

TITLE	Electoral Review Arrangements
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Council on 17 February 2022
WARD	None Specific
LEAD OFFICER	Andrew Moulton, Assistant Director Governance

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

To inform Council of the process for the Boundary Commission for England's Electoral Review.

RECOMMENDATION

Council is recommended to:

- 1) note the arrangements for a review of electoral arrangements by the Local Government Boundary Review for England;
- 2) agree to setting up a cross-party, Member level Working Group on the basis set out in paragraphs 4.3-4.5 of the report; and
- 3) agree the Terms of Reference of the Electoral Review Working Group as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report sets out the arrangements for a review to be undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) of the electoral arrangements in Wokingham Borough. Changes to electoral arrangements will come into effect from May 2024. It also sets out proposals for the establishment of a Working Group to compile the necessary submissions to the LGBCE and develop and recommend proposals to Full Council.

Council is asked to note the separate report on this meeting's agenda on Whole Council Elections.

Background

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Council is being advised of the arrangements for the review to be undertaken by the LGBCE and the information it will be required to submit, as well as being asked to establish a cross-party Working Group to develop and recommend proposals to Council.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 established the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and it has a responsibility to undertake reviews of the electoral arrangements of local authorities: the number of councillors, the names, number and boundaries of wards, and the number of councillors to be elected to each. The Commission is responsible for putting any changes to electoral arrangements into effect by submitting a Statutory Instrument for consideration by Parliament.
- 2.2 The LGBCE may make recommendations on:
- The total number of councillors to be elected to the Council;
 - The number of wards within an authority;
 - The number of councillors to be elected for each ward;
 - The name of the wards.
- 2.3 In carrying out a review, the LGBCE is required to have regard to:
- The need to secure equality of representation (i.e. the ratio of electors to councillors in each ward is as nearly as possible, the same);
 - The need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
 - The need to secure effective and convenient local government.
- 2.4 The electoral arrangements of each principal authority must be reviewed from time to time, and the LGBCE has a rolling programme of reviews undertaken for a variety of reasons. They have notified Wokingham Borough Council that they will undertake a review starting in 2022.
- 2.5 Whilst the LGBCE have limited powers in relation to Parish Councils, when making recommendations about the electoral arrangements of a principal authority such as Wokingham Borough, they can make recommendations about the electoral arrangements of any Parish Councils that are directly affected by new boundaries in the principal authority. In an area comprising Parishes, the LGBCE will use the Parishes as the building blocks for new wards.

3. The review timetable

- 3.1 The indicative timetable is shown below:-

Stage/Action	Timescale
Preliminary Period Informal dialogue with local authority. Focus on gathering preliminary information including electorate forecasts and other electoral data.	June 2021 to February 2022

Commissioner-level involvement in briefing group leaders on issue of Council size. Meetings also held with officers, group leaders, and members.	
Council size submission Deadline for submission by Council of proposals on Council size for the Commission to consider	25 March 2022
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.	25 March to July 2022
<u>Formal start of Review</u> Consultation on future warding arrangements Commission publishes its initial conclusions on Council size. General invitation to submit warding proposals based on Commission’s conclusions on Council size	July to October 2022
Development of draft recommendations Analysis of all representations received. Commission reaches conclusions on its draft recommendations	November to December 2022
Consultation on draft recommendations Publication of draft recommendations and public consultation on them	January to March 2023
Final recommendations Analysis of all representations received. Commission reaches conclusions on its final recommendations and publishes	June 2023
Order made Statutory Instrument approved	Average seems to be 4 months from being laid <i>November 2023</i>
New arrangements come into place for elections on	2 May 2024

4. Implications for Wokingham Borough

- 4.1 The Commission have stated that they aim to build a strong relationship with the Council under review as this helps to facilitate a robust, timely and efficient review. They will also require various bits of information from us and we are

obliged to provide it. This will range from the current electorate, a forecast of the local government electorate in 2028, a copy of the electoral register, and various maps.

- 4.2 Various meetings have already taken place between LGBCE Commissioners and staff and the Leaders of political Groups and Council officers to have the informal dialogue referred to above in the preliminary period. A presentation by the LGBCE to which all Councillors were invited took place on 27 October 2021.
- 4.3 It is clear that if the Council can demonstrate that it has conducted a detailed study of the issues and drawn up a submission on Council size and warding proposals impartially, it is possible that those proposals will be adopted by the Commission in making its recommendations. In view of this and the timing of the review the Council may wish to consider setting up a Working Party supported by the relevant officers, to undertake the gathering and analysis of information, liaison with Parish Councils, developing options and to submit recommended proposals to Full Council on Council size and the future warding arrangements.
- 4.4 The group needs to be a size conducive to formulating recommendations. Officers recommend a group of no more than 9 Councillors which is cross-party; the proportionality rules do not automatically apply to Working Groups, but based on the current proportionality rules this would result in a breakdown of membership across the two main political groups of 5:3 and this is recommended. It is also proposed that one Member from the Labour Group and one Member from the Independent Group are also included on the Working Group, one of whom will have voting rights and the other rights of attendance and speaking. The Group Leaders will provide the names of those Members that they wish to take up their Group's places on the Working Group.
- 4.5 The proposed terms of reference for the review are attached as Appendix 1 and Members are asked to approve these.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	Revenue

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

There are no other financial implications associated with this report.

List of Background Papers

None

Contact Andrew Moulton	Service Governance Services
Telephone No 07747 777298	Email andrew.moulton@wokingham.gov.uk
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