

Report to Council

7 December 2016

By the Chief Executive

DECISION REQUIRED

Not Exempt



**Horsham
District
Council**

Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on the Electoral Review Of Horsham: Warding Arrangements for Horsham District Council

Executive Summary

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) informed the Council in April 2016 that it would undertake an Electoral Review of the District to deliver electoral equality for voters in local elections. The Commission assesses electorate data for each local authority annually and conducts a review where significant electoral inequality is found. In 2016, 32% of Horsham's wards have a variance of greater than 10% with little prospect of the variance correcting itself through development or population movements.

On 21 July 2016, following member briefings and two seminars, the Council agreed a submission to the LGBCE, proposing a Council size of 47 councillors from May 2019. On 27 September 2016 the LGBCE wrote to the Council advising that it was commencing its consultation on proposals for a new pattern of electoral wards and that it was minded to recommend that 47 district councillors should be elected to Horsham District Council in future. This consultation ends on 5 December 2016 but the Council has been given an extension to 8 December to allow the matter to be considered at this meeting.

In drawing up a pattern of electoral wards the LGBCE must balance its three statutory criteria:

- To deliver electoral equality where each district councillor represents roughly the same number of electors as others across the district
- That the pattern of wards 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

With these criteria in mind, and following engagement with Members of the Council a proposed response to the consultation has been prepared and is now submitted to Council for approval. Electoral equality has been demonstrated in 20 of the 22 wards. However, in the proposed Broadbridge Heath and Forest Wards there would be variances which would exceed the LGBCE's criteria. The justification for exceptions to be made in these cases is set out at paragraph 3.3 below.

Recommendations

Council is recommended:

To approve the appended submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) on warding arrangements for Horsham District Council from May 2019 and in doing so agree that the LGBCE be asked to approve a Council size of 48 councillors (an increase in one from that originally proposed).

Reasons for Recommendations

To provide the Council's response to stage two of the electoral review process by proposing the warding arrangements that the council believes will be right for the authority from May 2019 to provide electoral equality whilst reflecting the interests and identities of local communities and providing for effective and convenient local government.

Background Papers

1. The presentation and papers issued by the LGBCE to the member briefing on 27 April 2016
2. The summary of the outcome of the survey of all members

Wards affected: All wards

Contact: Lesley Morgan, Democratic Services Manager

Background Information

1 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) informed the Council in April 2016 that it would undertake an Electoral Review of the District to deliver electoral equality for voters in local elections. The LGBCE set out a timetable whereby the review would be undertaken in two distinct stages. The first stage considered council size and was concluded by the LGBCE in September 2016. The second stage, currently underway, considers warding arrangements.
- 1.2 This report concerns the requirement for submissions to the LGBCE regarding warding arrangements to be made by 5 December 2016. The Council has been given an extension to 8 December to allow the matter to be considered at this meeting.
- 1.3 The LGBCE is not examining the external boundaries of the district as part of this review or the external boundaries of parish councils. The commission does not take into account local political implications and takes no account of parliamentary constituency boundaries which are the responsibility of the Boundary Commission for England.

2 Relevant Council policy

- 2.1 This warding arrangement proposal aligns with two objectives of the 2016/19 Corporate Plan:
 - Communities, Support our communities; and
 - Efficiency, Great value services

3 Details

- 3.1 The LGBCE, in drawing up a pattern of electoral wards, must balance its three statutory criteria:
 - To deliver electoral equality where each district councillor represents roughly the same number of electors as others across the district
 - That the pattern of wards 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
- 3.2 A full engagement programme with members has taken place since April 2016, including an LGBCE briefing for Members and officers on 27 April, two seminars (one in May and one in July) before the decision on Council size was made at Council in July, two surveys issued to all members (one in May on Council size and one in August on warding patterns), area-based group/individual Member discussions and an all-Member briefing on 28 November. Appendix A provides the narrative considerations which form the submission to the LGBCE.

3.3 Electoral equality has been demonstrated in 20 of the 22 wards. However, in the proposed Broadbridge Heath and Forest Wards there would be variances which would exceed the LGBCE's criteria. The justification for exceptions to be made in these cases is set out below.

- a) Broadbridge Heath, which is 13% below the average. It is considered that this is acceptable on the grounds that:
 - i. it is a rapidly developing area with a number of developments already in progress that may well see the electorate increase above that projected; and
 - ii. it is a well-defined community being wholly contained within the Broadbridge Heath Parish Council boundary.

- b) Forest, which is 13% above the average. It is considered that this is acceptable on the grounds that it:
 - i. reflects the interests and identity of the local community - the proposed ward has a clear identity being mostly a long established community. The Southern and Eastern boundary of this ward aligns to the rural area of Nuthurst Parish and Southwater Parish and the whole ward is covered by Forest Neighbourhood Council and it has distinct boundaries and the railway line.
 - ii. provides for effective and convenient local government within the overall town area.

4 Next Steps

- 4.1 If approved, officers will despatch the appended report and associated minute of council to the LGBCE on 8 December. The LGBCE timeline provides for a meeting of the commission to consider all proposals received on 17 January 2017 and prepare its draft recommendations.
- 4.2 The LGBCE's draft recommendations will then be made available for public consultation from 7 February 2017 until 3 April 2017. Final recommendations are scheduled for publication by the LGBCE in June 2017.
- 4.3 Following receipt of the LGBCE's draft recommendations Members will have the opportunity to consider and agree its response. This will be undertaken by the newly formed Governance Committee (if approved at this meeting as part of the Constitution Review) in consultation with all Members.

5 Outcome of Consultations

- 5.1 All members of the Council have been consulted as described in 3.2 above. There was neither a requirement nor an expectation that the Council should consult with anyone other than its own members. This is because the Council is a consultee in this process and is not the decision maker.

6 Other Courses of Action Considered but Rejected

- 6.1 Other options including a pattern producing wards with a maximum of two Members were considered and rejected as not meeting the LGBCE's statutory criteria.

7 Resource Consequences

- 7.1 The proposal to increase the number of Members to 48 would require the budget for members' allowances to be increased by a further £4,768 per annum than that reported at the meeting on 21 July 2016 (one further Member at the current basic allowance). This increase would have to be included within the budget setting process for 2019-2020.
- 7.2 The technical guidance published by the LGBCE states that the commission does not consider the financial implications that the council size proposal could have when it considers effective and convenient local government.
- 7.3 The Commission does not charge the local authority for the review.

8 Legal Consequences

- 8.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body established in 2010 by Parliament under the provisions of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.
- 8.2 The LGBCE is responsible for undertaking this review following statutory considerations. This report and methodology follows the guidance provided by the commission.

- 8.3 Electoral reviews are a matter for Full Council. Close alignment with electoral matters specified in the Local Authorities Functions and Responsibilities Regulations 2000, and local government convention exclude Electoral Reviews from the responsibilities of the Cabinet.

9 Risk Assessment

- 9.1 Electoral review is not a corporate risk. Mitigation of any operational risk is provided by the assurance that the LGBCE is an independent body, created by statute and accountable to Parliament, with a track record of delivering electoral reviews.

10 Other Considerations

- 10.1 The governance arrangements of the Council provide for Members to offer public assurance and challenge around crime and disorder, human rights and equality and diversity matters.