

MEETING:	EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL
DATE:	4 JANUARY 2013
TITLE OF REPORT:	ELECTORAL REVIEW OF HEREFORDSHIRE
REPORT BY:	HEAD OF GOVERNANCE

1. Classification

1.1 Open.

2. Key Decision

2.1 This is not a key decision.

3. Wards Affected

3.1 County-wide

4. Purpose

4.1 To consider and approve a submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, in respect of its proposals for Council size and warding arrangements in Herefordshire, as per the recommendations in Paragraph 5.

5. Recommendation

THAT: the Council considers the draft recommendations of the Boundary Commission, and

(a) accepts the proposal for a Council size of 53 members;

(b) supports the submission of Richards Castle parish council, that the parish should be included in the proposed Kingsland ward rather than Mortimer ward;

(c) subject to any further views or comments, accepts the recommended warding arrangements for the County; and

(d) approves the list of proposed ward names as set out in Appendix A for recommendation to the Commission. .

6. Key Points Summary

- The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBC) began a formal electoral review of Herefordshire in March 2012. The review is necessary because 30% of wards in the county currently have an electoral variance in excess of 10% from the average figure of electors per councillor in the Authority. Particularly, Hollington ward has a variance of 34%.
- The purpose of the LGBC review is to ensure electoral equality as far as possible. Achieving electoral equality means that there are an equal number of electorate per local ward councillor for every Council ward in Herefordshire.
- Council declined to make representations to the Local Government Boundary Commission on a pattern of warding, but it did request that the Commission consider single member ward representation as part of the review.
- The Commission's proposals were considered by the Electoral Review Working Group on 11 December 2012

7. Alternative Options

- 7.1 Council can approve an alternative option to that proposed by the LGBC if it wishes, but in doing so, must satisfy the requirement that any alternative proposals should be supported by demonstrable evidence.

8. Reasons for Recommendations

- 8.1 The LGBC will take account of the Council's views in order to inform its final recommendation to Parliament in Spring 2013.

9. Introduction and Background

- 9.1 Having considered the representations received during the previous stages of the review, on 13 November 2012 the LGBC published its draft recommendations for the future electoral arrangements for Herefordshire Council. The Commission has entered into a further period of public consultations, which will last until 7 January 2013.
- 9.2 All comments and further evidence received during this period will be taken into account before the Commission publishes its final recommendations in the Spring, 2013. Submissions may concern the proposed ward boundaries, the number of councillors, ward names and parish electoral arrangements; and may include agreement with particular draft proposals.
- 9.3 A hard copy of the LGBC report, and a large scale map, have been sent to all Members of the Council, and can also be accessed at:

<http://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/west-midlands/herefordshire/herefordshire-fer>

together with interactive mapping to show the proposals in detail. The details have also been considered by the Electoral Review Working Group on 11 December, and this report reflects their general conclusions.

10. Key Considerations

- 10.1 In accordance with the resolution of the Council on 20 July 2012, the Commission's proposals are based on a pattern of single member wards across the whole County. However, the Commission is now of the view that the number of councillors should be 53, rather than 54 as previously identified, on the basis that 15 is the right number for Hereford City and therefore 38 should be allocated to the remainder of the Authority to provide for good levels of electoral equality overall (see paragraphs 29 – 31 of the report). As a result, the average number of electors per councillor under the draft recommendations would now be 2681 currently, and 2793 by 2018.
- 10.2 The Commission states in the report that: "only one of our proposed 53 wards will have an electoral variance of greater than 10% from the average for the authority by 2018. We are therefore satisfied that we have achieved good levels of electoral fairness under our draft recommendations for Herefordshire." The ward concerned is Golden Valley North with a variance of 11%, although it may be noted that three other wards have a variation of exactly 10% from the average in 2018.
- 10.3 The Commission has based its proposals on the principle of not dividing parishes with joint working arrangements. The warding recommendations in the report indicate that no Grouped Parishes (Parish Councils) have been split under the proposals, which has been an important consideration for the Council throughout the review. However, there is an impact on Parish warding arrangements in the urban areas, which is explained in detail in paragraphs 97 – 105 of the report. Although the Commission does not have the power to alter parish boundaries, it must introduce or alter parish warding arrangements where necessary to ensure that parish ward boundaries coincide fully with County ward boundary lines.
- 10.4 Officers of the Electoral Review Project Team and the Members Working Group have reviewed the Commission's analysis and recommendations for electoral arrangements for each area of Herefordshire (as described in paragraphs 42 – 95 of the report), and the Group Leaders have also been briefed on the details. Particular attention has been given to proposals which differ from the scheme developed for consideration by Council last July. In general terms the draft recommendations follow that scheme in Hereford and Bromyard, and in many parts of rural Herefordshire and the Hereford Hinterland.
- 10.5 However, the Commission has adopted a different approach to warding arrangements from the scheme considered by Council in Ledbury, Leominster and Ross, and this also impacts on some of the arrangements adjoining these towns and in the more rural areas. Taken with the change to 53 councillors, and the need to ensure that the rural area has the correct allocation of councillors, it is clear that there would now be significant constraints on developing alternative options, not only for the Market Towns, but also in the neighbouring wards. The Working Group has accepted that, on the basis of single member wards, alternative arrangements could not be achieved without a wholesale redesign of much of the scheme for the County.
- 10.6 As part of the Working Group's discussion it was noted that there might be a little more scope to put forward alternative arrangements in specific areas if the occasional multi member ward was included in the scheme. It was also recognised that in some urban areas there could be a clear response from the community in support of a multi member ward option, based on strong community identity considerations. It was

