate of +/-10% from the average electorate for the authority.

2.1.3 The timeframe for such reviews is normally around 18 months and would involve the commitment of human and financial resources from the local authority to support the review.

2.1.4 While a local authority is able to request a review, the decision on councillor numbers is made by the Boundary Commission which may not recommend any change.

2.1.5 For comparison, the population, number of councillors and ratio for all of the seven West Midlands Metropolitan Councils is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

| <b>West Midland Metropolitan Councils:</b> | <b>Population</b> | <b>Number of Councillors</b> | <b>Population per Councillor</b> |
|--|-------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Birmingham                                 | 1,147,290         | 101                          | 11,359                           |
| Coventry                                   | 366,218           | 54                           | 6,782                            |
| Dudley                                     | 319,103           | 72                           | 4,432                            |
| Sandwell                                   | 327,716           | 72                           | 4,552                            |
| Solihull                                   | 214,078           | 51                           | 4,198                            |
| Wolverhampton                              | 260,993           | 60                           | 4,350                            |
| Walsall                                    | 282,302           | 60                           | 4,705                            |

## 2.2 Changing the pattern of elections

2.2.1 Elections to Coventry City Council are by thirds; elections take place three out of every four years with each councillor being elected for a term of four years. Legislation allows for alternative models including whole-council elections. Whole-council elections take place every four years with every seat being up for election at the same time.

2.2.2 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (as amended) enables councils to consider moving to whole-council elections from elections by thirds or halves. If a Council is considering passing a resolution for whole-council elections, it has to take reasonable steps to consult such persons as it thinks appropriate on the proposed change. The final resolution must be passed at a meeting specially convened for the purpose of deciding the resolution with notice of the object, and by a majority of at least two thirds of the members voting on it.

2.2.3 If a Council moves from elections by thirds to whole-council elections, it can go back to election by thirds at a later date but cannot not move to elections by halves.

2.2.4 The Council can pass a resolution at any point to move to whole-council elections the only restriction being that the move cannot take place in a fallow year. The next fallow year for Coventry is 2021.

2.2.5 It is anticipated that the introduction of whole Council elections would deliver cost savings over time, although some caution needs to be applied to any estimates as the pattern of other elections to the Police and Crime Commissioner, West Midlands Combined Authority and general elections have a significant impact on cost, and the costs of elements of elections may change over time.

2.2.6 The approximate costs of current elections, together with an estimate of the potential savings that could be achieved should whole council elections be introduced are shown in Table 2. Where elections are combined with national elections the costs are shared depending on the number of polls taking place on the day. It is not an exact split as there are some costs which are needed for each election such as ballot papers. These estimated costs are based on current information, however, if the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and West Midlands Combined Authority Mayor (WMCA) elections were to be combined then the costs would be more and the potential annual savings from any change reduced.

**Table 2**

| Year       | (Local in <b>bold</b> is the assumed year of whole council elections) |               | Cost to council of elections by Thirds | Cost to council of elections by Whole | Accrued savings from move to whole-council by year |
|------------|---|---------------|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| 2020*      | <b>Local</b>  | PCC, WMCA     | £150,000                               | £300,000                              | -£150,000  |
| 2021       |   |               | £0                                     | £0                                    | -£150,000  |
| 2022       | Local   | Parliamentary | £220,000                               | £0                                    | £70,000  |
| 2023       | Local   |               | £440,000                               | £0                                    | £510,000   |
| 2024       | <b>Local</b>  | PCC, WMCA     | £150,000                               | £300,000                              | £360,000   |
| 2025       |   |               | £0                                     | £0                                    | £360,000   |
| 2026       | Local   |               | £440,000                               | £0                                    | £800,000   |
| 2027       | Local   | Parliamentary | £220,000                               | £0                                    | £1,020,000   |
| 2028       | <b>Local</b>  | PCC, WMCA     | £150,000                               | £300,000                              | £870,000   |
| 2029       |   |               | £0                                     | £0                                    | £870,000   |
| 2030       | Local   |               | £440,000                               | £0                                    | £1,310,000   |
| Total Cost |   |               | £2,210,000                             | £900,000                              |  |

*\*Assumed 2020 first year of all out elections, that all existing polls remain eg separate PC and WMCA and that Parliamentary elections remain on the current schedule.*

2.2.7 The introduction of whole-council elections would be a significant change for electors and would require clear information advising them of their ability to select more than one candidate. It would also have an impact on the count process, where the selection of three candidates from the ballot paper would mean the count process would take longer.

### **3. Results of consultation undertaken**

3.1 No consultation has been undertaken in relation to this report. Should either of the options considered be pursued, the processes that would need to be followed include detailed arrangements for the consultation that would be required.

### **4. Timetable for implementing this decision**

4.1 Should either of the options considered be pursued, detailed timetables would need to be developed to follow required processes.

### **5. Comments from Director of Finance and Corporate Resources**

#### **5.1 Financial implications**

There are no direct financial implications arising from the initial decision on how to respond to the issues raised in the petition. Should Council take the decision to hold local elections on a four year cycle, this could save the Council in the region of £100,000 on an annualised basis. The outcomes of any review carried out by the Boundary Commission may not result in a reduction in the number of councillors and in this case would not deliver a financial saving.

#### **5.2 Legal implications**

When the Local Government Boundary Commission conduct electoral reviews they must adhere to certain rules. The main piece of legislation is the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act). This consolidates and amends provisions previously contained in the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1992 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

The requirements for local authorities to make changes to their electoral arrangements are set out in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (LGPIH Act 2007) as amended by the Localism Act 2011.

**6. Other implications**

**6.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan ([www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/))?**

Not applicable

**6.2 How is risk being managed?**

Not applicable

**6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?**

Not applicable

**6.4 Equalities / EIA**

Not applicable

**6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment**

None

**6.6 Implications for partner organisations?**

None

**Report author(s):****Name and job title:**

Adrian West, Members and Elections Team Manager

**Directorate:**

Place

**Tel and email contact:**

024 7697 1007

[adrian.west@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:adrian.west@coventry.gov.uk)

Enquiries should be directed to the above person.

| <b>Contributor/approver name</b>                                 | <b>Title</b>                                | <b>Directorate or organisation</b> | <b>Date doc sent out</b> | <b>Date response received or approved</b> |
|--|---|------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <b>Contributors:</b>   |   |                                    |                          |   |
| Michelle Rose  | Governance Services Officer                 | Place                              | 12/12/18                 | 13/12/18                                  |
| Liz Read   | Electoral Services Manager                  | Place                              | 12/12/18                 | 14/12/18                                  |
| Martin Reeves  | Chief Executive                             |                                    | 12/12/18                 | 17/12/18                                  |
| <b>Names of approvers for submission: (officers and members)</b> |   |                                    |                          |   |
| Finance: Paul Jennings   | Finance Manager (Corporate Finance)         | Place                              | 12/12/18                 | 19/12/18                                  |
| Legal: Gill Carter   | Team Leader (Regulatory)                    | Place                              | 12/12/18                 | 19/12/18                                  |
| Director: Barry Hastie   | Director of Finance and Corporate Resources | Place                              | 12/12/18                 | 19/12/18                                  |
| Members: Cllr A S Khan   | Cabinet Member for Policing and Equality    |                                    | 17/12/18                 | 17/12/18                                  |

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