

TO: **COUNCIL**
13 November 2019

**Local Government Boundary Commission for England Electoral Review
Stage 1 Submission**

Chief Executive/Returning Officer – Democratic & Registration Services

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is undertaking an electoral review of the Council. Members will recall that representatives of the Commission attended the Council in July to outline the process that will be followed. The review has two stages; the first determines the Council size and the second will look at future warding patterns.
- 1.2 The cross-party Boundary Review Working Group appointed by Council on 17 July has worked with officers to draft a submission to the LGBCE on the Council's preferred Council size. The Working Group is recommending that Full Council proposes to the LGBCE that, with effect from the Borough elections in 2023, the size of the Council should be 40 elected Members. This report seeks Council's approval to the recommended submission.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Council agrees the cross-party Boundary Review Working Group recommendation to propose a future Council size of 40 to the LGBCE and approves the supporting information at Annex A for submission to the Commission by 15 November 2019.**

3 Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 To agree a Council submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England for the future Council size for Bracknell Forest Council.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 This is set out in the submission at Annex A.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 In October 2018 the LGBCE advised that a review of the Council's electoral arrangements would take place. Bracknell Forest boundaries have not been reviewed since 2002. The review is intended to address the unequal levels of electoral equality in Bracknell Forest that have arisen since 2002. The review has two stages; the first determines the future Council size and the second will look at future warding patterns, including:
- The total number of wards
 - Ward boundaries
 - The number of councillors elected to each ward

- The names of each ward
- 5.2 An initial meeting to agree the review timetable was held on 27 March 2019 with the LGBCE Chairman, the Chief Executive of the Commission, the Leader of the Council, the Returning Officer (Council Chief Executive) and the Head of Democratic & Registration Services. Members were briefed on the process by the LGBCE at the 17 July Council meeting.
- 5.3 Following this briefing a cross-party Member Working Group was established with the following terms of reference:
- To ensure full Member involvement in, and support to, the electoral review process.
 - To consider options on the future size of the Council i.e. the number of elected councillors, taking into account governance arrangements, scrutiny and regulatory functions and councillors' representational roles; and to formulate draft recommendations on Council size for consideration by Council.
 - To support officers in the provision of information required by the LGBCE and the drafting of the Electoral Review document.
 - To recommend a pattern of wards to Council for submission to the LGBCE that demonstrates how the statutory criteria set by the LGBCE have been met.
- 5.4 Stage One of the review process has been undertaken by the Working Group supported by officers. In drafting the submission which is recommended to Council for approval, the Working Group considered the current and future electorate. Their forecast is based on growth arising from general population increases and the number of residential developments expected to be built and occupied by July 2025, which is five years beyond the date the changes will come into effect.
- 5.5 The submission considers the three areas that the LGBCE requires it to address:
- **Decision Making** – the number of councillors required to deliver the Council's decision-making structure
 - **Scrutiny & Partnerships** – the number of councillors required to support scrutiny, representation at external organisations and other bodies
 - **Representational Requirements** – the number of councillors required to provide effective community leadership
- 5.6 All councillors were surveyed about their representational roles and workloads.
- 5.7 Based on the evidence collected regarding future governance needs, population and housing supply forecasts and the results of the councillor survey, the working group concluded that the future size of the Council should be 40, which represents a 5% reduction in councillor numbers. This number affords the Council a degree of tolerance between electoral equality if developments do not proceed as planned whilst conversely allowing the Council to absorb elector numbers at the upper end of the forecast if all developments are delivered by 2025. 40 also represents an adequate number of councillors to create a ward pattern with a lower elector:councillor ratio in those wards with higher levels of deprivation if this is considered appropriate. It provides good capacity for working Members to contribute effectively. There should also be capacity for Members to continue to take advantage of the Council's robust learning and development programme to improve their skills and knowledge.
- 5.8 In summary the Working Group's view is that a Council of 40 councillors provides minimal disruption to the Council's sound governance arrangements. It allows Members to fulfil their roles as strategic leaders, community leaders and to deliver

effective scrutiny, regulation and partnership working and future proofs against planned population growth.

- 5.9 The draft submission has been shared informally with officers at the Commission who have confirmed that they should not require any further information at this stage and that it can be submitted once agreed by Council.

Next steps

- 5.10 The Council size proposals must be submitted to the LGBCE by 15 November 2019. The Council will be advised of the Commission's decision on councillor numbers at the end of December/beginning of January. This will complete Stage One of the electoral review. This number will only change if the Commission considers one more, or one fewer, councillors will work better with the warding pattern that will be adopted.
- 5.11 Stage Two of the review will commence in January 2020 and the first step for the Working Group will be to develop a warding pattern for the Borough in response to the LGBCE's consultation which will take place between 7 January – 16 March 2020. During this time anyone can submit a warding pattern. The LGBCE will publish its draft recommendations in June 2020 and responses can be made until 10 August 2020. The Commission's final recommendations will be published in November 2020. The Order will be laid in Parliament in early 2021 and the new arrangements will take effect from the May 2023 Borough elections.
- 5.12 It is important to note that the Commission will accept the proposal at both Stages One and Two of the review that provides the strongest evidence against the LGBCE statutory criteria. The Council's proposals are not given priority at either stage.

6 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 6.1 Stage One of the electoral review has been undertaken in accordance with the advice and guidance provided by the LGBCE. The remainder of the relevant legal issues are addressed within the report.

Financial Advice

- 6.2 There are no financial implications arising directly as a result of this report, however if the Council size is reduced to 40 there will be savings in relation to Members' Basic Allowance and provision of ICT kit. The scale of any savings cannot be quantified until the completion of Stage Two of the review.

Other Consultation Responses

- 6.3 All councillors were invited to take part in the councillor survey. 76% (32 of 42) responded and their responses informed the draft submission.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.4 Not required.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.5 There are no strategic risk management issues arising directly from this report.

Background Papers

Further information about the electoral review process can be found on the LGBCE website

[http://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/lgbce/Corporate%20Documents/technical-guidance-2014%20\(reduced\).pdf](http://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/lgbce/Corporate%20Documents/technical-guidance-2014%20(reduced).pdf)

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