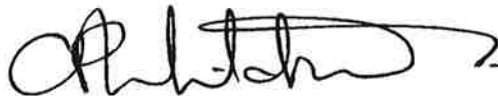


# 2013 Further Electoral Review Members' Working Group Agenda

1.00 p.m., Thursday 28th March 2013  
Committee Room No.1  
Town Hall, Darlington

1. Attendance at the Meeting.
2. To consider the Minutes of the Meeting of the Working Group held on 10th January 2013 (Minutes enclosed).
3. Council Size Submission.
4. Any Other Business.



Paul Wildsmith  
Director of Resources

27th March 2013

Town Hall, Darlington

#### Membership

Councillors Baldwin, Curry, Dixon, Harker, I Haszeldine, Johnson, Kelley, Nutt and Mrs Scott.

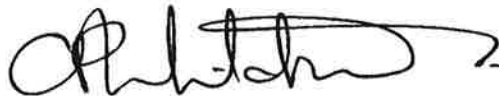
If you have any further queries on this agenda please contact Paul Dalton in the Democratic Services Section, Resources Group, during normal office hours 8.30 a.m. to 5.00p.m. Mondays to Thursdays and 8.30a.m. to 4.30p.m. Fridays (Direct Line (01325) 388387) or E-mail [paul.dalton@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:paul.dalton@darlington.gov.uk)



# 2013 Further Electoral Review Members' Working Group Agenda

5.00 p.m., Thursday 10 January 2013  
Committee Room No.1  
Town Hall, Darlington

1. Attendance at the Meeting.
2. To consider the Minutes of the Meeting of the Working Group held on 6 December 2012 (Minutes enclosed).
3. Council Size Submission.
4. Any Other Business.



Paul Wildsmith  
Director of Resources

4 January 2013

Town Hall, Darlington

#### Membership

Councillors Baldwin, Curry, Dixon, Harker, I Haszeldine, Johnson, Kelley, Nutt and Mrs Scott.

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**Further Electoral Review 2013  
Members' Working Group**

10th January 2013

**PRESENT** – Councillors Dixon, Harker, I. Haszeldine, Johnson, Kelley, Nutt and Mrs. H. Scott. (7)

**APOLOGIES** – Councillor Curry. (1)

**ABSENT** – Councillor Baldwin. (1)

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Ada Burns, Chief Executive, Catherine Whitehead, Assistant Director – Resources, Linda Todd, Head of Democratic and Customer Services, Lynne Wood, Elections Manager, and Paul Dalton, Elections Officer.

**11. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP HELD ON 6TH DECEMBER 2012 – IT WAS AGREED** – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Group held on 6th December 2012.

**12. COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION** – The Assistant Director – Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) inviting Members to explore the future size of the Council and to consider a rationale for any proposed size in readiness for our submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) as part of the Further Electoral Review.

The submitted report stated that the Council had been given the opportunity to make a submission to the LGBCE on the future size of the Council, and outlined the work undertaken to date. The submitted report outlined that the current financial climate would see the range of services provided by the Council reduce significantly, and highlighted that the role of Members could go in one of two directions. It was speculated that the role could shrink in order to focus primarily on the delivery of regulatory and statutory functions, or it could grow to develop into a much stronger representative set of functions, such as facilitating community action, or developing and running community forums. It was suggested in the report that the scope of the review should consider which direction the role of a Councillor would take, and that this should be reflected in the Council Size submission.

The submitted report identified three options in relation to the future role of Councillors. These were a greater role which supplemented a reduced workforce; a slight reduced role as the reduced functions of local authorities take effect; or a severe reduction in the number of Councillors in order to make savings, with the acknowledgement that there would need to be a corresponding reduction in the number of committees and the amount Councillors could be expected to do in their communities. Options were presented in the report together with rationale that supported each position.

The submitted report also stated that the LGBCE had agreed to extend the deadline for the draft submission until 6 May 2013, to allow for consideration of this decision alongside the budget proposals.

