

Committee: Electoral Working Group

Agenda Item

Date: 30 May 2013

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Title: Draft recommendations for new electoral arrangements in Uttlesford

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Item for decision

Summary

1. On 16 April 2013 the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) published draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements in Uttlesford. There follows a twelve week consultation period closing on 8 July 2013.
2. The Council meeting in July has been rescheduled from 14 to 1 July to allow any comments the Council wishes to make to be submitted in time. The Working Group is therefore requested to consider the draft recommendations and agree any views it is felt the Council should make in response.
3. The draft recommendations are very similar to the Council's own proposed scheme submitted to the LGBCE in January but do differ in a number of respects and these are described in the report.

Recommendations

4. That members consider any comments or counter proposals they wish to be submitted to the LGBCE and recommend accordingly to the Council.

Financial Implications

5. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Background Papers

6. 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.

No documents not already published were referred to in preparing this report.

Impact

- 7.

Communication/Consultation	Consultation carried out by the LGBCE
Community Safety	N/A

Equalities	N/A
Health and Safety	N/A
Human Rights/Legal Implications	N/A except in relation to the organisation of future elections
Sustainability	N/A
Ward-specific impacts	All wards
Workforce/Workplace	N/A

Situation

8. The LGBCE published on 16 April draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements in Uttlesford. The recommendations are based on a previously agreed council size of 39, a reduction of five from the existing 44. Please refer to the draft recommendations booklet published by the LGBCE, and the associated map, for further details.
9. In summary they provide for the following 21 wards:
 - 4 wards of three members
 - 10 wards of two members
 - 7 single member wards
10. The differences between the published recommendations and the Council's proposals are described in the following paragraphs.
11. The proposed separate single member wards of **Chesterford and Littlebury** and **Elmdon and Wenden** have been merged into a proposed two member ward to be named as **Chesterford and Elmdon**. The LGBCE proposed this arrangement because of the relatively high opposing variances in the wards proposed by the Council. The recommended arrangement has the advantage of overcoming the proposed split of Littlebury parish between different wards but the disadvantage of substituting a large two member ward in a rural area. The Council's proposals were based upon the principle that rural parishes should be represented by a single member to avoid becoming unmanageably big. The proposed ward includes no fewer than eight parishes and six parish councils.
12. There is an adjustment between proposed ward boundaries in **Saffron Walden** between the **Castle** and **Shire** wards affecting approximately 170 electors. The LGBCE report says that while this adjustment will slightly worsen electoral equality in these wards to 6% fewer and 3% more electors per councillor respectively, it will provide for a stronger boundary.

13. The Council's submission contained the somewhat contradictory approach to include **Wicken Bonhunt** within the **Newport** ward but at the same time to request that Wicken Bonhunt be retained in the **Clavering** ward. The LGBCE has decided that Wicken Bonhunt should remain in the Clavering ward even though this will worsen electoral equality in Newport from 3% fewer to 9% fewer electors than the average.
14. In the **Stansted** and **Stort Valley** area, the LGBCE decided to create a three member ward combining Stort Valley with **Stansted North**. This is because the inclusion of **Ugley** in the proposed Stort Valley ward is not considered appropriate since it has no direct road links to other communities in the proposed ward. The LGBCE's solution is to merge the two proposed wards together to form a three member ward.
15. The LGBCE has decided not to support the Council's proposal to transfer a small area of **Little Easton** parish (currently with no electors) to **Great Dunmow North** ward. They acknowledge that the Council has done this because the area will fall within the Woodlands Park development but the area is not considered to be viable as a parish ward. Instead, the LGBCE says that this issue is best addressed by a community governance review once the FER is complete and the electors are in place. This is something the EWG will have to consider at some future point.
16. Similarly, the LGBCE has decided not to adopt the Council's proposal for a single member **Stebbing** ward to include **Little Dunmow** and the eastern part of **Felsted** parish, and a two member ward combining most of **Felsted** with **Fritch Green**. Instead, the draft recommendation is for a two member **Felsted and Stebbing** ward and a single member **Little Dunmow and Fritch Green** ward. The stated reason is that the eastern part of Felsted has no direct road links with the remainder of the ward proposed by the Council.
17. The reasoning looks a little suspect as there are also no direct road links between Felsted and Stebbing. It will be for members to decide whether the LGBCE's recommendation is a better arrangement than the original proposal. The title of the Little Dunmow and Fritch Green ward may be better stated as **Fritch Green and Little Dunmow**, both in terms of alphabetical arrangement and to reflect the size of the respective communities.
18. Other than the matters summarised in the preceding paragraphs, the Council's proposals have been confirmed. This indicates that the approach we have adopted has been broadly along the correct lines.

Other matters

19. The LGBCE has decided not to adopt the Council's request for a departure from the rule relating to electoral equality to enable **Little Walden** to remain part of a Saffron Walden based ward instead of becoming part of the proposed **Ashdon** ward. This is because of the need to secure good electoral equality in Ashdon ward and to reflect the rural nature of Little Walden and the road links to Hadstock parish.

20. If members wish to pursue a request to depart from electoral equality requirements this can be done. It should however be noted that the LGBCE's report makes it clear that, irrespective of other considerations, the prime aim of the review is **to achieve electoral fairness within a local authority** which is stated to be a fundamental democratic principle. It therefore seems that the LGBCE is unlikely to agree to a departure from those principles.
21. The only other representation received is from Councillor Godwin. She accepts reluctantly that there is no viable alternative to the linkage of Birchanger with part of Stansted but argues that the name of the ward should incorporate Birchanger. If this were to be agreed the name Stansted South and Birchanger could be suggested. However there are many similar mergers elsewhere such as, for example, between Stansted North and Stort Valley. Very long ward titles should be avoided except where absolutely necessary to reflect the nature of the ward.
22. There is some discussion in the report about the nature of the proposed **Broad Oak and the Hallingburys** and **Takeley** wards. The LGBCE had concerns about the proposed transfer of part of **Hatfield Broad Oak** to Takeley ward. It will of course be remembered that the Council changed its proposals at a late stage to incorporate a three member ward for Takeley, to include **Little Canfield, Priors Green, Broxted and Chickney** as well as **Bush End**. This had not previously been considered because the EWG had adopted guidelines to propose single member wards in mainly rural areas.
23. It is understood that the Conservative group may wish to propose retaining Bush End within Broad Oak and the Hallingburys. However, as with the case of Little Walden mentioned in paragraph 19, it appears that the proposed Takeley ward will remain unviable without the inclusion of Bush End.

Parish arrangements

24. The report contains details of a number of parish electoral arrangements affected by the recommendations. These are listed below:

Hatfield Broad Oak parish – Bush End ward 1 cllr, Village ward 8 cllrs

Great Dunmow parish – North ward 6 cllrs, South ward 10 cllrs

Saffron Walden parish – Audley ward 4 cllrs, Castle ward 4 cllrs, Little Walden 1 cllr, Shire ward 7 cllrs

Stansted Mountfitchet parish – North ward 8 cllrs, South ward 7 cllrs

Risk Analysis

25.

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 member level

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.