

COUNCIL

15 FEBRUARY 2024

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES REVIEW – RESPONSE TO DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

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) draft recommendations; and**
 - b) delegates authority to the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance, in consultation with the Leaders of the political groups, to submit the agreed 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. Currently Worcestershire has 23 divisions (of 52 in total) which are 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. In the first stage of the review the LGBCE agreed that the County Council should continue to be represented by 57 Councillors. At its meeting in September 2023 the Council agreed a submission to the LGBCE setting out a pattern of divisions. The LGBCE considered this and submissions from others before publishing its draft recommendations on 9 January. The consultation on its proposals closes on 18 March.

Boundary Commission Draft Proposals

5. 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:

- Electoral equality - that each councillor represents a similar number of electors;

- 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
- Community identity and interests - reflect the communities local people live in.

The LGBCE also must 'future proof' the new arrangements for 5 years after the end of the review by aiming to achieve 'electoral equality'.

6. In summary, the LGBE proposals:

- Retain 52 divisions
- Keep the number of divisions represented by 2 councillors at 5. The Council proposed removing the 2-member division in Stourport, which was accepted. However, the LGBCE proposes to introduce a new 2-member division in Bromsgrove District
- Reduce the number of divisions where the electoral equality is forecast to be more than plus or minus 10% from 23 currently to 5
- Keep the boundaries of 14 divisions unchanged.

Process for producing the submission

7. Since publication of the proposals, officers have liaised with councillors for their comments and feedback. This has focused on where the LGBCE's proposals differ from those submitted by the Council last September.

8. The enclosed draft submission has been compiled using the feedback and addressing the proposals using the criteria set out at paragraph 5 above.

9. It has not been possible to propose changes to address all issues raised. Proposals must comply with the principles set out at paragraph 5 above and in some cases, it is not possible to arrive at electoral equality without further substantial changes which impact beyond a specific division. The LGBCE has shown in its report that it seeks and responds to suggestions submitted by other local authorities, Parish Councils and individuals. It has asked in its report for feedback from communities on specific proposals and submissions can be made to the LGBCE until the closing date of 18 March.

Next Steps

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

11. Whether or not a Council submission is agreed, Members are able to make their own submissions to the LGBCE by the 18 March deadline.

12. The timetable for the review is currently:

- 18 March – closing date for responses to the draft proposals to the LGBCE;
- 2 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

13. 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.

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

Risk Implications

15. 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

Hazel Best, Assistant Director for Legal and Governance

Tel: 01905 765609

Email: hbest@worcestershire.gov.uk

Supporting information

Appendix – draft Council response to the LGBCE draft recommendations on new electoral arrangements for Worcestershire County Council.

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](#)