

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Executive Director of Corporate Services

Council : 30 March 2011

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

1. Purpose

- 1.1** On 23 February 2011 a paper was submitted to Council seeking Council's views on questions posed in the Boundary Commission Consultation Paper on Determining Councillor Numbers. A response requires to be made to the Commission prior to 31 March 2011.
- 1.2** Council agreed that individual members should submit responses to the Head of Legal, Administrative and Regulatory Services. He would then draft a report which, subject to the approval of the Leader and Leader of the Opposition would be sent to the Boundary Commission for Scotland. Failing a unanimous response the matter would be referred back to Council for determination.

2. Background

- 2.1** The background is set out in the report to Council on 23 February 2011, which is annexed hereto.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** The Commission have invited responses to seven questions. Full responses to these have been received from Councillor's McBride and Bollan and Councillor Ronnie McColl indicated his views on question one at February Council. The responses received are:-

Question 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?

Councillor Ronnie McColl – maintain present numbers.

Councillor David McBride – there should be fewer Councillors from 2017 onwards. As part of reducing the cost of politics West Dunbartonshire Council should be reduced from 22 elected members to either 21 or 18 elected members, saving between £20,000 and £60,000 per year thereafter.

Councillor Jim Bollan – there should be more Councillors.

Question 2 – Should there be a minimum for Councillor numbers in any Local Authority and if so what should it be?

Councillor David McBride – 15 elected members. Any Local Authority whose membership falls below 15 members should be subject to a review.

Councillor Jim Bollan – the current number should be the absolute minimum.

Question 3 – Should there be a maximum number for Councillor numbers in any Local Authority and if so what should it be?

Councillor David McBride – no the number of elected members should where possible reflect the size of the population. The important point is to ensure that each member covers an equal number of constituents.

Councillor Jim Bollan – there should be no maximum number.

Question 4 – Should the Commission continue to apply uniform, transparent and objective methodology for determining Councillor numbers?

Councillor David McBride – yes. It is vital that the Commission's impartiality is beyond doubt and that it applies a uniform, transparent and adjective methodology for determining Councillor numbers.

Councillor Jim Bollan – yes.

Question 5 – What factors in addition to electorate per Councillor are relevant in determining Councillor numbers?

Councillor David McBride – consideration must be given to increasing the number of constituents a Councillor represents and consequently reducing the overall numbers of elected members.

Councillor Jim Bollan – poverty, deprivation, unemployment, health and educational attainment.

Question 6 – Should Councillor number be determined differently for different categories of Local Authorities and if so, what factors should be used to define those categories?

Councillor David McBride – no. Representation should be based on a objective criteria only. The different categories of Local Authorities is immaterial. The crucial factor that matters is the number of constituents in relation to the number of Councillors. Distance, or rurality, geography etc must be secondary to the number of constituents.

Councillor Jim Bollan – no.

Question 7 – Are there any other factors which are relevant to the Commissions consideration of Councillor numbers?

Councillor David McBride – yes. The size of the ward is an important factor in terms of effective representation. The three member ward is the most manageable option for elected members. Larger wards make it difficult but not impossible to maintain a strong link with communities.

Councillor Jim Bolland – accessibility and accountability are also relevant.

- 3.2** Clearly there are opposing views on questions 1 and 2 which means that Officers are unable to draft a single Council response incorporating the views of all members. It is therefore recommended that Council agree the terms of their response, which failing to leave it to individual members to respond to the consultation.

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 costs to the authority per Councillor.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** The key is to ensure that in the Commission's next review its proposals provide for a sufficient number of Councillors to undertake the key roles required.

7. Equalities Impact

- 7.1** There is no equalities impact in responding to the consultation and the Commission's proposals will in due course be subject to a full equalities impact assessment.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 8.1** Council is invited to either:-
- a) agree the terms of a response to the Consultation Paper,
 - b) invite members to submit their own consultation responses.

- 8.2** Whichever option is chosen it should be noted that the consultation response needs to be lodged prior to 31 March 2011.

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Appendices: None

Background Papers: None

Wards Affected: All