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**Meeting:** General Purposes Committee  
**Date:** 17 December 2009  
**Subject:** Electoral Review of Central Bedfordshire: Pattern of Wards

**Report of:** Director of Corporate Services

**Summary:** To consider the draft submission to be made in response to the consultation by the Boundary Committee for England on the number and location of electoral wards for Central Bedfordshire and to make recommendations to Council at its meeting to be held on 7 January 2010.

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Contact Officer: Brian Dunleavy, Electoral Services Project Officer

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Council

#### **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

##### **Council Priorities:**

This is a statutory review of the electoral arrangements for Central Bedfordshire as directed by the Electoral Commission in 2008. The objective of an electoral review is to provide for good, or improved, levels of electoral representation across a local authority area. Equal levels of electoral representation will assist the Council's capacity to provide effective and efficient governance.

##### **Financial:**

The conduct of the review is estimated to be in the region of £25,000 and these costs have been identified as part of the transitional costs. However, the Boundary Committee have determined that Central Bedfordshire Council should have 59 councillors; a reduction of 7 from the present number. This means that following the 2011 elections, savings of circa £85,000 will be made on the Members allowances budget.

##### **Legal:**

The review is being carried out in accordance with Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1992 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

##### **Risk Management:**

None

**Staffing (including Trades Unions):**

None

**Equalities/Human Rights:**

The revised electoral arrangements will ensure equality of representation throughout all of the wards within Central Bedfordshire.

**Community Safety:**

None

**Sustainability:**

None

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. that the Committee consider the conclusions of the Electoral Arrangements Review Working Group in relation to the number and location of electoral wards for Central Bedfordshire and determine whether to recommend the Council to approve the pattern of wards as shown in either Appendix A or Appendix B now submitted;
2. that the Director of Corporate Resources, in consultation with the Chairman of the Working Group, be authorised to prepare the draft submission to be presented to the Council on 7 January 2010 including taking account of any further responses to consultation received in the intervening period prior to the Council meeting.
3. that the Council be recommended:
  - (a) to endorse the proposed pattern of wards as proposed by the Committee under recommendation 1 above;
  - (b) to consider any responses received from Town and Parish Councils;
  - (c) to approve the Submission to the Boundary Committee for England on the number and location of electoral wards for Central Bedfordshire.
  - (d) to authorise the Director of Corporate Resources, in consultation with the Chairman of the Working Group, to respond to questions raised in connection with the submission from the Boundary Committee.

## **Review of Electoral Arrangements**

1. The electoral review of Central Bedfordshire formally commenced on 4 August 2009. Stage 1 of the process was consultation on council size and at meeting of Council held on 10 September 2009 this Authority submitted a proposal, with cross party support, for a council size of 66 members.
2. The Boundary Committee at stage 2, considered all of the evidence submitted on council size and concluded to recommend that Central Bedfordshire should have 59 councillors.

## **Pattern of Wards**

3. Stage 3 invites submissions for a new pattern of wards based on the forecast electorate in 5 years time. The predicted electorate for 2013 is 207,720 which means that each councillor should represent 3,521 electors.
4. Whilst the Boundary Committee would prefer electoral equality, it is acknowledged that it is not always possible. Consequently, the Committee will consider variances which are within 10% of the average to be acceptable, particularly if supported by community evidence or easily identifiable boundaries.
5. It is considered that a good pattern of wards should:
  - Provide good electoral variance, with all councillors representing as near as possible to the same number of electors.
  - Contain considerations of community identities and include evidence of community links.
  - Be based on strong, easily identifiable boundaries.
  - Be supported by local residents or parish or town councils.

## **The Submission on Pattern of Wards**

6. The Electoral Arrangements Working Group comprises of 3 Conservative Group members (Cllrs Peter Rawcliffe (Chairman), David Lawrence and Stephen Male) and 1 Liberal Democrat member (Cllr Peter Blaine). The substitute members, Cllr's Mrs Chapman and Ken Matthews from the Conservative Group together with the substitute from the Liberal Democrat Group also attended the meetings of the Working Group.
7. The Working Group has met on 3 occasions and concluded that their preference would be to submit two separate schemes on the pattern of wards for consideration by the Committee. Consequently, there are two alternative submissions for the Committee to consider. Each submission has been compiled following discussions with existing ward Councillors and has been subjected to various commutations throughout the process.
8. Both submissions have been circulated to all of the Town and Parish Councils for comment and it is intended to provide a schedule of replies for Members to consider at the meeting of Council on 7 January 2010.

8. The detailed cases are set out in the submission on Patterns of Wards attached at the Appendices.

**Appendices:**

Appendix A – Submission On Pattern of Wards (Conservative Group)

Appendix B – Submission On Pattern of Wards (Liberal Democrat Group)