

Wiltshire Council

Electoral Review Committee

26 June 2023

Update on Electoral Division Variance

Purpose

1. To receive an update on the electoral variance of Wiltshire Council Divisions.

Background

2. An Electoral Review is an examination of a principal council's electoral arrangements. This can change the total number of councillors, the number and boundaries of wards or Divisions, the number of councillors for any ward or Division, and the name of any ward or Division.
3. The LGBCE conducts reviews for two reasons:
 - i) At the request of the local authority; or
 - ii) If the local authority meets the Commission's intervention criteria:
 - a) If one ward has an electorate of +/-30% from the average electorate for the authority.
 - b) If 30% of all wards have an electorate of +/-10% from the average electorate for the authority.
4. From 2018-19 the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) conducted an Electoral Review of Wiltshire Council. This was because two Divisions had a variance from the average electorate of over 30%.
5. The new Divisions for Wiltshire Council came into effect in May 2021 for the local elections.

Main Considerations

6. The Electoral Review utilised projected electorate data provided by Wiltshire Council for 2024, six years from the formal start of the review. This included incorporation of estimates from spatial planning for major planning developments and housing growth.
7. Several Divisions were agreed by the LGBCE taking account of those projections, for example where areas included extant planning permission for major development or were included within the housing sites allocation plan as suitable for major development.
8. The electoral register from December 2022 provides data on the current electorates for each Wiltshire Council Division. These are set out at **Appendix A**.
9. 20 Divisions currently have a variance greater than 10%, one fewer than in 2022. This is below the intervention criteria of the LGBCE which would be 30 Divisions. The LGBCE have, in any case, confirmed that they would not be reviewing the situation such that changes could be made in advance of the 2025 elections.

10. The LGBCE technical guidance on Electoral Reviews also clarifies the reasons they conduct reviews as set out at paragraph 3, adding as a third point that *'the imbalance [in ward variance] is unlikely to be corrected by foreseeable changes to the electorate within a reasonable period'*.
11. As confirmed by the LGBCE in discussion with officers at the time of the update in 2022, on that basis, and given the recently conducted review, if 30% of Wiltshire Council Divisions were +/-10% from the average electorate from 2024 onwards, the Commission would likely seek a conversation with Wiltshire Council to assess the situation. For instance, to determine if the imbalance did appear likely to be corrected within a reasonable period by foreseeable changes to the electorate.
12. Should the criteria of a 30% variance be triggered and the Commission is not persuaded that the variances will improve Wiltshire would mostly likely be added to the review list. The timing of such a review would depend on how many authorities meet the intervention criteria and what other authorities the Commission wishes to review for any other reason. The Commission may choose to monitor an authority's variance for two or more years even after it triggers the intervention criteria.
13. Many of the Wiltshire Divisions which are currently overly large or overly small would be expected to come more within the acceptable variance as time passes, for example as development takes place or electorate registration varies. 12 of the 20 Divisions which are over 10% variance either moved in the direction of being more equalised from 2022 or had no change. However, in many cases this was a matter of a single percentage point only.
14. More significant are any Divisions which are close to or over 30% at variance with the average, as these are less likely to be come back within acceptable variance in the absence of significant disproportionate rises in the electorate elsewhere across the county.
15. In 2023 three Divisions had a variance of over 20% under the average Division as follows:

Division	Electorate	Variance
Chippenham Monkton	2265	-42%
Chippenham Lowden & Rowden	2670	-32%
Trowbridge Park	3003	-23%

There have been minor increases in the electorate to the Chippenham Lowden and Rowden and Trowbridge Park Divisions since the previous year, and no change for Chippenham Monkton.

16. Each of these Divisions includes an area involving major planning applications which have permission, have sought permission, or are within the housing sites allocation plan. Where permission has been granted and legal agreements made, delays to development mean the variance is still very high, but will improve as the developments take place. However, if developments are not occurring when the LGBCE review the information, or will not begin shortly at that time, the LGBCE may consider that the situation is not going to be corrected within a reasonable period. In some cases, legal

agreements are yet to be signed for areas which were anticipated to contain many hundreds of electors by this stage.

17. The situation can, however, change quickly. In 2022, Salisbury Bemerton Heath had a variance of -23%, and now has a variance of -17%, following an electorate increase of 246 on the previous year. A relatively small increase would see Lowden and Rowden drop below the trigger threshold of 30%. Monkton is likely to remain above the trigger threshold, but if moving in the right direction in years to come this would be taken into account by the Commission.

18. Only one Division is currently at greater than 20% variance above the average Division, as follows:

Division	Electorate	Variance
Purton	5019	+28%

19. Should the overall electorate of Wiltshire increase as previously projected, the variance of Purton would as a result reduce in proportion, though it would remain large. However, if electorate numbers increase overall less than anticipated as has occurred to date, or further unanticipated growth takes place within Purton, there is a danger the Division would exceed a +30% variance.

20. The Commission has previously confirmed that being significantly above the variance threshold is more likely to lead to being added to the review list. Purton's variance was 28% in 2022 as well, with an increase in electorate of around 36. As such, it remains at high risk of reaching the trigger point, but at least in the last two years has been steady compared to the average rise.

