

CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE – 25 JUNE 2015

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

ELECTORAL REVIEW OF LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Purpose

1. This report sets out a proposed scheme for new electoral divisions in response to an invitation from Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) to interested parties to submit proposals.

Background

2. The LGBCE is responsible for conducting electoral reviews. Electoral reviews are undertaken when electoral variances become notable. The LGBCE's criteria for initiating a review are as follows:-
 - (i) more than 30% of a council's wards/divisions having an electoral imbalance of more than 10% from the average ratio for that authority; and/or
 - (ii) one or more wards/divisions with an electoral imbalance of more than 30%;
 - (iii) the imbalance is unlikely to be corrected by foreseeable changes to the electorate within a reasonable period.
3. The County Council and the LGBCE agreed that a review was required as one of the criteria for review had been met, namely that 30% of electoral divisions now had an imbalance of more than 10%. The review process formally commenced in December 2014.

Statutory Rules

4. The LGBCE has to work within the legislative guidelines and the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act). Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act sets out the statutory criteria to which the LGBCE are required to have regard to in conducting electoral reviews and includes:
 - (i) the need to secure equality of representation;
 - (ii) the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
 - (iii) the need to secure effective and convenient local government.

5. In relation to the community identities and interests criterion, the LGBCE would aim to determine boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable, would not break local ties, and be long-lasting boundaries for divisions. The LGBCE will take into account factors such as the location and boundaries of parishes and the physical features of the local area when drawing boundaries.
6. In relation to parishes the legislation states:-
 - (i) every ward of a parish having a parish council (whether separate or common) must lie wholly within a single electoral division of the relevant county council, and a single ward of the relevant district council; and
 - (ii) every parish which is not divided into parish wards must lie wholly within a single electoral division of the county council and a single ward of the district council.
7. There is an additional requirement that when County Councils' electoral division boundaries are reviewed the LGBCE is required to have regard to the boundaries of district or borough wards. When making their recommendations, the LGBCE must ensure that every electoral division is wholly within a single district, so that no division crosses the boundary between two neighbouring districts.
8. Finally, Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act also states that the LGBCE should take into account any changes to the number and distribution of electors that is likely to take place within the five years following the end of a review. This requirement means that at the start of a review the County Council has been asked to provide the LGBCE with electorate forecasts up to 2021. These forecasts will form the basis of the new electoral divisions.

The Review Process

9. There are four main stages in the process for undertaking electoral reviews which are as follows:-

Stage 1	LGBCE to determine the Council size and agree electorate forecasts to 2021.
Stage 2	Invitation to interested persons to submit proposals for new electoral divisions (May 12 – July 21).
Stage 3	LGBCE to consider the proposals submitted and publish its draft recommendations for new electoral divisions consultation (October to December 2015)
Stage 4	LGBCE publishes its final recommendations on the new electoral divisions and an Order is laid in Parliament to give effect to this (March 2016).

Stage 1

10. The first stage of the process commenced in late 2014. This involved the County Council commissioning external consultants, Edge Analytics, to assist in preparing electorate forecasts in line with the guidance laid down by the LGBCE. The outcome of this work was submitted to the LGBCE in March and those forecasts were agreed. The agreed forecasts now form the basis on which the Council's and other interested parties proposals will be constructed. The electorate forecasts can be found on the LGBCE website via the following link <http://www.lgbce.org.uk/current-reviews/east-midlands/leicestershire/leicestershire-county-council>.
11. As part of this first stage, the LGBCE invited the County Council to submit proposals on Council size. The question of Council size is the starting point in any electoral review, since it will determine the optimum 'councillor:elector ratio' across all electoral areas against which levels of electoral imbalance can be measured. The County Council submitted its proposals on Council size in March 2015 and put a case forward to retain the Council size at its current level – 55 members. The LGBCE on 12th May indicated that it was minded to recommend a Council size of 55 members. Consequently, based on the forecasts and a council size of 55, each elected county councillor would represent 9,466 electors in 2014 rising to 9,984 in 2021. The Council Council's submission on Council size can be accessed via the following link [http://politics.leics.gov.uk/Published/C00000134/M00004177/A100043379/\\$ReportoftheConstitutionCommitteeAppendix1.docA.ps.pdf](http://politics.leics.gov.uk/Published/C00000134/M00004177/A100043379/$ReportoftheConstitutionCommitteeAppendix1.docA.ps.pdf) .

Stage 2

12. This report concerns the second stage of the process, to respond to the LGBCE invitation to interested parties to submit proposals for new electoral boundaries. To help prepare its scheme the County Council established a politically balanced Working Party comprising of members from the three main political groups to oversee all aspects of the review.
13. In preparing the proposed scheme the Working Party took into account the LGBCE's Electoral Review Technical Guidance - April 2014 and the statutory rules governing electoral reviews as set out in paragraphs 4 – 8 of this report. The Working Party was also advised that it was only one of a possible number of consultees as other organisations and members of the public would be able to submit their own proposals to the LGBCE.
14. In drawing up its proposals the Working Party was mindful that the main reason that a review in Leicestershire was required was to improve electoral equality. The Working Party's approach has been that, wherever possible, existing electoral divisions should be retained and that it would only propose changes where these were required to rectify electoral inequality. By seeking to retain existing electoral divisions the Working Party was of the view that it would help retain existing community identities which are now well embedded

following the implementation of last Periodic Electoral Review of Leicestershire in 2005. The initial proposals considered by the working party were circulated to political groups for consideration. The comments received from political groups can be found via this link:

www.leics.gov.uk/boundaryreview_disborproposals.htm.

