

LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

PERIODIC ELECTORAL REVIEW

STATEMENT ON THE SIZE OF THE COUNCIL

Introduction

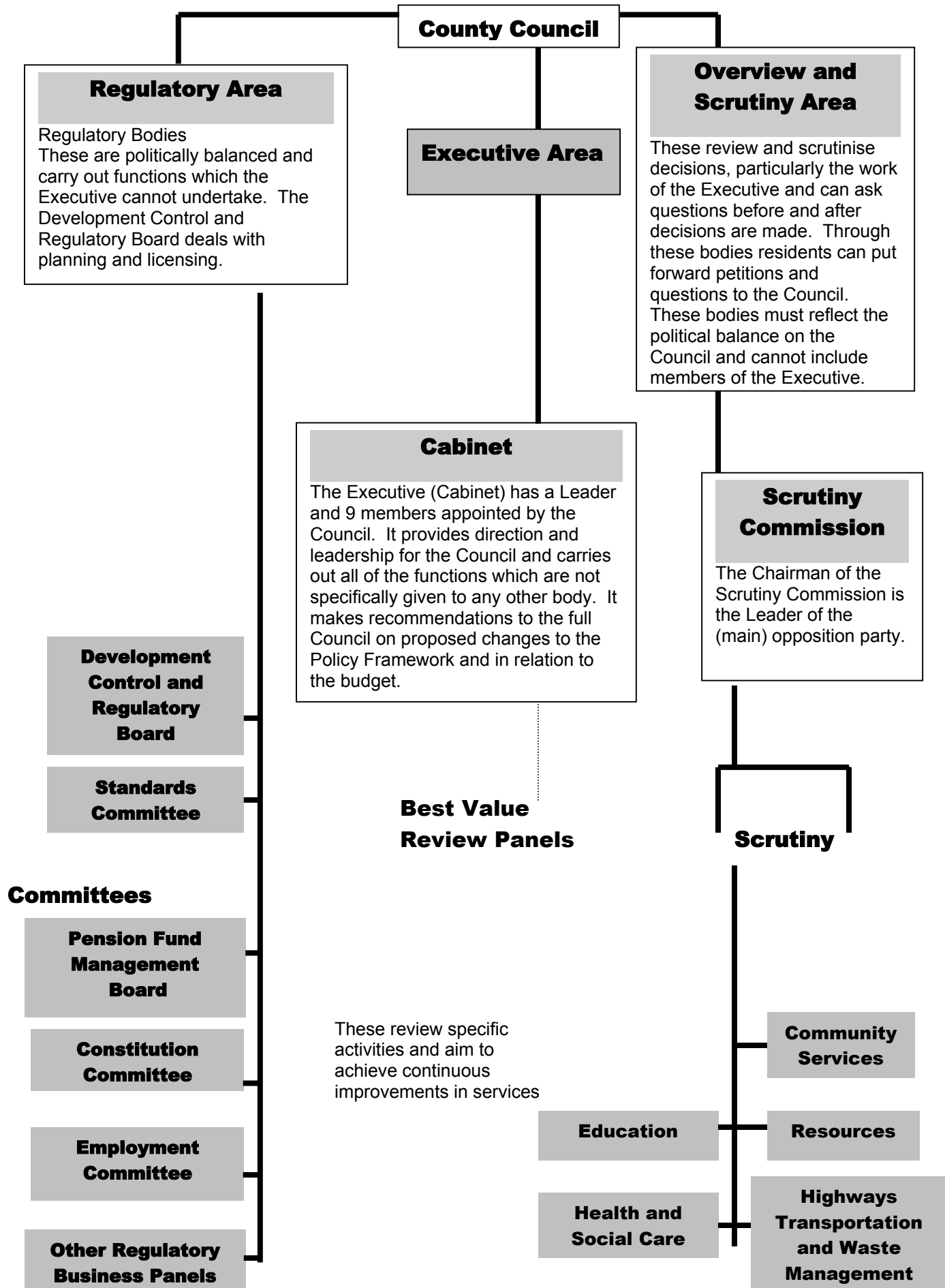
1. The County Council has decided that a Council size of 55 members is appropriate for Leicestershire County Council to secure the continuation of convenient and effective local government for the area. This statement sets out the factors which have been taken into account in arriving at that conclusion.

Background

2. The Electoral Commission's Guidance and Procedural Advice for Periodic Electoral reviews makes it clear that the question of Council size is the starting point in any electoral review since that determines the optimum councillor:elector ratio across all electoral areas, against which the levels of electoral imbalance can be measured. The guidance indicates that each area should be considered on its own merits and that there should be no attempt to aim at equality of Council size between authorities of similar types and populations.
3. The guidance places particular importance on proposals for Council size being properly developed in the context of a review of internal political management and the role of councillors in the new structure.

