

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL – FUTURE ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Boundary Committee for England has published its draft recommendations on the periodic electoral review (PER) of the electoral arrangements for Hampshire that commenced in August 2002. The last review was in 1980.
- 1.2 Copies of the Boundary Committee's full report have been placed in the Members' Room. The report has also been published on the Councillors' Area of the NFDC web site. All members were advised that the recommendations were available for viewing. Maps showing the proposals relating to both the whole of the County and to New Forest District will be exhibited at the meeting.
- 1.3 The Cabinet is requested to consider the Boundary Committee's draft recommendations and to agree the Council's comments. While comments on the proposals for the County as a whole could be submitted, it is suggested that comments be confined to the proposals for New Forest District.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, as far as possible, equal representation across the local authority as a whole. Any imbalances of more than 10% in any division would have to be fully justified. Reviews also seek to ensure that each district area within a county is allocated the correct number of county councillors with respect to the district's proportion of the county's electorate.
- 2.2 When considering county council electoral arrangements, the Boundary Committee is required to have regard to the boundaries of district wards. In its report, the Committee has said that it attaches considerable importance to achieving coterminosity between the boundaries of county divisions and district wards, but that this is not always possible while providing for the optimum level of electoral equality. It seeks to achieve the best available balance between electoral equality and coterminosity.
- 2.3 At the start of the review the Boundary Committee invited members of the public and other interested bodies to express their views. This Council did not submit views at the initial stage, preferring to wait until draft recommendations were available before commenting.

3. BOUNDARY COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 The Committee's draft recommendations provide for:

- (a) the County Council to comprise 78 councillors, serving 73 divisions (an increase of 4 councillors from the current 74, serving 74 divisions);
- (b) the average number of electors per councillor to be 12,780 (based on projected 2006 electorates);
- (c) the number of county divisions in New Forest District Council's area to remain at 11 and for these to continue to be single member wards; and
- (d) the 11 county divisions comprise, and be named, as follows –

Proposed New County Division	District Ward/Parish or Parish Ward
Brockenhurst	Bashley District Ward
	Boldre & Sway District Ward
	Brockenhurst & Forest South East District Ward
Dibden & Hythe	Butts Ash & Dibden Purlieu District Ward
	Dibden & Hythe East District Ward
	Hythe West & Langdown District Ward
Fawley	Fawley, Blackfield & Langley District Ward
	Furzedown & Hardley District Ward
	Holbury & North Blackfield District Ward
Fordingbridge	Bramshaw Parish (of Bramshaw, Copythorne North & Minstead District Ward)
	Copythorne North Parish Ward (of Bramshaw, Copythorne North & Minstead District Ward)
	Downlands and Forest District Ward
	Fordingbridge District Ward
	Forest North West District Ward
Lymington	Buckland District Ward
	Lymington Town District Ward
	Pennington District Ward
Lyndhurst	Ashurst, Copythorne South & Netley Marsh District Ward
	Minstead Parish (of Bramshaw, Copythorne North & Minstead District Ward)
	Bransgore & Burley District Ward
	Lyndhurst District Ward

Proposed New County Division	District Ward/Parish or Parish Ward
Milford & Hordle	Fernhill District Ward
	Hordle District Ward
	Milford District Ward
New Milton	Barton District Ward
	Becton District Ward
	Milton District Ward
Ringwood	Ringwood East & Sopley District Ward
	Ringwood North District Ward
	Ringwood South District Ward
Totton North	Totton Central District Ward
	Totton North District Ward
	Totton West District Ward
Totton South & Marchwood	Marchwood District Ward
	Totton East District Ward
	Totton South District Ward

- 3.2 The extract from the Boundary Committee's report that deals with the arrangements for New Forest District is attached at Appendix 1.
- 3.3 As stated in the Committee's report, the recommendations provide a good degree of electoral equality and a high percentage of coterminosity. While the fact that some district wards and parishes will be split between County Divisions is regrettable, it is understandable that, as the primary aim of the review is to secure electoral equality, 100% coterminosity is very difficult to achieve. The recent review of District ward boundaries highlighted this fact. It is recommended that the proposals be supported.

4. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 4.1 The current consultation period on the draft recommendations expires on 8 March. The Boundary Committee will then consider representations and make final recommendations to the Electoral Commission. The Commission will decide whether to accept, modify or reject the Committee's final recommendations. If the Electoral Commission accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, it will make an Order and decide when the new arrangements will come into effect. It is usual for new electoral arrangements to apply from the next ordinary election following the making of an order. Provided there are no unforeseen delays, the new Divisions should take effect from the May 2005 County Council elections.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 None arising directly from this report. Changes to the County Division boundaries will require changes to the electoral register and, depending on the date on which an order is made, might require the production of a revised version of the register. If a revised version is required, costs for preparation, printing and distribution are likely to be about £1,000. New maps showing the amended Division boundaries will also have to be produced. The cost of these is likely to be about £300. It is hoped that this expenditure could be contained within existing budgets.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 That the Boundary Committee's draft recommendations for the revised County electoral arrangements, insofar as they relate to New Forest District, be supported.

Further information:

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Background Papers:

Published documents

New Forest District

Under the current arrangements, the New Forest district is represented by 11 county councillors serving 11 divisions. Brockenhurst division is currently 25% over-represented (27% by 2006). Dibden & Hythe division is currently 24% under-represented (22% by 2006). Fawley division is currently 14% over-represented (16% by 2006). Fordingbridge is currently 26% over-represented (28% by 2006). Lymington division is 10% over-represented, both now and in 2006. Lyndhurst division is currently 21% over-represented (22% by 2006). Milford & Hordle division is currently 19% under-represented (17% by 2006). New Milton division is currently 3% under-represented (2% by 2006). Ringwood division is currently 16% under-represented (15% by 2006). Totton North division is currently 21% over-represented (22% by 2006). Totton South is currently 14% under-represented (16% in 2006). Overall, relative to the size of the electorate in the rest of the county, New Forest is over-represented on the County Council.

