

**Meeting of the Full Council
Meeting to be held on 2 September 2015**

Report submitted by the Director of Governance, Finance and Public Services

Part A

Electoral Division affected:
All

Electoral Review of Lancashire County Council's Area
(Appendix A refers)

Contact for further information:

Paul Bond, (01772) 534676, Head of Legal and Democratic Services

paul.bond@lancashire.gov.uk

Roy Jones, (01704 533619, Legal and Democratic Services

Roy.jones@lancashire.gov.uk

Executive Summary

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is undertaking an electoral review of the County Council's electoral arrangements. The review is being undertaken because of electoral imbalances that have arisen since the last review in 2003/04.

The review process will result in an order on new electoral arrangements being laid in Parliament in May 2016, with new arrangements taking effect in time for the county council elections in May 2017.

The Boundary Commission is currently consulting on patterns for County Council Electoral Divisions and the Full Council is asked to consider recommendations from the Political Governance Working Group (PGWG) on a submission on Electoral Division patterns to the Boundary Commission.

Recommendation

Full Council is asked to consider the recommendations of the Political Governance Working Group on Electoral Division Patterns, as set out at Appendix A, and agree which proposals should be submitted on Electoral Division patterns to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

Background and Advice

In May 2015 the Full Council considered a submission to the LGBCE on its consultation on Council size as part of the current electoral review of the County Council's electoral arrangements. The review is being undertaken because of electoral imbalances that have arisen since the last review in 2003/04.

The LGBCE's criteria for initiating a review are as follows:

- (a) more than 30% of a council's divisions have an electoral imbalance of more than 10% from the average ratio for that authority; and/or
- (b) one or more wards/divisions with an electoral imbalance of more than 30%; and
- (c) the imbalance is unlikely to be corrected by foreseeable changes to the electorate within a reasonable period.

The review was been triggered by the LGBCE because as at December 2014, 34% of LCC's divisions (29 divisions) had an electoral imbalance of more than 10% from the average ratio for the authority.

The review as a whole is looking at the size of the Council and the boundaries of the current 84 Electoral Divisions. The review is being undertaken over 2015/16, and will culminate in an order on new electoral arrangements being laid before Parliament in May 2016, with new arrangements in place for the County Council elections in May 2017. The timetable for the review is as follows:

Stage	Date
Submission to LGBCE on Council size	22 May 2015
LGBCE Council Size Meeting	16 June 2015
Division Patters Consultation	23 June – 31 August 2015
Draft Recommendations Published	17 November 2015
Draft Recommendations Consultation	17 November 2015 – 11 January 2016
Final Recommendations Published	5 April 2016
Order Laid	May 2016
Implementation Election	May 2017

It has previously been agreed by the Urgency Committee that the County Council's Political Governance Working Group (PGWG) would make recommendations to the Full Council on all matters relating to the review.

The Full Council in May 2015 unanimously accepted the Working Group's recommendations that a future Council size of 84 Electoral Divisions and Members be adopted as part of the current electoral review with the retention of single member Electoral Divisions only. The Full Council also approved the formal submission on Council size to the LGBCE which was made on 22 May.

On 16 June 2015 the Boundary Commission considered the Council's submission on Council size and decided, based on the evidence in the Council's submission, that it was 'minded to' recommend a Council size of 84. The Council size forms the basis

of the Boundary Commission's work to draw up new Electoral Division Boundaries. The Commission commenced a consultation on the pattern of Electoral Divisions across the County and specifically within each District area, on 23 June. The consultation ends on 31 August, however the Boundary Commission have granted the County Council a small extension of time to allow consideration of the County Council's submission on Electoral Division patterns at a special Full Council meeting on 2 September 2015, which has also been extended to Political Groups.

