

DRAFT COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In May 2011 the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (“the Commission”) confirmed that a Further Electoral Review of Herefordshire would be undertaken beginning formally in March 2012. The Review is needed because 30% of Wards in the County have an electoral variance in excess of 10% from the average figure for electors per Councillor in the Authority. In addition the Hollington Ward has a variance of 34%.
- 1.2 An all-Party Members’ Working Group has been appointed to oversee the Review process, and to develop the responses and submissions which will be required as a result of the Commission’s consultations and proposals. This work is undertaken on behalf of the full Council, which will consider and determine the Authority’s position at each stage of the Review.
- 1.3 This initial Submission, prepared by the Working Group and approved by the full Council on 2 March 2012, presents the case for a Council of 54 Councillors.

2. Context – Key Characteristics of the County

- 2.1 Herefordshire is a predominantly rural county, with the 4th lowest population density in England. It is situated in the south-west of the West Midlands region bordering Wales. The city of Hereford, in the middle of the county, is the centre for most facilities; other principal locations are the five market towns of Leominster, Ross-on-Wye, Ledbury, Bromyard and Kington.
- 2.2 Herefordshire has beautiful unspoilt countryside; distinctive heritage; remote valleys and rivers. The River Wye divides the county, flowing east from the Welsh border through Hereford city before turning south into the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Malvern Hills, rising to 400m, border the east of county, and the south-west is dominated by the western reaches of the Black Mountains with altitudes of more than 600m.
- 2.3 Unlike other rural counties, which have large areas with no residents, Herefordshire’s 179,300 residents are scattered across its 842 square miles – which poses a particular challenge for service delivery and access. Almost all of the land area falls within the 25% most deprived in England in terms of geographical barriers to services; the Golden Valley in the south-west and the Mortimer locality in the north-west are particularly affected. Compounding the physical access issue, access to broadband, mobile phone services and other service infrastructure is an issue for some residents and businesses in rural areas.
- 2.4 With only four railway stations, the transport network is mainly comprised of rural ‘C’ or unclassified roads leading off single carriageway ‘A’ roads. The main road links, which all pass through Hereford, are the A49 trunk road (running from north to south), the A438 (east

to west), the A4103 towards Worcester and the A465 towards Abergavenny and South Wales.

- 2.5 Herefordshire has a relatively old population structure, and numbers of older people are expected to continue to increase disproportionately to the rest of the population. Population growth is driven by net in-migration of people of all ages, mainly from other parts of the UK – although immigration levels have increased substantially since the expansion of the European Union in 2004. Although current evidence suggests that the majority of eastern European migrants are short-term seasonal workers, over half of the 3,700 non-UK citizens registered to vote in Herefordshire in 2010 were from the new member states.
- 2.6 Although the county as a whole has relatively low levels of overall, multiple deprivation, several areas of south Hereford and Leominster are persistently amongst the most deprived in England, and are becoming more deprived relative to other parts of the country. Latest figures show that an area of Ross-on-Wye is also amongst the most deprived nationally. There are also small pockets of rural deprivation.
- 2.7 Overall people in Herefordshire are healthy, live longer compared with national life expectancy, and have positive experiences of the things that affect their lives and well-being. However, there are significant health inequalities between those living in the most and least deprived areas.
- 2.8 In general the county has a relatively large proportion of employment in sectors that tend to attract lower wages such as ‘wholesale and retail’ and ‘agriculture’, which affects the overall productivity of the county. Self-employment is more common than nationally, particularly in ‘agriculture’, ‘arts, entertainment and recreation, and other service activities’ and ‘construction’. Unemployment is higher than prior to the recession, but remains low compared to regional and national levels. Low wages and relatively high house prices mean that the affordability of housing is a key issue for the county – both to buy and rent, so there is consistently high demand for social housing.
- 2.9 The emerging planning strategy for the County includes the provision of 16,500 new homes in the period up to 2031 with supporting infrastructure. Around 40% of the new homes will be built in and around the main urban area of Hereford, with the remaining developments being dispersed to the market towns and rural area.
- 2.10 Herefordshire Council is a Unitary Authority and has responsibility for more than 5000 people who are engaged in different ways in the delivery of the Council’s services, including staff employed in schools. Some of these staff (1336) deliver integrated services on behalf of NHS Herefordshire, with whom the Council has joint working arrangements through Herefordshire Public Services for service provision throughout the County. In addition, there are other staff who work in services which have been outsourced by the Council. The Council’s net budget for 2012/2013 amounts to £143.359 million.

