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<b>REPORT TO EXECUTIVE</b>			
<b>PORTFOLIO AREA: Health and Community Activities</b>			
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>		7th July, 2003	
<b>Public</b>			
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No	<b>Recorded in Forward Plan:</b>	No
<b>Outside Policy Framework</b>			

**Title:** Number of North West MEPs following enlargement of the European Union

**Report of:** Town Clerk and Chief Executive

**Report reference:** LDS 37/03

### Summary:

The Electoral Commission has issued a consultation paper on the way in which a reduced number of Member's of the European Parliament representing the UK (as required by the Treaty of Nice) should be distributed among the existing 12 European Parliamentary electoral regions. The Report explains the alternative methods of calculating the number to be allocated to each region and highlights the implications for the North West Region. The Commission is seeking views on alternative methods of calculation by 18<sup>th</sup> July, 2003.

### Recommendations:

Members are invited to respond to the Commission's consultation paper.

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## **1 Introduction**

1.1 The Electoral Commission has published a consultation paper on the method to be used to calculate the distribution of a revised total number of UK Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) between the twelve electoral regions and is seeking views on the following question:

*'Which method of calculation should the Commission use and why?'*

1.2 Responses to the consultation must be submitted by Friday 18<sup>th</sup> July.

## **2 Background**

2.1 Under the Treaty of Nice, which prepared the European Union for enlargement from 15 up to 27 member states, the European Parliament will increase to 732 MEPs. However, representation will continue to be roughly divided between each member state according to population size, so the number of MEPs elected by each existing member state will need to be reduced. If the Union expands to the full 27 member states, this would mean the number of UK MEPs would be reduced from 87 to 72. The Treaty also provided for transitional arrangements in the event that not all accession states sign an accession treaty by 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2004.

2.2 UK MEPs are elected on a regional basis to 12 electoral regions, with the number of MEPs returned being roughly in proportion to the size of electorate in each region. A change in the total number of UK MEPs will therefore require the number of MEPs for each region to be recalculated. The current distribution of MEPs is as follows:

### Region Number of MEPs

North East 4

**North West 10**

Yorkshire and the Humber 7

East Midlands 6

West Midlands 8

Eastern 8

London 10

South East 11

South West 7

Wales 5

Scotland 8

Northern Ireland 3

3. The European Parliament (Representation) Bill, which is expected to receive the Royal Assent shortly, provides for the Electoral Commission to make a recommendation to the Lord Chancellor as to the distribution between regions of the total number of MEPs. In advance of a request for such a recommendation, the Commission is seeking to establish the method to be recommended to calculate the new distribution of MEPs.

### **3 Requirements**

3.1 Because the test is one that is likely to be applied more than once at the request of the Lord Chancellor to take account of different accession timetables, and because the test has to be repeated by the Commission as part of a regular review process, the Commission wishes to establish a consistent method of calculation. The method must also comply with the following statutory criteria:

- each electoral region is allocated at least three MEPs;
- the ratio of electors to MEPs is as nearly as possible the same in each electoral region.

3.2 The Commission will take full account of the responses to the consultation in making its recommendation to the Lord Chancellor. It is mindful, however, that no method can achieve perfect electoral equality and that accordingly it is inevitable that there will be some variation in electors to MEPs ratios between regions. This variation is unavoidable because of the relatively small number of MEP seats to be distributed and because of the obvious need to deal in whole numbers and not fractions. The method of computation must also be easily understood and scrutinised.

### **4 Alternative Methods of Calculation**

4.1 The Commission has identified four possible methods of calculation:

#### **A. Divisor Method**

4.2 Under this method, the electoral quality test is applied first and then any adjustments made to ensure that each region has at least three MEPs. An initial calculation is made to determine the ratio of electors to MEPs across

the UK as a whole (by dividing the total electorate by the number of UK MEPs) and then this figure is used to work out the allocation of MEPs to each region.

4.3 This initial distribution, however, results in fractions of MEPs so the figures must be rounded up or down. For example, a region entitled to 5.46 MEPs would be assigned 5 and a region entitled to 5.81 MEPs would be assigned 6. The rounding process may produce a total number of MEPs greater than the allocation for the UK, for example 73 instead of 72. The extra seat would then be taken from the region with the lowest ratio of electors to MEPs.

