

26 June 2008

**Electoral Review of the County
Council**



Report of Lesley Davies, Acting Director of Corporate Services

Purpose of Report

- 1 To inform the Council of the proposed review of the County Council's electoral boundaries and suggest a way forward to deal with Stage 1 of the Review.

Background

- 2 Earlier in the year the County Council was notified of the Electoral Commission's decision *in principle* to direct an Electoral Review during 2008 and 2009, commencing after the May 2008 elections, to be followed by further elections in 2010.
- 3 Despite the very strenuous and cogent representations made jointly by the 8 Principal Authorities in the County that the Commission should reconsider this decision, the Commission subsequently reaffirmed their view that a five year term of office was unacceptable for councillors in a new authority and that an electoral review implemented at an early opportunity would ensure that the new Authority was able, early in its life, to have an appropriate council size and good levels of electoral equality across its area.
- 4 On 2 June, officers from the 8 Authorities were briefed by the Boundary Committee's Director on the Review Process.
- 5 A similar briefing has been arranged for Member representatives of the 8 Authorities to take place at County Hall later today.

The Review Process

- 6 Assuming the Electoral Commission makes the necessary Direction to the Boundary Committee, the six stage Review will commence formally on 15 July and conclude in May 2009 with the formulation of final recommendations to the Commission. At that stage there is very little likelihood of further change to the proposals. It is for the Electoral Commission to accept and implement the changes by Order which could therefore trigger elections in 2010, although the Electoral Commission have said they will make no decision on this until the conclusion of the Review. The Review Timetable is briefly summarised as follows:

Stages One and Two (July 2008)

- Consultation on Council size.
- Consideration of Council size.

Stage 3 (October 2008)

- Invitation to submit schemes and representations.

Stage 4 (December 2008)

- Consider submissions.
- Formulate Draft recommendations.

Stage 5 (March 2009)

- Publication of Draft Recommendations.
- Invitation to comment in support or opposition.

Stage 6 (May 2009)

- Consider further submissions.
- Formulate Final Recommendations and submit to Electoral Commission.
- Period for further representations to the Electoral Commission.

- 7 The starting point for the review will be to determine the appropriate number of Members for the Council. This will take account of political management structures, scrutiny and representative roles for all Members. The County Council will be invited to submit proposals on the size of the Council, supported with evidence and showing how these provide for appropriate community engagement and empowerment. We will also be required to demonstrate that the proposed Divisional pattern reflects community identity. Either single or multi-Member Divisions, or a combination of the two are possible.
- 8 The primary objectives of the Review are:
- Electoral equality – to be achieved over 5 years.
 - Easily identifiable boundaries
 - Evidence of community identities and interests
 - Effective and convenient local government
- 9 The Boundary Committee considers that, ideally the building blocks for the review should be parish and town council boundaries where they exist. The Boundary Committee also considers that, as this is a new Authority, the current Electoral Division pattern should not be a determining factor. The Boundary Committee cannot consider Parliamentary Constituencies and a review of these boundaries will follow in due course.

Recommendation

- 10 Members are asked to note the above position, and, subject to the Electoral Commission's Direction to commence the Review, authorise me to establish, in consultation with Group Leaders, an all-party Member Working Group to deliberate and report back to Full Council to inform the Council's response to Stage 1 of the Review on the future size of the Council.

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