

Agenda Item No. 9

Title: **West Wiltshire Boundary Review 2005**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Content – Leader of the Council**

Reporting Officer: **Caroline Nash – Principal Elections Officer**

Introduction

The Boundary Committee for England (the Boundary Committee) is responsible for conducting electoral reviews as directed by The Electoral Commission. As a result of the poor levels of electoral equality in West Wiltshire under the existing arrangements, The Electoral Commission directed The Boundary Committee to review the electoral arrangements of the district. The broad objective of this electoral review is to achieve, as far as possible, equal representation across the district as a whole. (*The Executive Summary for the Boundary Committee*).

The last review of this area was completed in 1999 but, as a result of population changes, significant electoral imbalances have arisen. Because of these electoral imbalances it has been decided that a further review is required. (*Boundary Committee Press Release*).

The Review Process Approved by Council

So that deadlines from the Boundary Committee can be met; the following timetable was approved by Council:

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|----------------------------|---|--|
| 25 th July | - | Boundary Committee Seminar to discuss the way forward for review and to gather information. |
| Early August | - | To produce proposals discussed at seminar in July. |
| Mid August | - | Send out proposals to all Members, Town Councils and Parish Councils for consultation and to await responses and comments on the preferred proposal. |
| Early September | - | To make minor amendments to proposal chosen by Council |
| 14 th September | - | Sign-off chosen proposal at Full Council. |
| 3 rd October | - | Deadline for submission of report and proposal to the Boundary Committee. |

During the Seminar on 25th July 2005, Council opted for proposals to be produced on 44, 46, 48 Members for the District of West Wiltshire.

The initial Response

Due to the low rate of response to the proposals, the result of the survey is less robust. There may have been a range of people unable to respond within the deadlines, we are however, unable to say if this was due to holidays and conflicting appointments or for other reasons. It may be useful to identify any of these reasons if Members feel it would assist the Boundary Committee in the analysis of the response.

A number of the comments received showed a clear understanding of the local knowledge and issues but a less focused approach to the district as a whole. Some of the responses received were more imaginative than others and some parish comments were based on a misunderstanding of the proposals sent out. All of these issues are likely to be a result of the limited timeframe for consultation given to us by the Boundary Committee.

All comments received have been examined and an analysis of these comments is attached as Appendix 1.

Although the response has been limited, there is a clear preference for 48 Members for the District of West Wiltshire, although it would be fair to say that this seems to be viewed as the “least worst” option. Useful comments about community identity have enabled us to offer two approaches for 48 Members, with minor amendments to the ward boundaries. These are attached in Appendix 1.

Council also requested that option be provided for both multi and single member wards for each of the 5 towns. The work undertaken shows that this is possible for each of the 5 towns to have an arrangement with or without single member wards. Members will need to decide the appropriate approach in each of the 5 towns. The Members Information Sheet 525 informed Members of the opportunity to view the single-member ward options once they have been completed in early September.

Conclusions

The Council needs to resolve the number of Members appointed to be proposed to the Boundary Committee so that the necessary paperwork and documentation to accompany the proposal can be completed by the 3rd October 2005, when the Boundary Committee wants to receive our final comments.

If any Members have strong objections to any part of the proposal, they must submit their comments directly to the Boundary Committee for assessment. Unfortunately, timescales set by the Boundary Committee prevent us from making any further amendments.

Option B for 48 Members, (including new wards of Hilperton, Staverton & Holt; Semington, Great Hinton, Keevil, Bulkington, Steeple Ashton, West Ashton & North Bradley; 5 current Trowbridge Wards with the addition of Southwick) appears to be the one which most accords with the Boundary Committee requirements and the consultation responses.

Recommendations

That Council resolves:

1. That Multi-Member wards be included for the following towns:
Bradford on Avon
Melksham
Trowbridge
Warminster
Westbury
2. That Single-Member wards be included for the following towns:
Bradford on Avon
Melksham
Trowbridge
Warminster
Westbury
3. That 48 Members is selected as the most appropriate size for the Authority and that the ward boundaries be shown as set out in Option B.