At Stage One, the County Council put forward proposals for 11 single-member divisions. These proposals would give 82% coterminosity. Its proposed Brockenhurst division would comprise Bashley, Brockenhurst & Forest South East and Boldre & Sway wards. It would be 9% over-represented (13% by 2006). Its proposed Dibden & Hythe division would comprise Butts Ash & Dibden Purlieu, Dibden & Hythe East and Hythe West & Langdown wards. It would be 18% under-represented (17% by 2006). Its proposed Fawley division would comprise Fawley, Blackfield & Langlely, Holbury & North Blackfield and Furzedown & Hardley wards. It would be 3% under-represented (having an electoral variance equal to the county average by 2006). Its proposed Fordingbridge division would comprise Downlands, Fordingbridge, Forest North West wards and Bramshaw parish and Copythorne North parish ward of Bramshaw, Copythorne North & Minstead ward. It would be 9% over-represented (12% by 2006). Its proposed Lymington division would comprise Buckland, Lymington Town and Pennington wards. It would be 5% over-represented, both now and in 2006. Its proposed Lyndhurst division would comprise Ashurst, Copythorne South & Netley Marsh, Bransgore & Burley and Lyndhurst wards and Minstead parish of Bramshaw, Copythorne North & Minstead ward. It would be 2% under-represented (having an electoral variance equal to the county average by 2006). Its proposed Marchwood & Totton South division would comprise Marchwood, Totton East and Totton South wards. It would be 10% under-represented (9% by 2006). Its proposed Milford & Hordle division would comprise Fernhill, Hordle and Milford wards. It would be 7% under-represented (6% by 2006). Its proposed New Milton division would comprise Barton, Becton and Milton wards. It would be 9% under-represented (7% by 2006). Its proposed Ringwood division would comprise Ringwood East & Sopley, Ringwood North and Ringwood South wards. It would be 6% over-represented (9% by 2006). Its proposed Totton division would comprise Totton Central, Totton North and Totton West wards. It would have an electoral variance equal to the county average (3% by 2006).

The County Council stated, 'The New Forest is best described as a wheel with bands of population around the periphery and with a rural centre based upon the villages of Lyndhurst and Brockenhurst. The proposals are particularly mindful of the special needs of the population bands comprising The Waterside, the coastal towns, the Avon Valley and the core New Forest area'. It stated that its Brockenhurst division 'is based upon the village of Brockenhurst and incorporates the parishes to the south and east. Bashley is the rural part of New Milton town which is similar to other parts of this proposed division'. It stated 'Dibden & Hythe [division] is based upon Hythe & Dibden Town Council boundaries and is a natural community. It forms the central element of the Waterside community'. Its Fawley division is based upon Fawley Parish Council and 'forms the southern element of the Waterside community'. Its proposed Fordingbridge division covers the north of the Avon Valley, with Fordingbridge town being its focal point. The County Council stated that its Lymington division 'remains as existing, focusing on the towns of Lymington and Pennington'. Its proposed Lyndhurst division 'includes a swathe of rural parishes stretching from the south west to the north east of the district which all have an affinity with Lyndhurst which is at its centre'. Its proposed Marchwood & Totton South 'joins the southern part of Totton town and the parish of Marchwood which are adjacent'. Its proposed Ringwood division comprises 'the town of Ringwood and the parish of Sopley which is a natural community along the Avon Valley'. It stated that its proposed Totton division 'includes Totton town centre and forms the north part of the Waterside community'.

Councillor Randall put forward proposals for the Totton and Marchwood areas of the district. This proposal was based on keeping Totton Town Council in a single division. As the submission states, the Totton Town Council does indeed merit a single county councillor. However, in order to incorporate this into the proposals for the remaining area, Councillor Randall's proposals transfer Marchwood parish into a division with Lyndhurst. However, in doing so, this proposal creates a detached division, with Marchwood having no direct links with the Lyndhurst area, since it is cut off by the proposed Brockenhurst division.

Fawley Parish Council made general comments about the review process. Hythe & Dibden Parish Council asked that the parish of Hythe & Dibden form a division. Totton & Eling Town Council expressed concerns about the County Council's proposals.

We have given careful consideration to the evidence received. We note that the County Council's proposals secure good levels of coterminosity and reasonable levels of electoral equality across the district, while in the most part reflecting local communities. We would concur with Councillor Randall's views that the division of Totton Town Council is not ideal and that the links between Totton South and Marchwood are not very clear. However, we must give consideration to the district as a whole and how individual divisions fit into the whole area. Although from a purely community argument we would support the creation of a single Totton division, unfortunately this is not this possible as Councillor Randall's alternative would lead to a detached Marchwood area. We do not consider that this would represent community identity and always seek to avoid such proposals. Therefore, some compromise is necessary and in this instance we would concur with the County Council's view that this involves dividing Totton between two divisions. We have examined the possibility of fitting a Totton division into the County Council's proposed scheme, but have been unable to do so. We would welcome local views and any locally developed schemes that can resolve the issues for this area. However, all schemes should consider the knock-on effect for the area as a whole.

Given the good levels of electoral equality, coterminosity and community argument, we propose adopting the County Council's proposals in their entirety. However, we do propose two division name changes to reflect community identity. Given that Totton forms the larger part of the proposed Marchwood & Totton South division, we propose renaming this Totton South & Marchwood division. In the interests of clarity, we also propose renaming the proposed Totton division as Totton North division.

The levels of electoral equality and coterminosity under our draft recommendations would be identical to the County Council's proposals. Our draft proposals are illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.