3. The Council's Vision

3.1 Herefordshire Council, with its NHS partners, has a shared vision: 'Working together to deliver efficient excellent services and improve outcomes for the people of Herefordshire'

3.2 The following core principles set out what the council stands for, and what residents can expect of it.

PRINCIPLE	IMPACT
Valued Services	<i>Focusing on our priorities & what matters to people, stopping things we don't need to do</i>
Reducing Bureaucracy	<i>Less regulation and red tape, smaller local government; right first time delivery</i>
Supporting the Vulnerable	<i>Targeting resources on individuals, families, communities at risk or disadvantaged; early intervention & prevention; a shift in social care provision</i>
Value for Money	<i>Reducing the pay bill; third party spend savings; smarter delivery; cutting costs</i>
Local Delivery	<i>Devolution to parishes and the VCS, local decision making; working through 9 localities</i>
Personal Responsibility	<i>Self reliance, people and communities helping themselves, behavioural change; increase in personalisation</i>

3.3 Through the local government boundary review the council is seeking to demonstrate, in particular, three of the above principles: *reducing bureaucracy* and *securing value for money* by ensuring that the number of wards in the county, and the number of members representing each ward is proportionate and appropriate to meet the needs of the county and its residents; and *local delivery* by ensuring that configuration of ward boundaries has regard to the locality working arrangements being established.

4. Council Size

4.1 The first issue to be addressed in the Review is that of Council size, that is the number of Councillors to be elected to the Authority. Once identified, this will determine the average number of electors per Councillor in all wards across the County. This electoral equality figure is reached by dividing the electorate by the proposed number of Councillors. The Councillor/Electorate ratio figure then becomes the target as working arrangements are

prepared in the following stages of the Review. The current Herefordshire electorate is 142,026.

4.2 The Technical Guidance from the Commission indicates that the factors which influence Council size can be grouped under four broad elements relating to the Council's political management arrangements:

- The decision making process – what decisions, taken where and how is it managed?
- Quasi-judicial process – planning and licensing – what is the workload and how is it managed?
- The scrutiny process – what is scrutinised and how is the total scrutiny workload managed?
- The representative work of the elected members – in the community, in partnerships and sitting on outside bodies.

4.3 The Commission will want to be satisfied that the number of Councillors available to cover all of this activity (and related less formal but essential processes) will enable these roles to be discharged effectively. The Commission will consider whether the proposed number creates sufficient capacity at Member level for the effective running of the Council.

5. Governance Model

5.1 The Council operates a Leader and Cabinet model of governance under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000. The full Council (currently 58 elected members) elects the Leader, who then appoints members to the Cabinet, and decides on their portfolios. The Cabinet exercises most functions of the Authority and makes decisions for matters which are not allocated elsewhere in the political structures. There are currently 7 Cabinet Members (including the Leader) all of whom hold a portfolio. The Cabinet is supported directly by 6 other members, each of whom is assigned support responsibility within a specific portfolio.

5.2 The full Council decides the overall budget and policy framework and agrees the annual budget to which the Cabinet and Committees of the Council must operate.

5.3 The Leader and Cabinet are held to account by a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee, formed from Councillors who are not members of the Cabinet (non-executive members). The Committee also has a role in policy development, and can appoint "task and finish" Groups of Members to carry out specific service reviews. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee exercises the Council's statutory responsibilities for "external" scrutiny – including Crime and Disorder and the National Health Service. Although it is not a decision making body, the Committee can make recommendations for action to the Cabinet and Council Meeting, and to external bodies as appropriate.

- 5.4 The Council appoints a number of other Committees, which exercise delegated decision making powers on the Council's behalf. These are the Regulatory Committee, Planning Committee, Audit and Governance Committee and the Standards Committee. The quasi-judicial functions are exercised by the Planning and Regulatory Committees, with the latter carrying out a wide range of regulatory powers and duties, including licensing and registration. The Council also appoints an Employment Panel and an Employment Appeals Panel to deal with the defined roles which Councillors have concerning staffing matters. The Council may also set up Informal Advisory Bodies and Working Parties which are not decision making but can offer advice and assistance across the political management structures.
- 5.5 The political management arrangements were reviewed following the last election in May 2011. The key changes were
- a reduction in the number of Cabinet Members including the Leader from 9 to 6, although the number was subsequently increased back to 7, and 6 Cabinet Support Members were also appointed
 - a reduction in the number of Scrutiny Committees from 6 to 1. Previously there had been an Overview and Scrutiny Committee, supported by 5 themed Scrutiny Committees. Those themed Committees were discontinued leaving only the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with power to set up "task and finish" groups, drawn from all non-executive members of the Council (including co-opted Members)
 - further changes to the scheme of delegation to officers, with particular regard to Planning and Regulatory functions, so that officers have more responsibility for decisions, and less work is channelled through Committees and therefore through councillors.

