



Northumberland

County Council

COMMITTEE: COUNCIL

DATE: 18TH JANUARY 2023

Electoral Review of Northumberland – Phase Two Submission Report

Report of: Cllr. Glen Sanderson, Leader of the Council

Responsible Officer: Philip Hunter, Interim Senior Service Director

Purpose of report

To update Council on phase two of the Electoral Review of Northumberland County Council being undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) and to present the Council's proposed submission on divisional patterns.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Council:

- (a) Notes the update on the Electoral Review currently being undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.**
- (b) Notes the submission by the interim Senior Service Director being made on Divisional patterns.**
- (c) Delegates authority to the interim Senior Service Director to make any final changes to the Council's submission on Divisional patterns, to be exercised in consultation with Leader of the Council and all other Group Leaders, before submitting to the Boundary Commission.**
- (d) Notes that political groups, individual Members, partners, community groups, residents and other bodies may make their own separate submissions to the Boundary Commission during this phase of consultation.**

Link to Corporate Plan

This report links to all aims and priorities of the Corporate Plan 2021-24.

Key issues

- At the end of 2021, The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE or 'The Commission') notified the Council of its plan to undertake an Electoral Review for Northumberland County Council.

- The Council did not request the Review but instead the review has been triggered due to Northumberland meeting the LGBCE's criteria for electoral inequality in a number of its Divisions.
- Throughout the Review, the Commission invites views and submissions from the Council (as a whole), political groups and communities. The Commission will use these submissions to inform its determinations and judgements on Council size and proposed Divisional boundaries.

Background

1. On 2nd November 2022, Full Council agreed a report setting out the Council size submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE). The submission asked the Boundary Commission to consider two options for Council size – maintaining the current Council size at 67 Members or a modest increase to 70 Members. Following consideration of the Council's submission and other evidence, the Commission has stated it is 'minded to' agree a Council size of 67. This position could change as a result of the current phase two of the electoral review, where the Commission consults on Divisional patterns.
2. On 22nd November 2022, the Boundary Commission opened its consultation on the Council's Divisional patterns (ward boundaries). This consultation runs until 30th January 2023. All County Council Members were invited to a briefing on this phase provided by the Commission on 12th December 2022. Town and Parish Councillors as well as other stakeholders were also invited to the briefing.
3. At the briefing session on 12th December 2022, the Commission outlined the second phase of the Electoral Review which is focusing on the County's Divisional patterns. Although the Commission expects the Council to make a submission of proposed Divisional boundaries, **anyone or any group can make their own submission as part of this consultation. This includes but is not restricted to residents, partners, individual Members and political groups.** The Commission will only consider proposals based on the three statutory criteria for proposing Divisional boundaries. These are:
 - **Electoral equality** - the aim is to achieve electorate numbers in each Division that are within, plus or minus, 10% variance of the average for the County. The electorate sizes are based on projected electorate sizes for the year 2028, which were agreed by the Commission as part of phase 1 of the Electoral Review.
 - **Community identities and interest** – Divisional boundaries should – as far as possible reflect community interests and identities, and boundaries should be identifiable. Issues to consider include for example, transport links, community groups and facilities, natural or physical boundaries, parishes and shared interests.
 - **Effective and convenient local government** – Divisional boundaries should promote effective and convenient local government. Issues to consider include for example the number of councillors for, the geographic size of, and the links between parts of the Division.

4. The Commission will not accept evidence that clearly falls outside of the three statutory criteria, including for example, political consequences, impacts on house prices or insurance premiums or arguments based simply on maintaining the status quo.
5. As part of this phase of the Electoral Review, Officers from the Elections and Information Services Teams have developed proposed Divisional boundaries for the County based on the three statutory criteria set out above. In developing the proposals, Officers have:
 - Engaged with the Group Leaders; and,
 - Met separately with the political groups and non-aligned Members to present proposals, answer questions and, consider proposals made by Members.
6. Following conclusion of this engagement, officers have made available to all Members an interactive map which outlines proposed new boundaries to be submitted to the Commission (subject to Full Council agreement) as part of this phase of consultation. This is available at the link below, which was shared with all Members on Friday 13th January.
<https://northumberland.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=36b6bd864d4d40729612d2d8d6d193d0>
7. Where Members have any difficulties accessing or using the interactive map, Officers can make available hard copies of maps on request.
8. The Officer proposals would result in a Council size of 69 Members, with two additional Divisions proposed in the Longhirst and Cramlington areas. The proposals would also result in two Divisions in Alnwick (a single-member pattern was agreed by Full Council at its 2nd November 2022 meeting).
9. It is important to highlight three key points:
 - Members and political groups are still free to make individual submissions to the Commission on any aspect of the Divisional patterns, including responses that differ from or even contradict the Council submission. Officers can offer Members available data and reasonable, technical assistance if they wish to make separate submissions before 30th January.
 - The Boundary Commission will consider each response to its consultation on the merits of the evidence submitted as long as the evidence is based on the three statutory criteria outlined above. In this sense the Council submission will not be accorded extra weight of authority relative to other responses. It is the weight of evidence that is critical.
 - The Council submission is not the final Divisional pattern for the County. The Commission will consider the Council's submission alongside other submissions and the Commission itself will then produce a set of proposed Divisional boundaries which will be consulted on separately.

Next Steps in the Boundary Review

10. Subject to Council agreement, the final Submission on proposals for Divisional boundaries will be forwarded to the Commission for consideration on or before 30th January 2023. Following that, the key next steps of the review include:

- Publication and consultation on draft proposals - 25 April – 3 July 2023
- Publication of final recommendations – 3 October 2023
- Parliamentary approval of recommendations – Autumn / Winter 2023
- Implementation of new electoral recommendations – May 2025

Implications

Policy	This report links to all aims and priorities of the Corporate Plan.
Finance and value for money	Whilst this report and the Council Size Submission to the LGBCE do not contain direct financial implications, any determination by the Commission to increase or reduce the Council size would have consequent financial implications for the Council. Also, changes to Division boundaries made by the Commission may have cost implications relating to changes to electoral arrangements.
Legal	The Statutory Powers of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to undertake and implement a Boundary Review are contained in Part 3 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 In accordance with Part 3 of the Council's Constitution, matters in relation to electoral arrangements are reserved to full Council.
Procurement	N/A
Human Resources	N/A
Property	N/A
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	N/A

Risk Assessment	N/A
Crime Disorder &	N/A
Customer Consideration	N/A
Carbon reduction	N/A
Health and Wellbeing	N/A
Wards	All Wards

Background papers:

None

Report sign off.

Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:

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