

**Agenda Item No:** 5 **Report No:** 144/15

**Report Title:** Electoral Review: Ward Patterns

**Report To:** Council **Date:** 9 November 2015

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Andy Smith, Leader of the Council

**Ward(s) Affected:** All

**Report By:** Catherine Knight, Assistant Director of Corporate Services

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### **Purpose of Report:**

To recommend approval of the proposals of the Electoral Review Working Group in respect of ward patterns for Lewes District Council, in accordance with the requirements of the Electoral Review being conducted by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).

### **Officers Recommendation(s):**

- 1 To approve the recommendations of the Electoral Review Working Group in respect of ward numbers, boundaries and names, as set out in section 6 of the Working Group's appended proposals document.
- 2 To authorise the Head of Democratic Services to submit the decision to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on behalf of the Council.

### **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 1 To achieve the outcomes of the Electoral Review and to ensure the LGBCE timetable is met.

### **Information**

#### **2 Background**

- 2.1 The LGBCE is required to undertake an Electoral Review of East Sussex County Council prior to the next County Council elections in May 2017. In addition, reviews are being conducted in Wealden and Hastings as part of the process as, in both authorities, electorate imbalance in wards/divisions (where some councillors represent significantly more or fewer electors than other councillors) has triggered the need for such a review.

- 2.2** Although there was no current requirement for such a review in Lewes, Eastbourne or Rother, the LGBCE asked to review the whole County at the same time and all the relevant authorities agreed to take part.
- 2.3** Due to the simultaneous reviews being conducted county-wide, consistency of approach is being overseen by a joint officer Project team with representatives from all the authorities. However, within the bigger picture, each Council needs to produce its own review proposals.
- 2.4** Essentially, there are two parts to the review, firstly where we made proposals in respect of the size of the Council and, secondly, where we make proposals in respect of ward numbers, boundaries and names. In both cases, the Council needs to supply robust evidence in respect of the review criteria to support its proposals.

### **3 Council Size**

- 3.1** At its meeting on 6 July 2015, Council approved the proposal that no change be made to the Council size of 41 members. This was submitted to the LGBCE and has been accepted.
- 3.2** At the same meeting, Council agreed that the Electoral Review Working Group consider and produce the proposals for ward patterns (ie. names, number and boundaries). The cross-party Working Group comprised Councillors Andy Smith, Sarah Osborne, Tony Rowell and Ruth O’Keeffe (Councillor Simon Barnes was invited but was unable to participate in the Group).

### **4 Ward Patterns**

- 4.1** The Working Group has undertaken a great deal of detailed work in analysing potential scenarios for ward changes that address the criteria. This was essential as, even in the event that minimal or no change is recommended, the Council needs to demonstrate a robust, thought out process for arriving at that position.
- 4.2** The final proposals of the Working Group are appended to this Report (see Appendix) and the Council is asked to formally approve its recommendations. In arriving at its recommendations, as well as taking into account the statutory criteria below, the Working Group worked to the guiding principles that wherever possible communities are kept whole, that ward boundaries are practical and that where possible, co-terminosity between District wards and County divisions is achieved.
- 4.3** The Head of Democratic Services as the designated lead officer has a duty to ensure that any Council submission meets the criteria set by the LGBCE.

### **5 Criteria**

- 5.1** When considering warding patterns, the Council has to have regard to the LGBCE’s three main criteria set out in law which it must follow when

it produces a new pattern of wards. An email link to the LGBCE's guidance on how to propose ward patterns was sent to all councillors.

**5.2** The criteria are as follows:

- The new pattern of wards should mean that each councillor represents roughly the same number of voters as elected members elsewhere in the District – in Lewes this means 1,993 electors per councillor.
- Ward patterns should, as far as possible, reflect community interests and identities, and boundaries should be identifiable.
- The electoral arrangements should promote effective and convenient local government, and reflect the electoral cycle of the Council.

**5.3** The LGBCE recognises that perfect electoral equality is unlikely to be achieved across the District. If the Council proposes a boundary that has many more, or fewer, voters in it than the target, the Council will need to provide evidence that such a variance is justified on the grounds of the other statutory criteria. There is no prescribed level of variance from the average that the LGBCE will accept without detailed justification. The LGBCE will accept a variance of +/-10% if it can be justified.

**5.4** A parish is the embodiment of a local community. It is for that very reason that the LGBCE recommends using Parish Council boundary lines as building blocks for proposing new wards. As such, divisions of parishes have been avoided so as to keep local communities intact.

**5.5** With regard to the renaming of wards, where significant changes are being made it is likely the name will need to change as the ward would be comprised of different communities. Suggested new names are proposed within section 6 of the Appendix.

## **6 Consultation and timetable**

**6.1** In order to encourage participation and awareness, details of how to contribute to the Electoral Review process were posted on the Council's website with a link to the relevant LGBCE page, and via press release. Further, the Boundary Commission will be publishing and consulting on all proposals received, including the Council's submission.

**6.2** Internally, all councillors were asked to feed in any comments or observations about their own individual ward. Those comments that were received were taken into account by the Working Group during their deliberations. The draft proposals developed by the Working Group were also circulated to all councillors for information.

**6.3** In addition, an informal drop-in session was held to provide an opportunity for all members to view the proposal maps and share their views. Members of the Working Group have also been liaising with their wider political groups.

- 6.4** All proposals (including the Council's) need to be submitted to the LGBCE by the end of November 2015. The LGBCE is then expected to publish its draft recommendations in March 2016. Public consultation on the draft recommendations is scheduled to take place between March and June 2016. Once the LGBCE has considered the representations and evidence as part of the consultation, it intends to publish final recommendations in September 2016.
- 6.5** New electoral arrangements are due to come into effect at the next scheduled elections following the completion of the review. This means that the new arrangements for East Sussex County Council will come into effect in May 2017, and in May 2019 for Lewes District Council.

### **Financial Appraisal**

- 7** None arising from this Report save the officer time inherent in assessing current polling district boundaries and analysing the location of polling stations as a result of the changes. This is important in order to ensure that all electors retain reasonable accessibility to suitably located and designed polling stations. There will also be work in updating a number of our systems including IDOX Strand (Electoral Registration), IDOX Uniform (Planning, Building Control, Gazetteer, Street Naming and Numbering), ESRI ArcGIS (GIS) and Open Text (Website).

### **Legal Implications**

- 8** None over and above those set out in the body of this Report.

### **Risk Management Implications**

- 9** If the recommendations are not implemented, the main risk will be that the Council fails to meet its legal duties and the requirements of the Electoral Review are not met. Failure to engage in the Electoral Review and make a considered, evidence-based submission on the Council's preferred warding pattern to the LGBCE by the deadline could result in the LGBCE imposing a warding pattern which may not reflect the needs and aspirations of the Council and the communities it serves.

### **Equality Screening**

- 10** An Equality Analysis report was previously completed and appended to the Cabinet report on 6 July 2015 at [Equality Analysis - Electoral Review](#). Positive impacts are expected from the Electoral Review as its purpose is to provide electoral equality and to ensure fair representation at local government elections.

### **Background Papers**

- 11** Local Government Boundary Commission for England guidance documents: <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/current-reviews/south-east/east-sussex/lewes>

### **Appendix**

- 12** Electoral Review Working Group Ward Proposals document