

Title:	Boundary Review
Portfolio holders:	Councillor Graham Payne- Leader
Reporting officer:	Nicole Smith (Democratic Services Manager)
Key Decision:	No

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to:

- Confirm the Councils' views on the proposed electoral divisions for the new Unitary Wiltshire Council, West Wiltshire area.

Background

In preparation for the move to One Council, Wiltshire is currently undertaking an electoral review. The review officially started on 26th February following the approval of the Structural Order to create the new unitary authority by both Houses of Parliament.

The main aim of an electoral review is to try to ensure 'electoral equality', which means that all councillors in a single authority represent approximately the same number of electors. The County Council has prepared its proposal for the new unitary electoral divisions, and district, town, and parish councils are now being formally consulted.

The Boundary Committee will also take into account proposals received from other interested parties such as residents and political parties, as well as parish, towns or district councils before 21st April 2008. The final decision of the Electoral Commission will hopefully be in place for the elections to the new unitary council in May 2009.

Boundary Review Timetable

There are four stages to this review. We are currently in stage 1 which started on 26 February 2008. The Boundary Committee requests that all representations should be submitted no later than 21 April 2008. After this date, the Committee will not be in a position to accept representations to feed into its draft recommendations.

In the light of the evidence available to it, The Boundary Committee will prepare draft recommendations. It is intended that the draft recommendations will be published in early July 2008 on their website at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk

The draft recommendations will be sent to the County Council and District Councils in Wiltshire, as well as to all organisations and individuals who submitted representations during Stage One.

There will then be an **eight-week** period of consultation on the draft recommendations, which is scheduled to run from early July to late August, before the Boundary Committee considers the responses to consultation, formulates its final recommendations and submits them to The Electoral Commission. They expect to submit their final recommendations to The Electoral Commission on or around 31 October 2008.

Proposed Option for Consultation

The County Council would like to formally consult the District Council on their proposals for the new unitary electoral divisions. The County Council is seeking views on the proposals in Appendix 1. We are being requested to either confirm our support for, or our opposition to, the proposals.

The Boundary Commission has made it very clear that for each division it will allow 10% above or below the average number of electors which is 3700. This means there can be no more than 4070 electorate and no less than 3330 electorate in each division. The proposal gives 100% electoral equality as all of the proposed divisions within the 10% tolerance. Finally, 89% of the proposed divisions fall within community area boundaries, with a small area of West Wiltshire crossing over into the current Kennet District boundary.

There are broadly three options available to the Council:-

1. Confirm support for the current proposal, but still allowing individual members to submit individual thoughts or concerns directly to the County Council or Boundary Commission.
2. Confirm our reasons for not supporting the proposal, giving clear factual evidence to back up any argument.
3. Confirm support in principle, but highlight a few areas of concerns that may require addressing

Risk Assessment Implications

There are no risks associated with stage 1 of the formal consultation of the proposed electoral divisions for this council.

Financial and Performance Implications

There are no financial implications in submitting views to the County Council on the proposed electoral divisions for the new Unitary Wiltshire Council.

Legal and human rights implications

There are no financial implications in submitting views to the County Council on the proposed electoral divisions for the new Unitary Wiltshire Council.

Next Steps

The next steps will be to:

- To submit the Council's views on the proposed electoral divisions to the County Council before 17 April 2008
- Provide further comments during the 8 week period of consultation on the draft recommendations prepared by the Boundary Committee in July 2008

Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- Confirm the Council's support of the proposed electoral divisions for the new Unitary Wiltshire Council

Options considered and rejected	See Options 1 - 3 above
Date of implementation	To confirm recommendation of Council to Wiltshire County Council by 17 April 08.