6. Council

- 6.1 The full Council at present consists of 58 Members with "all out" elections every 4 years. The Council is a Unitary District authority (single tier) and is therefore responsible overall for the delivery or commissioning of the full range of local government services in the area. The large majority of these functions are overseen at political level through the Cabinet. Herefordshire Council works very closely with other service providers in the County, and in particular has a formal partnership with NHS Herefordshire, with the two organisations sharing a range of integrated management arrangements. Both bodies are also members of the wider Herefordshire Partnership, which includes all major organisations working in the County, and sets the overall policies and priorities through the Herefordshire Sustainable Community Strategy.
- 6.2 The full Council meets at least 5 times per year, to exercise the functions reserved to it under the Constitution, and in particular to adopt the Policy Framework and Budget. The meetings are held during the day, rather than in the evening.

7. Cabinet

7.1 The Cabinet consists of 7 portfolios as follows:-

- Corporate Strategy and Finance (Leader)
- Health and Wellbeing [with 2 Support Members for Children and Adult Social Care]
- Corporate Services and Education [with 1 Support Member for Finance and Commercial Services]
- Enterprise & Culture [with 1 Support Member for Broadband, Business and Tourism]
- Environment, Housing and Planning [with 1 Support Member for Planning]
- Highways, Transportation and Waste/Sustainability [with 1 Support Member for Waste/Sustainability]
- Major Contracts

7.2 Although the Cabinet Support Members are allocated specific responsibilities, in practice they can assist the portfolio holders with other aspects of the business.

7.3 Accordingly, including the Support Members there are 13 Councillors directly involved in the discharge of the Cabinet's business. 7 of these members meet collectively as the Cabinet once per month to carry out their formal decision making responsibilities. These 12 meetings per year are held during the daytime.

7.4 The Constitution provides that individual Cabinet Members may also take separate decisions which concern their portfolio, and also that a Cabinet Committee of 3 or more can be constituted to take decisions if required. Since May 2011, 13 decisions have been taken on an individual portfolio basis, in addition to the usual collective process of the full Cabinet.

8. Overview and Scrutiny

8.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee comprises 17 non-Executive Councillors plus 5 statutory voting Co-opted Members. In addition to the Chairman, there are 6 Vice Chairmen each with a lead responsibility for scrutiny based on 6 of the designated Cabinet portfolios. The Committee has responsibility for all overview and scrutiny functions on behalf of the Council, and its terms of reference are therefore extensive. The key powers are:-

- advise the Cabinet on policy development and review of existing policies
- review and scrutiny of collective and individual Cabinet decisions, including the exercise of "call in" procedures when necessary
- establish time limited and task focused Task and Finish Groups to carry out in depth reviews and scrutiny of policy and services
- review the performance of the Council, Cabinet and partners

- act as the Council's statutory Crime and Disorder Committee including the review of partner agencies
- discharge the Council's statutory powers to scrutinise and review the planning, provision and operation of health services affecting the area

8.2 The Committee is scheduled to meet 12 times per year, again during the day. However, this is the minimum figure and additional meetings are required to conduct "ad hoc" business, such as dealing with a "call in" notice. Currently 6 themed Task and Finish Groups have been appointed, with membership numbers varying between 5 – 8 councillors. Members of Task and Finish Groups may be appointed from all non – Executive councillors and are required to undertake Scrutiny Training before they can participate. The reviews themselves are demanding of Members' time and commitment to deliver reports in a timely manner, taking on average up to 8 two – hour meetings to complete their work. Additional one – day "quick" reviews are to be built in to the programme in the future. It is expected that the Vice Chairs will lead the Task and Finish Reviews in their area of responsibility.

8.3 Prior to the changes in May 2011, there were 38 meetings of Scrutiny Committees during the year. The reduction to 1 standing Scrutiny Committee was intended to manage the overview and scrutiny business more efficiently, but it should be assumed that further meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be needed each year, together with significant Task and Finish activity in order to discharge the role effectively. Overall however it is intended that there will be somewhat less impact on Members' time in this area of work.