The Chief Executive opened discussion with an acknowledgement that Members were minded to formulate a submission around a figure in the high 40's, and stated that Members would need to develop an evidence-based case for such a submission. The Assistant Director – Resources highlighted that she had held discussions with the LGBCE, who in turn had confirmed that any proposal should reflect expectations on Councillors in the future, and therefore it would be appropriate to include the 'Darlington Together' philosophy within the Council's submission.

Members welcomed the recognition from the LGBCE that the future roles of Councillors would be very different. Members agreed that there was a need to examine the future role of Councillors and, in particular, the significant amount of work around public health.

Members felt that it was important to acknowledge that Darlington Borough Council was the third smallest unitary authority in the country, however were responsible for the same number of functions as a large city authority.

Further discussion ensued on the anticipated changes to a Councillor's role, including the requirement for greater attendance at meetings, the additional work that may be generated by Government funding reductions, participation in the governance arrangements for City Deal, greater involvement in Neighbourhood Watch schemes, and increased linkages with the Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Members entered into discussion on changes to the Wards concerned, however were reminded that this initial stage did not provided for the revision of ward boundaries. Members expressed concern that any great changes in membership would lead to a complicated and expensive ward boundary review.

Discussion ensued on the absolute number of Councillors, and how this figure was reflected in other unitary authorities. Members were informed that other unitary authorities have on average approximately 40 Councillors, and only one other unitary authority had a lower Elector to Councillor ratio than Darlington.

Members determined that the best case in formulating a submission around a figure in the high 40's would need to incorporate the increased role due to involvement in the Clinical Commissioning Group, the Darlington Partnership, new Public Health responsibilities, and the upsurge in expectations from the public. Members were concerned that a move to a more radical proposal would mean that the Council would not be able to operate effectively.

**IT WAS AGREED** – (a) That the parameters for the Council Size submission be set between 49 and 53 councillors.

(b) That the following rationale be used to form the basis of the recommended figure:

- (i) Darlington prides itself on having a diverse skills set within its membership which enables Members to contribute effectively to decision making and scrutiny, and is representative of the community it serves.
- (ii) The need to ensure that employed individuals are able to stand and serve as councillors is essential to maintaining this. Within this context it is not possible to make the extent of councillor community roles mandatory.
- (iii) Darlington has a strong reputation for partnership working through its Local Strategic Partnership and other arrangements. Maintaining sufficient councillors is necessary to enable the Council to continue, and enhance, partnership working.
- (iv) The 'Darlington Together' philosophy is essential if a small council like Darlington is going to be able to serve its population effectively. Councillors have an important role in making this philosophy a reality within communities.
- (v) The population of Darlington has risen by 7700 since mid-2001 at the time of the most recent census. Population forecasts show that a programme of house-building will lead to a further increase before 2019.
- (vi) Darlington has a mix of rural and urban areas and it is important to ensure that appropriate representation is given to all communities across the Borough.
- (vii) Public perception will demand a reduction in councillors, but this needs to be balanced against the impact that cuts will have on Council services and the need for councillors to become community leaders and encourage business and communities to fill that void.

(c) That the Ordinary Meeting of the Council, scheduled for Thursday, 9th May 2013 be brought forward to Thursday, 2nd May 2013, in order to approve the Council Size submission, and that the revised timetable for the draft submission on Council Size be agreed.

**13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS** – A brief discussion ensued on anomalies on ward boundaries, including where new developments had been built, however it was explained that these would be addressed in the next stage of the Further Electoral Review process.





**Further Electoral Review 2013  
Members' Working Group**

6th December 2012

**PRESENT** – Councillors Curry, Dixon, Harker and Mrs. H. Scott. (4)

**APOLOGIES** – Councillor Baldwin, I. Haszeldine, Johnson, Kelley and Nutt. (5)

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Ada Burns, Chief Executive, Catherine Whitehead, Assistant Director – Resources, Linda Todd, Head of Democratic and Customer Services, Lynne Wood, Elections Manager, and Paul Dalton, Elections Officer.

