

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Council **DATE:** 24th September 2020

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WARD(S): All

PART I **FOR DECISION**

WORKING GROUP ESTABLISHMENT AND UPDATE

1. **Purpose of Report**

To seek approval to establish a new Working Group on the Slough Electoral Cycle and Parliament Boundary Review and to update Council on the work of existing working groups.

2. **Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

The Council is requested to resolve:

- (a) That an Electoral Cycle and Parliamentary Boundary Working Group be established as set out in paragraphs 5.1 to 5.8.
- (b) Subject to (a), that political groups be invited to nominate members of the Working Group. It is proposed that the Working Group be composed of nine Members in line with political proportionality (8 Labour and 1 Conservative Member).
- (c) That the work of the Joint Cabinet-Scrutiny Covid Working Group and the Member Development Task & Finish Group be noted.

3. **The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan**

3a. **Slough Wellbeing Strategy Priorities –**

The working groups aim to promote high standards of governance and therefore contributes to all strategic priorities.

1. Starting Well
2. Integration (relating to Health & Social Care)
3. Strong, healthy and attractive neighbourhoods
4. Workplace health

3b. **Five Year Plan Outcomes**

- Outcome 1: Slough children will grow up to be happy, healthy and successful
- Outcome 2: Our people will be healthier and manage their own care needs
- Outcome 3: Slough will be an attractive place where people choose to live, work and stay
- Outcome 4: Our residents will live in good quality homes

- Outcome 5: Slough will attract, retain and grow businesses and investment to provide opportunities for our residents

4. **Other Implications**

(a) Financial

There are no direct financial implications of the proposed action to establish a Working Group and note the work of other groups. Any proposals emerging from the Working Groups and Task & Finish Group will be considered by the relevant body of the Council and be subject to full financial appraisal at that stage.

A move to whole council elections would lead to a financial saving for the Council in the three years where there was no Borough election. It was previously estimated in a report to Overview & Scrutiny in 2016 on this matter that savings of circa £100,000 could be realised over the four year period. This was a high level estimate and is subject to change especially if the Electoral Commission, Home Office or the Election Claims Unit issue revised guidance on the accounting arrangements for elections in the future.

(b) Risk Management

There are no risks associated with establishing a Working Group. Any proposed actions will be subject to a risk assessment prior to any decisions being made.

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no Human Rights Act implications.

The Council's power to change its electoral cycle is set out in Sections 31 to 36 and 53 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, as amended in Schedule 2 of the Localism Act 2011. That Act also enables the Council to make an order to change the electoral cycle of Parish and Town Councils. If the Council so resolves, it will be unable to change the scheme again for at least five years.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

There is no requirement to conduct an Equalities Impact Assessment.

5. **Supporting Information**

Electoral Cycle and Parliamentary Boundary Review Working Group

- 5.1 At the Annual Council meeting held on 21st May 2020, the Ruling Group signalled its intention to review Slough's electoral cycle to explore the option of moving to whole Council elections. The Opposition Group indicated that it was supportive of such a review. This report proposes establishing an Electoral Cycle and Parliamentary Boundary Review Working Group to take forward this work.
- 5.2 The Working Group's activity would be carried out in two stages:
 - Stage 1 – review of Slough's electoral cycle to be carried out by the end of 2020 in advance of the budget setting process and elections planned for May 2021.

