



**Classification**

**Item No.**

**Open**

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|--|---|
| <b>Meeting:</b>                        | Cabinet<br>Council  |
| <b>Meeting date:</b>                   | 11 November 2020<br>25 November 2020  |
| <b>Title of report:</b>                | Local Government Boundary Commission for England's Review of Bury Council   |
| <b>Report by:</b>                      | Councillor Eamonn O'Brien<br>Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Growth<br>Councillor Tahir Rafiq, Cabinet Member for Corporate Resources and HR |
| <b>Decision Type:</b>                  | <b>Council Decision</b>   |
| <b>Ward(s) to which report relates</b> | <b>All Wards</b>  |

**Executive Summary:**

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England has identified Bury as requiring a review of Council Size (number of councillors) and warding arrangements as it is almost twenty years since the last review was carried out.

The review will be carried out in a number of stages, initially looking at Council Size and then distribution of Wards, including consideration of any ward name changes.

The Council has established a Member Working Group chaired by the Leader of the Council and consisting of the leaders of all political parties in the Borough. The work of the group is supported by officers from Legal and Democratic Services, Planning and Communications sections.

The working group has supported the proposed contents of the Council Size Submission.

## **Recommendation(s)**

That: Cabinet is asked to recommend to Council that:

1. The Council's response, as part of the preliminary period reviewing the number of councillors, to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England as set out in Appendix 1 be agreed;
2. Authority be delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive to submit the response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, making any minor amendments as required for submission.

## Key considerations

### **1. Background**

- 1.1 In 2019, the Council was contacted by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) about undertaking a review of the number of councillors in Borough and the distribution of ward boundaries. Progress with this work has been delayed by the impact of the global pandemic.
- 1.2 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body established by Parliament in April 2010. It is not part of government and are accountable to Parliament through the Speaker's Committee.
- 1.3 The LGBCE has a responsibility, set out in law, to review every local authority 'from time to time'. Bury Council was selected as it has not had a review since 2003. By the time the recommendations of the current review are implicated, the current boundaries will have been set for nearly 20 years.
- 1.4 The key aim of the review is to ensure the future delivery of electoral equality, with each councillor broadly representing the same number of voters. The

LGBCE ideally requires no ward to show a variance from the average number of voters of no more than 5%, although recognises this there can be factors, just as geography or local characteristic which make this not possible. However, where wards show variance of more than 10%, serious concerns are raised as to the equity of political representation.

- 1.5 At the present time, two wards have been identified as having a variance over 10% from the Borough average, as shown in the table below:

| Ward Name       | No. Cllrs | Electorate 2019 | Variance 2019 (%) |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Besses          | 3         | 8494            | -2.3%             |
| Church          | 3         | 8591            | 0.4%              |
| East            | 3         | 8908            | 0.3%              |
| Elton           | 3         | 8898            | 2.0%              |
| Holyrood        | 3         | 8913            | 2.1%              |
| Moorside        | 3         | 9191            | 5.2%              |
| North Manor     | 3         | 8286            | -4.1%             |
| Pilkington Park | 3         | 7811            | -10.9%            |
| Radcliffe East  | 3         | 9394            | 5.6%              |
| Radcliffe North | 3         | 8869            | 3.1%              |
| Radcliffe West  | 3         | 8756            | 0.1%              |
| Ramsbottom      | 3         | 9333            | 7.7%              |
| Redvales        | 3         | 9579            | 7.4%              |
| Sedgley         | 3         | 9238            | 5.1%              |
| St Mary's       | 3         | 8512            | -3.9%             |
| Tottington      | 3         | 8184            | -4.9%             |
| Unsworth        | 3         | 7496            | -13.1%            |

\*Data based on December 2018 electoral registers.