4.4 The second stage of calculation using the divisor method involves making adjustments to ensure that at least three MEPs are allocated per region. This involves determining how many MEP seats must be redistributed – if there is only one region that fails to meet the three-per-region test, one seat will need to be redistributed. Again, that seat will be given up by the region that has the lowest ratio of electors to MEPs.

## **B. Outlier Method**

4.5 Under this method, some regions may be discounted for the purpose of electoral equality calculations. An initial allocation of the minimum number of seats (3) is made to any region which, if the divisor method were applied, would obtain fewer than three seats. A new divisor is then used to distribute the remaining seats – the new divisor is calculated using the electorates for the remaining regions and the remaining number of seats to be distributed.

4.6 At present Northern Ireland is the only region for which adjustments are needed in order to ensure a total of three MEPs given current electorate figures.

## **C. Iterative Method**

4.7 Three seats are given to each of the 12 regions first of all. The remaining seats are then distributed to achieve electoral equality by allocating them one by one to the region with the highest ratio of electors to MEPs at each stage of the process. Following the distribution of a seat to a region, the ratio of electors to MEPs for that region is recalculated prior to the next seat being distributed.

## **D. Regressive Method**

4.8 Regression provides a mathematical method for predicting the 'best fit' relationship between two variables, in this case electorates and seats. These predicted values can then be scaled up or down to meet the required number

of MEPs. Adjustments are then made to ensure that each region has at least three seats, to round the predictions to whole numbers and to ensure that the distortion caused by any redistribution is minimised.

## **5 Assessment of the various methods**

5.1 Although it will often be the case that the different methods will produce the same outcome (that is, the same recommended number of MEPs for each region), this is not necessarily the case in every situation. Depending on the precise electorate figures to be used and the total number of MEPs to be distributed, there may be small variations in the outcomes produced by different methods. Based on December 2002 electorates, the Appendix illustrates the distributions produced by methods A – C for the proposed final 72 MEPs and, by way of comparison, an interim example of 79 MEPs. (The regressive method is not included because the calculation requires complex mathematical techniques.)

5.2 A priority for the Commission is the promotion of transparency in all electoral procedures so as to foster understanding and confidence. Although the initial distribution and subsequent periodic reviews are technical, mathematical exercises, the Commission is aware of the significance in representational terms and is therefore concerned that the basis for the calculation should be one that political parties and the electorate can understand.

5.3 The Commission's comments on the methods of calculation are as follows:

### **A. Divisor Method**

5.4 This method, in which the electoral quality test is applied first and then any necessary adjustments made, most closely reflects the methods used in periodic reviews of local government electoral arrangements in which a primary consideration is electoral equality. It relies, however, on roundings and redistributions and, to the extent that any necessary redistribution of a seat from one region to another might lead to perceptions of 'winners' and 'losers', is potentially contentious.

### **B. Outlier Method**

5.5 This method recognises that Northern Ireland is exceptional, being the only region for which adjustments are currently necessary to ensure it has a total of three MEPs. It may, however, be desirable to have a standard approach that does not involve treating individual regions as 'special cases' because of circumstances applying at the time of a particular review.

### **C. Iterative Method**

5.6 This method, in which the three-per-region test is met first, more strictly adheres to the provisions in the Bill because the need to ensure that each region has at least three MEPs is listed as the first requirement before considerations of electoral equality. The calculation, however, involves more stages than the divisor or outlier methods and might therefore be regarded as more complex, although it does not involve roundings or redistributions from one region to another. It is also a form of an established method that is used for seat allocations under some proportional electoral systems [including European Parliamentary elections themselves] and is known as the d'Hondt formula.

## D. Regression Method

5.7 The Commission has some reservations about this method because of concern that the chosen method of calculation should be transparent, so as to promote understanding and confidence. In order to select a method that relies on mathematical techniques that may be difficult for the layperson to understand, the Commission would need to be convinced of the mathematical superiority of such a method over the alternatives. There will be distortion whatever method is used; the ability of a regression model to reduce this distortion, particularly following adjustments to ensure that each region has at least three MEPs, may be limited.

