

CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE – 18 JUNE, 2003

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

PERIODIC ELECTORAL REVIEW OF LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to enable the Committee to make recommendations to the County Council on a proposed scheme of electoral arrangements in response to the Boundary Committee's invitation to the Authority to submit proposals.

Background

2. At the last meeting of the Committee on 8 May, 2003 consideration was given to a report which set out initial draft proposals prepared by officers to assist in the development of the Council's scheme of proposed electoral arrangements. The Committee approved the initial draft proposals as a basis for consultation with all interested parties and agreed to meet again on 18 June 2003 to consider the results of the consultations and determine the final scheme to be recommended to the County Council.

Statutory Criteria

3. The Electoral Commission and Boundary Committee have to observe certain criteria when proposing county electoral divisions. The County Council, therefore, has to take these into account in preparing its proposals.
4. The criteria provide that, having regard to any changes in the number or distribution of the local government electors of the county likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the start of the review:
 - (a) the number of local government electors shall be, as nearly as may be, the same in every electoral division of the county;

- (b) every electoral division shall lie wholly within a single district (i.e. electoral divisions should not cross district administrative boundaries);
- (c) every ward of a civil parish, having a parish council, shall lie wholly within a single electoral division (i.e. no ward of a parish or town council should be divided by an electoral division boundary);
- (d) every parish which is not divided into parish wards shall lie wholly within a single electoral division;

Subject to (a) – (d), the criteria provide that regard should be had to:

- (e) the desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable;
 - (f) any local ties which would be broken by the fixing of any particular boundary; and
 - (g) the boundaries of the wards of the districts in the county.
5. In relation to (g) above the Boundary Committee attaches much importance to achieving coterminosity between the boundaries of divisions and wards. Where wards or groups of wards are not coterminous with county divisions, this can cause confusion for the electorate at local elections, lead to increased election costs and, in the Committee's view, is not conducive to effective and convenient local government.
 6. In addition to the above, representatives of the Boundary Committee have stressed the importance of any proposals put to it being evidence based and the desirability of demonstrating that they have local support and, if possible, support across the political parties.

Council Size

7. As indicated in the report to the Committee's last meeting, the question of the Council size is the starting point of any electoral review. The Electoral Commission's guidance stresses that whatever Council size is put forward it is important to demonstrate that the issue has been fully thought through and has been developed in the context of a review of internal political management and the role of councillors in the new structures. Accordingly, a statement has been prepared to support the decision taken to base the Council's proposals on a Council size of 55 elected members. A copy of the statement is attached as Appendix A to this report.

Response to the Initial Draft Proposals

8. It was agreed at the last meeting of the Committee that a process of consultation should take place with elected members, district councils and other interested parties on the initial draft proposals which had been prepared by officers. The initial draft proposals are attached as Appendix B to this report.
9. In commenting on the proposals members were advised that:-
 - (a) it would be helpful if members sought help and advice from the appropriate officers before putting forward alternative proposals;
 - (b) the Committee will be unlikely to be able to respond positively to any alternative proposal which fails to address the effects on adjoining electoral divisions;
 - (c) proposals should be submitted either via or following consultation with the relevant Group Leader or Group Whip.
10. The comments and alternative proposals put forward during the consultation exercise are set out in Appendix C. A number of bodies have indicated that there were unable to reply within the timescale laid down but will respond as soon as they are in a position to do so. These will be drawn to the attention of members at the earliest opportunity.

Revised Draft Proposals

11. Officers have examined further this matter and have prepared a revised set of proposals. These are set out in Appendix D to this report. The main factors which have influenced the revision of the initial draft proposals are:-
 - (a) the availability of further time to explore the various options available;
 - (b) the comments and alternative proposals put forward in response to the consultation exercise;
 - (c) advice of external consultants and informal advice of the Boundary Committee's officers;
 - (d) the aim to develop a package of measures from all the suggestions available which "best fits" the Electoral Commission's guidelines in terms of electoral equality and the achievement of a co-terminosity with District ward boundaries.
12. The revised draft proposals amend the initial draft proposals in the following ways:

Blaby

Changes have been made to improve electoral equality. These involve splitting the District Wards of Cosby with South Whetstone and Winstanley.

Charnwood

- (a) The District Wards of Loughborough Ashby, Loughborough Dishley and Hathern, Loughborough Garendon and Loughborough Storer have been reconfigured to improve electoral equality.
- (b) The whole of the District Ward of Barrow upon Soar is now retained within one single electoral division. The resultant effect on electoral equality is not significant and is outweighed by the advantages of coterminosity.

Harborough

The proposals have been reconfigured to avoid the need to split Billesdon across two electoral divisions. This improves both electoral equality and coterminosity.

Hinckley and Bosworth

No change.

Melton

Waltham on the Wolds District Ward is combined with other Wards to the East to respond to local representations. This has only a marginal effect on electoral equality.

North West Leicestershire

Reconfiguration as follows to improve both electoral equality and coterminosity:-

- (a) to provide that all Ashby District Wards are contained within a single electoral division;
- (b) to avoid the need to split the Ashby Wolds District Ward;
- (c) to avoid the need to split the Ravenhurst and Packington District Ward.

Oadby and Wigston

The Oadby District Wards have been reconfigured to respond to representations received about community identity. The effect on electoral equality is not significant.

13. The revised draft proposals referred to above are within the following ranges compared with the average electorate:-

	<u>No. of Divisions</u>
Within +/- 10%	40
+/- 10% - 12%	8
+/- 12% - 14%	2
+/- 14% - 16%	1
+/- 16% - 18%	1
+/- 18% - 20%	2
more than +/- 20%	1

14. This is an improvement over the initial draft proposals. There are also fewer split wards. Where the imbalance exceeds +/- 10% the Boundary Committee has said that it will require particular justification and it believed that this can readily be given in all of the instances where this is the case.

Naming of Electoral Divisions

15. The County Council is required to put forward suggested names to apply to the respective electoral divisions within its proposed scheme and members have been asked to contact officers where they have particular views about the naming of any electoral division(s). Once the Committee has determined its recommendations to the Council it is proposed that members should be invited to put forward suggestions about names and that the Chief Executive be authorised to deal with the naming of electoral divisions when he draws up the Council's detailed scheme.

Equal Opportunities Implications.

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

Recommendations

17. The Committee is asked:-
- (a) to recommend the County Council to approve the statement set out in Appendix A to this report relating to Council size as part of the Council's submission to the Boundary Committee;
 - (b) to determine what recommendations to put forward to the County Council as to the detailed scheme of proposed electoral arrangements to be recommended to the Boundary Committee;

- (c) to authorise the Chief Executive to take all necessary action to draw up a detailed scheme of proposals including the naming of electoral divisions for submission to the Boundary Committee by the deadline of 7 July 2003, subject to confirmation of these by the County Council at its meeting on 9 July 2003.

Background Papers

Guidance and procedural advice for periodic electoral reviews – Electoral Commission – July 2002.

Responses to the County Council’s consultation process.

Circulation under Sensitive Issues Procedure

All members have been consulted on the initial draft proposals and will have an opportunity to consider the matter further at the meeting of the County Council on 9 July 2003.

Officer to Contact

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