9. Planning and Regulatory Committees

9.1 Prior to January 2010 the Council operated a system of 3 Area Planning Sub Committees meeting monthly with all Members taking a place on the one appropriate to their ward location. In addition, there was a Planning Committee which consisted of 21 members, which met every 6 weeks with additional meetings as required for major applications or issues.

9.2 These arrangements were reduced from January 2010 to a single Planning Committee with meetings based on a 3 week cycle, with increasing levels of delegation of decisions to officers, and this has continued since May 2011. Accordingly there are 16 scheduled meetings of the Committee each year, which will decide 80 planning matters at Member level in the current municipal year. The meetings take place during daytime, and tend to last approximately 3 hours on each occasion. There are 19 Members on the Committee, and Ward Members are also entitled to attend to speak on applications within their area.

9.3 The Committee also hold site inspections in relation to some of the applications, averaging 9 per year involving a commitment for Members of 2 hours each time. Councillors as a whole are significantly involved in planning business, as all Members are consulted on all applications within their Ward. This will include Councillors liaising with interested parties and Parish Councils to ascertain their views prior to responding to the Planning Officers. As such, this represents a distinct element of Member workload.

- 9.4 The Regulatory Committee is responsible for a very wide range of regulatory functions, including statutory obligations and the quasi-judicial processes of licensing and registration, and dealing with appeals from officer decisions. The operation of this Committee also underwent change in 2011, as prior to February the Committee met monthly, with a Sub-Committee (of 3 Members drawn from the main Committee on a rota basis) appointed to deal with licensing work. The Sub-Committee needed to meet every 3 – 4 weeks to cover the business.
- 9.5 The current practice is for the full Regulatory Committee to meet every three months, to oversee the process, review and updating of policies previously approved by the Cabinet and receive performance information. More of the business has been delegated to an Officer Panel, with the remainder – primarily Licensing Appeals and other regulatory matters – being dealt with by the Regulatory Sub-Committee, which meets at least fortnightly, and is projected to meet 30 times in the current year, to determine 75 substantive cases.
- 9.6 10 Councillors are appointed to the Regulatory Committee, with 3 of these Members forming the Sub-Committee each time on a rotating basis. Meetings of both bodies are held during the day, with the Sub-Committee in particular lasting over 3 hours at times.
- 9.7 As with Planning, all Councillors are consulted about Licensing and certain regulatory matters (e.g. footpath diversions) affecting their Ward, may need to “take soundings” locally and can attend Regulatory meetings to give their views.
- 9.8 Given the nature of this work, Members of both the Planning and Regulatory Committees are required to undertake training on roles and responsibilities, and the conduct of the Committee’s business. Two planning events were held in 2011, together with one Regulatory session. In addition, Regulatory Committee Members were involved in 4 additional sessions as part of the changes introduced earlier in 2011. Members also have ad hoc “one-to-one” training sessions when appropriate, in relation to Planning issues. An example of this would be training for a member who is substituting for a Planning Committee member for the first time.

10. Other Committees

- 10.1 The Audit and Governance Committee exercises the Council’s responsibilities with regard to risk management, internal and external audit and governance and approval of the Council’s statements of accounts. This has recently been extended to include a review and updating of the Constitution. It consists of 10 Councillors and meets 6 times per year.
- 10.2 The Standards Committee comprises 2 Herefordshire Councillors and 2 nominated substitutes, 3 Independent Members (non-Councillors) and 2 representatives of Town and Parish Councils and 2 nominated substitutes. Its role is to promote high standards of conduct by Members of the Council, and to deal with complaints where a person thinks that a Councillor (including Parish Councillors) has not complied with the National Code of Conduct. The Committee meets quarterly, and has appointed 4 Sub-Committees (Assessment, Review, Consideration and Hearing) which meet as required to deal with the various stages of complaints. Last year the various sub-committees met a total of 10 times,

and dealt with 64 complaints about local authority, parish or town councillors. The role of this committee is under review because of changes in the regime for dealing with complaints about Members, brought about by the Localism Act. Some responsibilities may transfer to the Audit and Governance Committee.

- 10.3 The Council has also appointed an Employment Panel and an Employment Appeals Panel, consisting of 5 members, and 3 Members chosen from a pool, respectively, to fulfil the Council's responsibilities under Staff Employment Rules and the authority's Employment Policies and Procedures. It may be anticipated that the workload of both bodies will reduce, to reflect the lower number of direct employees in the Council. The Panels meet as and when required.