- 1.6 This situation is predicted to increase by 2026, with more wards demonstrating inequality in representation as new housing developments are completed and demographic changes occur within households, reinforcing the need for ward patterns to be revised as part of the later stages of the review:

| PD - Ward Code  | Projected Electorate - Mid Year 2026 |                    |                          |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
|                 | Electorate                           | Absolute Deviation | % Deviation from average |
| Besses          | 8,422                                | -300               | -3.4                     |
| Church          | 8,479                                | -243               | -2.8                     |
| East            | 8,943                                | 221                | 2.5                      |
| Elton           | 8,805                                | 83                 | 1.0                      |
| Holyrood        | 8,806                                | 84                 | 1.0                      |
| Moorside        | 9,073                                | 351                | 4.0                      |
| North Manor     | 8,631                                | -91                | -1.0                     |
| Pilkington Park | 7,713                                | -1,009             | -11.6                    |
| Radcliffe East  | 9,612                                | 890                | 10.2                     |
| Radcliffe North | 8,814                                | 92                 | 1.1                      |
| Radcliffe West  | 8,666                                | -56                | -0.6                     |
| Ramsbottom      | 9,360                                | 638                | 7.3                      |
| Redvales        | 9,481                                | 759                | 8.7                      |
| Sedgley         | 9,312                                | 591                | 6.8                      |
| St Marys        | 8,646                                | -76                | -0.9                     |
| Tottington      | 8,118                                | -604               | -6.9                     |
| Unsworth        | 7,390                                | -1,332             | -15.3                    |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>148,269</b>                       |                    |                          |
| <b>Average</b>  | <b>8,722</b>                         |                    |                          |

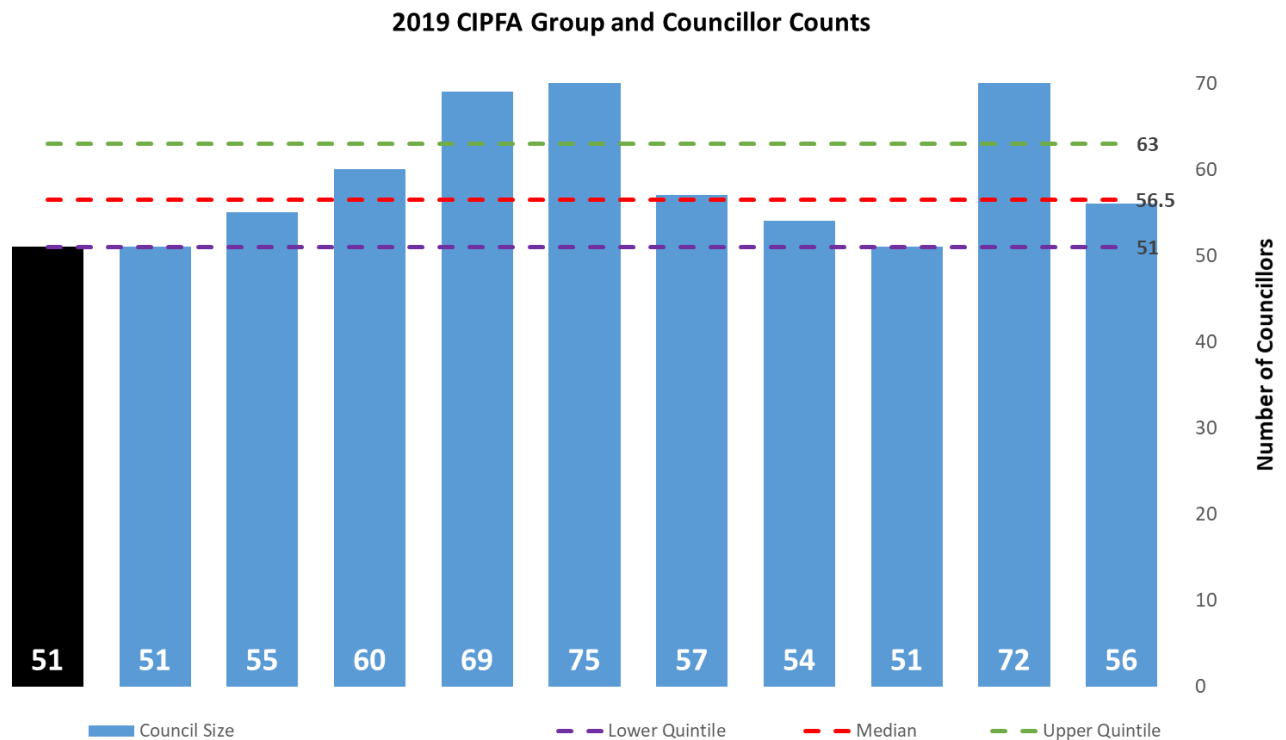
- 1.7 The initial stage of the review will consider the appropriate future size of the council and, therefore, there is potential for an increase or decrease in the number of councillors in the Borough.