**6. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP HELD ON 6TH NOVEMBER 2012 – IT WAS AGREED** – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Group held on 6th November 2012.

**7. MEMBERS' SURVEY RESULTS** – The Assistant Director – Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) outlining the further responses received in relation to the Members' Survey, and stated that, although the responses indicated that some Councillors undertook significant Ward work, this was not universal. The Assistant Director – Resources advised Members that the evidence provided did not allow for a strong argument to be made, and suggested that the evidence supplied in relation to the Council Size submission should be coupled with future expectations of the Councillors role to strengthen any reasoning proposed.

Members entered into discussion on the mitigating circumstances for the lack of evidence, such as the high level of employed Councillors, and it was noted that this reflected the composition of the electorate. Discussion ensued on the additional work that would have an impact on the future role of a Councillor, such as the greater involvement in Public Health, restorative justice and the benefit reforms. It was noted that the benefit reforms would also have an impact on the capacity of the Citizens Advice Bureau, and this would subsequently have a knock-on effect in terms of an increased workload for Councillors. The Chief Executive stated that the new responsibilities would help define the minimum service required, and also enable Members to focus on the non-statutory services that remained crucial to Darlington's future. The Assistant Director – Resources suggested that any argument or evidence should focus on what made Darlington different to other authorities.

**IT WAS AGREED** – That the content of the discussion be noted.

**8. DISCUSSION ON COUNCIL SIZE** – The Assistant Director – Resources reported on comparisons with other North East authorities, in terms of the elector per councillor ratio. The Assistant Director – Resources also stated that she had prepared a range of proposals based on a sliding scale of the number of Councillors, and had drafted a rationale to support each figure. Members entered into discussion on the minimum number of Councillors required, however noted that it was difficult to compare to other larger authorities as Darlington was a small unitary authority. Further discussion ensued on comparisons with similar sized authorities, and

Members were advised that it may be difficult to justify maintaining the present level of representation given other elector to councillor ratios and that it would be necessary to tease out further arguments to support any such stance.

Members felt that it was important to identify the number of officers that would be required to cover the work that a reduction in Councillors would generate, and develop an agreed approach as to the level of work required by a Councillor, however Members acknowledged that it was not possible to impose rules on, or dictate, how a democratically elected representative should work.

Members were requested to give further consideration to the rationale behind the submission, with particular emphasis on the minimal management structure of the Council and the high rate of employment amongst serving Councillors, in relation to developing a convincing evidence based case with regard to both the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, and public perception. Members expressed concern that the review may be perceived as an opportunity to make savings with a reduction in Councillors, which may be to the detriment of appropriate democratic representation. Concerns were expressed that the level of evidence provided to date did not create a strong argument for maintaining the current number of Councillors.

Discussion ensued on the minimum number of Councillors required to maintain the functions of the Council. Members discussed the geographical differences in the town, and the existing community linkages. It was broadly agreed that a figure of 40 Councillors would be too low to respond to the changing agenda within Local Government, however Members recognised that the current level of evidence did not support the retention of 53 Councillors. Members felt that a figure in the high 40's would be a minimum starting point, however believed that this may not transfer easily to the existing electoral map and the natural geography of the town, and were concerned that this may lead to under-representation. Members were also mindful of increasing population trends.

Members focused on the close links Councillors had with the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and the Town Centre Board, and looked at increased involvement in Scrutiny work, and the emerging 'Darlington Together' and 'Darlington Cares' work strands.

Discussion returned to the minimum number of Councillors required to discharge the functions of the Council, with a proposal that further rationale be drafted for a range encompassing 40 to 53 Councillors. Members reiterated that they felt that 40 Councillors would be too low, especially when sickness, leave, aspirational and geographical factors were taken into consideration, and felt that a figure in the high 40's would be more appropriate.