11. Advisory and Other Bodies

- 11.1 The Council, Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may appoint Working Parties or Advisory Groups which include in their membership Councillors and representatives from partner organisations or the local community. These bodies have no decision making powers, but may provide advice and support within the political management structure. At present the following have been established:

Rural Forum (All councillors can attend))

Locality Meetings (covering Hereford City, the 5 market towns, plus 3 rural localities) (All councillors)

Electoral Review Working Group (10 councillors)

Member Development and Training Group (4 councillors)

- 11.2 The Council has constituted a Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board (under the provisions of the Health and Social Care Bill). It consists of a wide range of partner organisations, and is chaired by the Council's representative (member of the Cabinet). The Board meets monthly and its role, including membership, will be developed significantly in future as the Bill becomes law.

- 11.3 The Leaders of each of the Party Groups meet on a monthly basis under the Chairmanship of the Leader of the Council. These meetings although informal fulfil an important role in the overall political management of the Council. In addition, each Party Group holds broadly monthly meetings which involve associated time commitments from all Members. These meetings are also important as they enable Groups to decide their policies and approach to the business being dealt with through the formal political management system.

12. Councillors' Representational Roles

- 12.1 The Council makes appointments for Members to sit on a wide range of outside bodies with national, regional and local remits, including Joint Boards, Partnerships, Charitable Trusts and Community Organisations. The full list of these bodies is attached, involving 118 places to be taken by Councillors. On average therefore each Member currently needs in theory to sit on 2 outside bodies, whose meeting arrangements will vary but will include evening

meetings. However, in practice a significantly higher number of places than the average are taken by certain councillors, particularly the Cabinet and other office holders, which is a reflection of the roles undertaken by these Members and the requirement for them to take up places on external bodies related to their work.

- 12.2 In addition there are 167 local authority places to be taken on Herefordshire School Governing Bodies of which 31 are currently filled by Councillors, with the large majority being a Governor for just 1 school. Governing Bodies tend to meet twice a term at late afternoon or evening meetings of no longer than 2 hours duration, resulting in a regular time and preparation commitment for the Members concerned.

13. Engagement with Town and Parish Councils

- 13.1 Herefordshire is 100% parished. There are 245 parishes in the county grouped into 134 parish councils and 4 parish meetings. There are 1200 parish councillors across the County. The relationship between parish councils and the unitary authority has been agreed and published as “The New Charter 2011” (attached).
- 13.2 Ward Members are the key contacts between the unitary authority and parish councils. With the emphasis on localism and the passing of the Localism Act, this relationship is even more important. It can also be quite complex – the Hereford City Parish area covers 7 different Unitary wards and a total of 17 Herefordshire councillors.
- 13.3 Whilst Ward Members in the City and Market Towns only have one parish council with which to relate, rural ward members have up to 8 parish councils with which to work. It is the very nature of the rural county that these parish councils are spread out over a considerable area with travelling time an important aspect of the work of the rural ward member.
- 13.4 The Authority is actively trying to encourage the working relationship between the Ward Members and the parish councils in their wards. Ward Members are expected to attend all parish council meetings, hold surgeries in the parishes, work with parishes on their parish plans and increasingly work to improve service delivery at local level (see New Charter 2011).
- 13.5 An emerging issue following the enactment of the Localism Act is Neighbourhood Planning. Closely connected to Community-led planning, this is a statutory process to enable parish councils to plan the land use in their areas. Parish councils can work alone or work together on the production of the neighbourhood plan. The role of the Ward Councillor is to advise and support the parish councils in their ward when or if those parish councils wish to develop a plan.
- 13.6 In addition, the Herefordshire Council is increasingly engaging with its local communities across all directorates. This engagement often takes the form of consultations which involve full briefings of Ward members who then go on to lead the consultation at community and parish council level (evidence the latest Local Development Framework consultation). This process, whilst very rewarding, is time consuming and resource intensive. In all these ways the role of the Ward member as a community leader is being enhanced.