## 2. Stage 1 - Analysis of the Current Size

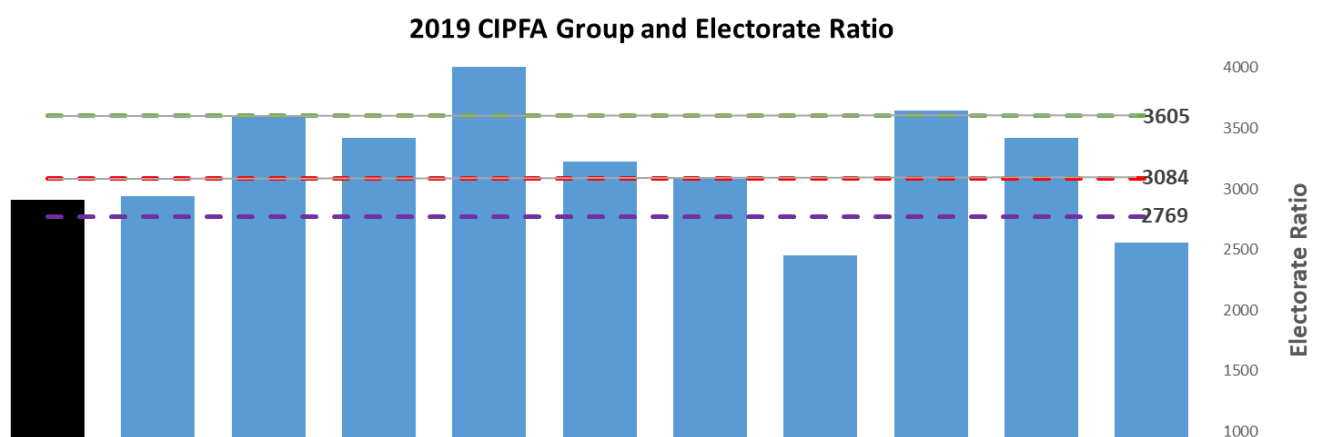
- 2.1 The first stage of the review will consider the relevance of the current Council size and whether this should be increased, decreased or remain the same.
- 2.2 The proposed size of the Council will consider the Governance arrangements, the Scrutiny function, and the representative role of Councillors in local communities.
- 2.3 Bury currently has 51 councillors, representing 17 wards:

| Number of Councillors | Number of Electors | Councillor:Elector Ratio |
|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| 51                    | 148,453            | 2,911                    |

- 2.4 When making decisions about the size of the council, the LGBCE will make comparisons with the CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) nearest neighbour group.
- 2.5 As shown in the bar chart below, Bury (shown in black) has one of the smallest number of councillors in its CIPFA group.



- 2.6 While this could indicate that Bury has a shortfall in the number of councillors, particularly when comparisons are made with other Greater Manchester authorities who have considerably more councillors and yet have equal responsibilities and commitments to support the work of the combined authority. (E.g. Bolton at 60, Wigan at 75, and Tameside at 57).
- 2.7 However, the number of electors represented by each councillor should also be considered, as this indicates the potential workload and time commitment required from each councillor. The table below shows this information against the same comparator group. This shows a slightly different picture with some councils with more councillors than Bury having higher commitments per councillor in terms of the number of electors they each represent on average. Overall, in terms of elector representation per councillor, Bury does not appear to show as underrepresentation as the bar chart looking at councillor numbers alone appears to show.



