

## **Wiltshire Council**

### **Electoral Review Committee**

**23 July 2019**

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## **Further Limited Consultation of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England**

### **Purpose**

1. To approve a draft response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (“The Commission”) regarding its further limited consultation on its new set of draft recommendations setting out a proposed pattern of electoral divisions.

### **Background**

2. On 15 September 2017 Wiltshire Council (“The Council”) was notified by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (‘the Commission’) of its intention to carry out an electoral review of the Council in its 2018/19 work programme.
3. On 17 October 2017 Council established the Electoral Review Committee (‘the Committee’) to progress the Council’s response to the review, and to formulate recommendations on any submissions to be made to the Commission during the review process.
4. Following two submissions from the Council, on 28 August 2018 the Commission announced that it was minded to agree a council size of 98 councillors, noting its decision was taken *‘in the context of the Area Boards and their importance to the Council’s decision-making process’*.
5. A consultation on a pattern of divisions was therefore launched to run from 28 August - 5 November 2018. The Council, following consideration of evidence by the Committee, approved a submission on a proposed pattern of divisions at its meeting on 16 October 2018.
6. A consultation on [draft recommendations](#) from the Commission was launched from 5 February - 15 April 2019. The Council, following consideration of evidence by the Committee, approved a submission in response at its meeting on 25 March 2019.
7. The Commission was due to announce its final recommendations on 2 July 2019. These would have been either approved or rejected by Parliament, and would not have been amendable. However, the Commission instead informed the Council it would launch an additional consultation period on revised draft recommendations, which would run from 2 July 2019 - 29 July 2019. The consultation is only in relation to specific areas.
8. At its meeting on 9 July 2019 Full Council delegated responsibility for approval of a response to the further limited consultation to the Committee due to the timescales necessary to respond.

## **Main Considerations**

9. The Committee considered the revised draft recommendations of the Commission informally at a workshop on 15 July 2019. A meeting was also held for local members whose divisions are impacted by the proposals at a meeting on 5 July 2019.
10. As the Commission itself recognised, it has been very difficult to propose a suitable pattern of divisions for the southern part of council area. This was why it accepted a division of over 10% variance '*having regard to the boundaries of parishes in that part of Wiltshire*' in its draft recommendations. This required the combination of some parishes that was not ideal in some cases, due to the need for a cohesive county wide proposal.
11. It is recognised that a lot of representations had been received by the Commission in certain areas, in particular around Winterslow and Firsdown, and that the Commission had sought to address the concerns expressed in those areas.
12. However, how the Commission has sought to address those concerns leads to significant impacts across a very wide area of the council. Little explanation accompanies many of the Commission's proposed changes compared to their initial proposals, and in several cases the proposals are inferior when considered against the statutory criteria.
13. In particular, the Commission's attempts to address concerns raised in the public consultation have not paid sufficient regard to whether, on balance, the harm perceived in the specific areas concerned outweighs the overall harm to community interests and cohesion across the entire area. As the Commission has in most cases not explained why their own reasoning in many areas should now be disregarded, many of the changes would appear to be the result of a purely mathematical exercise.
14. The Committee members who attended the workshop considered a number of different responses, balancing the impacts of various proposals and seeing if there were ways to address the stated concerns of the Commission without causing greater difficulties overall.
15. It was concluded, however, that whilst the changes in specific areas were understandable in their intent, the overall impacts upon council divisions were of less suitable electoral equality, had an even greater negative impact upon community interest and cohesion, and therefore did not aid effective and convenient local governance.
16. It is therefore recommended that the Committee approve a draft response restating its last proposals as the most suitable against all three statutory criteria.

## **Safeguarding Implications**

17. There are no safeguarding implications.

### **Public Health Implications**

18. There are no public health implications.

### **Procurement Implications**

19. There are no procurement implications.

### **Equalities Implications**

20. There are no equalities implications.

### **Environmental Implications**

21. There are no environmental implications.

### **Financial Implications**

22. Community Governance Reviews will involve significant ongoing work. Consideration will need to be given to securing additional resourcing once the scope of the review has been determined.

### **Legal Implications**

23. The Electoral Review is a statutory process carried out by the Commission in accordance with its obligations and powers as set out in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

### **Risks**

24. If the Council fails to respond to the review the Commission would determine matters based on the submission of other interested parties.

### **Next Steps**

25. Following consideration of all representations the Commission will publish its final recommendations detailing a pattern of divisions and division names in Autumn 2019. At that stage the proposals can no longer be amended, but will be laid before Parliament where they can be either accepted or rejected. This would be scheduled to take place from early 2020 onwards, and come into effect for the unitary elections in May 2021.

### **Proposal**

26. To approve the draft submission as detailed in **Appendix A**, subject to any necessary consequential changes to the documentation by the Director of Legal, Electoral and Registration Services after consultation with the Chairman of the Electoral Review Committee.

### **Ian Gibbons - Director of Legal, Electoral and Registration Services**

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### **Appendices**

Appendix A – Draft Submission to the Further Limited Consultation of the LGBCE

## **Background Papers**

[Initial Draft Recommendations of the LGBCE](#)

[Wiltshire Council Initial Response to the LGBCE](#)

[Revised Draft Recommendations of the LGBCE](#)

[Technical Guidance of the LGBCE](#)