Members entered into discussion on gathering further evidence from their respective Group Members, although it was acknowledged that one Councillor was having difficulties obtaining time off from work duties to attend to Council business. This was cited as an example of the limitations sometimes placed on Councillors' time, and further discussion ensued on the limitations placed on those Councillors who were

full-time carers. It was noted that the average length of service of a Councillor on this Council extended over a long period, which created stability within the authority. Members discussed the strength and value provided by Task and Finish Group work, which utilised Councillor time, with a low officer cost.

**IT WAS AGREED** – That the Assistant Director – Resources continue to prepare the Draft Submission, within the parameters of the discussion noted above, for consideration at the next meeting of this Group.

**9. UPDATE FROM THE BOUNDARY COMMISSION** – The Chief Executive informed Members that an approach had been made to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), to extend the period of time allocated to prepare the Council's submission on Council Size. It was stated that it would be difficult to outline an argument when the Council did not know what the financial situation over the coming years might be. The Chief Executive advised that the LGBCE had been sympathetic to the Council's request, and had initially granted an extension of two months, and were actively considering a four month extension.

**IT WAS AGREED** – (a) That the meeting of the Further Electoral Review Working Group, scheduled to be held on Tuesday, 11th December 2012, be cancelled.

(b) That the Special Meeting of Council scheduled to be held on Thursday, 20th December 2012, be cancelled.

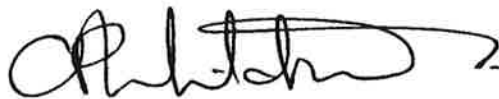
**10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS** – No further business was brought forward at the meeting.



# 2013 Further Electoral Review Members' Working Group Agenda

4.00 p.m., Thursday 6 December 2012  
Committee Room No.1  
Town Hall, Darlington

1. To consider the Minutes of the Meeting of the Working Group held on 6 November 2012 (Minutes enclosed).
2. Members' Survey Results (enclosed).
3. Discussion on Council Size.
4. Update from the Boundary Commission.
5. Any Other Business.



Paul Wildsmith  
Director of Resources

4 December 2012

Town Hall, Darlington

#### Membership

Councillors Baldwin, Curry, Dixon, Harker, I Haszeldine, Johnson, Kelley, Nutt and Mrs Scott.

If you have any further queries on this agenda please contact Lynne Wood in the Democratic Services Section, Resources Group, during normal office hours 8.30 a.m. to 5.00p.m. Mondays to Thursdays and 8.30a.m. to 4.30p.m. Fridays (Direct Line (01325) 388287) or E-mail [lynne.wood@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:lynne.wood@darlington.gov.uk)



**Further Electoral Review 2013  
Members' Working Group**

6th November 2012

**PRESENT** – Councillors Curry, Dixon, Harker, I. Haszeldine, Johnson, Kelley and Mrs. H. Scott. (7)

**APOLOGIES** – Councillor Nutt. (1)

**ABSENT** – Councillor Baldwin. (1)

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Ada Burns, Chief Executive, Catherine Whitehead, Assistant Director – Resources, Linda Todd, Head of Democratic and Customer Services, Lynne Wood, Elections Manager, and Paul Dalton, Elections Officer.

**1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR – IT WAS AGREED** – That the Chief Executive be appointed Chair of this Group.

**2. LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND** – The Assistant Director – Resources provided an overview that outlined the purpose and structure of the Further Electoral Review.

The Assistant Director – Resources highlighted that the purpose of the Review was to ensure electoral equality for voters, whilst delivering effective and convenient local government. It was stated that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) had invited the Council to make a submission in terms of 'Council Size', this being the number of councillors required to deliver effective, convenient local government, and that the proposal should demonstrate the rationale that supported the Council's view. Members were reminded that ward boundaries were not the subject of the initial stage of the review.

The Chief Executive stated that this working group had been formed in order to provide a platform for discussion to inform the submission, identify differing views, and attempt to develop a consensus.