14. Locality Strategy

- 14.1 Over the past eighteen months, Herefordshire Public Services (Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire) has been working with its partners to develop an improved approach to meeting the needs of local communities. Locality working is about working with communities, so that they have real influence on what services are delivered and how in their area. HPS will work closely with communities to have a better understanding of what issues are important to them and how all parties can work together to achieve better outcomes for people and places.
- 14.2 By working together, HPS aims to achieve:
- Strengthened community leadership - working together for the benefit of the local area
 - Services meeting the needs of communities - designed and delivered with the customer in mind
 - Joined up local services - sharing of resources and integrating services
 - Working in partnership with empowered communities - local people involved in local decisions and given more control over local issues.
- 14.3 In early 2010, nine localities were identified to help deliver services closer to communities and address local needs. These localities are: Hereford City, five market towns (Leominster, Bromyard, Ross-on-Wye, Ledbury and Kington) and three rural areas (Weobley, Golden Valley and Mortimer).The areas provide the basis for a joined up approach to delivering services and ensure that HPS is able to maintain as many valued local services as possible.
- 14.4 The localities approach will bring together HPS, parish councils, delivery partners and community representatives to discuss and agree local priorities. An approach tailored to each area will be developed, reflecting the different needs of each locality, building on what currently works and connecting to existing mechanisms that reach the more vulnerable or hard to reach members of the community.
- 14.5 The development of the Locality Strategy will build on joint arrangements which already work well in practice. A good example is the liaison with West Mercia Police, whose Area Policing Teams have been set up using the Council's ward boundaries, thereby enhancing local community identity. Another example is the South Wye Regeneration Partnership, which is bringing significant benefits to the area.
- 14.6 The role of the Ward Councillor is key to the delivery of the Locality Strategy. This new way of working will be supported through existing staff and resources and each of the Localities will be supported by a senior manager from the public sector.

15. Councillors as Elected Representatives

- 15.1 A significant element of Councillors' workloads arises from their position as elected representatives of the local community. This includes dealing with electors' individual issues and complaints ('caseload'), holding "surgeries" for electors and possibly home visits. Although this activity is difficult to quantify and will vary from one Member to another, it has to be taken into account as it can impact on Member capacity and effectiveness.
- 15.2 Some officer support is available to Members towards helping with correspondence, and through the provision of newsletters and briefing notes. There are 5 dedicated staff in the current structure, allocated as follows: 3 general members' support officers, 1 cabinet support secretary, and 1 personal assistant to both the Leader and the Chairman. However there is no direct support available to assist with Member caseloads, and this is expected to remain the position at least in the short term.
- 15.3 Increasingly members deal with information by electronic means. They receive weekly updates electronically, and meeting papers and agendas. They are also using email extensively as a means of contacting officers and their constituents.

16. Member Development

- 16.1 Member development is an essential means of enabling all Councillors to develop their knowledge and personal skills, helping them to carry out their varied roles in an effective manner. The Council provides an annual programme of (internal and external) events and other personal development opportunities. There is an expectation that Councillors will participate – indeed training is a pre-requisite for certain areas of work, e.g. both Planning and Regulatory Committees. The programme provides events on a weekly basis which are open to all councillors and are generally well attended. Preparation for and attendance at Development Events requires all Councillors to set aside the necessary time, and it is intended that this level of programme will continue. This activity is overseen by a Member Development and Training Group comprising 4 Councillors and 4 nominated substitutes, which meets on a quarterly basis.
- 16.2 The Members' Handbook is an excellent resource which is widely used by all councillors.

17. Briefing Arrangements for Councillors

- 17.1 Briefings are held for Cabinet members before each Cabinet meeting. There are also pre-meeting briefings for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman before every Committee and Sub-Committee.
- 17.2 2 dates are set aside every month for additional briefings that members might require on anything. These are built into the calendar so that members know that there is always some time set aside for them on a reliable basis, and this helps them to plan accordingly. Councillors also receive a weekly newsletter.