These initial proposals were subsequently amended by the Working Party and formed the public consultation document.

The County Council Proposal – Summary

15. The Scheme which is now being proposed for approval by the County Council comprises of fifty three single member divisions and one two member division.
16. Overall the proposed Scheme ensures that 121 out of the 151 district/borough wards across the County are wholly contained within an electoral division. This results in 80% co-terminosity across the county.
17. The Scheme proposal significantly improves electoral equality as 50 of the 54 electoral divisions are within the +/- 10% tolerance of the county average. Four divisions exceed this tolerance, 3 divisions are between +/- 11% -13% and one is between +/- 14% - 15%. The Working Party believes that it is able to provide a strong justification as to why these four electoral divisions should be established as proposed. These justifications are set out in the district by district detail which appears later in this document.
18. There was all party support at the Working Party for the proposed electoral division changes in the following District and Boroughs:-
 - Blaby
 - Charnwood
 - Harborough
 - Hinckley and Bosworth
19. The proposals put forward for Melton reflect the views of the Conservative Group. A proposal from the Labour Group to split the town of Melton into two divisions, Melton East and Melton West and make some marginal changes to the Asfordby division was not supported.
20. With regard to North West Leicestershire there were two areas of disagreement. The first centred on the town of Coalville and its immediate surrounds where a Labour party proposal for a Whitwick Division and a Coalville North and Coalville South Division was not supported. The second centred on Ashby Money Hill district ward, which is in the proposed Valley electoral division. The Labour Group had argued for its inclusion in the Ashby de la Zouch division and for the Ashby Castle district ward to be in the Valley division.

21. With regard to the Oadby and Wigston there was broad support for the proposed scheme with the only exception being that the Liberal Democrat Group was in favour of a two member electoral division for the Oadby area.

Consultation responses

22. The County Council consulted on its draft proposals between 18th May and 29th May 2015. The consultation was on-line on the County Council website and the draft proposals were drawn to the attention of all District/Borough councils within Leicestershire, the Leicestershire and Rutland Association of Local Councils (who in turn advised all Parish Councils who are members of the Association), and key community and voluntary organisations known to the County Council.
23. The Working Party acknowledged that the consultation response timescale was extremely short but necessary to accommodate the decision making process within the Council to get approval of this submission in time for the LGBCE deadline of 21 July. The consultation process was also not ideal in that:
- (i) Only a two week period was allowed for responses.
 - (ii) Consultees were asked to provide a view on the preferred option; alternatives were not provided.
 - (iii) The non-parished areas of the County were not specifically targeted given that there was no single association/organisation through which the consultation paper could be cascaded down.
24. Recognising all of the above, the Working Party undertook the consultation as a means of providing an opportunity to get an initial view so as to provide a 'sense check' to the proposals it had put forward.
25. Fifty five responses were received to the online consultation, and two direct responses via email. Respondents were asked to comment about what they liked and/or disliked about the County Council's proposals, and whether they agreed with the proposed Electoral Division names and if they did not they were given an opportunity to propose alternative names. All the responses, as received, to the consultation can be found in the consultation response document via this link:
- www.leics.gov.uk/boundaryreview_disborproposals.htm.
26. In the main the majority of respondents only commented about a specific district/borough however, twelve respondents made general comments or comments affecting more than one district/borough. Of those twelve, eleven respondents supported the County Council proposals. For the remaining districts/borough within the County a brief summary is set out below:-
- Blaby District – Three responses were received all of which either strongly agreeing or tended to agree with the proposals.

Charnwood Borough – Four responses were received three strongly agreeing with the proposal and one strongly disagreeing.

Harborough District– No responses were received.

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough – Two responses were received both tending to agree with the proposals.

Melton Borough – Fifteen responses were received with nine strongly agreeing and four tending to agree with the proposal. Two respondents indicated that they tended to disagree or strongly disagreed with the proposals.

North West Leicestershire District – Seventeen responses were received. Three respondents strongly agreed with the County Council proposal and one tending to agree. Eleven disagreed with the proposals of which seven strongly disagreed and four tended to disagree. One respondent neither agreed nor disagreed with a further one respondent not indicating their preference.

Oadby and Wigston Borough – only two responses were received one strongly agreeing with the proposals and one tending to disagree.

27. The Member Working Party considered the outcomes of the consultation and noted that the comments in large part reflected the differences between the political parties as outlined in paragraphs 19 - 21 of this submission. However, the Working Party did make one change from its draft proposals which was to locate Ashby Money Hill in the Valley Division and the Ashby Castle district wards in Ashby de la Zouch division.

Equal Opportunities and Human Rights Implications

28. The purpose of the review is to ensure that as far as possible each person's vote carries the same weight.

Recommendations

29. The Committee is asked to recommended that the County Council agrees the proposals for new electoral divisions for submission to the LG BCE.

Background Papers

Local Government Boundary Commission for England – Electoral Reviews Technical Guidance April 2014

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