## 6 Conclusion

6.1 The Commission is concerned to ensure that the method used to calculate the distribution of MEPs should be fair and intelligible in addition to meeting the statutory criteria. There should also be reasonable scope for the method to be understood and to be scrutinised.

6.2 In summary, the four methods of calculation are

- **the divisor method** which achieves electoral equality throughout the UK and then makes redistributions to ensure that there are at least three MEPs per region.
- **the outlier method** which treats Northern Ireland as a special case to which three MEPs are assigned first and then distributes the remaining seats to achieve electoral equality
- **the iterative method** which allocates three MEPs to each region and then distributes the remaining seats to achieve electoral equality
- **the regressive method** which applies a regression technique which determines the best fit between two variables – in this case the number of votes and the number of MEPs.

6.3 The Commission is also willing to consider any other method of calculation that meets the statutory criteria.

6.4 So far as the North West Region (and indeed most other regions) is concerned, it could be argued that it does not matter which method of calculation is used because the same result is likely to be achieved whichever method is applied. As illustrated in the Appendix, each region except Northern Ireland will have fewer MEPs than at present and in the North West the number would reduce from 10 to 8 (assuming a total of 72 MEPs).

6.5 If, however, a view is to be expressed in response to the Commission's question, it is suggested that the iterative method might be the most appropriate. This method is the closest to meeting both the statutory criteria and the Commission's own in that it ensures each region has three MEPs before taking account of electoral equality and deals in whole numbers without need for any rounding up or down. No redistribution of seats has to be made at any stage because it relies on the application of a straightforward mathematical process which is worked through until all seats have been allocated. The method mirrors the system used to allocate seats within regions at European Parliamentary elections and therefore offers a degree of consistency in approach.

7 Recommendation

Members are invited to respond to the Commission's consultation paper.

Appendix

A. Divisor Method

Region Electorate 72 MEPs 79 MEPs

(Dec 2002)

Initial distribution Rounded Initial distribution  
Rounded

North East 1,925,557 3.10 3 3.40 3

North West 5,211,747 8.39 8 9.19 9

Yorkshire and 3,756,511 6.04 6 6.63 7

the Humber

East Midlands 3,230,315 5.12 5 5.70 6

West Midlands 4,031,769 6.49 6 7.11 7

Eastern 4,164,785 6.70 7 7.35 7

London 5,219,292 8.40 8 9.21 9

South East 6,164,095 9.92 10 10.88 11

South West 3,845,540 6.19 6 6.78 7

Wales 2,233,202 3.59 4 3.94 4

Scotland 3,905,553 6.28 6 6.89 7

Northern Ireland 1,072,404 1.73 2 + 1 1.89 2 + 1

### B. Outlier Method

Region Electorate 72 MEPs 79 MEPs

(Dec 2002)

	<u>Initial distribution</u>	<u>Rounded</u>	<u>Initial distribution</u>	<u>Rounded</u>
North East	1,925,55	3.04	3	3.34
<b>North West</b>	<b>5,211,747</b>	<b>8.23</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9.07</b>
Yorkshire and	3,756,511	5.94	6	6.53
the Humber				
East Midlands	3,230,315	5.10	5	5.62
West Midlands	4,031,769	6.37	6	7.01
Eastern	4,164,785	6.58	7	7.24
London	5,219,292	8.25	8	9.08
South East	6,164,095	9.74	10	10.72
South West	3,845,540	6.08	6	6.69
Wales	2,233,202	3.53	4	3.88
Scotland	3,905,553	6.17	6	6.79
Northern Ireland	1,072,404	3	3	3



## C. Iterative Method

Region Electorate (Dec 2002) 72 MEPs 79 MEPs

Final distribution Final  
distribution

North East 1,925,557 3 4

**North West 5,211,747 8 9**

Yorkshire and 3,756,511 6 6

the Humber

East Midlands 3,230,315 5 6

West Midlands 4,031,769 6 7

Eastern 4,164,785 7 7

London 5,219,292 8 9

South East 6,164,095 10 10

South West 3,845,540 6 7

Wales 2,233,202 4 4

Scotland 3,905,553 6 7

Northern Ireland 1,072,404 3 3