
Subject: PROPOSAL FOR A REVIEW OF ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

Meeting and Date: Electoral Matters Committee – 16 May 2017
Council – 17 May 2017

Report of: Chief Executive

Decision Type: Non-Key

Classification: UNRESTRICTED

Purpose of the report: To commission an electoral review by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England of the number, boundaries and names of wards and the number of councillors to be elected to each.

Recommendation: Electoral Matters Committee

1. That Council request the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to proceed with an Electoral Review of this Council in 2017.
2. That the Committee recommends to Council that an indicative size of council membership of 30 to 35 be adopted for submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

Council:

1. That the Council request the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to proceed with an Electoral Review in 2017.
 2. That the proposal for the indicative size of council membership, as recommended by the Electoral Matters Committee, be adopted for submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.
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1. Summary

- 1.1 Electoral Reviews are reviews of the electoral arrangements of local authorities: the number of councillors, names, number and boundaries of wards and electoral divisions and the number of councillors to be elected to each.
- 1.2 They are normally carried out to improve electoral equality in an area. This means ensuring, so far as is reasonable, that each councillor elected to a local authority represents the same number of electors.
- 1.3 The Local Government Boundary Commission is responsible for putting any changes to electoral arrangements into effect, and does this by making a Statutory Instrument or order. The local authority then conducts local elections on the basis of the new arrangements set out in that order. This would apply to the 2019 district council elections.

2. Introduction and Background

What is the Local Government Boundary Commission for England?

2.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) was established by Parliament under the provisions of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. Independent of central and local government, and political parties, it is directly accountable to Parliament through a committee chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons. The Commission's objectives are:

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

How is a review undertaken?

2.2 The Council size is the starting point in any electoral review since it determines the average number of electors per councillor to be achieved across all wards or divisions of the authority. Local Government Boundary Commission cannot consider the patterns of wards without knowing the optimum number of electors per councillor, which is derived from dividing the electorate by the number of councillors to be elected to the authority.

2.3 In conducting its review of the Council, the Local Government Boundary Commission will consider the following factors:

- (a) Well-reasoned proposals from the Council which clearly demonstrate the individual characteristics and needs of our local authority area and our communities and how our circumstances relate to the number of councillors elected to the authority.
- (b) How many councillors we consider are required, having regard to the political management arrangements, regulatory and scrutiny functions and the representational role of councillors, both in terms of their ward work and representing the council on external bodies and to provide for effective representation of citizens.
- (c) That our proposals reflect likely future trends or plans for the Council over the next five to ten years. In every review the Local Government Boundary Commission aim to ensure that their recommendations remain relevant for the long term.
- (d) The individual characteristics of the Council, whether that would involve an increase, decrease or no change to the existing arrangements. However, the Local Government Boundary Commission will seek to put the council's proposal in context. To provide context to the authority's proposal on council size, they will refer to the Nearest Neighbours model prepared and published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). This will identify the Council's 15 nearest two-tier district council neighbours.

- (e) The time that has elapsed and changes that have happened since the last Periodic Electoral Review in 2002.
 - (f) There are no strict mathematical criteria for council size or imposed national formula for its calculation.
- 2.4 There are levels at which the Local Government Boundary Commission would consider an authority being too small to discharge its statutory functions or too large to be able to function in an effective manner. For this reason, the Local Government Boundary Commission will give detailed consideration to proposals for council sizes of below thirty councillors to be assured that the reduction will not jeopardise the ability of a council to manage its business effectively.
- 2.5 Through the Electoral Matters Committee, the Local Government Boundary Commission will undertake preliminary discussions with the Council. This will usually start up to six months in advance of the formal commencement of the review. It will give the Local Government Boundary Commission the opportunity to hear our views about council size and begin to test the assumptions made by the Council. This is to ensure that the Local Government Boundary Commission has a thorough understanding of the rationale for the council size that has been proposed and that all relevant considerations have been properly considered.
- 3. Why do we want to make a submission at this stage?**
- 3.1 Following the 2015 district council elections, officers were considering whether to request Council's approval for a Periodic Electoral Review, as the last review was in 2002. However, the proposed four way district merger discussions meant that this was put on hold, as if the single Council for East Kent had progressed an Electoral Review for that new Council would have been required, negating the need for this Council to request a review its own arrangements.
- 3.2 Following the decisions across East Kent on 22 March 2017, the need to consider an electoral review became relevant once again. Although, the timescales will be tight, it is still possible for an Electoral review to be undertaken in time for the 2019 district council elections. However, although the Council may request that Local Government Boundary Commission undertake an Electoral Review, there is no guarantee that we will be included on their work programme before 2019. The decision as to whether an Electoral Review will take place is ultimately for the Commissioners.
- 3.3 Preliminary conversations have been held with the Local Government Boundary Commission to gauge their willingness to include the Council on their work programme. They have advised that they are prepared to consider our late inclusion. However, the Local Government Boundary Commission require the Council to provide an indicative target Council size to assist in its deliberations and prioritisation of its Work Programme.
- 3.4 To assist members in providing an indicative Council size, the following information is provided:
- (a) Dover currently has circa 230 Staff and 45 Members which is a ratio of approximately 1:5.
 - (b) Canterbury City Council (2014) and Shepway District Council (2014) have undergone an Electoral Review over the last few of years. Thanet District Council has yet to be reviewed.