anticipated that the Commission would take any such representations into account before arriving at its final recommendations.

- 10.7 The Commission's draft recommendations provide that Richards Castle parish council should be included in the proposed Mortimer ward. Representations had been received from the parish council, that the area should be part of the proposed Kingsland ward, based on strong local links with the neighbouring village of Orleton (proposed Kingsland Ward), and the separation by 7 miles of open country and poor road links with the rest of the proposed Mortimer ward. The impact of this change on electoral equality would be neutral in Mortimer, but lead to a 13% departure from the average in Kingsland by 2018. The parish council argues that the community identity and convenient and effective local government criteria should override the electoral equality factor in this case. The Working Group was supportive of this submission.
- 10.8 It should be noted that there are some descriptive errors in the Commission's report, where at paragraph 79 the heading should be "West" Rural Herefordshire, and at paragraph 85 "East" Rural Herefordshire. Similarly, paragraph 93 should refer to "west" of Sutton Walls, and paragraph 94 to the "east" of Hereford.
- 10.9 Members reviewed the list of the proposed names for the 53 wards of the County, as set out on pages 25 – 28 of the LGBC report, and considered whether any more suitable alternatives should be put forward to the Commission. In the more rural areas, many of the proposed ward names seem to be based rather arbitrarily on the name of one Parish in the area. There would also appear to be some scope to retain current ward names where there is little or no change to the wards concerned, if that would be preferred. The Working Group recommends to the Council the list of ward names as set out in Appendix A attached.
- 10.10 Council is requested to consider and, as appropriate, approve the recommendation at Paragraph 5 of this report, so that a response can be made to the Commission's consultation, before the deadline of 7 January 2013.

11. Community Impact

- 11.1 It should be noted that any new warding arrangements could have implications on the Council's current localities.

12. Equality and Human Rights

- 12.1 The proposal of the LGBC will create more electoral parity throughout the County which should make it easier for residents to know who their elected representatives are.

13. Financial Implications

- 13.1 Costs have been incurred in the preparation of the Council's submission, which can be met from current budgetary provision, and there will be additional costs involved in carrying out any re-warding exercise that will follow the Commission's decision. This will also be met from existing budget provision as no additional support is being made available.

14. Legal Implications

- 14.1 The review is being carried out in accordance with the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, and the Secretary of State's statutory guidance. The Council has a duty to comply with the review.

15. Risk Management

- 15.1 The major risk associated with this review relates to the implementation of the proposed warding pattern, which will need to be done within existing resources and by experienced staff who already have a full work load. Staff may not be able to cope with the additional workload and there are risks that important tasks/projects fall behind. Careful project management will need to be introduced to deliver everything in the teams' work plans.

16. Consultees

- 16.1 A detailed county-wide communication exercise is being carried out as part of the review.

17. Appendices

- 17.1 Appendix A - Alternative proposals for LGBC ward names.

18. Background Papers

- 18.1 The LGBC's report and mapping, available at:

<http://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/west-midlands/herefordshire/herefordshire-fer>