

County Council

19 July 2023

**Local Government Boundary Commission
Review**



Report of 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 consider 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 stage considered warding patterns. On 21 September 2022, the Council considered draft proposals in relation to Council size. The second stage considered the boundaries of future electoral divisions, the number of councillors representing each division and the name of the divisions.
- 5 Each political group submitted their proposals directly to the LGBCE as part of the consultation on warding patterns, which closed on 30 January 2023.
- 6 On 2 May 2023, the LGBCE published draft recommendations for a new pattern of electoral divisions, division names and electorate which were subject to a final round of consultation which closed on 10 July 2023.

Recommendation

- 7 Council is recommended to note the report.

Background

- 8 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.
- 9 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.
- 10 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.
- 11 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.
- 12 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%.
- 13 Any changes made to the electoral arrangements following the review will be implemented to coincide with the local elections in 2025.

Progress to date

- 14 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.
- 15 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 summarised 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.

- 16 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

- 17 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.
- 18 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

- 19 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 ended on 30 January 2023.
- 20 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.
- 21 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.

- 22 An example warding pattern for 98 Councillors was also provided to demonstrate how the mapping software could create new divisional boundaries.
- 23 Officers worked with individual members and nominated leads from political groups to create options for divisional patterns.
- 24 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.
- 25 It was agreed at Full Council on 25 January 2023, 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 could make directly to the LGBCE.

Draft Proposals

- 26 The LGBCE published draft recommendations for a new pattern of electoral divisions, division names and electorate, considering all of the representations received on 2 May 2023.
- 27 The draft recommendations are for
- nine single councillor divisions
 - 28 two councillor divisions; and
 - 11 three councillor divisions
- 28 The LGBCE consider that their draft recommendations provide for good electoral equality while reflecting community identities and interests based on the evidence received as part of the consultation.
- 29 Officers have studied the draft recommendations and consider that from an administrative point of view, and in terms of managing the democratic and electoral processes, the proposals are sound. However, Members may have their own views on the proposals and the consequent impact on communities.
- 30 A full list of proposed divisions, names and their corresponding electoral variances can be found at Appendix 2. An outline map of the proposed divisions is provided at Appendix 3.

- 31 In considering the draft recommendations, it should be noted that the proposed divisional boundaries set out by the LGBCE must have regard to statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. This provides that if a parish is to be divided between different divisions it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single division. On that basis, the LGBCE are proposing revised parish electoral arrangements for City of Durham, Peterlee, Spennymoor and Stanley.

Consideration of the proposals

- 32 The proposals were open to a final round of consultation which closed on 10 July 2023. The LGBCE agreed that the Council could submit a response after that date to enable the matter to be considered at the Council meeting on 19 July 2023.
- 33 The consultation invited comments on whether:
- (i) the proposed divisions reflect local communities?
 - (ii) how do you think the proposals can be improved?
 - (iii) are the names of the proposed divisions right?
- 34 The Electoral Review Member Working Group met on 27 June 2023 to consider the proposals. The Group considered that it was unlikely that a single Council response could be agreed. It was therefore agreed that each political group and/or individual Councillors would respond directly to the consultation by 10 July 2023. A report would be presented to Council for information.
- 35 The Boundary Commission will consider all of the representations received in this latest round of consultation and are expected to publish their final recommendations in November 2023.

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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 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.