(c) Canterbury City Council has a population of 159,965 (source Office of National Statistics 2015 Population Estimates), Shepway District Council has a population of 110,034 (source Office of National Statistics 2015 Population Estimates) and Dover District Council has a population of 113,228 (source Office of National Statistics 2015 Population Estimates).

(d) Canterbury City Council has 39 members, Shepway District Council has 30 members and Dover District Council currently has 45 members.

3.5 Based on the above comparisons, it is reasonable for this Council to set an indicative target of 30 to 35 members following an Electoral Review.

3.6 In the event that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England consents to include a Review of Dover District Council's Electoral Arrangements in its work programme, the Electoral Matters Committee will make recommendations to Council at each stage of the Consultation process.

4. Identification of Options

4.1 Option 1: To request that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England proceed with an Electoral Review of this Council in 2017 and an indicative size of council membership of 30 to 35 be submitted.

4.2 Option 2: To request that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England proceed with an Electoral Review of this Council in 2017 and members suggest an alternative indicative size of council membership for submission.

4.3 Option 3: Not to proceed with an electoral review.

5. Evaluation of Options

5.1 Option 1 is the preferred choice. The council last had an electoral review in 2002. Since that time the Executive system of political management has been introduced and become imbedded. The Local Government Boundary Commission has requested that the Council provides an indicative number of members. Based on comparisons with our East Kent near neighbours of Canterbury City Council and Shepway District Council a number in the range of 30 to 35 appears to be appropriate.

5.2 Option 2. This would meet the requirements of the Local Government Boundary Commission, but would need clear rationale for the reasoning.

5.3 Option 3 will mean that an electoral review would not be delivered before the 2019 district council elections.

6. Resource Implications

6.1 There are no resource implications for the Council at this stage.

7. Appendices

Appendix 1 – The Local Government Boundary Commission's stages for an Electoral Review

8. **Background Papers**

Local Government Boundary Commission for England Guidance.

Contact Officer: David Randall, Director of Governance ext. 2141

The Local Government Boundary Commission's stages for an Electoral Review

Preliminary Period

- Informal dialogue with local authority.
- Focus on gathering preliminary information including electorate forecasts and other electoral data.
- Commissioner-level involvement in briefing group leaders on the issue of council size. Meetings also held with officers, group leaders, full council and, where applicable, parish and town councils.
- At the end of this process, the council under review and its political groups should submit their council size proposals for the Commission to consider.

Up to 6 months in advance of formal start of review

- Council size decision - Commission analyses submissions from local authority and/or political groups on council size and takes a 'minded to' decision on council size (5 weeks)

Formal start of review

- Consultation on future warding/ division arrangements. The Commission publishes its initial conclusions on council size.
- General invitation to submit warding/division proposals based on Commission's conclusions on council size. (12 weeks)
- Development of draft recommendations. Analysis of all representations received. The Commission reaches conclusions on its draft recommendations. (12 weeks)

Consultation on draft recommendations

- Publication of draft recommendations and public consultation on them. (8 weeks)
- Further Consultation (if required). Further consultation only takes place where the Commission is minded to make significant changes to its draft recommendations and where it lacks sufficient evidence of local views in relation to those changes. (Up to 5 weeks)

Development of final recommendations

- Analysis of all representations received. The Commission reaches conclusions on its final recommendations. (12 weeks)

Time periods shown are the expected typical duration of stages. They are not standards or undertakings. The progress of a review will be determined by the nature of the issues to be addressed and the availability of information to underpin sound decision-making, not by a determination to complete a review within any given period.