18. Conclusions

- 18.1 The changes made by the Council to the Member – level governance arrangements in 2011 were intended partly to allow councillors further to develop their community and representational roles. The Council continues to recognise the importance of effective corporate decision making and scrutiny arrangements, but wishes to change the balance of councillors’ overall activities to provide more capacity for working with communities, in line with the Locality Strategy. The reduction in the formal Committee structure recognised that Members would continue to participate in “Task and Finish” Scrutiny and Advisory groups as part of their corporate roles. The Council is of the view that a total of 54 councillors would have capacity to carry out their varying responsibilities effectively, for the reasons set out below.
- 18.2 It is generally recognised that in Authorities operating the “Leader and Cabinet” governance model, Cabinet Members and those involved directly with them as Cabinet Support Members (the Executive) carry a high level workload on behalf of the Council. These councillors are responsible for the majority of the Authority’s decision making and associated activities, including regular formal meetings, weekly briefings, and close engagement with officers and partner organisations. The Cabinet leads policy development at the political level and is accountable for effective delivery and performance. Accordingly, councillors in Cabinet positions tend to work full time on these activities, and are not normally able to take up places on other Committees. There are currently 7 Cabinet Members plus 6 Cabinet Support Members in Herefordshire, and there are no plans at the present time to alter these arrangements. In terms of the overall allocation of Committee places to councillors, the 13 Cabinet Members would be discounted, due to the demands placed upon them collectively and individually as the Executive. Having said this, there is at present a need for the Support Members to act as substitutes on certain Committees, in order to ensure compliance with the political proportionality rules for those Committees. This aspect will have to be kept under review by the Council following the next elections.
- 18.3 Similar considerations apply to the Chairman of the Council, who as the Authority’s “civic head” is not able to take up any significant Committee workload, because of his/her civic programme and related responsibilities. The role of the Vice Chairman would also have to be assessed depending on the civic workload expected of that Office.
- 18.4 Taking the 7 Cabinet Members and their 6 Support councillors and the Council Chairman out of the “pool” for the allocation of seats on Committees and other member – level groups would leave 40 councillors available from the overall Council size of 54.
- 18.5 In addition to the Cabinet, the other areas where Member workloads are particularly high relate to the “statutory” Committees – Planning, Regulatory and Overview and Scrutiny. As indicated in the detailed analysis above, meeting frequencies especially for Planning and Regulatory are high. Planning Committee (19 Members) operates on a 3-week cycle, with a great deal of ancillary activity. The 10 Members of the Regulatory Committee are required to meet at least every 2 weeks as the Regulatory Sub Committee, in addition to the quarterly meetings of the Committee itself, which represents a substantial commitment. Given the

workloads involved, the majority of councillors would only be able to take a place on one of these Committees, with the heaviest burdens falling on the Committee and Sub Committee Chairs.

- 18.6 The change to one formal Overview and Scrutiny Committee has reduced the total number of standing scrutiny Committees in the structure, and accordingly the number of places available. The Council intends to operate with this more streamlined structure in the future, but other factors must be taken into account. The 17 councillors on this Committee will continue to carry significant responsibilities for holding the Cabinet to account, contributing to policy review, and scrutiny of specific decisions. In addition to the Chair, 6 other Members of the Committee are appointed as Vice Chairs, with direct responsibility for scrutiny and review of designated Cabinet portfolios. Committee Members will also participate in “Task and Finish” scrutiny reviews in addition to the programmed minimum of 12 regular meetings of the Committee per year.
- 18.7 At present, a total of 46 seats is available on the 3 statutory Committees, which would ensure that all of the 40 “eligible” councillors would be able to take a place on one of these bodies, with 6 having to sit on two under the current arrangements. The Council would review the composition of each Committee (in accordance with the “political proportionality” rules), once the Council size figure is established, to ensure following the elections that the best “fit” is achieved.
- 18.8 The remaining decision making bodies of the Council meet less frequently – between 4 and 6 times a year. Their workloads are lower, with proportionately less time commitment required of Members. Audit and Governance Committee comprises 10 councillors, and Standards Committee includes just 2 Unitary Councillors. In addition, the Employment Panel and the Employment Appeals Panel involve 8 Member places in total. As a result, only half of the available 40 councillors would have to take places on these bodies, so these activities can readily be combined with other work.
- 18.9 The Council intends to continue and develop the current arrangements for Members to engage in Advisory and other “ad hoc” Working Groups, which make an important contribution to the governance arrangements overall. At present 4 such bodies have been appointed, and it is assumed that this pattern will continue and develop, with an average of 6 Groups being constituted each year. With 6/7 councillors on each, the estimated number of places available per year would total around 40, which equates to 1 place for each councillor – bearing in mind that these appointments would be based on Members’ individual expertise and particular areas of interest.
- 18.10 With regard to Overview and Scrutiny, it is envisaged that around 14 - 18 “Task and Finish” Scrutiny Review Panels would be appointed annually comprising both themed Task and Finish groups and the “quick” one day reviews. Although these may all vary in size, and include Co-opted Members, 5/6 councillor places on each would be the norm. Membership of these Panels will be open to all (non Cabinet) Members of the Council and not just the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Assuming that between 7 – 9 of the Panels will be based on themed groups, approximately 45 places would be available each year, broadly equal to one place for each eligible Member of the Council. The remaining one day reviews would

represent a more intermittent call on Members' time, and could generally be accommodated within the councillors' overall workloads.

