

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Executive Director of Corporate Services

Council : 23 February 2011

Subject: Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland – Consultation Paper on Determining Councillor Numbers

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to obtain Council's views on the questions posed in the Boundary Commission's Consultation Paper on determining Councillor numbers in order to allow a response to be made to the Commission prior to 31 March 2011.

2. Background

- 2.1 On 5 January 2011 the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland published a Consultation Paper seeking views on the factors which the Commission might use in a methodology to determine Councillor numbers for each Council area when it carries out its next general review of electoral arrangements in all Scottish Local Authorities. As part of those reviews the Commission needs to make recommendations about the appropriate number of Councillors for each Council area. The review is likely to take place between 2013 and 2106. A copy of the Commission's Consultation Paper is attached.
- 2.2 When the Commission carried out their review of the electoral arrangements between 1994 and 1996 they allowed different categories of Council to have a different ratio of Councillors to electors. West Dunbartonshire fell into category 3, being an authority with less than 60% of the population living outwith settlements of 10,000 or more persons and an overall population density of 1 person or more per hectare. This gave a ratio of 1 Councillor per 3,500 electors.
- 2.3 The Commission recognises that in broad terms Councillors fulfil four distinct roles:-
- Executive decision making;
 - Scrutiny of decisions taken by others within the Local Authority;
 - Regulatory functions such as planning and licensing;
 - Representing all the residents and interest groups within their ward and dealing with issues that they raise.

3. Main Issues

3.1 The Commission recognise that there have been a number of significant changes to the context and working of Local Government since their 1996 methodology was adopted. These include:-

- devolution from Westminster to the Scottish Parliament, with an associated increase in the total number of elected members representing the interests of any one area;
- establishment of multi-member electoral wards for local government so that any elector has a choice of 3 or 4 councillors to turn to;
- increased remuneration for councillors, which means councillors may be able to afford to spend more time on council business with less pressure to earn an outside income;
- changing public perceptions of elected members and the associated costs;
- electronic communications, including email and websites which make it easier for councillors to communicate with electors, and vice versa;
- responsibilities transferred to local communities, for example through development trusts, with a corresponding increased requirement to consult with local communities;
- services transferred to stand alone bodies, such as leisure services trusts, housing associations, joint venture companies, countryside and heritage trusts;
- partnership initiatives with other bodies;
- introduction of forms of cabinet government within some local authorities, which means that while all councillors will still have a representative and scrutiny role, not all will have executive decision making responsibilities, while others will have more;
- moves to increase efficiency and effectiveness, such as combining services and reducing the number of senior officers and committees;
- delegation of decision making from whole councils to area committees with devolved responsibilities and to officers;
- shared services with neighbouring councils and the possibility that this may increase in the face of financial and other pressures;
- establishment of National Parks, with a transfer of some responsibilities to them, but with councillor involvement on their boards;
- changing demographic structure of Scotland and changing spatial distribution of the population.

3.2 The Commission wishes to know the extent to which these and other changes have affected Councillor workload and how these affect the need to maintain, reduce or increase the number of Councillors in Scotland as a whole and within each Local Authority.

3.3 The Commission have invited responses to the following questions:-

1. Do institutional and cultural changes since 1996 suggest that for Scotland as a whole there should be more or fewer councillors from 2017 onwards?

2. Should there be a minimum for councillor numbers in any local authority, and if so what should it be?
3. Should there be a maximum for councillor numbers in any local authority, and if so what should it be?
4. Should the Commission continue to apply a uniform, transparent and objective methodology for determining councillor numbers?
5. What factors, in addition to electorate per councillor, are relevant in determining councillor numbers?
6. Should councillor numbers be determined differently for different categories of local authorities and, if so, what factors should be used to define those categories?
7. Are there any other factors which are relevant to the Commission's consideration of councillor numbers?

4. People Implications

- 4.1 There are no staffing or people implications in responding to the Consultation.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial implications in responding to the Consultation, albeit a change to the number of Councillors in an area will have a financial impact in terms of the cost to the authority per Councillor.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1 The key is to ensure that in the Commissions next review its proposals provide for a sufficient number of Councillors to undertake the key roles identified in paragraph 2.3.

7. Equalities Impact

- 7.1 There is no equalities impact in responding to the Consultation and the Commissions proposals will in due course be subject to a full equalities impact assessment.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 8.1 Council is invited to provide views on the terms of a response to the seven questions asked by the Commission, as detailed in paragraph 3.3 of this report.

- 8.2 Thereafter the response would be finalised by the Head of Legal, Administrative and Regulatory Services, the draft response approved by the Council Leader (and Leader of the Opposition if there is broad agreement on

the terms of a response) and forwarded to the Commission before the deadline on 31 March 2011.

Joyce White
Executive Director of Corporate Services

Person to Contact: Andrew A Fraser, Head of Legal, Administrative and Regulatory Services, Council Offices, Garshake Road, Dumbarton, G82 3PU. Telephone 01389 737800
e-mail: andrew.fraser@west-dunbarton.gov.uk

Appendices: None

Background Papers: None

Wards Affected: All