- Stage 2 – response to the expected consultation on the review of Parliamentary Boundaries in 2021.
- 5.3 It is proposed that the Working Group consist of nine Members on a politically proportionate basis. Eight nominations would therefore be sought from the Labour Group and one from the Conservative Group. Other attendees and contributors may be invited to Working Party meetings or consultation events to help inform the work, for example from political parties as part of the Parliamentary Boundary Review.
- 5.4 At present the Council operates a system of election by thirds. Each member serves a term of four years, producing a four yearly cycle of elections, allowing for Borough Council elections to be held in three of four years. A move to whole Council elections would mean that Borough elections would be held once every four years, rather than in three out of every four years.
- 5.5 Under current legislation the Council can resolve to make a change to its electoral cycle, subject to certain conditions. The 2011 Localism Act has given the Council increased flexibility in deciding when to make the change and now allows the Council to select the year to transfer to “whole Council” elections. The process would involve consultation on any proposed change and any decision would require a two-thirds majority of Members’ voting at a specially convened meeting of the Council. The Council would then need to publish an explanatory note and give notice of any change to the Electoral Commission.
- 5.6 Reviews of Parliamentary boundaries are undertaken by independent Boundary Commission and are currently required every five years. The Council established a Working Group that last met in 2017 and responded to the most recent review insofar as the proposed changes were expected to impact on Slough.
- 5.7 In March 2020 the Government announced that it would not implement the previously proposed net reduction in the number of seats in the House of Commons to 600 and instead it would introduce a Bill to amend the Rules of Redistribution. The Parliamentary Constituencies Bill 2019-21 was introduced on 19 May 2020 and includes no proposed change to current 650 MPs.
- 5.8 The next review is due to start in 2021 and will have to be completed by the Boundary Commissions by 1 July 2023. The proposed Working Group will therefore consider any proposals and make recommendations to Council on a response.

Joint Cabinet-Scrutiny Covid Working Group

- 5.9 At its meeting on 18th May 2020, the Cabinet received a report on the Council’s Covid-19 Recovery and Renewal Planning. This set out a phased approach to recovery over five years. The short, medium and long term impacts of Covid-19 on both the town and the Council were expected to be extensive and these were set out in the report to Cabinet.
- 5.10 The Cabinet resolved that a joint working group be established with scrutiny to contribute to the work on recovery and renewal. It is envisaged that the Working Group will be established shortly and will regularly review the Council’s Covid-19 recovery and renewal strategies and planning; identify any areas requiring further

investigation; and allocate these areas to Cabinet, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and / or Panels as appropriate.

- 5.11 The Working Group will have equal representation with four members of the Cabinet and the four chairs of Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Panels. A preliminary meeting was held on 15th September 2020 at which draft terms of reference for the Working Group were discussed and key strategic issues of the Covid response were identified for allocation to scrutiny work programmes.
- 5.12 The Working Group will also look at responding to changes in the Council's organisational structures/directorates arising from the Our Futures transformation programme. This is likely to result in some realignment of the workload and subjects considered by the scrutiny panels to reflect new directorate structure, the new locality-based-working model and the Council's priorities in the 5 year plan.

Member Development Task & Finish Group

- 5.13 A Member Development Task & Finish Group has been established with the primary purpose of developing and implementing an effective Members' Development Strategy, timetable and programme. It will also review the current Performance Review Framework and the procedure allocating the budget for Member development.
- 5.14 The Task & Finish Group is chaired by Councillor Akram and the other members of the group are Councillors Hulme, Dar, Bains, Sabah, Kelly, Ali and Plenty. Three meetings have been held so far with a further meeting planned for 8th October 2020.
- 5.15 The Task & Finish Group has discussed a wide range of issues including the most effective methods of delivering training e.g. 'classroom' based sessions, interactive training and use of technology such as webinars and e-learning. Consideration has been given to IT support, induction for new Members, gaps in the existing programme, mandatory training and attendance.
- 5.16 All councillors were provided with the opportunity to contribute to the work of the group through the survey carried out in July on Members' learning and development, the results of which will inform the final actions and recommendations emerging from the Task & Finish Group.

6. Comments of Other Committees

This report has not been considered by any other Committees. The Joint Cabinet-Scrutiny Covid Working Group was agreed to be formed by Cabinet on 18th May 2020.

7. Conclusion

The Council is requested to consider the proposal to establish an Electoral Cycle and Parliamentary Boundary Review Working Group and to note the update on other working groups.

8. Appendices Attached

None.