

# Council Report



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## Electoral Review of Milton Keynes City Council

Report sponsor **Sharon Bridglalsingh**  
Director for Law and Governance

Report authors **Peter Brown**  
Head of Democratic Services  
[Peter.brown@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:Peter.brown@milton-keynes.gov.uk)

**Peter Taylor**  
Electoral Services Manager  
[Peter.taylor@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:Peter.taylor@milton-keynes.gov.uk)

|                                             |                            |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Exempt / confidential / not for publication | <b>No</b>                  |
| Council Plan reference                      | <b>Not in Council Plan</b> |
| Wards affected                              | <b>All</b>                 |

### Executive summary

In October 2022 the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission), notified the Council it had met intervention criteria for an Electoral Review. This was because more than 30% of our existing wards had an electoral imbalance of more than 10%. An electoral review commenced during the summer of 2023 which is broadly split into two stages:

| Phase | Activity                             | Dates               |
|-------|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1     | Number of Councillors / wards needed | June '23 – Feb '24  |
| 2     | Boundaries and names of new wards    | May '24 – April '25 |

This report is predominantly concerned with phase one of the review and asks Full Council to agree a position on how many Councillors it will need by 2030. In order to inform both phases of the review, electorate forecasts are also required to be prepared, both as a whole authority and Polling District level.

A Working Group of Councillors (Andrews, J Carr, Ferrans, Geary, Hume and Marland) was established to assist officers in the preparation of a Council size proposal and to provide feedback about the development of electorate forecasts. The Working Group supported a modest increase of Council size with some Groups supporting plus 3 Councillors and some plus 6 Councillors. Whilst not subject to a Council decision, the Working Group have supported officers to develop an electoral forecast of 220,000 local government electors by 2030.

## 1. Proposed Decision/s

- 1.1 That Council note the prepared overall local government electorate forecast of 220,000 by 2030.
- 1.2 That given the forecast increase in local government electorate by 2030, the Council confirms its position:
  - a) that 'no increase' to the Council's size, neither secures appropriate representation for the residents of Milton Keynes, nor is sustainable from a Councillor workload perspective; and
  - b) a modest increase in Council size should be supported, recognising that there are arguments for and against an increase of plus 3 and plus 6 Councillors.
- 1.3 That the submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England attached at **Annex A**, with a proposed Council size of 63 (plus 6 Councillors), be agreed.
- 1.4 That authority be delegated to the Director of Law and Governance to make minor changes to the submission, in consultation with the Leaders of Political Groups.

## 2. Why is the Decision Needed?

- 2.1 As the Council is formally in review, the Commission require a submission from MKCC, to make a decision about the Councils' size in March 2024. This will enable the second phase of the review (warding patterns) to be commenced, after elections in May 2024.

## 3. Background

- 3.1 Initially the Working Group directed itself to a question about the Council's electoral arrangements (whether to continue to elect by thirds or to move to all out elections every four years). This is entirely a matter for MKCC, but any change would require significant public consultation and has a high bar in terms of Council support (two thirds of Councillors voting must support any change). Whilst some Councillors in the working group were supportive of exploring a move to all out elections, it became apparent that there would not be sufficient support for a change and so no further work was undertaken. This meant that Council size proposals were developed based on the principle of three member wards.

### Council size

- 3.2 The Commission will make a final decision about our Council size having considered any proposals submitted. Proposals must be based on a range of factors and not solely driven by the ratio of Councillors to electors. Notwithstanding this, Milton Keynes is the fastest growing authority in the South East so there is a rudimentary argument that significant previous and expected growth will require additional Councillors. Indeed, the Commission will consider how our proposed council size compares to the number of and ratio of our CIPFA benchmarked authorities.

- 3.3 In line with published guidance from the Commission our draft Council size proposal considers a range of factors including governance arrangements, scrutiny functions and the representational role of Councillors in the community. To support our proposal a survey was prepared to consider the views of Councillors about the workload, activity and views about Council size. 75% of Councillors responded to the survey and more information relating to the results are set out in the draft Council size proposal.
- 3.4 If there is not unanimous support for the draft proposal, Political Groups and Councillors (along with any other interested parties) may also make a submission to the Commission about their preferred Council size.
- 3.5 Once the Council (and any others) have submitted their size proposals, the Commission will make a decision at their board meeting on 12 March about the Council size moving forward. This will then form the basis for consultation on warding arrangements. During Stage 2, the Commission could revisit their decision on Council size if they find that a different number of wards would deliver a warding pattern that better reflected local communities.

