

The
Local Government
Boundary Commission
for England

Ms Kate Kennally
Cornwall Council,
County Hall,
Truro,
TR1 3AY

26 September 2017

Dear Ms Kennally,

ELECTORAL REVIEW OF CORNWALL: DIVISION ARRANGEMENTS

I am writing to inform you that the Commission has, today, opened its consultation inviting proposals for a new pattern of electoral divisions for Cornwall Council.

The Commission is minded to recommend that 87 councillors should be elected to Cornwall Council in future. The Commission now invites proposals from the Council, interested parties, and members of the public on a pattern of electoral divisions to accommodate those councillors.

Councillor numbers

In coming to its conclusion on the number of councillors that should be elected to Cornwall Council from 2021, the Commission has considered a large and detailed range of evidence. We are grateful to the Council, its councillors and staff, as well as many others across Cornwall for the extensive and detailed materials they have provided in their submissions during the preliminary period and the subsequent consultation stage. It is clear that Cornwall Council, partner organisations and many local people have thought seriously about the kind of council they believe should take on the challenges of the next decade and beyond.

Several themes emerged over the early stages of the review and these have provided a basis for our decision. In particular, the Commission has noted the broad consensus that the Council's role is changing. In particular, there is a vision for Cornwall Council to be a strategic body that has the capacity, powers and ambition to take on responsibility for issues that matter to the people and economy of the county, including integrating health and social care, providing transport services and supporting skills to drive the local economy. The Council is clearly forging its role as a unitary authority, taking advantage of devolution opportunities, and embracing its position as the strategic leader for the Cornwall.

It was also clear from evidence received in the preliminary stage, and during the subsequent consultation, that the current electoral arrangements are not best suited to facilitate the achievement of that vision. In particular, the present number of councillors might be seen to diminish accountability, inhibit double devolution, and impinge on the setting and delivery of a single strategic vision for Cornwall. It is, therefore, unsurprising that we received substantial evidence in the preliminary stage that pointed towards a significant reduction in the number of councillors elected to the Council. It fell to the Commission, therefore, to determine an exact number.

The Commission has been persuaded by evidence that the Council is already taking steps to streamline its policy and decision-making functions. It also noted that the Council's ongoing governance work (including outputs of the Governance Review External Group) is likely to yield further efficiencies in the use of members' time. In coming to a specific number, the Commission was also persuaded by evidence from the Cornwall Association of Local Councils (CALC) that a range of 85-95 councillors would reflect the changing nature of decision making, provide adequate scrutiny and could provide a platform for better coordination between different tiers of local government in Cornwall. We understand that CALC's overall analysis found support amongst other contributors to the review.

Working within this range, we understand that officers supporting the Review Panel subsequently calculated that 87 councillors potentially provided the best fit between Community Network Areas and new divisions. In terms of good representation for people and communities, the Commission found this to be a persuasive factor in determining a number. The Council had likewise found this to be a useful methodology, albeit coming to a different conclusion outside the 85-95 range.

Accordingly, at the end of the preliminary phase of the review, the Commission considered that the evidence pointed to a council size of 87 councillors but wished to test this proposition through a public consultation.

Responses to the consultation broadly fell into four categories. Seventy-five respondents indicated their desire for the council to retain the existing 123 members. However, the Commission did not receive evidence to persuade it that the *status quo* would, in fact, help the council to deliver the ambitions it had publicly stated, notably in its devolution deal. Indeed, the evidence suggested that 123 councillors was already a barrier to effective decision making and would impede the delivery of the Council's new strategic vision for the rest of this decade and beyond.

The Commission received 74 submissions supporting its preliminary proposition for 87 councillors. In broad terms, these reflected the reasoning outlined above and by the Commission in its consultation documentation.

In addition, the Commission received a further 50 responses to the consultation which generally supported a reduced number of councillors but without specifically supporting either 87 or 99 councillors.

The Council reaffirmed its support for 99 councillors along with 44 other responses. The Commission carefully noted the evidence provided in support of this proposition but concluded that the submissions in support of this number did not contain fresh and persuasive evidence, in particular in relation to future governance requirements.

In considering the various arguments, the Commission acknowledges the points made (especially by CALC) during the consultation that a council size of 87 will necessitate further work on devolution to town and parish councils and the provision of support for councillors at both tiers to deliver an effective system of local governance. However, given the work on governance that is ongoing in Cornwall and the Council's evident commitment to putting in place new arrangements, alongside the time remaining before implementation of new electoral arrangements, the Commission has not been persuaded to move away from the 85-95 councillor range.

put forward at the earlier stage.