### 3. Stage Two – Warding Patterns

- 3.1 The second stage of the review will look at how wards are distributed within the Borough. While these have often followed historic townships or areas, these alone are insufficient to justify the continuation of existing ward boundaries, as these can change over time. However, it is recognised that community interests and identities need to be considered when drawing new boundary lines and, at this stage, the LGBCE will undertake significant consultation with such groups. Similarly, topographical features such as watercourses, railway lines or arterial roads which provide barriers between or definition to wards will also be considered.
- 3.2 Warding patterns must not be considered as part of any rationale for the size of the Council. These will only be reviewed after the future Council size has been agreed.

### 4. Conclusion of the Review

- 4.1 The results of the review will result in ward boundaries being redrawn which match the distribution of the population and the geography of communities across the Borough.
- 4.2 The implementation of the results of the review will result in 'all out' local elections.
- 4.3 Future reports and analysis will be brought to Cabinet and Council at each stage of the review, when this work is undertaken and completed.

### 5. **Conclusions and Other Alternatives Considered**

- 5.1 For the reasons highlighted, the Council recommends that Bury should retain the existing number of 51 councillors. It is believed this level is required to provide a sufficiently diverse range of members for effective governance of the borough.

- 5.2 A greater number of members would increase resilience and representation and contribute to more manageable workloads. However, it has been concluded that an increase is difficult to justify at a time when budgets and services are under severe financial and demand pressures.

## **6. Recommendations**

- 6.1 Cabinet is asked to recommend to Council that:

1. The Council's response, as part of the preliminary period reviewing the number of councillors, to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England as set out in Appendix 1 be agreed;
2. Authority be delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive to submit the response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, making any minor amendments as required for submission.

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### **Community impact**

The completion of the review will ensure more effective councillor representation for the electorate of the Borough.

The new Council size and distribution will support the Bury 2030 Strategy by empowering local communities and individuals, and giving clearer responsibility and accountability to Councillors.

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### **Equality Impact and considerations:**

*Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:*

*A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -*

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;*
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;*

- (c) *foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.*

*The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.*

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Equality Analysis</b>   | <i>Please provide a written explanation of the outcome(s) of either conducting an initial or full EA.</i> |
| <p>The first stage of the review will consider the size of the Council. By ensuring a more equitable distribution of electors across councillors, there will be greater opportunity to fulfil the Council's Equality Duty. For example, areas which might have increased in population through immigration in recent years, could have been under-represented under the current distribution, whereas the review allows a more balanced distribution.</p> <p>Consultation in the second stage of the review, will also be under-taken with all local and community groups, providing an opportunity for all communities to have a voice in the future format of the Council.</p> |   |

### **Assessment of Risk:**

The following risks apply to the decision:

| <b>Risk / opportunity</b>  | <b>Mitigation</b>   |
|--|---|
| Opportunity to provide greater elector representation.   | Undertaking the review after a period of almost twenty years justifies the review.  |
| Confusion amongst the electorate if their wards are redrawn.   | Communications with the electorate, particularly at election periods, will minimise this.   |
| Risk in that by remaining at the same number of councillors, they will struggle to meet the increased expectations of them locally and regionally. | Current austerity regime and pressure on local authority budgets does not justify increase in the number of councillors in the Borough. |



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**Consultation:**

A working group, chaired by the Leader of the Council and consisting of all Opposition Group Leaders, has been involved in the completion of the Council Size Submission and consulted on the proposals.

The LGBCE will undertake extensive consultation as part of Stage 2 of the review.

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**Legal Implications:**

As set out in the report.

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**Financial Implications:**

There are no costs arising from the proposals.

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**Report Author and Contact Details**

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**Background papers:**

Local Government Boundary Commission for England, Bury Electoral Review, Member Briefing

Local Government Boundary Commission for England, Council Size Submission, Bury Council (enclosed)

**Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.**

| Term  | Meaning   |
|-------|---|
| CIPFA | Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy |
| LGBCE | Local Government Boundary Commission for England      |