

B: 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 County Council and the LGBCE agreed that a review was required as one of the criteria for a 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

3. The LGBCE has to work within the legislative guidelines. Schedule 2 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 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.

There are a number of other criteria and factors the LGBCE must have regard to and these are set out in detail in the attached submission.

The Review Process

4. 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

5. The first stage of the process commenced in late 2014. This involved the preparation and agreement of electorate forecasts with the LGBCE. 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>.

6. 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's submission on Council size can be accessed via the following link
[http://politics.leics.gov.uk/Published/C00000134/M00004177/AI00043379/\\$ReportoftheConstitutionCommitteeAppendix1.docA.ps.pdf](http://politics.leics.gov.uk/Published/C00000134/M00004177/AI00043379/$ReportoftheConstitutionCommitteeAppendix1.docA.ps.pdf).

Stage 2

7. This report concerns the second stage of the process and sets out the County Council submission to the LGBCE 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.
8. 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

9. The Scheme which is now being proposed for approval by the County Council is set out in a separate document which accompanies the Council report booklet. It proposes fifty three single member divisions and one two member division. 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;
 - Significantly improves electoral equality as 50 of the 54 electoral divisions are within the +/- 10% tolerance. Only four divisions exceed the +/- 10% tolerance, 3 divisions are between +/- 11% -13% and one

is between +/- 14% - 15%. The attached submission provides a strong justification as to why these four electoral divisions should be established as proposed.

10. 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
11. 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.
12. 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 was located 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.
13. 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

14. The County Council consulted on its draft proposals between 18th May and 29th May 2015. The attached submission sets out how the consultation was undertaken and acknowledges that was not ideal and very limited in scope. The consultation did provide as a means to get an initial view so as to provide a 'sense check' to the proposals put forward.
15. 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.
16. In the main the majority of respondents only commented about a specific district/borough. Twelve respondents made general comments. 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 agreed 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 tended 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.

17. 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. This was to move Ashby Money Hill from the Valley Division into the Ashby de la Zouch division and move the Ashby Castle district ward from Ashby de la Zouch Division to the Valley Division

Consideration by the Constitution Committees

18. The recommendations of the Constitution Committee are contained in the motion which appears below.

(Motion to be moved:

That the proposed County Council submission on new electoral divisions be approved.)

25th June 2015

**Mr N. J. Rushton CC
Chairman of the Constitution Committee**

Background Papers

Reports to the Constitution Committee on 25th June concerning:-

- The Electoral Review of Leicestershire County Council
- Review and Revision of the Constitution