

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL

14 DECEMBER 2021

Title:

LGBCE Boundary Review
Warding Pattern Submission

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Paul Follows, Leader of the Council

Head of Service: Robin Taylor, Head of Policy and Governance

Key decision: Yes

Access: Public

1. Purpose and summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the Council's proposed consultation response to the draft recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission) on future warding patterns for the borough based on their recommendation that the size of the council be reduced to 50 members with effect from the next Borough elections in May 2021.
- 1.2 The council's proposed consultation response reflects the conclusions of the Boundary Review Member Working Group after taking account of the representations of Waverley councillors regarding the Commission's recommendations.

2. Recommendation

That the Executive recommends to Full Council that

- i. the Council's formal response to the Local Government Boundary Commission's 'Draft recommendations on the new electoral arrangements for Waverley Borough Council' is approved and submitted to the Commission; and
- ii. the Joint Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader, is delegated to finalise the Council's submission, incorporating points raised in debate at this Council meeting.

3. Reason for the recommendation

The recommendation enables the council to make a submission to the Commission on the future warding pattern for the council. The deadline for submissions is 13 December 2021.

4. Background

- 4.1 The Electoral Review of Waverley Borough Council began in 2020. Following submissions to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission) on council size, the council has been notified that the Commission is minded to recommend a council size of 50. The second stage of the review is the consultation on new ward boundaries to accommodate 50 councillors. It is the Commission's responsibility to develop and publish draft recommendations on ward patterns. The Commission invited submissions from the council and any other interested parties to inform its development of recommendations, and the council made a submission with recommendations in July 2021.
- 4.2 The Commission published its report and recommendations on 5 October 2021, and these are available on the Commission's [website](#). The Commission's summary of the report is attached at **Annexe 1** to this report, and the full report is published as a supplement to this agenda. The review considered the total number of district councillors, the number of councillors per ward and the names of wards. In its recommendations, the Commission has attempted to recognise local identity, physical barriers and administrative convenience, provided that the "electoral equality" principle is secured.
- 4.3 Based on the recommended council size of 50, and the forecast electorate for 2027 of 105,281 (based on population projections which include the effects of housing developments in the Borough), the target average electorate per councillor is 2,106. The Commission will allow a variance of up to +/-10% from the target ratio:

	-10%	Target ratio	+ 10%
1 councillor	1,895	2,106	2,317
2 councillors	3,790	4,211	4,632
3 councillors	5,685	6,317	6,949

- 4.4 The cross-party Member Working Group, convened to draw up the initial warding pattern submission, has met a further four times to review the Commission's recommendations and consider representations from borough councillors, and to prepare the council's draft consultation response. It is important to note that some of the warding suggestions put forward by councillors are mutually exclusive and the Working Group has had to make recommendations based on balancing the Commission's criteria with local views and representations. It is likely that neither the council's consultation response nor the Commission's final recommendations will satisfy all parties.
- 4.5 Anyone can make representations to the Commission. The Commission's deadline for receipt of submissions on warding patterns is 13 December 2021. The Commission is aware that Waverley has its Full Council meeting on 14 December and will accept the council's submission following that meeting.
- 4.6 The next steps for the Commission are:

Final recommendations considered by Commission	1 March 2022
Order laid	Spring 2022
Order made	Summer 2022
Implementation	May 2023

Full details of the review are available on the [LGBCE website](#).

Response to the Commission's recommendations

- 4.7 The Commission's draft recommendations propose that Waverley Borough Council should have 50 councillors, and those councillors should represent 22 wards: eight three-councillor wards, 12 two-councillor wards, and two single-councillor wards across the council area. The boundaries of all but one ward would change. In drawing up their recommendations, the Commission considered all the submissions received during the initial phase of the consultation.
- 4.8 The Member Working Group invited all councillors to provide feedback on the Commission's draft recommendations. In summary, the feedback received is as follows:
- Concern has been expressed by Councillors representing rural wards that have been enlarged as a result of this review: Alfold, Dunsfold and Chiddingfold; Bramley, Busbridge, Hambledon and Wonersh; and the group of western villages (Frensham, Churt, Dockenfield, Tilford and Thursley). Concerns relate to issues around natural geographic boundaries between communities and community identities. They also feel there are challenges in representing such large areas with three or two councillors. Parish councils have also expressed concern at being in such large groupings.
 - There is support for the realignment of the Cranleigh wards, Ewhurst and Ellens Green, Milford and Witley, and Hindhead and Beacon Hill.
 - Hambledon parish has expressed a preference to remain with Witley. Busbridge parish has expressed a preference to remain with Hambledon or Hascombe, and did not wish to become part of a Godalming ward.
 - There is a range of views from Farnham councillors and officers have met separately with them to reach a solution based on eight two-councillor wards
 - Godalming councillors are generally in agreement about the realignment of the wards save for the large Binscombe and Charterhouse ward.
 - Haslemere councillors asked for a realignment of the Haslemere West and East boundaries to reflect better the communities of Shottermill, Critchmere and Wey Hill and the town centre area.
 - Major concern was expressed by both the Working Group and Godalming and Farnham Town Councils about the proposed new town wards. Under the proposals, the wards will no longer be coterminous and all parties found this unacceptable.
- 4.9 The Working Group has considered carefully all the alternative warding suggestions put forward and tested them for compliance with the Commission's electoral equality test. In some cases, ward councillors have put forward suggestions that are mutually exclusive with those submitted by other ward councillors.
- 4.10 In short, it is proposed that Waverley should have 50 councillors, and those councillors should represent 24 wards: five three-councillor wards, 16 two-councillor wards, and three single-councillor wards across the council area. **Annexe 2** summarises the Commission's recommendations and whether the Working Group accepts them or is putting forward a counter proposal.