21. Although there is a growing risk that Wiltshire Council could meet the intervention criteria in the period after 2024, given it has been recently reviewed by the LGBCE, officers were advised in 2022 it is less likely (though not impossible) that a review would take place in advance of the 2029 elections. Given the continuing mix of oversized and undersized Divisions, the more Divisions approach the trigger points, the greater the risk.

22. Legislation does allow for a partial electoral review to take place, not covering the entire area of an authority. However, the Commission has not undertaken a partial review of this nature to date, and if Wiltshire considered making such a request it would need very strong grounds and evidence to justify this. Even then the Commission may choose not to conduct such a review.

Safeguarding Implications

23. There are no safeguarding implications.

Public Health Implications

24. There are no public health implications.

Procurement Implications

25. There are no procurement implications.

Equalities Implications

26. There are no equalities implications.

Environmental Implications

27. There are no environmental implications.

Financial Implications

28. There are no financial implications

Legal Implications

29. Electoral Reviews are conducted in accordance with the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

Workforce Implications

30. There are no workforce implications.

Risks

31. If variances of Divisions exceed the trigger thresholds after 2024 the Council may be added to the review list by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

Proposal

32. To note the update on Electoral Division variance.

33. To receive a report annually on the variance.

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Appendices

Electoral Variance

Background Papers

None

Appendix 1 – Electoral Variance

Division	Electorate	Variance
Aldbourn & Ramsbury	4491	115%
Alderbury & Whiteparish	4529	116%
Amesbury East & Bulford	4237	108%
Amesbury South	3754	96%
Amesbury West	4264	109%
Avon Valley	4072	104%
Bowerhill	3409	87%
Box & Colerne	4040	103%
Bradford-on-Avon North	4033	103%
Bradford-on-Avon South	4143	106%
Brinkworth	3832	98%
Bromham, Rowde & Roundway	3946	101%
By Brook	3552	91%
Calne Central	3833	98%
Calne Chilvester & Abberd	3950	101%
Calne North	3777	97%
Calne Rural	4354	111%
Calne South	3620	93%
Chippenham Cepen Park & Derriads	4111	105%
Chippenham Cepen Park & Hunters Moon	3780	97%
Chippenham Hardenhuish	3738	96%
Chippenham Hardens & Central	4008	102%
Chippenham Lowden & Rowden	2670	68%
Chippenham Monkton	2265	58%
Chippenham Pewsham	3790	97%
Chippenham Sheldon	4002	102%
Corsham Ladbrook	4128	106%
Corsham Pickwick	4145	106%
Corsham Without	3812	97%

Cricklade & Latton	4091	105%
Devizes East	4246	109%
Devizes North	3373	86%
Devizes Rural West	3587	92%
Devizes South	3859	99%
Downton & Ebble Valley	3988	102%
Durrington	3633	93%
Ethandune	3686	94%
Fovant & Chalke Valley	3696	94%
Hilperton	3514	90%
Holt	3688	94%
Kington	4082	104%
Laverstock	4376	112%
Ludgershall North & Rural	3663	94%
Lyneham	4095	105%
Malmesbury	4326	111%
Marlborough East	4030	103%
Marlborough West	4452	114%
Melksham East	3754	96%
Melksham Forest	3980	102%
Melksham South	3853	98%
Melksham Without North & Shurnhold	3658	93%
Melksham Without West & Rural	3649	93%
Mere	3629	93%
Minety	3913	100%
Nadder Valley	3665	94%
Old Sarum & Lower Bourne Valley	4609	118%
Pewsey	3906	100%
Pewsey Vale East	4355	111%
Pewsey Vale West	4055	104%
Purton	5019	128%
Redlynch & Landford	3676	94%

Royal Wootton Bassett East	3825	98%
Royal Wootton Bassett North	4169	107%
Royal Wootton Bassett South & West	4588	117%
Salisbury Bemerton Heath	3248	83%
Salisbury Fisherton & Bemerton Village	4180	107%
Salisbury Harnham East	3838	98%
Salisbury Harnham West	3432	88%
Salisbury Milford	4266	109%
Salisbury St Edmund`s	3888	99%
Salisbury St Francis & Stratford	4029	103%
Salisbury St Paul`s	3891	99%
Sherston	4014	103%
Southwick	3341	85%
The Lavingtons	3612	92%
Tidworth East & Ludgershall South	4081	104%
Tidworth North & West	3883	99%
Till Valley	4067	104%
Tisbury	3642	93%
Trowbridge Adcroft	4192	107%
Trowbridge Central	4646	119%
Trowbridge Drynam	3506	90%
Trowbridge Grove	4036	103%
Trowbridge Lambrok	4060	104%
Trowbridge Park	3003	77%
Trowbridge Paxcroft	4114	105%
Urchfont & Bishops Cannings	3870	99%
Warminster Broadway	3964	101%
Warminster East	4225	108%
Warminster North & Rural	4179	107%
Warminster West	3338	85%
Westbury East	4097	105%
Westbury North	3926	100%

Westbury West	4246	109%
Wilton	3689	94%
Winsley & Westwood	3927	100%
Winterslow & Upper Bourne Valley	4189	107%
Wylde Valley	3830	98%
Total Electorate	383462	
Average Electorate	3912	