

Central Bedfordshire Council

General Purposes Committee

28 March 2019

Central Bedfordshire Council – Electoral Review

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Purpose of this report

The report proposes the establishment of a Member Working Group to consider and make recommendations to this Committee on the Electoral Review of Central Bedfordshire Council that is being conducted by the Local Government Boundary Committee for England.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to:

- 1. Establish a Working Group of Members to work with officers to develop proposals and carry out consultation with stakeholders concerning proposals for a submission to the Local Government Boundary Committee for England (LGBCE) relating to revised electoral arrangements;**
- 2. Agree that membership of the Working Group be limited to 4 Members; and**
- 3. Agree that the Working Group reflects the overall political composition of the Council following the elections scheduled to take place on 2 May 2019.**

Review of Electoral Arrangements

1. The LGBCE have commenced a review of the electoral arrangements for Central Bedfordshire. The timing of the review will ensure that revised electoral arrangements will be introduced in time for the ordinary elections in 2023.
2. The object of the review is to ensure a fairer representation at local government elections given the significant changes in the distribution of electors since the last review in 2009. Matters that will be considered are:

The total number of Councillors to be elected to the Council.

The names, number and boundaries of wards.
The number of Councillors to be elected to each ward

3. The review is likely to have implications for the whole local authority not just areas with high levels of electoral inequality.
4. The electoral review will have two distinct parts:
 - a. Council size; and
 - b. Ward boundaries

Council Size

5. The first part of the review will determine the total number of Councillors to be elected to the Council in future. The Commission have an expectation that the Council will submit a proposal for a council size that they believe is right for the authority.
6. In making its judgment on council size the Commission consider three broad areas:
 - a. Governance arrangements of the Council and how it takes decisions across the broad range of its responsibilities.
 - b. The Council's scrutiny functions relating to its decision making and the Council's responsibilities to outside bodies.
 - c. The representational role of Councillors in the local community and how they engage with people, conduct casework and represent the Council on local partner organisations.

Warding Patterns

7. The Commission will carry out two phases of public consultation and the Council will be invited to present its proposals for new ward boundaries.
8. At the first round of consultation the Commission will ask for proposals on new ward boundaries and they will use the responses to that consultation to draw up draft recommendations for new boundaries across the Council's area. The second round of consultation will afford the Council opportunity to comment on the draft recommendations and to propose alternatives.
9. The Commission will draw up new electoral arrangements that provide the best balance in accordance with the statutory criteria. The criteria include three main elements:
 - a. Delivering electoral equality for local voters. *(This means ensuring that each Councillor represents roughly the same number of electors so that the value of their vote is the same regardless of where they live in the local authority area).*
 - b. Interests and identities of local communities. *(This means establishing electoral arrangements which, as far as possible, avoid splitting local ties and where boundaries are easily identifiable).*
 - c. Effective and convenient local government. *(This means ensuring that the wards can be represented effectively by their elected representatives and that the new electoral arrangements, including both the council size decision and*

warding arrangements, allow the local authority to conduct its business effectively).

Electoral Review Timetable

Develop council size proposal	17 January 2019 to 17 September 2019
Commission Meeting on Council size	15 October 2019
Consultation on warding patterns	22 October 2019 to 13 January 2020
Commission Meeting on Draft Recommendations	17 March 2020
Consultation on Draft Recommendations	31 March 2020 to 8 June 2020
Commission Meeting on Final Recommendations	21 July 2020
Order laid	Autumn 2020
Order made	Winter 2020
Implementation	2023

Council Priorities

10. This report contributes to the Council's priority of creating stronger communities and a more efficient and responsive Council. Ultimately, the recommendations made in a electoral review ought to bring about improved community engagement, more cohesive communities, better local democracy and result in more effective and convenient delivery of local services.'

Legal Implications

11. The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act) section 56 requires the LGCBE to review 'from time to time' every principal local authority in England and make recommendations about electoral arrangements. In addition, the LGCBE can at any time review the arrangements for all or any part of a principal local authority's area.
12. The LGCBE can make recommendations for the following aspects of local authority electoral arrangements:
 - a. The total number of councillors to be elected to the council (known as 'council size');
 - b. The number and boundaries of wards/divisions;
 - c. The number of councillors to be elected for each ward/division; and
 - d. The name of any ward/division.
13. Schedule 2 of the 2009 Act sets out the statutory criteria to which the LGBCE are required to have regard in conducting electoral reviews. In summary, in making recommendations, LGBCE are required to have regard to:
 - a. The need to secure equality of representation;

- b. The need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
- c. The need to secure effective and convenient local government.

Financial and Risk Implications

- 14. The anticipated costs for the review are minimal and relate only to the cost of the external correspondence with stakeholders. This will be managed within existing budgets.

Equalities Implications

- 15. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 16. There are no direct equalities implications that have been identified as relevant to this report. However, achieving a more even distribution of electoral representation in every ward will provide an opportunity for fairer representation.

Conclusion and next Steps

- 17. Any changes to the electoral arrangements that are approved by the LGBCE are brought into effect by means of a formal Order. This Order shall come into force on 1 April 2023

Background Papers

None

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