

Electoral Review of Horsham District Council

**Submission to the Local Government
Boundary Commission for England on the
future warding arrangements for Horsham
District Council**

Stage Two – Warding Arrangements
December 2016

Executive Summary

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is the independent body that is responsible for conducting boundary and electoral reviews of principal authorities in England. The commission wrote to Horsham District Council in April 2016 to inform the council that it would undertake a boundary review within the local authority area in order to make changes to boundaries to ensure that each elected member of Horsham District Council would, by the elections in 2019, represent an equal number of electors. This means ensuring, so far as is reasonable, that for Horsham District Council, the ratio of electors to councillors in each electoral ward, is the same. The LGBCE identified that in 2016 seven of the 22 wards (31.8%) within the district needed to be corrected to deliver electoral equality in the future. An electoral review has **two** distinct stages:

- Stage one – the number of members (council size)
- Stage two – warding arrangements

Stage one – the number of members (council size)

The LGBCE asked Horsham District Council to propose the number of members that it thinks it will need in the future. On 21 July 2016 the Council agreed a submission to the LGBCE, proposing a Council size of 47 councillors from May 2019. The LGBCE considered the proposal and, on 27 September 2016, 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.

Stage two – warding arrangements

This report considers the future warding arrangements for Horsham District Council, bearing in mind the three statutory criteria the LGBCE will apply:

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

The consensus view of Horsham District Council's members is that the Council should comprise **22** wards of varying sizes represented by **1, 2 or 3** members as appropriate and that in order to deliver electoral equality based on the projected electorate figures for 2021/22 (within a 10% tolerance) the total number of members for the district should be **48** (an increase of **1** above that previously suggested). The detailed breakdown of electorate numbers/members per ward is shown in appendix A.

About Horsham

Horsham district is located in West Sussex, within the South East of England. The district covers an area of 530km² (205 square miles) and is predominantly rural in character, and contains a number of small villages and towns. The largest urban area is the market town of Horsham, situated in the north-east of the District and 95km² (36.49 square miles) of the District falls within the South Downs National Park. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) 2014-based subnational population projections indicate that the population of the South East is likely to grow at a faster rate than England as a whole; Horsham in particular is predicted to have a 7% population change from 134,000 in 2014 to 144,000 by 2024.

The last electoral review of the district in July 2002 concluded that Horsham District Council would increase its number of members from 43 to 44, and that the number of wards be reduced from 25 to 22.

Developing this proposal to the Commission

The review process in respect of warding arrangements was characterised by the engagement of all members in the development of this proposal to the commission. There were 4 clear phases of engagement.

1. The LGBCE presented to an all member seminar on 27 April 2016 when members were informed of the overall review process.
2. More than half of members completed an electronic survey which was issued to all members in August 2016 – the views expressed in the survey were borne in mind when drawing up proposals for new warding arrangements.
3. All members were invited to engage with the officer preparing the proposals through geographical area-based group or individual member discussions – two thirds of members attended at least one meeting and efforts were made to address specific issues raised by members by revising the proposals where possible.
4. A member seminar was held on 28 November – members were again informed of the overall review process, the statutory criteria that needed to be addressed and how the current proposal had emerged.

1. Delivering electoral equality where each district councillor represents roughly the same number of electors as others across the district

Using the agreed future number of members for the district (47) and the projected electorate for the district in 2010/22 it was determined that the average number of electors per member was 2359. A tolerance of plus or minus 10% then gave a range of 2123 to 2595.

In preparing options for members to consider it became clear that drawing up warding patterns using the originally proposed number of members for the district would result in many parishes being split between district wards with the resultant warding of those parishes, which would impact negatively on the statutory criteria relating to reflecting the interests and identities of local communities and providing for effective and convenient local government. It became apparent that an increase to 48 members produced a more consistent and less radical pattern across the district.

Therefore, using the currently proposed number of members for the district (48) and the projected electorate for the district in 2021/22, the average number of electors per member is 2310 with a range within tolerance of 2079 to 2541.

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.

In addition there are a number of areas where large scale development is underway and these are generally in the proposed wards that are on the low side of the tolerance to take account of imminent population growth.

Most of the proposed wards at the higher end of the tolerance are in areas where there is unlikely to be large scale growth.

2. Producing a pattern of wards that, as far as possible, reflects the interests and identities of local communities

Where possible, the building blocks used to produce the proposed pattern of wards are existing polling districts and parish council areas, which generally reflect the interests and identities of local communities.

There are just three areas where this has not been possible due to the need to deliver electoral equality:

- i. Southwater Parish Council area – this is a large and rapidly growing parish which is already outside the tolerance for a 3 member ward and with current developments this situation will only worsen. It is therefore proposed to create two parish wards, one containing the bulk of the old village, the retail centre and urban area to the north and east of the parish and the other containing the some of the southern part of the urban area and the south western-area of the parish where new development is underway. The first of these parish wards will be a 2 member ward in its own right and the second will form another 2 member ward together with the Shipley Parish Council area. This will also necessitate the redrawing of the polling districts in Southwater Parish.
- ii. North Horsham Parish Council area – this is a very large parish, in terms of electorate numbers, adjoining the unparished area of Horsham town and already comprises four parish wards due to the current district ward arrangements. A further parish ward will need to be created as a consequence of the recent West Sussex County Council review of divisions. The proposed warding arrangements will necessitate a review of the parish ward areas and number of parish councillors per parish ward. This will include a new parish ward in the area to the north of the A264 bypass (a clearly identifiable boundary) which whilst small in terms of electorate at present is expected to see considerable growth in the next 5 to 15 years.
- iii. Horsham town area - polling district NP has been split using the northern boundary of Horsham Park, which is unlikely to change, in order to provide a ward pattern that produces electoral equality (the exception being Forest – see section 1 above)

3. Providing for effective and convenient local government

The proposed warding arrangements are in many cases similar to or unchanged from the existing arrangements, which have worked well for many years. Areas where changes are proposed are generally based on existing communities (e.g. parish council areas) and take account of projected electorate growth thus ensuring that no members are over-burdened and no area is under-represented. As the projected ratio of electors per member (2310 +/- 10%) is similar to the existing ratio (2338 +/- 10%) members should not experience an increase in casework. Horsham District Council operates on the basis of 'all-out' elections every four years and, as such, a mixed pattern of 1, 2 and 3 member wards remains effective and convenient.