EXTRACT MINUTE - POLLING PLACES REVIEW COMMITTEE

The Head of Law and Governance reminded members that the Local Government Boundary Commission was undertaking an electoral review of the Council, which had been triggered due to electoral imbalances which had arisen in more than 30% of the Council’s wards. The Committee was reminded of the two stages of the review and that this meeting would be requested to determine recommendations to Council on whether single member wards should be retained and the future size of the Council.

A wide range of information had been presented to a working group of members of the Committee, which had related to the Executive, Scrutiny and Statutory decision making arrangements of the authority, to assist the Committee to make its recommendations to Council.

A survey on the electoral review had been completed by 28 members and all the respondents were supportive of the retention of single member wards and 71% felt that 36 wards should be retained.

Four options on council size had been considered by the working group all of which took into account the availability of non-executive councillors to undertaken overview and scrutiny and statutory committee functions and these were outlined for information.

Details had also been considered on the structure of the Council’s overview and scrutiny function and the allocation of seats on committees and appointments to outside bodies, to identify whether any changes in structure, membership and appointments would impact on members. The working group noted the unequal allocation of committee seats amongst Groups and appointments to outside bodies.

In considering the community representation role, the working group felt that the deprivation level of wards would have a significant impact on the amount of constituency matters raised with the ward councillor and that a councillor representing a deprived area would have a larger and more diverse caseload than those representing more affluent wards.

Members also felt that the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic had impacted on Councillors communicated with their residents and undertook their community leadership role and that its impact on employment and deprivation would be felt for a number of years. While technology and digital meetings had been used during this time, to ensure that all members were able to continue with their community responsibilities, it was noted that not all residents were comfortable with technology and that personal contact was preferred by some electors.

It was proposed by Councillor Burgin and seconded by Councillor Tristram that Council be recommended to adopt the retention of single member wards and 36 wards.

In proposing the motion, reference was made to the electoral forecast for the district which expected a growth in electors which was approximately the equivalent of two wards. Any reduction in the number of Councillors would affect the ability of members to represent the ward effectively when combined with a forecasted increase in the electorate and would be greatest felt in those deprived area.

The proposal was also in accordance with the motion approved by Council on 2 December 2020, relating to the retention of single member wards.

On the motion being put to the vote, the Chair announced that the motion had been carried unanimously.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL – That the Council’s submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission on Council Size be comprised of 36 single member wards.