

**Body:** Council

**Date:** 16 November 2016

**Subject:** Boundary Review – Final Outcome

**Report of:** Assistant Director - Corporate Governance

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**Ward(s):** All

**Purpose:** To advise the Council of the final proposals from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and Wales arising from the 2015 Boundary Review, and set out the process going forward to ensure readiness for the County Council elections in May 2017.

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**Recommendations:** Council to approve the following:

- (a) That the final outcome of the 2015 Boundary Review be noted and accepted.
  - (b) That the proposed work process set out in section 4 of this report in order to implement the changes in time for the 2017 County Council elections be endorsed, including the proposal that the final decision on revised polling districts and stations be made by the Audit and Governance Committee.
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## **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 Eastbourne Borough Council participated in a joint County-wide boundary review in 2015. These are undertaken periodically to ensure that councils are adequately represented in respect of numbers of councillors, and that electoral wards are broadly in balance in terms of electorate sizes. Such reviews are required to take into account known future building plans and future population projections. Although working as part of a cross-county group, each authority was required to submit its own individual proposals.

## **2.0 Eastbourne Proposals**

2.1 An internal cross party working group was set up to formulate proposals and these were approved by Council in November 2015. There was unanimous cross-party agreement to retain the existing number of councillors (27),

number of wards (9), and ward names. In terms of boundary changes, a map showing the Council's three originally proposed changes (zones 1, 2 and 3) is attached to this report at **appendix 1**. There was unanimous agreement to transfer part of north Ratton ward into Hampden Park (zone 1 on the attached map) to correct an electorate imbalance. However, there was a split vote in respect of the other two changes (zones 2 and 3 on the attached map) affecting Ratton and Old Town wards. No other boundary changes were proposed by the Council.

2.2 In April 2016, the Boundary Commission submitted its draft proposals. The Commission supported the Council position in respect of councillor and ward numbers, ward names, and the zone 1 boundary change but rejected the zone 2 and zone 3 proposals. In addition, the Commission proposed its own boundary alterations between St, Anthony's and Sovereign wards to improve electorate balance.

2.3 In May 2016, a response to the Commission's draft proposal was submitted on behalf of the Council objecting to their proposed boundary changes between St. Anthony's and Sovereign wards on the following grounds:

- The current boundary line is extremely well defined along the main Pevensey Bay road whereas the Commission's proposal replaces it with a much weaker, more confusing and less distinct boundary.
- It is the view of all councillors and indeed both Borough and County officers that the proposed new boundary has no meaningful community cohesion benefits to either ward.
- To our knowledge, there have been no community representations requesting to change this boundary line.
- The current estimates forecast that Sovereign ward will only be at an 11% variance and, in our view, the disruptive outcome of the Commission's proposed new boundary is disproportionate to correct this.

In addition, the administration submitted a statement requesting reinstatement of the zone 2 and zone 3 proposals on the grounds that they better reflect community identity in that area.

### **3.0 Final Outcome**

3.1 The Boundary Commission submitted its final proposals at the end of September 2016. The final proposal accepts the case made by the Council as set out in 2.3 above and removes their previously proposed boundary adjustments between Sovereign and St Anthony's wards. The Commission have not accepted the argument put forward in respect of the zones 2 and 3 changes to the boundary between Old Town and Ratton wards. ***Thus, the only change to the current ward map as a result of the review is the zone 1 change to the Ratton and Hampden Park boundary originally proposed by the Council.***

3.2 This is now an end to the formal review and there is no further opportunity for challenge.

## **4.0 The Work Ahead**

- 4.1 The new boundaries first come into effect at the East Sussex County Council elections in May 2017. In August 2016, all members received a communication outlining the detailed work process that would need to take place. This process is summarised here.
- 4.2 The necessary statutory polling place review commenced shortly after the Commission's proposals were received with a 6-week period of public consultation. The review only covers the one polling district affected by the Commission's proposals – Ratton RNA. The last borough-wide polling place review took place in 2014 and regulations require full reviews to be undertaken at least every 4 years. The next full review will therefore need to be undertaken in 2018.
- 4.3 As the consultation period is still in effect, it is too early to make final polling place review decisions at this meeting. However, the Audit and Governance Committee meets on 30 November 2016 and its terms of reference include electoral matters and provide for the committee to determine the outcome of the review. A final decision at this point will allow the necessary in-house work on re-configuring electoral registers to commence and be completed in time for the county elections.
- 4.4 As part of this process, consultation with Borough and County members of wards affected by the proposal has been ongoing and is an important part of finalising arrangements in time for the Audit and Governance Committee.
- 4.5 It is an unavoidable outcome of the review that for the c. 290 electors living in the area to be moved into Hampden Park it will mean a change in the ward in which they are situated and in the polling station allocated to them. In all such cases, we will communicate the changes clearly in advance of the 2017 County Elections when the changes come into force.

## **5.0 Consultation**

- 5.1 When formulating initial proposals, there was extensive consultation with political parties on the Council via the members of the Working Group. The Boundary Commission was responsible for consulting with the public on all proposals received, including the Council's. However, that consultation process was also promoted on the Council's website with a link to the relevant Boundary Commission page. In addition, the Council's formal proposal was also posted on the Council's website and all of this information was promoted via press release in the Eastbourne Herald.

## **6.0 Implications**

- 6.1 There are no environmental or financial implications arising from this report.
- 6.2 It is important to have regard to the knock-on effects of boundary reviews in respect of equality. In applying the changes, we will, as always, have full regard to the availability and location of premises that have appropriate facilities and access. Where possible, it is desirable to maintain existing

premises and polling district boundaries. However, where it is necessary to change in order to ensure that there are suitably accessible polling stations within reasonable distance of the electorate, then we will do so.

6.3 East Sussex County Council has always maintained the position that, whatever the final outcome, the objective is to maintain the coterminous county division numbers and boundaries with the Borough wards.

6.4 Another interesting and somewhat perplexing point is that, whilst the new boundaries come into effect for County elections for 2017, the old boundaries remain in effect for any Borough by-elections until 2019 when the new boundaries take over. This means we will effectively need to retain two separate electoral maps and arrangements in case of any Borough by-elections prior to May 2019.

## **7.0 Summary**

7.1 This report sets out the final outcome of the 2015 boundary review. The changes made as a result of the Council proposal that had unanimous support, have been adopted by the Commission but they felt unable to support proposals where there was political division. Other, and in our view, unnecessary proposed changes in the earlier draft have been removed. Thus the final outcome for Eastbourne is minimal change and this reflects the high quality and equitable electoral arrangements that we have in place.

**Peter Finnis**

**Assistant Director - Corporate Governance**

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### **Background Papers:**

- Eastbourne Borough Council proposal to the Boundary Commission
- Boundary Commission draft proposal and Council response
- Boundary Commission final proposal

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