**IT WAS AGREED** – That the overview provided by the Assistant Director – Resources be noted.

**3. MEMBERS' SURVEY RESULTS** – Members were informed that all Members of that Council had recently been invited to complete a survey to inform the submission on 'Council Size', and the Assistant Director – Resources provided an overview of the responses received. It was noted that not all Members had responded to the survey.

Members felt that the survey did not capture a fair reflection of the role of a Councillor. Discussion ensued on varied aspects of the role, and the time requirements involved. It was highlighted that the work of a Councillor did not necessarily fall into a quantifiable pattern, and concerns were expressed with regard

to the lack of evidence gathered surrounding the role, in particular in relation to the scrutiny function.

Members entered into discussion on the proportion of Members in employment, and felt that the high proportion of employed Members was a positive attribute, as it reflected both a cross section of the local population, and brought vast experience to the Council.

Members felt that the survey provided a foundation, however agreed that it was important to capture some of the high profile work that Members had been involved with. Recent work conducted as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan Consultation, and Member involvement in the Hyper-acute Services Review Group, were highlighted as examples of substantial pieces of work. Members also felt that it was important to capture the work conducted by Members outside of their immediate Council role.

Discussion ensued on the additional work Members undertake in preparation for meetings, and the differences between the 'political' aspect of the role and the 'representative' aspect of the role.

Consideration was given to the impact that legislative requirements may have on future work, with the Localism Act 2011 and the Health and Social Care Act 2012 highlighted as having the potential to increase Councillor workload.

**IT WAS AGREED** – That the survey be re-circulated to Members, and that Members be invited to expand upon, and give greater consideration to, the average time spent undertaking their councillor role.

**4. DRAFT SUBMISSION** – Members received the Draft Submission document (previously circulated), and were invited to give consideration to the number of Councillors required by this Council to deliver effective, convenient local government, with particular emphasis on what made this Council unique.

Members entered into discussion on whether the Council's political balance may have an impact on the level of work conducted by Members, and the high level skills base of Members in Darlington, compared to other authorities.

It was suggested that the chairs of each of the Scrutiny Committees be interviewed to fully capture the level of work conducted by the Members of those Committees. It was noted that the scrutiny work conducted by Members of this Council was highly regarded locally, especially in relation to the Health and Partnership Scrutiny Committee. Members felt that it was also important to capture the additional work with regard to scrutiny undertaken by Members at a regional level.

Discussion ensued on alternative evidence that could be collated to support the submission, including satisfaction levels from the Community Survey, case studies, and street studies. Members enquired as to whether there was any evidence that Members had not fulfilled their role, or responded to residents.



Members reflected on the previous review in 2001, which prompted an increase of one Member in Darlington and, whilst acknowledging the present trend of reducing the number of Members, noted that Darlington had not had any further increase over the course of the interim period.

Members also considered the commensurate increase in Officer time that a decrease in Members may result in.

**IT WAS AGREED** – That the content of the discussion be noted.

**5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS** – It was proposed that a special meeting of this group be arranged prior to the next scheduled meeting on Thursday, 6th December 2012.

**IT WAS AGREED** – That a special meeting of the Further Electoral Review 2013 Members' Working Group be held on Tuesday, 27th November 2012.



# 2013 Further Electoral Review Members' Working Group Agenda

3.30 p.m., Tuesday 6 November 2012  
Committee Room No.1  
Town Hall, Darlington

1. Appointment of Chair.
2. Legislative Background - Presentation by Catherine Whitehead, Assistant Director, Resources.
3. Members' Survey Results - Presentation by Sharon Raine, Head of Information and Insight.
4. Draft Submission (enclosed).
5. Any Other Business.



Paul Wildsmith  
Director of Resources

31 October 2012

Town Hall, Darlington

Membership

Councillors Baldwin, Curry, Dixon, Harker, I Haszeldine, Johnson, Nutt and Mrs Scott.

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