- 18.11 On the foregoing basis, the number of seats required for the effective political management of the Council is:

Statutory Committees - 46

Ordinary Committees – 20

Advisory/Working Groups – 40

Scrutiny Themed Task and Finish Groups – 45

Total Places – 151

- 18.12 The 40 available councillors would therefore take on average around 3.75 places each, being a combination of a high workload statutory Committee; a medium workload ordinary Committee; and the more ad hoc themed Scrutiny and Advisory Groups.

- 18.13 The additional requirements associated with the formal structures and meetings for councillors to attend briefings, undertake preparatory work, and participate in appropriate Member Development activities relevant to their roles (as described above) have also been taken into account in assessing councillor capacity. The Council has also noted that there has been a recent small increase in the proportion of the current councillors holding full or part time jobs in addition to their council work. As the majority of the Committee meetings are currently held in the daytime, the Council has been careful to propose the number of Councillors at a level which will reflect the availability of Members overall to participate in the Committee business. The Council would also wish to make the role of a councillor attractive to as many people as possible, and to encourage a widely representative cross section of the public to stand for election. This means that the Council's meeting arrangements should be compatible with councillors in employment, and allow sufficient capacity and flexibility in the system for individuals to carry out both roles. These trends would be reassessed following the election of the new Council, and the arrangements for meetings kept under review. The Council is however satisfied that an average of 3.75 places per councillor will result in manageable individual workloads enabling all Members to make an effective contribution.

- 18.14 In summary, this analysis results in each of the non – Cabinet related Members in a Council of 54 (and not including the Chairman of the Council) broadly occupying 1 place on a Committee with a high workload and commitment level; together with 1 seat on both a "Task and Finish" Group and an Advisory/Working Group; and with half (20) of the councillors being appointed to a Committee/Panel with a "medium" rather than a high workload. All Members would, of course, attend the full Council Meeting at least 5 times per year. Overall, it is considered that this represents a balanced and varied workload for the 54 councillors, with capacity to deliver convenient and effective governance at the corporate level.

- 18.15 These conclusions are supported by the outcomes from the most recent (2010) National Census of Local Authority Councillors, which indicated that “on average, councillors were members of 3.6 committees or sub – committees, which was a similar average to 2008 (3.7).”
- 18.16 With regard to councillors’ representational roles, as mentioned previously, the 54 Members will be required to represent the Council on a theoretical average of 2 outside organisations (recognising that leading councillors will take a higher proportion of these places), plus 31 places currently taken by councillors on school governing bodies . Although the meeting arrangements and frequencies for these bodies will vary, many will take place in the evening, and will place demands on Members’ time for briefing, preparation and travel in addition to the actual meetings themselves.
- 18.17 Of particular significance is the Council’s commitment to working closely with Parish Councils, and to develop this activity further as part of the Locality Strategy. As described above, this policy impacts directly on each Member of the Council, as all councillors are expected to undertake a personal leadership role, working closely with the Parish Councils in their Ward. Bearing in mind that Herefordshire is a wholly parished Authority, and the predominantly rural nature of the county, liaison with Parish Councils will continue to make significant demands on Members’ time. Currently, 34 out of the 58 unitary councillors are also elected members of Parish Councils, so a good platform is already in place further to develop these working relationships. It is envisaged that the proposed Council size of 54 would be sufficient to provide the capacity for the ongoing development of the Locality Strategy, particularly as other corporate commitments will progressively become a little less for the majority of councillors. These arrangements will contribute directly to effective local governance across the whole County area.
- 18.18 This proposal for a Council size of 54 has addressed the four broad elements identified by the Commission with regard to convenient and effective local governance. The Authority is satisfied that this number would provide sufficient capacity to enable councillors to discharge all aspects of their roles and to run the Council effectively.
- 18.19 Using the current electorate figures, 54 councillors would represent an electorate of 142026, giving a target electoral equality figure of 2630 electors per councillor. Given the largely rural characteristics of the County, and the substantially dispersed population, this is considered to be an appropriate ratio enabling the councillors to relate effectively to the interests of electors in their Wards.

19. Number of Councillors per Ward

- 19.1 The Council’s approach is based on a general presumption for single Member Wards, where this can be achieved without detriment to local communities. It is expected that single Member Ward arrangements will apply particularly in the rural localities. In order to protect community interests, avoid splitting communities and to retain local community identities as far as possible, flexibility will be provided to allow 2 Member Wards where needed, and in exceptional cases to enable the possibility of one or more 3 Member Wards. It is envisaged that any multi Member Wards will be located primarily in the more urban areas. Any

proposals in due course for multi Member Wards will be based on evidence that the three statutory criteria will be best satisfied with such a configuration in the areas concerned.