- 4.11 **Annexe 3** summarises the feedback from ward councillors and Town and Parish councils, and the response and recommendation from officers. Subject to the agreement of Council, Annexes 2 and 3 will form the basis of the submission to the Boundary Commission as the council's consultation response to the draft recommendations.
- 4.12 The calculations for the forecast of 2027 elector numbers are based on a combination of natural population increase as well as additional electors generated from new housing developments. The Boundary Commission have used ONS population forecasts which have not been made available to our officers. Wherever possible our figures have been referred to the Commission for ratification but due to time pressures, at the time of writing, further adjustments have not been possible, particularly in the Farnham area where variances have exceeded +/-10. It may be possible to rectify this in due course and an oral update will be given at the meeting.

Town and Parish warding arrangements

- 4.13 Feedback has been received from Godalming and Farnham Town Councils on the proposed town council ward arrangements. In summary the town councils both wish to see coterminous borough and town wards, and to have each ward name prefixed by the town name. In order to make their preferred town council warding arrangements work, both towns favour a reduction in their council numbers. Both Town Councils have submitted requests to Waverley to carry out a Community Governance Review recommending a reduction in their council size. Detail of what this entails is set out in a separate report on this Executive agenda.
- 4.14 It is not ideal to be carrying out a Community Governance Review at the same time as the Commission is finalising its recommendations on the Borough electoral review and the council cannot pre-empt the outcome of the Community Governance Review process. However, the submission to the Commission will make clear that the recommendations on warding patterns for Farnham and Godalming Town Councils are that the ward boundaries should be coterminous with the borough wards and advise the Commission of the request to carry out a Community Governance Review looking at the size of Farnham and Godalming Town Councils.

5. Relationship to the Corporate Strategy and Service Plan

- 5.1 The review's core principles of establishing, as far as possible, a structure for fair and accountable local democracy reflects the Council's vision, particularly open, democratic and participative governance

6. Implications of decision

6.1 Resource (Finance, procurement, staffing, IT)

Most of the work for the Boundary Review is undertaken by the Commission. However, there has inevitably been an overhead of staff time in preparing data and supporting the process which is being met from current approved resource.

The final approved changes to ward boundaries will have an impact on the Council's IT systems which are geographically based on wards, and on the arrangements and preparations for the May 2023 Borough elections.

6.2 Risk management

Appropriate risk assessments will be undertaken as necessary.

6.3 Legal

The Boundary Review is conducted by the LGBCE in accordance with statute, particularly the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. Any changes to the borough will be made by Parliamentary Order to take effect at the next Borough Council elections in May 2023. The Council has a duty to support the Commission's work and to provide input to that work

6.4 Equality, diversity and inclusion

There are no direct equality, diversity or inclusion implications in this report. Equality impact assessments are carried out when necessary across the council to ensure service delivery meets the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010.

6.5 Climate emergency declaration

There are no direct climate emergency implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

7. Consultation and engagement

7.1 The boundary review process has included public consultation, run by the LGBCE. Waverley has promoted the consultation to the public via its social media platforms.

8. Other options considered

8.1 The review is being conducted by the Commission, and the council is invited to contribute to and inform the Commission's considerations. It is in the interest of the council to engage with this process and make a submission on the potential future ward pattern.

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9. Governance journey

9.1 Proposals are recommended to Full Council for approval.

Annexes:

Annexe 1 – LGBCE New electoral arrangements for Waverley Borough Council – Summary of the Waverley Report

Annexe 2 – Summary of Waverley Borough Council submission on warding arrangements

Annexe 3 – Consultation feedback from Waverley Ward Councillors and Parish Councils

Background Papers

There are no background papers, as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972).

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