

Body: Council
Date: 27 May 2015
Subject: Boundary Review
Report of: Senior Head of Corporate Development and Governance

Ward(s): All

Purpose: To put a process in place to enable the Council to submit proposals as part of the 2015 boundary review being conducted by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and to determine the recommended size of the Council in the future.

Contact: Peter Finnis, Senior Head of Corporate Development and Governance, 1 Grove Road, Eastbourne, BN21 4TW Tel: 01323 415003
E-mail: Peter.Finnis@eastbourne.gov.uk

Recommendations:

- (1) To approve submission of the proposal for Council size to the Boundary Commission, as recommended in section 5.3 below.**
- (2) To note that Annual Council approved the creation of a working group comprising the Senior Head of Corporate Development and Governance and 3 Councillors (politically proportioned) to consider and produce the subsequent proposal for wards (names, number and boundaries).**
- (3) To receive a further report from the Senior Head of Corporate Development and Governance on behalf of the member working group on ward proposals at the next Council meeting.**

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is required to undertake an electoral boundary review of East Sussex County Council. In addition, reviews need to be conducted in Wealden District and Hastings Borough as part of the process as, in both authorities, electorate imbalance in wards/divisions has triggered the need for such a review.

2.0 County-Wide Proposal

2.1 Although there is no current requirement for such a review in Eastbourne, Lewes or Rother, the Commission has asked to review the whole County at

the same time. Initially, it was assumed that a lighter-touch review would be the approach taken in these additional cases. However, it is now clear that the Commission wishes to conduct equivalent full-scale reviews in all areas.

2.2 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 Borough/District will need to construct its own review proposal. This was last undertaken in Eastbourne in 2000.

2.3 Essentially, there are two parts to the review, firstly where we make 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, we will need to supply robust evidence in respect of electorate equality and forecasts and whether the wards reflect significant communities, themes and landmarks. **Thus, this report solely considers the issue of Council size.**

3.0 Eastbourne Borough Council – Current Position

3.1 As members will be aware, Eastbourne Borough Council currently has 9 borough wards and 27 councillors as a result of the last boundary review conducted in 2000. That review was able to achieve:

- (a) Electorate figure balance between wards which even now, 15 years later, only has an 11% variance from the average electorate per ward whereas all our neighbouring authorities have much higher variances at present (from 20% to 38%).
- (b) Fully coterminous boundaries with our 9 county electoral divisions.
- (c) All wards with strong identities and equally strong main arterial road boundaries.

3.2 Much of what was achieved in 2000 is still relevant today and, as a result, it is not my anticipation at this time that we should be seeking changes in either Council size or ward numbers/boundaries. However, we will need to prove this position.

4.0 The Review - Conduct, Criteria and Timeline

4.1 The Commission has made it clear that the review will only be considering council size and internal ward boundaries. The review specifically excludes all forms of outer (borough and parliamentary) boundaries as well as any unitary status issues.

4.2 It has also been made clear by the Commission that Council size changes would only be considered if they were within specific representational ranges appropriate to the size and demographic of the Borough/District. In the case of Eastbourne, the approved size range is a council membership of from 27 to 54, thus we are currently at the bottom of that recommended size range. Therefore, unless we can prove exceptional circumstances, the only valid arguments are likely to be in respect of retaining the same number or increasing Council size. All the other Boroughs/Districts in East Sussex are also currently within their respective ranges but have considerable scope for

size reduction.

4.3 The primary criteria for the overall review is in three key parts:

- (a) Electorate equality – Achieving a reasonably even spread of elector numbers across each ward. This will need to take into account current electorates and forecasts to 2021.
- (b) Community Identity – Do the ward boundaries fully encapsulate existing communities?
- (c) Effective and Convenient Government – Is the Council size appropriate to ensure the effective discharge of Council business and representation of the community?

4.4 The first critical deadline to hit is 10 July 2015. This is the deadline for us to submit draft proposals for Council size. We would then expect Commission feedback on draft proposals with finalised proposals for Council size needed to be in by 7 August 2015. Following on from that, as soon as possible post-22 September 2015, we will need to submit our proposals regarding ward names, numbers and boundaries.

5.0 Eastbourne Borough Council Proposal re Council Size

5.1 When the last boundary review was conducted, Eastbourne Borough Council had already been operating a pilot cabinet-style system for a year. This was well ahead of the subsequent legislation and it enabled us to take a strategic view from a position of experience on the appropriate council size working within this style of local government. It was on that basis that we reduced Council size from 30 to 27 members.

5.2 The other key factor in 2000 was that we wanted to move away from the combination of 10 borough wards and 8 county divisions all with different boundaries, and replace this with a coterminous set of 9 borough wards and county divisions. This approach was fully supported both by the Boundary Commission and East Sussex County Council.

5.3 Therefore, the test here is to determine whether there has been such significant change so as to justify a different proposal at this time. In terms of balancing borough wards and county divisions, the same reasoning applies as does the general number of members in respect of effectively discharging Council duties under the cabinet style system. The remaining question is whether elector numbers have increased to a degree to compromise effective representation. The table below sets out the relevant comparisons in respect of average representation.

