

To: Council
24 November 2021

Bracknell Forest Community Governance Review
Executive Director: Delivery – Democratic & Registration Services

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report seeks the Council's agreement to commence a full community governance review of the Bracknell Forest borough area and sets out the rationale for the exercise.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Council agrees to commence the formal process to undertake a full community governance review of the Bracknell Forest borough area as set out in section 5 of the report.**
- 2.2 That authority to agree the review Terms of Reference is delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Boundary Review Group.**

3 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The 2019 Local Government Boundary Commission's (LGBCE) review of Bracknell Forest resulted in several changes to the electoral arrangements for Bracknell Forest Council. These included a reduction in the number of councillors elected to the Council from 42 to 41 and the creation, merging and renaming of several borough wards.
- 3.2 In addition, changes were made to the parish electoral arrangements as a direct consequence of the revised warding arrangements for the Council. This was undertaken by the Commission in accordance with Schedule 2 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act), which provides that if a parish is to be divided between different borough wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single borough ward.
- 3.3 The Commission does not have the power to recommend changes to the external boundaries as part of an electoral review. However, the Council has powers under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to conduct community governance reviews to effect changes to parish electoral arrangements. Council is asked to authorise a full community governance review to ensure that town and parish councils within the Bracknell Forest area are well aligned with these new arrangements.
- 3.4 In order for any changes to be implemented in time for the next local government elections which will take place in May 2023, a decision to proceed will need to be taken at the November Council meeting.
- 3.5 Several parish/ town councils have informally requested a review of their respective areas.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 The Council could decide not to undertake a full community governance review of the parish electoral arrangements in its area. This would result in no changes to the external boundaries of the town/parishes. The Commission's changes to the parish arrangements for Binfield, Bracknell Town, Sandhurst Town, Warfield and Winkfield would be treated as the default position and adopted even if no further changes are made by the Council.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 which gives local authorities the power to make changes to parish/ town areas within the local authority boundary also sets out the legal processes required to complete a review. These can be segmented into three distinct stages:

Stage one - undertaking a review

- 5.2 It is proposed that the cross-party Boundary Review Group (BRG) established by the Leader of the Council, works with officers to undertake the community governance review and make recommendations to Council for any changes to the town/parish arrangements. For the location of polling stations to be considered as part of the review it is further proposed that the terms of reference of the BRG are widened to cover the work usually undertaken by the Electoral Review Steering Group (ERSG) to review polling districts and polling places. Three of the four members of the ERSG are also members of the BRG. The fourth member, Councillor Turrell will be invited to join the BRG for this piece of work.
- 5.3 The Council must produce and publish terms of reference for the review, setting out the review timetable, the geographic area covered by the review, the scope and other relevant information. Officers will prepare draft terms of reference for consideration by the Boundary Review Group at its first meeting. Whilst authorities must consult with affected stakeholders including electors, other local authorities that may have an interest and any other impacted party, there is no prescribed way to undertake the required consultation process. The consultation process will be set out in the terms of reference.
- 5.4 The indicative review timetable is set out in the table below.

Activity	Timeline
Terms of reference published	By 31 December 2021
First stage public consultation	February/March 2022
Draft proposals published	June/July 2022
Second stage public consultation	August/September 2022
Final proposals completed	October 2022
Order made by Council	30 November 2022 Council meeting
Order takes effect	Full Borough/Parish elections in May 2023

Stage two - making recommendations

- 5.5 Representations received as part of the consultation process must be considered when drafting recommendations and judged against the review criteria set out in the terms of reference.
- 5.6 Recommendations must be published with the reason for them. Interested and affected parties such as the existing town/parish councils, must be notified of the recommendations.

Stage three - implementing the review

- 5.7 Once the review is complete Bracknell Forest Council will make a Reorganisation Order to implement any changes. The Order will take effect from the borough/parish elections in May 2023.

6 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 6.1 The statutory basis for conducting community governance reviews is set out in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The Authority must also have regard to the contents of guidance published jointly by the Local Government Boundary Commission and the (then) Department for Communities and Local Government in 2010 when conducting such reviews.

Financial Advice

- 6.2 There are no material financial implications arising from consideration of this report.

Other Consultation Responses

- 6.3 Not sought.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.4 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and has highlighted the need to ensure that, in the commissioning and running of the consultation, those with a disability or any accessibility issues can respond to the consultation via a method that is open to them.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

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

Climate Change Implications

- 6.6 The recommendations in Section 2 above are expected to have no impact on emissions of CO₂ due to the nature of the exercise which is predominantly administrative using existing resources.

Background Papers

None

Contact for further information

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