

County Council

25 January 2023

**Local Government Boundary Commission
Review**



Corporate Management Team

Paul Darby, Corporate Director of Resources

Councillor Amanda Hopgood, Leader of the Council

Councillor Richard Bell, Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance

Electoral Division(s) affected:
Countywide.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To note the next steps in relation to the Local Government Boundary Commission England (LGBCE) in respect of future electoral divisions.

Executive Summary

- 2 The LGBCE are conducting an Electoral Review of Durham County Council. The Review will consider and determine:
 - The total number of councillors to be elected to the council;
 - The boundaries of future electoral divisions;
 - The number of councillors representing each division; and
 - The name of the electoral divisions
- 3 The principal aim of the review is to deliver electoral equality across the local authority area by ensuring councillors represent a similar number of electorate and that this is consistent with national criteria.
- 4 The review is conducted in two stages. The first stage considered Council size and the second considers warding patterns. On 21 September 2022, the Council considered draft proposals in relation to Council size. This report sets out the next stage of the review in respect of the boundaries of future electoral divisions, the number of councillors representing each division and the name of the divisions.

Recommendation

5 Council is asked to:

- i) note the progress made in relation to the boundaries of future electoral divisions, the number of councillors representing each division and the proposed names of the divisions; and
- ii) note that each political group intend to submit proposals directly to the LGBCE as part of the consultation on warding patterns.

Background

- 6 The last local government boundary review in County Durham took place following the 2008 elections and was implemented to coincide with the local elections in May 2013.
- 7 Local government boundary reviews are conducted to ensure fair representation at local government elections after any significant changes in the distribution of electors and seek to deliver electoral equality for voters in local elections.
- 8 Reviews also look at whether the boundaries of divisions (wards) within a local authority area need to be altered, and will aim to create boundaries that are appropriate, and reflect community ties and identities.
- 9 In October 2021 the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) notified the County Council of their intention to undertake a review of Durham County Council to consider and determine:
 - The total number of councillors to be elected to the council;
 - The boundaries of future electoral divisions;
 - The number of councillors representing each division; and
 - The name of the electoral division.
- 10 The average electorate per Councillor within County Durham is 3,106. Durham meets the Commission's criteria for electoral inequality as one division has a variance outside +/-30% of the average for the authority. Furthermore, 15 (24%) of the 63 divisions have a variance outside +/-10%. Four divisions have a variance outside +/-20%.
- 11 Any changes made to the electoral arrangements following the review will be implemented to coincide with the local elections in 2025.

Progress to date

- 12 In January 2022, representatives from the LGBCE held preliminary discussions with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, Group Leaders, the Chief Executive, and Officers from Legal and Democratic Services to discuss the review process.
- 13 The LGBCE delivered a briefing to all Members on 11 February 2022 which outlined the purpose and process of the review. The LGBCE also prepared a guide for Councillors, which summarises the reasons for the review, the detail of the electoral review process, the stages of the

review, and how to get involved. It included a list of the current divisions and variances, and a map showing the electoral imbalances. This document was provided to all Councillors and is attached at Appendix 2 to the report.

- 14 A Member Working Group comprising all Group Leaders and the Chair of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (or their representatives) was established to oversee the preparation of the Council's submissions. The Working Group is supported by Officers from Democratic Services, Research and Intelligence and Planning.

Stage One: Council Size

- 15 On 21 September 2022, Council agreed the submission in relation to Council size and delegated authority to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services in consultation with the Electoral Review Member Working Group to finalise the data and information required. These were submitted to the LGBCR by the deadline of 4 October 2022.
- 16 On 22 November 2022, the LGBCE confirmed that it will be recommending that the Council size should be 98 Councillors. This recommendation may change slightly as the work in relation to boundaries is completed if it is considered that slightly more/slightly fewer Councillors would better achieve the objectives of the review.

Stage Two: Warding Patterns

- 17 Stage two of the review considers the boundaries of future electoral divisions, the number of councillors representing each division and the name of each electoral division. Consultation on these matters opened on 22 November 2022 and will close on 30 January 2023.
- 18 On 28 September 2022 the Electoral Review Member Working Group met to agree its approach in relation to warding patterns. It was originally envisaged that there would be proposed drop-in sessions to enable all Members to participate in the exercise. However, once the Working Group understood the nature of the exercise and the technology used to formulate proposals, it decided that it was more appropriate for groups to nominate representatives to work on proposals on behalf of their groups.
- 19 Members were provided with an analysis of the current electoral register which included a breakdown of all polling districts, existing wards and parishes and the current and forecast electorate figures, to assist them in the formation of proposed new warding arrangements.

- 20 An example warding pattern for 98 Councillors was also provided to demonstrate how the mapping software could create new divisional boundaries.
- 21 Following this officers' have worked with individual members and nominated leads from political groups to create options for divisional patterns.
- 22 The Electoral Review Member Working Group met again on 6 January 2023 to check on progress from the respective political groups. It was clear from discussion that it would be impractical to present multiple proposals for electoral divisions to the Council for consideration with a view to getting a consensus and agreed Council submission.
- 23 On that basis, it was agreed that each political group would make their own submissions to the LGBCE and that there would not be a single agreed Council submission. The submissions made by individual political groups would be in addition to any representations which individual Members may wish to make directly to the LGBCE. The group also recognised the importance of providing narrative with their submission to ensure that the proposal would provide the best balance to meet the statutory criteria.

Next Steps

- 24 At the conclusion of the warding patterns consultation, the LGBCE will propose a new pattern of electoral divisions, division names and electorate, taking into account all of the representations received.
- 25 The LGBCE proposals are then expected to be consulted upon between 25 April 2023 to 3 July 2023. The Council will have one final opportunity to comment on these proposals prior to the publication of the Commission's final recommendations which are expected in September 2023.

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The outcome of the review will come into effect at the local elections in 2025.

Finance

Additional tools have been purchased to assist with the second part of the review in looking at divisional / warding arrangements. These build on the election management system to provide mapping with the forecasted electorate to assist the council in proposing re-configured boundaries that meet the criteria set by the LGBCE on elector equality.

Consultation

The Member Working Group and Group representatives have consulted with their groups regarding the proposals put forward.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None specific within this report.

Climate Change

None specific within this report.

Human Rights

None specific within this report.

Crime and Disorder

None specific within this report.

Staffing

Significant Officer time is required to support the review and collate the information required by the LGBCE

Accommodation

None specific within this report.

Risk

None specific within this report.

Procurement

None specific within this report.