

TITLE	Council Response to Local Government Boundary Commission for England Consultation
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Council on 23 March 2023
WARD	None Specific
LEAD OFFICER	Chief Executive - Susan Parsonage

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is the independent body that is responsible for deciding the boundaries between the wards of Wokingham borough. It is reviewing Wokingham borough to make sure councillors represent about the same number of electors, and that ward arrangements help the council work effectively. It wants to be sure that its proposals reflect community ties and identities.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council approves its submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBCE) as recommended by the Electoral Review Working Group (ERWG) and set out at Appendix 1.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

A new pattern of wards is being developed for Wokingham Borough Council.

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is an independent body accountable to Parliament. It recommends fair electoral and boundary arrangements for local authorities in England. In doing so, it aims to:

- Make sure that, within an authority, each councillor represents a similar number of electors
- Reflect the electoral cycle so that each ward is represented by three councillors
- Create boundaries that are appropriate, and reflect community ties and identities
- Deliver reviews informed by local needs, views and circumstances

On the 31 January the LGBCE published its proposal for a new warding pattern in Wokingham. [Microsoft Word - Wokingham DR report - FINAL](#) The Commission is running a consultation on these proposals until the 10 April 2023.

The ERWG has reviewed the Commission's proposal and drafted the submission on behalf of the Council. The proposed response largely supports the Commission's proposals. The ERWG could not reach a consensus on the issue of three member wards for the Twyford and Hurst and Southern ward arrangement and this response reflects this.

The LGBCE's final recommendations are due to be published on 4 July 2023. Changes will come into effect from May 2024 when all 54 seats will be elected.

Background

At its meeting of 17 February 2022, Council received an update on the LGBCE review and agreed to set up a cross-party Electoral Review Working Group (ERWG).

On the 24 March 2022, the Council agreed the Phase 1 submission on the number of Councillors as 54 Members. On the 30 August 2022, the LGBCE supported this proposal and launched their consultation on warding arrangements on this basis. The consultation ran until the 7 November 2022.

The Council submitted its warding proposals following approval by Council on the 20 October 2022.

The LGBCE published its proposal for new warding patterns in Wokingham on the 31 January 2023. The consultation is open to anyone to submit a response prior to the deadline on the 17 April 2023.

The ERWG met on the 15 February 2023 to discuss the Council's response, work through the options and agree the Council's draft response set out in Appendix 1.

LGBCE Timeline

Stage/Action	Timescale
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 issue of Council size. Meetings also held with officers, group leaders, and members.	June 2021 to February 2022
Phase 1 - Council size submission Deadline for submission by Council of proposals on Council size for the Commission to consider.	25 March 2022
Phase 1 - Council size decision LGBCE 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
Formal start of Review Consultation on future warding arrangements LGBCE publishes its initial conclusions on Council size. General invitation to submit warding proposals based on LGBCE's conclusions on Council size.	August to November 2022

Development of draft recommendations Analysis of all representations received. LGBCE reaches conclusions on its draft recommendations.	December 2022 to January 2023
Consultation on draft recommendations Publication by LGBCE of draft recommendations and public consultation on them.	31 January 2023 to 10 April 2023
Final recommendations Analysis of all representations received. LGBCE reaches conclusions on its final recommendations and publishes.	4 July 2023
Order made Statutory Instrument approved.	Average likely to be 4 months from being laid i.e. November 2023
New arrangements come into place for elections on	2 May 2024

The Submission

The Electoral Review Working Group has agreed this response to the Commission's proposals. The ERWG was able to unanimously support the Commission in all wards except for "Twyford and Hurst" and "Southern" ward. The majority supported the Commission's proposals but a minority view felt that both these areas better represented their communities with a two / one member ward arrangement. We have provided both options to the LGBCE.

Ward Naming

The Commission have proposed names for each of the wards. The ERWG felt that the retention of existing warding names should be retained and have suggested that these replace the proposals.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

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

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None.

Cross-Council Implications
The Electoral Review will result in all-out local borough elections in May 2024 which will be a significant event requiring careful planning and delivery with support from services across the Council.

Public Sector Equality Duty
The outcome of the Review will determine the number of councillors for the Borough as well as both the number of wards and ward boundaries, allowing for the most effective representation of the Borough's diverse communities.

Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i>
There are no specific impacts of this decision on the Council's carbon neutral objective.

List of Background Papers
Appendix A

Contact Andrew Moulton, Paul Ohsan Ellis	Service Governance
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