The Commission is inviting localised evidence from organisations and members of the public on the most appropriate Electoral Division pattern for Lancashire. This will help the Commission draw up their draft recommendations. Political Groups/Parties can if they wish submit their own submissions direct to the Commission. The Commission's draft recommendations will be published for consultation in November 2015 until January 2016.

Criteria for Electoral Division Patterns

The following three statutory criteria apply to formulating new Electoral Division patterns:

- To deliver electoral equality where each county councillor represents roughly the same number of electors as others across the county.
- That the pattern of Divisions should, as far as possible, reflect the interests and identities of local communities.
- That the electoral arrangements should provide for effective and convenient local government.

The Boundary Commission will test proposals against the criteria before drawing up draft recommendations. Accordingly, all proposals should demonstrate how they meet the three requirements. The Commission will take decisions based on the strength of the evidence presented to it and not merely on assertion. For example, details of community interests such as the location and use made of local facilities, services and local organisations demonstrating how a community manifests itself will carry greater weight than submissions that simply assert that an area has community identity.

The Boundary Commission's view is that while it can accept a variance of above or below 10% of the County Council's average electorate per Division, it has to receive very strong evidence for doing so. The evidence needs to relate to the Commissions' other statutory criteria relating to community identities and interest, and effective and convenient local government. The Commission does sometimes accept variances which are outside the 10% range, if there is strong evidence that the Division reflects communities better than an alternative proposal. The further away from the 10% variance that the Electoral Division is the stronger the evidence will need to be.

The Boundary Commission recommend using polling districts as the logical building blocks when making a pattern of Electoral Divisions. A polling district can be split but it would be difficult, particularly within the tight timescales available to the County Council, to validate proposals that include split polling districts to ensure that the projected electorate for a Division remains within the required variances. The

current and projected electorate data available and published is drilled down to polling district level only.

Officer Initial Proposals

The Boundary Commission aims to deliver a pattern of Electoral Divisions where each Councillor represents approximately the same number of electors. Its recommendations will be based on the number of electors not the total population for an electoral Division. The Commission has an obligation, set out in law, to consider electorate forecast five years after the completion of the review. For the current electoral review the electorate forecast is at May 2021, based on the electorate for each Division as at the published electoral registers in June 2015

The Boundary Commission have confirmed that the published forecast electorate data for May 2021 as supplied by the County Council will be that used for drawing up Electoral Division patterns. The average forecast electorate for a County Division as at May 2021 is 11,083. The electorate has been projected from electorate and housing development information provided by District Councils and other sources available to the County Council such as ONS data.

The PGWG in July considered initial proposals for Electoral Divisions patterns for all 12 District Council areas prepared by officers. The initial proposals were based on the forecast electorate variances within each District for May 2021 published on the Boundary Commission's website as agreed with the Commission.

All District Councils were initially contacted to provide the information in March and recognising the extremely busy election period and Easter holidays the final date for receipt of electorate and housing data was set at 12 June. This was the last possible date to allow for the electorate to be forecast and published on the Boundary Commission website for the consultation period. It may well be that new housing data has emerged since that date however the Commission have made it clear that the published figures should be used as the basis for drawing up Electoral Divisions in order to maintain a level playing field. Political Groups or individuals can if they so choose make their own submissions to the Commission based on alternative electorate and population predictions.

The new Division patterns were drawn up on a District by District basis as District Boundaries cannot be changed by this review.

The officer proposals submitted to the PGWG were based on LGBCE Guidance, which had previously been circulated to all Members, and aimed to ensure that each Division was within the 10% above or below electorate threshold required by the Commission. In a number of cases more than one option for a Divisional change was put forward where there are different options to secure electoral balance and to achieve electorates within the threshold limits. Officers gave careful consideration to the LGBCE guidance to achieve best fit and to meet community identity requirements.

It has been accepted by the Working Group that to address current and expected electorate imbalances that from the outset there will have to be a decrease within Preston District area of one Councillor and an increase within the Chorley District area by one. Officers had been asked to look at an option to decrease the number of Councillors within Hyndburn by one and increase the number of Councillors within Ribble Valley by one. Officers reported that this was not a possibility in order to remain within electoral variances limits and also because of the consequential impact on other Divisions.

