

Agenda Item: 7

Meeting: General Purposes Committee

Date: 2 July 2009

Subject: Review Of Electoral Arrangements - Central Bedfordshire

Report of: Director of Corporate Services

Summary: The report proposes the establishment of a Member Working Group to consider and make recommendations to this Committee on the Review of Electoral Arrangements that is about to be conducted by the Boundary Committee for England.

Contact Officer: Stephen Cooke, Electoral/Members' Services Manager

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All Wards of Central Bedfordshire

Function of: Council

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. that the Committee 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 Boundary Commission for England relating to revised electoral arrangements;
2. that membership of the working group be limited to 4 Members; and
3. that the Working Group consist of 3 Members of the Conservative Group and 1 Member of the Liberal Democrat Group, to reflect the overall political composition of the Council.

Review of Electoral Arrangements

1. The Boundary Committee for England are due to conduct 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 next ordinary elections in May 2011.
2. The object of the review is to ensure a consistent level of representation across the area of a local authority. Matters that will be taken into account are:-
 - The total number of councillors to be elected to the council
 - The number and boundaries of wards
 - The number of councillors to be elected for each ward
 - The name of each ward

2. The formal launch of the review is expected to take place in August 2009 although some preliminary briefings and meetings will be held during July between the staff of the Boundary Committee and Members and staff of Central Bedfordshire as well as representatives of various stakeholders, including town and parish councils. There are in total 6 stages to the review as noted below. The Boundary Committee anticipate that the whole review process will take between 56 and 66 weeks to complete.

Stage	What Happens?	Timescales
Preliminary stage	Preliminary briefings and meetings with local authority	6-8 weeks
Council size consultation	A consultation specifically on council size	6 weeks
Stage 1	Initial consultation on electoral arrangements	Typically 12 weeks
Stage 2	Deliberation and analysis of representations	Typically 10 – 14 weeks
Stage 3	Publish draft recommendations and consult on them	Typically 12 weeks
Stage 4	Consider representations on draft recommendations and publish final recommendations	Typically 10 – 14 weeks

3. Three separate pieces of legislation set out the rules for electoral reviews, they are:-

- (a) The Local Government Act 1972
- (b) The Local Government Act 1992
- (c) The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007

The Boundary Committee, when making their recommendations must take into consideration the statutory criteria, set out in Section 13 of the Local Government Act 1992, as amended by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The statutory criteria are:-

- (i) The need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities.
- (ii) The need to secure effective and convenient local government.
- (iii) The need to secure equality of representation.
- (iv) The desirability of securing the appropriate number of councillors in each ward which elects by halves or by thirds.

4. The Boundary Committee are also required, as far as reasonably practicable, take account of changes to the number and distribution of electors that are likely to take place within the next five years. This ensures that any arrangements adopted should retain a high degree of equality of representation for the maximum possible period following the introduction of revised electoral arrangements.
5. The Boundary Committee have an expectation that the Council will submit a proposal. Given the relatively short period for each stage of the review it is suggested that a small Working Group is established to work with officers in developing detailed proposals for consideration by this Committee. Approval of the final proposals for submission to the Boundary Committee is subject to adoption by the full Council.
6. Whilst a Working Group would not be subject to proportionality it is nonetheless suggested, particularly given the nature of the task, that a Working Group of 4 Members be appointed, with representation being 3 Members of the Conservative Group and one Member of the Liberal Democrat Group.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

This is a statutory review and has no direct implications relating to Council priorities but equality of representation underpins all service provision.

Financial:

The requirement for this review relates directly to the establishment of the unitary authority and the associated costs, estimated to be in the region of £25,000 have been identified as a transitional cost.

Legal:

The submission of the Council must conform to the requirements of the legislation listed in paragraph 3(a) to (c) of this report.

Risk Management:

None

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

None

Equalities/Human Rights:

Revised electoral arrangements will ensure an equality of representation throughout all wards of Central Bedfordshire.

Community Safety:

None

Sustainability:

None