

COUNCIL

14 SEPTEMBER 2023

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES REVIEW

Recommendation

- 1. The Assistant Director for Legal and Governance recommends that the Council:**
 - a) Approves the draft response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's (LGBCE) initial consultation; and**
 - b) delegates authority to the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance, in consultation with the Leaders of the political groups, to submit the response to the LGBCE.**

Background

2. In the summer of 2022, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) announced that it would be carrying out a review of the electoral boundaries of the County Council. The main purpose of the review is to improve electoral equality across the whole of the county. The County Council's electoral boundaries have not been reviewed since 2004.

3. The LGBCE provides tables summarising the electorate totals per division on their website: [Worcestershire | LGBCE](#) According to those tables, Worcestershire has 23 divisions (of 52 in total) which are currently plus or minus over 10% variance from the local authority average number of electors per Councillor. This is above the threshold to trigger a review. The last review of Worcestershire's electoral arrangements resulted in minor revisions to division boundaries, and a reduction of 57 divisions to 52, but did not lead to any reduction in Councillor numbers.

4. The first stage of the current review looked at whether the number of County Councillors (57) should be changed. The council submitted a report to the LGBCE, compiled by officers having consulted with members, which recommended that the number of councillors should remain at 57. This was supported by the LGBCE.

Boundary Commission Initial Consultation

5. The LGBCE launched the next stage of the review on 16 May, and this runs until 19 September. This 'initial consultation' asks local people and organisations to tell the LGBCE about their communities. The enclosed submission contains proposals for electoral boundary arrangements which address the criteria at paragraph 7 below, for consideration by Council. The proposals have been compiled by council officers following consultation with all county councillors.

6. Some aspects of the LGBCE's activities are legal requirements. For example, it has to 'future proof' the new arrangements for 5 years after the end of the review by aiming to achieve 'electoral equality'. Also, by law the current review cannot propose divisions which cross the boundaries of each District Council. The LGBCE produces guidance about the content of submissions which is published on its website [How to propose a pattern of wards or electoral divisions \(lgbce.org.uk\)](https://lgbce.org.uk).

7. The law which governs the work of the LGBCE says that it can only make decisions about new division arrangements based on 3 specific criteria:

- a) Electoral equality - that each councillor represents a similar number of electors;
- b) Convenient and effective local government - to propose divisions that use clearly identifiable boundaries, have appropriate names, and make it as easy as possible for the councillors to do their jobs, and
- c) Community identity and interests - reflect the communities local people live in.

The enclosed proposals take into account all three criteria.

8. As part of the effective and convenient local government requirement, the LGBCE tries to plot County Council division boundaries which are co-terminous with District ward boundaries. This means that residents are clear about who represents them on each authority; the administration of local elections is straightforward and county councillors can communicate effectively with district council and other representatives as part of their role. There are occasions when such 'coterminosity' cannot be achieved without adversely affecting electoral equality.

9. Proposals for each division are made on a district basis. Four of the District Councils - Malvern Hills, Redditch Borough, Worcester City and Wychavon - have had reviews of their ward boundaries recently. The LGBCE had been consulting on variations to some ward boundaries in Worcester City over the summer. Council officers had based their work on the latest set of proposals by the LGBCE. They have reviewed this after the LGBCE published their final proposals for the Worcester City review on 29 August, as there were some changes to detail. The proposals in the submission therefore reflect the latest position with District ward boundaries.

Process for producing the submission

10. The LGBCE sought details of the estimated number of electors in the County in 2029. This was achieved using:

- details of the current number of electors;
- proposals for areas of housing development, obtained from colleagues in each District Council

and was calculated using a formula provided by the Boundary Commission. The data has been published on the LGBCE's website during the consultation period.

11. The table below shows the outcome of this exercise in terms of the average number of electors per councillor in 2029. This shows that the average number of electors per councillor for the county council area is 8,687. As electoral division boundaries cannot

cross District Council boundaries, the size of electorate per county councillor in each district is also shown.

Table 1: Table showing number of County Councillors per District Council area in 2029 and the estimated variance from the county average number of electors.

	Number of County Cllrs	Electors per councillor 2029	Variance	Number of Councillors using county average
Bromsgrove	9	9256	6.50%	9.59
Malvern Hills	8	8660	-0.30%	7.98
Redditch	8	8345	-3.90%	7.68
Worcester	10	8240	-5.20%	9.48
Wychavon	12	9131	5.10%	12.61
Wyre Forest	10	8386	-3.50%	9.65
Worcestershire	57	8,687		

12. Applying the projected increase in electorate numbers to each division showed that in 2029 it was likely that 23 divisions would be above 10% variance (plus or minus) from the county average number. The submission in front of the Council today has reduced that to 5.

13. Initial draft proposals were mapped based on moving polling district areas to try and meet the electoral equality objective, These were shared with Group Leaders and all councillors who were invited to comment and to feed back about considerations for communities in each area.

14. Councillor feedback and further research by officers has led to the draft submission being presented to the Council today. In some instances, changes suggested by councillors have not been included as they would not meet the criteria set out in paragraph 7 above.

Next Steps

15. Council is asked to consider the draft submission to the LGBCE, attached at the appendix.

16. Whether or not a Council submission is agreed, Members are able to make their own submissions to the LGBCE by the 19 September deadline.

17. The timetable for the review is currently:

- 19 September – closing date for submissions about communities to the LGBCE;
- 9 January - 18 March 2024 – the LGBCE carries out a public consultation on its proposals;
- July 2024 – the LGBCE publish its recommendations;
- To be confirmed - the LGBCE asks Parliament to approve its recommendations;
- May 2025 - New arrangements apply to local elections.

Legal, Financial and HR Implications

18. The LGBCE was established as an independent public body under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. It is independent of central and local government and political parties, reporting to Parliament via a committee of MP's. Its objectives are to:

- provide electoral arrangements for English principal local authorities that are fair and deliver electoral equality for voters, and
- to keep the map of English local government in good repair and work with principal local authorities to help them deliver effective and convenient local government to citizens.

19. In its constitution, the functions in relation to Elections and Boundaries are reserved to the Council for decision.

Risk Implications

20. The main risk for the review is if there are delays in the timetable set for the review and implementation is delayed. The current timetable for the review plans to enable changes to be implemented for the County Council elections in May 2025, planning for which will begin some months beforehand.

Contact Points

Specific Contact Points for this report

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Supporting information

Appendix – draft Council submission on division size and boundary arrangements.

Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance) there are no background papers relating to the subject matter of this report.

For transparency, details of the Boundary Review for Worcestershire are on the Local Government Boundary Commission website here:

[Worcestershire | LGBCE](#)