Following representations made by the previous leadership of the Council, the Commission, unusually, decided to delay the review by an entire electoral cycle in order to allow the Council to construct, and implement, the changes required to support streamlined governance arrangements. Since the outcome of the review will now not be enacted until 2021, the Commission believes that this will give sufficient time to undertake governance changes that will endure throughout the next decade and beyond. The Commission is confident that the Council has the time and willingness to continue its governance improvements on the basis of a council size of 87.

In summary, and considering all the evidence supplied to it as part of the review, the Commission considers that 87 councillors reflects the widespread agreement on reducing overall numbers of members. It will promote good strategic decision making while ensuring capacity for scrutiny as well as forming the basis of effective representation for people and communities across Cornwall.

Further details of the consultation are available on the Commission's website, including copies of every submission received.

Publicising the review

I would be grateful if you could bring the consultation to the attention of elected members. Furthermore, a copy of the Commission's press release and posters advertising the next stage of the review are being sent to your Council. It would be much appreciated if you could publicise the consultation by arranging for copies to be placed on display at local information points, and by taking such other steps as you consider appropriate to bring the review to the attention of the public and other interested parties. We would appreciate it if you could promote the consultation online, via social media and any other channels you would normally use to engage residents.

Further details about the review are available on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk where there is information about how to get involved and the kind of evidence the Commission is seeking in support of any proposed division patterns.

In addition, the Commission's consultation portal allows visitors to interact with online maps of the current electoral divisions, draw their own boundaries and feed views into the consultation process directly. The portal is available at <https://consultation.lgbce.org.uk>.

Submissions can also be made by email to reviews@lgbce.org.uk and by post to the address at the end of this letter.

Review timetable

This phase of consultation closes on **19 February 2018**.

Once the Commission has considered all the proposals received during this phase of consultation, it plans to publish draft recommendations for new electoral arrangements in May 2018. Public consultation on the draft recommendations is scheduled to take place between 5 May 2018 and 16 July 2018. Once the Commission has considered the representations and evidence as part of that consultation, it intends to publish final recommendations in October 2018.

New electoral arrangements for the council are scheduled to come into effect at the council elections in 2021.

Creating a pattern of divisions

In drawing up a pattern of electoral divisions, the Commission must balance its three statutory criteria, namely:

- To deliver electoral equality where each councillor represents roughly the same number of electors as others across the council.
- That the pattern of divisions should, as far as possible, reflect the interests and identities of local communities.
- That the electoral arrangements should provide for effective and convenient local government.

The Commission will test proposals against the criteria before drawing up draft recommendations. Accordingly, all proposals should demonstrate how they meet the three requirements. The Commission will take decisions based on the strength of the evidence presented to it and not merely on assertion. For example, details of community interests such as the location and use made of local facilities, services and local organisations demonstrating how a community manifests itself will carry greater weight than submissions that simply assert that an area has community identity.

The Commission will consider all submissions on their merit. A well-evidenced submission from an individual which addresses the three statutory criteria will be more persuasive than one which does not, even if the latter is from an elected individual or body.

Further information on drawing up a pattern of electoral divisions is available in our guidance document: *Electoral reviews: technical guidance* which can be found at <http://www.lgbce.org.uk/policy-and-publications/guidance>. We also publish a practical guide for putting forward submissions called *How to propose a pattern of divisions* which is available at http://www.lgbce.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0008/25694/Proposing-new-divisions-guidance-2015-08-04.pdf.

Our website includes information about previous electoral reviews of councils where you can see how the Commission came to its conclusions and how other counties,

districts and parishes built their own pattern of divisions.

Please feel free to contact us at any time should you have any questions. Officers at the Commission will be happy to assist with technical aspects of your division scheme either in person or via email or telephone.

Correspondence and enquiries

Correspondence relating to this review should be addressed to:

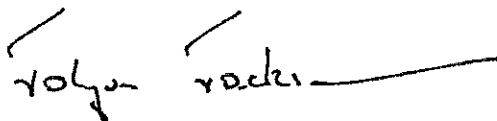
Review Officer (Cornwall)
Local Government Boundary Commission for England
14th Floor Millbank Tower,
Millbank
London
SW1P 4QP

or direct to your main contacts at the Commission who will be:

- Emily Starkie, Review Officer, with specific responsibility for the day-to-day running of the review
- Alison Evison, Review Manager, who leads the team dealing with this and other reviews

You will already be aware that the timetable outlined above includes your request to lengthen the consultation on division patterns which we announce today. I hope the extension - and our collaborative approach to the review overall - will continue into the next stages of the review.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jolyon Jackson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Jolyon Jackson CBE
Chief Executive
reviews@lgbce.org.uk
0330 500 1525