Average number of Electors per Councillor (Based on a Council size of 27)			
Year 2000 (Actual)	Year 2005 (As predicted in 2000)	Current Year (Actual)	Forecast for 2021
2515	2713	2702	2846

It is interesting to note that the 5-year prediction given in 2000 for 2005 was optimistic and that this figure has yet to be reached 15 years on from the

time it was predicted. It's also worth noting that the increase from 2000 was heavily influenced by the residential growth in Sovereign Harbour. Even so, the above numbers show only a modest increase in elector numbers per councillor over the last 15 years. The forecast for 2021 takes into account known plans for residential developments that have a reasonably high level of surety. We have cross-referenced our forecasts with those held by the County Council in order to build as accurate a picture as possible in respect of electorate numbers over the next 5 years. EBC and ESCC forecast estimates correlate closely. All the Boroughs and Districts will be using the County figures so that forecasting is consistent across the County.

- 5.4 One significant change that has occurred since the last boundary review in 2000 is the use and availability of technology by members in discharging their representational activity. This has seen particularly accelerated in the last two years where, as part of the 'agile working' transformation programme, the supply and use of i-pads and the availability of 'report it' apps have provided members with tools to make their representative role potentially more efficient. The introduction of the neighbourhood management team has also given members an 'in the field' officer resource for them to work with in partnership and the introduction of the devolved budget scheme in 2008 provided members with funds to respond to local community needs and initiatives.
- 5.5 Thus, having regard to the modest forecast in electorate growth, the retention of the same statutory democratic structure as those that existed in 2000, and the advancements in technological tools and the organisational improvements in addressing issues in the community, **it is recommended that we submit a response to the Commission indicating that our current Council size should remain unchanged and that we would strongly wish to retain the current coterminous membership on East Sussex County Council.**

6.0 Consultation

- 6.1 The Commission has emphasised the point that their role is to be the owner of the review and the Council's role is as a consultee who is invited and expected to submit proposals. However, any other group or individual can also submit proposals as part of the process. Public consultation on all proposals received, including the Council's, will be subsequently conducted by the Commission. Of course, we will assist this process by providing the Commission with contact information for local community and stakeholder groups. Clearly, a well-constructed and evidenced proposal from the Council will be strongly considered and, subject to consultation feedback, is likely to be accepted.
- 6.2 All members of the Council and Corporate Management Team have been consulted in respect of proposed future Council size. Fifteen responses have been received all confirming that the future size of the Council should not be increased from the present number. The only specific variances were
- One response indicated that it would be valuable to have a greater representation on East Sussex County Council
 - One response indicated that we could cope with fewer members on

East Sussex County Council

- Two responses indicated that we could further reduce the size of the Borough Council felt that this number could be reduced

County Council size and representation will, of course, be considered by the County Council as part of their proposals for proportionate representation across the whole County. Also, as stated earlier, it is unlikely that a further reduction in Borough Council size will be sanctioned by the Boundary Commission and, indeed, it would be difficult to ensure appropriate memberships of our statutorily required committees with fewer members.

- 6.3 In respect of specific feedback commentary provided by members responding to the consultation, one member stated that the current numbers allows for all councillors to be involved in the running of the Council without having too much pressure. Another member stated that, as we strive for efficiency savings, and best practice working, it would go against the grain to increase the number of councillors.

7.0 Further Work and Implications

- 7.1 It is being recommended to Annual Council that a small working group be set up for the Senior Head of Corporate Development and Governance to work with on developing ward proposals ahead of a further report to Council in July. When conducting the last boundary review in 2000, considerable regard was taken in establishing strong identities for the current wards and using main arterial roads for boundaries wherever possible. Consequently, the presumption at this stage is that we would wish to retain existing ward names, numbers and boundaries and maintain coterminous arrangements with the county divisions. However, this will depend on the geographical balance of the current and forecast electorate number estimates.
- 7.2 As this report is recommending no change, there are no specific legal, financial, environmental or equality implications arising from the proposals. The primary implications relate to time and capacity. It will be especially important for members to share any specific thoughts on any ward change proposals, via the working group members, as early as possible in order that the necessary analysis of current and future electorate balance can be undertaken. This is critical as, should there be any proposals to change ward boundaries, it will almost certainly have a knock-on effect to other ward boundaries in order to maintain electorate equality.

8.0 Summary

- 8.1 There would appear to be a clear consensus that the current number of councillors is appropriate to ensure effective representation and efficient management of the Council. Having regard to the track record of the Council of this size over the last 15 years, the streamlined and modern decision making structure that we employ, and the modest elector forecasts for the next 5 years, maintaining existing Council size would be the appropriate proposal to make to the Boundary Commission.

Peter Finnis

Senior Head of Corporate Development and Governance

Background Papers:

- Electorate Data – Current electoral register
- Development Data – Planning and housing future forecasts from EBC and ESCC
- Boundary Commission Guidance on Council Size
- Eastbourne Boundary Review 2000 – content and justifications

(pf\P:council\15.05.27\boundary review)