

Committee: Electoral Working Group

Agenda Item

Date: 12 September 2012

5

Title: Further Electoral Review

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Item for decision

Summary

1. The Council was notified by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) in April 2011 that Uttlesford had been identified as requiring a Further Electoral Review (FER) as a result of imbalances in the present warding structure. That review started in July following the formal submission of the Council's case for a council size of 38-40 with a proposal by the LGBCE for a council size of 39. The consultation on council size ends on 3 September and the LGBCE will then reach its conclusions prior to a further twelve-week period for representations to be made on proposed electoral arrangements. This will run from 23 October 2012 until 14 January 2013.
2. The Council's (and this Working Group's) task therefore, is to examine options for a new warding scheme to operate from the next ordinary election in 2015. Although the LGBCE's final recommendation on council size will not be known until October, we must work on the assumption that 39 will be the final number of councillors to be agreed and consider warding arrangements accordingly. It is expected that the Council's final decision on a revised warding scheme will be taken at the Full Council meeting on 11 December 2012.

Recommendations

3. There is no recommendation at this stage but members are asked to examine the options discussed in appendix B and arrive at some preliminary conclusions to enable further work on preparing a revised warding scheme.

Financial Implications

4. *There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.*

Background Papers

5. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.

The Council's existing warding scheme
Electoral and population data as supplied to the LGBCE
LGBCE Technical Guidance dated July 2012

Impact

6. Please refer to the impact table below.

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Communication/Consultation | The FER includes full public consultation |
| Community Safety | No impact |
| Equalities | No specific impact |
| Health and Safety | No impact |
| Human Rights/Legal Implications | No impact |
| Sustainability | No impact |
| Ward-specific impacts | All wards |
| Workforce/Workplace | No specific impact |

Situation

7. In conducting any electoral review, the LGBCE is required to have regard to the following statutory criteria:
 - The need to secure equality of representation;
 - The need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities (including the desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable, and which will not break local ties); and
 - The need to secure effective and convenient local government

8. These criteria have equal weight and the LGBCE will seek to achieve the best scheme having regard to all the factors. In doing so the LGBCE must consider both the existing electorate (as at July 2012) and a five year forecast of the electorate (actually six years from the start of the review) as at 2018. The figures supplied to the LGBCE are set out in appendix A to this report. It is these figures that we must now use in determining our warding proposals.

9. In considering new warding scheme options, the Council is asked to seek to bring the greatest improvement to electoral equality at the first election at which they will come into effect (May 2015). However, at the same time, we must take account of the five-year forecast as there is a requirement to have regard to the *likely increase, decrease or movement in electorate* over that time.

10. A further factor which members are asked to consider is the certainty that the majority of, if not all, existing wards will be altered to some extent as a result of

this exercise. Consequently, it is **better to consider the preparation of a new warding scheme as a totally new creation and not to start from the viewpoint of altering existing wards as little as possible.**

11. The options presented in this report are not yet fully developed and it is recognised that members may already have their own ideas as to how a new warding scheme should be developed. However, it is considered that some guiding principles are needed before a new scheme can be produced for agreement. This process may take some little while to develop.
12. In doing this preliminary work, officers have had regard to the following guiding principles:
 - Using both 2012 and 2018 figures, the average number of electors representing a councillor in each proposed ward is within 5% wherever possible, and in no case proposed to be more than 10% at variance from the electoral quota, that is the average number of electors found by dividing the total number of councillors into the overall electorate. Where it is possible to do so the percentage variance from the quota will be nearer to the average in 2018 than in 2012 but only on the basis that the proposal is valid on the basis of existing figures.
 - A mix of one, two, and three member wards has been used with a preponderance of single member wards in rural areas and two member wards in urban areas; three member wards have been proposed only where there seems no reasonable alternative.
 - The proposals avoid splitting parishes wherever possible although that is of course inevitable in Great Dunmow, Saffron Walden and Stansted.
 - The proposals try to have regard to principles of community identity. In other words the proposals have avoided including a mix of urban and rural areas within the same ward, unless this is unavoidable. It is however, inevitable that closely adjoining parishes will be included within the same ward, sometimes in instances where villages are considered to have little in common, or where there is no specific evidence of community identity between those parishes, or where they have not been linked within the same ward in the past.
 - The proposals try to take account of the statutory criterion of effective and convenient local government, particularly in considering the likely impact of the proposals on the workload of individual councillors, e.g. the number of parish councils contained within each ward.
 - Account has been taken as far as possible of coterminosity between new ward boundaries and existing county council divisions (and proposed new Parliamentary boundaries as well), but a lack of coterminosity cannot be used as an overriding objection to a new warding arrangement.

Electoral Working Group 12 September 2012 – Further Electoral Review

- Detached wards have not been proposed in any case as this is not considered to be good practice.
- Doughnut wards (a rural ward entirely surrounding an urban area) have not been used.
- The impact on parish electoral arrangements has not been directly considered at this stage but where parishes are to be divided by a new ward boundary, parish wards will have to be established within or along the same divisions of those boundaries.
- However, having regard to all of the above factors, it is unavoidable that the exercise of proposing new wards will be driven principally by the number and pattern of electors within the district.

13. This is a starting point. There is no rush to reach final conclusions as the Council's proposals can be submitted as late as early January 2013. Even if the Council is asked to consider final proposals at the meeting in mid-December, there is still plenty of time to consider proposals in detail before then.

14. The options included in this report are in general terms only and are presented as a starting point for what is a potentially complex exercise. Members are therefore asked to consider the options presented on the attached paper marked as appendix B.

Risk Analysis

15. Please see below for the risk analysis.

| Risk | Likelihood | Impact | Mitigating actions |
|---|---|--|--|
| A new electoral scheme is agreed that does not meet either the business needs of the Council or the representational needs of the communities within Uttlesford | 1 – There is some risk that unsuitable arrangements will be agreed but only if the Council does not engage fully with the review and consultation process | 3 – The impact on the operational and decision-making needs of the Council might be severe if an unsuitable scheme is agreed | Full engagement with the review process both at officer and at member level to ensure that the case is made for an appropriate council size and warding scheme |

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.

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