The Council's submission to the Boundary Commission on Council size did support the retention of single member electoral divisions only to continue to maximise accountability and geographic representation. However officer proposals did include three alternative proposals for two-Member Divisions in Hyndburn, Ribble Valley and Wyre to overcome particular electoral variance difficulties.

Hard copy maps for each of the 12 Districts showing the current and officer proposed Electoral Divisions have been on display in the Members Retiring Room (The Palatine Room) since 22 July. The maps are also available on C-First.

The following documents and material have previously been provided to the Working Group and all members:

- Council size document by District identifying initial consequential changes based on the forecast electorate at 2021 for 84 Electoral Divisions.
- Electoral Data pro-forma showing the electorate for the start of the review (June 2015) and the forecast of the electorate for 2021.
- The methodology adopted by the County Council for the calculation of electorate and population growth for each of the 12 Districts.
- Interactive maps for each of the 12 Districts showing the current Electoral Division, Ward and Parish boundaries can be found at:
<https://consultation.lgbce.org.uk/node/5383>
- Static maps including the June 2015 divisional electorate data:
<http://www3.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/web/?siteid=6120&pageid=46467&e=e>
- District maps showing polling districts available on the Lancashire Profile website:
<http://www3.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/web/?siteid=6120&pageid=46467&e=e>

The Working Group agreed that the officer initial proposals would be considered by each Political Group with any proposed changes or alternative proposals to be submitted to Democratic Services by Groups by 10 August. This would allow validation of any Group proposals against the Boundary Commission's criteria by officers in advance of the next Working Group meeting to be held on 18 August and

for Full Council on 2 September. The Working Group emphasised that proposals should be submitted by Groups only and not by individual Members. Individual Members and political groups can make separate submissions direct to the Boundary Commission

The Commission will consider all submissions on their merit. A well evidenced submission from an individual which addresses the three statutory criteria will be more persuasive than one which does not, even if the latter is from an elected individual or body.

Once the Commission has considered all proposals received during this consultation it intends to publish draft recommendations on new Electoral Divisions in November. Public consultation on those recommendations will then take place until January 2016. The Commission will publish its final recommendations in April with a view to an order being laid before Parliament in May and the new Electoral arrangements in place for the County Council elections in May 2017.

Recommendations

The Working Group at its meeting on 18 August considered the initial officer proposals for each District Council area presented at the Working Group meeting in July, together with proposals submitted by Political Groups.

Electronic versions of all the proposals considered by the Working Group have been placed on C-First

The Working Group acknowledged that any proposals to be considered by Full Council have to be validated beforehand by officers as previously agreed, otherwise proposals can be submitted direct to the Commission.

The Working Group agreed:

- New Electoral Divisions on a District by District basis and alternatives for certain Divisions as set out at Appendix A for consideration and approval by the Full Council as the Council's formal submission on Electoral Divisions patterns to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.
- The names for each Electoral Division and alternatives as set out in Appendix A for consideration and approval by Full Council
- That, in order to ensure a proper validation, any alternative division proposals to be submitted as amendments at Full Council to the Working Group's proposals must be submitted, in confidence, to Democratic Services by Tuesday 25 August.

Consultations

N/A

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management

The LGBCE has a statutory duty to undertake an electoral review of a Council's electoral arrangements once the electoral variance threshold triggers the need for a review. This is the case in Lancashire and the County Council has an obligation to review its electoral arrangements and ensure that it makes recommendations to the Commission on Council size and electoral arrangements that enable Councillors to effectively represent their communities and to meet the requirements of the County Council to effectively serve its community.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
LGBCE Electoral Reviews Technical Guidance	April 2014	Roy Jones 01772 533619

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A