#### Electorate Forecasts

- 3.6 Alongside a Council size proposal, electorate forecasts must also be submitted by officers looking forward five years after the review completion in 2025 (to 2030). The Commission recognises that different approaches will be taken by different authorities but does provide a basic forecasting tool which considers the relationship between ONS population forecasts and the electorate over three years and then applies this to the ONS forecast population for 2030.
- 3.7 In discussion and agreement with the Commission and Working Group, this methodology was not used for three reasons:
- a) it relied on forecasts prepared in 2019, which significantly underestimated the population of Milton Keynes compared to census data for 2020 (and beyond);
  - b) it considered a relationship between the overall population and electorate as opposed to those over 18 and forecasts to be over 18; and
  - c) it applied overall forecast growth to all Polling Districts arbitrarily, which does not reflect the pattern of growth in Milton Keynes (some Polling District electorates have grown significantly, whilst others have fallen or remained relatively stable over a number of years).
- 3.8 Our approach, which has been shared with the Commission, instead compares the 18 plus population of Milton Keynes to registers over three years and then applies this relationship to the 18 plus population forecasts for 2030 using data for the Council's Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA), to achieve an overall forecast of 220,000.

3.9 Individual Polling District forecasts were then prepared using data based on likely housing completions, the number of young people attaining voting age in each ward and trends based on previous growth / decline. Because the total of all Polling District forecasts exceeded the overall forecast, in line with Commission guidance, they were then proportionately constrained back to 220,000 (the overall forecast).

#### 4. Implications of the decision

|                   |   |                                     |   |
|-------------------|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| Financial         | Y | Human rights, equalities, diversity | N |
| Legal             | Y | Policies or Council Plan            | N |
| Communication     | Y | Procurement                         | N |
| Energy Efficiency | N | Workforce                           | N |

##### a) Financial implications

There are direct and indirect financial implications of an increased Council size. For example, more Councillors results in additional basic allowances being paid, whilst there are also additional costs, administering additional ward/s for elections.

Additional Councillors also require administrative and officer support and assuming no changes to the Council's Ward based budget scheme would be entitled to the same discretionary budget of £1,000.

As any increase in Council size would not take effect until 2026/27, pressures would need to be factored into the budget setting from this year onwards.

Table 1 - Illustrative increase in costs per year from 2026/27<sup>1</sup>

| Scenario       | Wards | Ratio     | Basic allowance | WBB    | Election Admin |
|----------------|-------|-----------|-----------------|--------|----------------|
| 57 (no change) | 19    | 1 : 3,842 | N/a             | N/a    | N/a            |
| 60 (plus 3)    | 20    | 1 : 3,650 | £37,500         | £3,000 | £2,000         |
| 63 (plus 6)    | 21    | 1 : 3,476 | £75,000         | £6,000 | £4,000         |

##### b) Legal implications

The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 ('the 2009 Act') gives the Commission the power to review the electoral arrangements of all, or any, principal councils in England.

The legislation states that 'the total number of members of the Council' forms part of an authority's electoral arrangements, but does not set out how many members (or Councillors) each authority (or type of authority) should have. Rather, it is the Commission's responsibility to determine the appropriate number of Councillors for each authority.

The Commission will, having had regard to size submissions from a Council, or other interested parties, agree a Council size that, in its judgement, enables the Council to take its decisions effectively, to discharge the business and responsibilities of the council successfully, and provides for effective community leadership and representation.

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<sup>1</sup> Indicative costs shown - would be subject to indexation / inflationary pressures from 2027/28 onwards

### c) Communication

Whilst there is no formal public consultation on this phase of the review, the Commission would take into consideration any alternative proposals submitted by Political Groups or other interested parties.

Once Stage 2 of the review commences significant consultation and engagement will be required with Parish Councils and other stakeholders.

## 5. Alternative(s)

5.1 To submit a different size proposal – this would require further work to review and present evidence to coherently support an alternative Council size.

5.2 To not submit a size proposal at all. Whilst there is no obligation on the Council to do so, this would mean that the Commission could make a decision about Council size that does not reflect the views of the Council. Alternatively, in the absence of a proposal the Commission may choose to undertake a public consultation on the matter, affecting the review timetable moving forward.

## 6. Timetable for implementation

6.1 An indicative timetable of events is set out below:

| Phase | Item / activity                                         | Dates                       |
|-------|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1     | Draft Council Size Proposals considered by Full Council | January 2024                |
|       | Council size proposal & electorate forecasts submitted  | February 2024               |
|       | Commission decision on Council Size                     | March 2024                  |
| 2     | First consultation on Warding patterns                  | May – July 2024             |
|       | Parish Briefing                                         | May 2024                    |
|       | Second consultation on Warding patterns                 | October 2024 - January 2025 |
|       | Final recommendations published                         | April 2025                  |
| 3     | All out elections to new boundaries                     | May 2026                    |

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### List of annexes

Annex A – Draft Council Size Submission

### Background papers

Electoral Review of Milton Keynes City Council – a Guide for Councillors