Present Position

4. The County Council presently comprises 54 members. It adopted a new Constitution under the Local Government Act 2000 with effect from June 2001, which applied the Leader and Cabinet model of political management. The Council was amongst the first authorities of its type to adopt this style of political management, having previously "piloted" this model within the Authority from September, 1999.
5. The main features of the political management arrangements for Leicestershire are set out below:-



6. Within this framework the responsibilities of the various bodies are as follows:

The County Council

7. The County Council comprising all 54 members meets on seven occasions each year, 6 ordinary meetings and a further meeting to determine the budget.
8. The Council is responsible for the final decisions on the policy framework and budget. It also appoints the Leader, the Cabinet and other bodies.

The Cabinet

9. The Cabinet comprises the Leader and 9 other members, all from the controlling Group. The Cabinet meets to take collective decisions relating to the implementation of policies and plans previously approved by the County Council. In 2002/3 the number of such meetings was 27. Cabinet members also meet informally on a regular basis to consider policy options and receive briefings from officers.
10. Under the Constitution approved by the Council, individual members of the Cabinet take 'lead member' roles for particular service areas but do not have personal executive powers. Lead members are therefore involved in their own regular meetings with Chief Officers for briefing purposes.
11. The workload of Cabinet members, particularly those Lead Members with extensive portfolios, has increased substantially since the new decision-making process was introduced in 1999. The involvement in a range of partnership activities is one reason. 3 Cabinet Support Members have recently been appointed to assist and support Cabinet Members in their work.

Overview and Scrutiny

12. There are five Scrutiny Committees each comprising 11 elected members whose work is co-ordinated by a 15 member Scrutiny Commission. Scrutiny Panels comprising 5 members have been established on an ad hoc basis to look in depth at particular issues and the practice is likely to continue.
13. The purpose of these scrutiny bodies is to advise on policies and plans being submitted to the Council and ensure that the Cabinet and officers acting under delegated powers are held to account.
14. The 5 Scrutiny Committees are shown below together with the number of meetings held last year:-

| | <u>No. of Meetings</u> |
|--|------------------------|
| | <u>2002/03</u> |
| Education | 12 |
| Health and Social Care | 6 |
| Resources | 4 |
| Community Services | 6 |
| Highways Transportation and Waste Management | 8 |

15. The Scrutiny Commission itself considers issues which are not covered by the terms of reference of any other scrutiny body or which cover more than one service area. It met on 7 occasions in 2002/03.
16. Scrutiny bodies meet as and when required. 43 meetings of scrutiny committees took place in 2002/03.

Regulatory Bodies

17. A number of regulatory bodies exist to deal with non-executive functions, for example the Development Control and Regulatory Board which deals with planning applications. These include a Standards Committee which has responsibility for handling matters relating to the conduct of members and officers within the Authority. 37 meetings of regulatory bodies were held in 2002/03

Highways Forums

18. A series of seven Highways Forums is being established across the County from May 2003 to advise the Authority on Highways and Transportation issues, as recommended by the Review Panel which conducted a Best Value Review of Highways Management arrangements within the Authority.
19. All members of the County Council will have a place on the relevant Forum, with the number of places held by County Councillors being matched by an equivalent number of members from the appropriate District Council. Each Highways Forum will meet on at least two occasions each year.

Individual County Councillors

20. All members of the County Council carry out important work in representing their particular electoral division and dealing with casework on behalf of their constituents.
21. Many members will also serve on various other bodies such as:-

Partnership bodies, for example those concerned with community safety, early years development, local strategic partnerships

Other Statutory bodies:-

Leicestershire Police Authority (5 members)

Combined Fire Authority (11 members)

Governing Bodies of local schools and other educational institutions.

Approximately 114 other bodies ranging from major national and regional bodies to more local bodies, including a number of charitable trusts.

More than 50% of the Council also serve as members of a District Council.

Of the 54 members on the Council 31 are in receipt of some form of special responsibility allowance.

Implications for Council Size

22. The County Council's decision making structure was established before the timescale for any review of electoral arrangements had been determined and was therefore built around a County Council size of 54 members. Experience since the new structure was initially established in September 1999 has led the Council to conclude that there is no reason to suppose that any major change to the size of the Council either way would lead to improvements in the effectiveness of the organisation or other improvements for local residents.
23. With a 10 member Cabinet along with 3 Cabinet Support Members (excluded from serving on Scrutiny) there are 41 members to fill the permanent places in that part of the structure as follows.

| | |
|--|-------|
| Scrutiny Bodies | 70 |
| Regulatory Board/Combined Fire Authority | 24 |
| | <hr/> |
| | 94 |
| | <hr/> |

A substitutes procedure is in operation for all of these bodies.

