

REPORT TO: ELECTORAL REVIEW WORKING GROUP

DATE: 22 JUNE 2022

TITLE: RESPONSE TO LGBCE WARDING CONSULTATION

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RECOMMENDED that:

- A** The Working Group considers proposals for revised ward boundaries based on Harlow having either 11 or 12 wards.

BACKGROUND

1. To comply with the statutory requirement to carry out an electoral review, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has a legal requirement to review all local authorities from time to time. An electoral review is an examination of a council's electoral arrangements and Harlow was last reviewed 22 years ago. There are two stages to the LGBCE review process; the first being the decision on Council size; and the second being the Warding arrangements.
2. The LGBCE issued the Council a 'minded-to' decision on 26 April 2022 following its stage one considerations, that Harlow should continue to have 33 Councillors. This followed the co-operation of the cross-party Electoral Review Working Group comprising of both Conservative and Labour members which resulted in a Council submission that the number be increased to 36.
3. The LGBCE is now running a public consultation on warding proposals for Harlow. This consultation is now due to run to the 28 July. At this stage, as well as for the initial submission stage, any interested party may submit a proposal in

response to the consultation. They have set out three criteria that any proposals should follow. These are that:

- i) There should be equality of electorate across all wards (meaning councillors in each ward should represent approximately the same number of voters);
 - ii) Ward patterns should, as far as possible, reflect community interests and identities and boundaries should be identifiable; and
 - iii) Electoral arrangements should promote effective and convenient local government.
4. A guide on proposing warding patterns has been put together for the benefit of Councillors and this is attached as Appendix A. A workshop has also been arranged to take place immediately before this meeting.
 5. The LGBCE has said the Council can submit more than one proposal if it wishes. There will be a presumption in favour of proposals that comply with the 'minded-to' decision. However, the LGBCE have stated they will be led by the evidence and can change their recommendation on council size based on the evidence they receive.

ISSUES/PROPOSALS

6. In considering future warding patterns it is necessary to consider:
 - i) The total number of wards;
 - ii) Ward boundaries; and
 - iii) The number of councillors elected to each ward
7. Whilst the council could submit a proposal which meant council size was not a multiple of three, the LGBCE is highly unlikely to accept any such proposal unless there were hugely compelling reasons. This is because the Council has elections by thirds and the LGBCE wants to ensure electors have the same number of opportunities to participate in the democratic process. It is recommended that the Council submits two proposals: One that provides 33 Councillors and one which provides 36 Councillors. These would produce 11 or 12 wards respectively.
8. No proposal will perfectly meet the LGBCE's criteria, and the focus should be on a proposal that best meets the criteria. This may involve some balancing of electorate sizes against community cohesion.

11 Wards

9. Members will be aware of the challenges that exist in creating an 11-ward proposal that meets criteria a and b. The town has many well-defined communities, as a result of the Gibberd principles which have governed the town's development.
10. Using the Electoral Forecast of 74,056 an 11-ward proposal should be aiming for 6,732 electors per ward, +/- 10% (therefore an electorate between 6058 and 7,405 will be in balance and acceptable).
11. Officers have drawn boundaries which provide electoral equality and the most appropriate community cohesion possible as well as boundaries purely based on communities however these versions do not provide electoral equality. It is recommended that Councillors use these as starting points to produce a single 11 ward proposal for inclusion in the Council's consultation response. The maps are attached as appendices B and C to the report.

12 Wards

12. There is political consensus that 12 wards would best meet the LGBCE's criteria. There is also consensus that the additional ward should include the developments at Gilden Way and Newhall.
13. Using the Electoral Forecast of 74,056 a 12-ward proposal should be aiming for 6,171 electors per ward, +/- 10% (therefore an electorate between 5553 and 6,788 will be in balance and acceptable).
14. Both Councillors and Officers have produced draft 12-ward maps on this basis. The final proposal will need to show that it better meets the LGBCE's criteria compared to possible 11 ward solutions, focus on ward names will assist in supporting the community identities and boundaries building on the Gibberd new town plan.

Next Steps

15. The Working Group is recommended to discuss proposals and agree on a response to the consultation. This should include the number of ward proposals it wishes to submit.
16. Full Council will approve the Council's response to the consultation at its meeting on 28 July. The LGBCE will then consider all the consultation responses and produce draft ward recommendations.

IMPLICATIONS

Strategic Growth and Regeneration

None specific.

Author: Andrew Bramidge, Director of Strategic Growth and Regeneration

Finance

None specific.

Author: Simon Freeman, Deputy to the Chief Executive and Director of Finance

Housing

None specific.

Author: Andrew Murray, Director of Housing

Communities and Environment

As contained in the report.

Author: Jane Greer, Director of Communities and Environment

Governance and Corporate Services

Legal Consideration:

Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (Sec 56) provides that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England must from time to time conduct a review of electoral arrangements of each principal council in England.

Author: Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Services

Appendices

Appendix A – Guide on Warding Patterns

Appendix B – 11 Ward Maps (Community Cohesion)

Appendix C – 11 Ward Map (Electoral Equality)

Appendix D – Councillor Leppard 12 Ward Map

Appendix E – Councillor Vince 12 Ward Map

Appendix F – Councillor Leppard 11 Ward Map

Appendix G – Councillor Vince 11 Ward Map (to follow)

Background Papers

None.

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

LGBCE – Local Government Boundary Commission for England