24. Given that these bodies are politically balanced, in the case of the majority party this means that they have to fill 56 of the 94 places from a pool of 15 non-executive members. (Each of the members on average serves on between 3 and 4 of these bodies). This takes no account of any bodies still to be established to examine the new health scrutiny role of the Council. On this basis any substantial reduction in the size of the Council would be likely to necessitate a review of the Council's Scrutiny Structure.
25. Under the traditional committee structure all members felt that they were playing a part in the decision making process. A key feature of the new arrangements has been the concentration of decision making in the hands of a relatively small number of Executive Members. The Scrutiny function exists to provide appropriate checks and balances on the activities of the Executive but some members, who are not part of the Executive, do not yet see scrutiny as providing a satisfying or meaningful role. The County Council has continued to develop its scrutiny role having learnt from its initial experience and these arrangements are gradually becoming more effective and focussed.

26. A recent report following an Ofsted inspection of the Leicestershire LEA contained the following statement:-
- “The Education Scrutiny Committee is having an increasing influence after a slow start and is fulfilling its role effectively. The Committee receive regular reports on the performance of schools and progress on the implementation of the Education Department Plan and has effectively scrutinised decisions made by the Executive.”
27. As part of its annual programme of performance audit work at the Council the Audit Commission is conducting a study of Leicestershire’s Scrutiny arrangements which hopefully will point to ways in which the Scrutiny function can be further developed.
28. The Council has no evidence to suggest that any substantial changes to the size of the Council would improve the effectiveness of Scrutiny and there is concern that any such change would have the opposite effect. For example, any substantial increase will result in more competition for places on the more popular scrutiny bodies.
29. In relation to the representative role of members of the County Council one important factor which the Council has taken into account is the question of geographical size of some electoral divisions, recognising that the emphasis of the review is on electoral equality. Under the present arrangements there are a number of electoral divisions which cover large, sparsely populated areas of the County. In such areas, where transport links are often not good, the local members have a demanding task keeping in touch with the many distinctive communities which make up the area. In several cases this involves contact with more than 10 separate parish councils.
31. A reduction in the number of County Councillors would obviously make this situation worse. On the other hand it would be necessary to increase the size of the Council substantially to make any real impact on these particular electoral divisions, something which the Council believes cannot be justified.

Justification for Change

32. Whilst the Council believes the current size of the Council is broadly correct, it has concluded that the current allocation of seats is no longer appropriate. Table 1 below sets out the position.

Table 1

| <u>District</u> | <u>Current No of Seats</u> | <u>Electorate 2002</u> | <u>Entitlement</u> | <u>Electorate 2007</u> | <u>Entitlement</u> |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|
| Blaby | 8 | 70,935 | 7.86 | 72,637 | 7.78 |
| Charnwood | 14 | 123,167 | 13.64 | 127,719 | 13.68 |
| Harborough | 6 | 61,727 | 6.84 | 64,003 | 6.86 |
| Hinckley & Bosworth | 9 | 80,330 | 8.90 | 84,514 | 9.05 |
| Melton | 4 | 38,214 | 4.23 | 39,553 | 4.24 |
| North West Leicestershire | 8 | 69,773 | 7.73 | 71,527 | 7.66 |
| Oadby and Wigston | 5 | 43,313 | 4.80 | 44,180 | 4.73 |
| | <u>54</u> | <u>487,459</u> | <u>54.00</u> | <u>504,133</u> | <u>54.00</u> |

Average Electorate

9,027

9,336

33. The above figures clearly illustrate that Harborough is entitled to an extra seat, but none of the other districts are over-represented when the figures are rounded up to the nearest whole number.
34. If the overall size of the County Council were to be increased by one seat the figures would work out correctly. Table 2 below sets out the position.

Table 2

| <u>District</u> | <u>Electorate 2002</u> | <u>Entitlement</u> | <u>Electorate 2007</u> | <u>Entitlement</u> |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|
| Blaby | 70,935 | 8.00 (8) | 72,637 | 7.92 (8) |
| Charnwood | 123,167 | 13.90 (14) | 127,719 | 13.93 (14) |
| Harborough | 61,727 | 6.96 (7) | 64,003 | 6.98 (7) |
| Hinckley and Bosworth | 80,330 | 9.06 (9) | 84,514 | 9.22 (9) |
| Melton | 38,214 | 4.31 (4) | 39,553 | 4.32 (4) |
| North West Leicestershire | 69,773 | 7.87 (8) | 71,527 | 7.80 (8) |
| Oadby & Wigston | 43,313 | 4.89 (5) | 44,180 | 4.82 (5) |
| | <u>487,459</u> | <u>55.00 (55)</u> | <u>504,133</u> | <u>55.00 (55)</u> |

Average electorate

8,863

9,166

Conclusion

35. The County Council believes that a Council size of 55 members is the appropriate size for Leicestershire County Council having regard to the political management arrangements it has put in place.

36. The pressures being placed on elected members are such that any reduction in numbers could overburden members, putting at risk the effectiveness of the present political arrangements. On the other hand anything other than a marginal increase could interfere with the progress which has been made towards enhancing the role of non-executive members, particularly in relation to the development of the Council's overview and scrutiny activities.