

ELECTORAL REVIEW OF HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has commenced a review of Hampshire County Council. This Council, together with other principal authorities in Hampshire, have been invited by the Commission to submit views on future County Council electoral division boundaries.
- 1.2 The review is being undertaken to deliver electoral equality for voters across the county. At present, some county councillors represent many more, or many fewer, electors than others. The review aims to correct those imbalances.
- 1.3 The last review of the County's electoral arrangements took place in 2003/04, with changes arising from the review being implemented at the 2005 elections.
- 1.4 There are 11 County Divisions covering New Forest District Council's area. The make-up of each of these is shown in Appendix 1. A map is at Appendix 4.

2. THE REVIEW

- 2.1 The review will recommend new electoral arrangements for the County Council. In particular it will propose:
 - (a) The total number of councillors elected to the council
 - (b) The number of electoral divisions
 - (c) The number of councillors representing each division
 - (d) Division boundaries
 - (e) Names of divisions
- 2.2 The LGBCE must, by law, balance the following three criteria:
 - To deliver electoral equality where each county councillor represents roughly the same number of electors as others across the county. (The LGBCE, in practice, works on the principle that electoral variances of more than 10% are not acceptable)
 - That the patterns of divisions should, as far as possible, reflect the interests and identities of local communities
 - That the electoral arrangements should provide for effective and convenient local government.
- 2.3 The formal 10 week consultation period started on 26 May and will close on 3 August 2015. Representations received during the consultation period will be considered by the Commission, which will then publish draft recommendations. There will then be a further period of consultation on the draft recommendations. Final recommendations are expected to be published in April 2016, with the new electoral arrangements coming into effect at the local elections in 2017.

- 2.4 Following initial discussions with Hampshire County Council, the Commission has indicated that it is minded to recommend that the size of the council should remain at 78. The LGBCE will hold further discussions with the County Council, after which the LGBCE will allocate a specific number of County Councillors to each district and draw up a pattern of divisions. Electoral divisions cannot cross the external boundaries of a district. Consultation on the divisions will then take place and there will therefore be a further opportunity for this Council to comment on detailed arrangements.
- 2.5 The County Council has established a cross-party Members' Working Group with one member drawn from each District, plus one member as the Chairman. Cllr Jacqui England (Independent member for the Lymington Division) is representing New Forest District on the Working Group. The Group is chaired by Cllr Ken Thornber, the member for the Brockenhurst Division. The Members' Working Group will make recommendations on the proposed pattern of electoral divisions to a Group Leaders' Working Group

3. FORECASTING CHANGES IN POPULATION/ELECTORATE AND PROJECTED MEMBER:ELECTOR RATIOS

- 3.1 The law requires that when making its recommendations, the LGBCE should take into account any changes to the number and distribution of local government electors likely to occur within five years following the end of the review. The review is due to be completed in 2016, and therefore electoral forecasts are required to 2021. Electoral figures at as 1 December 2014 and forecasts for 2021 are at Appendix 2 to this report. (This appendix also shows the over- or under-representation within each division. This is dealt with further later in this report.) Details relating to the other Divisions in Hampshire are included for information and comparative purposes.
- 3.2 The electorate forecasting methodology used to arrive at the 2021 electorates is shown at Appendix 3 to this report. The 2021 forecasts are crucial to the review. In considering electoral forecasts the LGBCE places weight on both the methodology used and consistency of application. It is therefore important that the same methodology is used consistently throughout the County Council's area.
- 3.3 The 2021 electorate estimates are based on the County Council's 2014-based Small Area Population Forecast ('SAPF'). The SAPF model is a proven forecasting model developed within the County Council's Research and Intelligence Team, and is consistently used throughout the County Council's area for various service planning roles, including school place planning.
- 3.4 The 2014 electorates shown in Appendix 2 for 2014 are the 1 December 2014 registered local government electorates for each District. **The LGBCE have made it clear that the figures presented to them in respect of current electorate figures must be those from the electoral registers of December 2014.** While this position is understandable, it is unfortunate that the review relies so heavily on register data as at 1 December 2014 as those registers were the first published following the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER). While every effort was made by this Council (and no doubt by other authorities) to ensure the accuracy of the registers at that date, the total electorate in New Forest District as at 1 December 2014 was 141,898, but the number as at 1 July 2015 has risen to 143,478. The SAPF forecast electorate total for 2021 is 142,910, 568 fewer than the current electorate. This can be explained by the anticipated increase in single-occupancy dwellings, and the restricted supply of new dwellings, but the questionable accuracy of the 1 December 2014 registers could be of concern.

- 3.5 The total 1 December 2014 electorate in the County was 1,020,276. Based on the present number of 78 members, this equates to an average electorate per member of 13,080. Electorate forecasts to 2021 indicate an overall projected increase in electorate to 1,079,999. Based on the current (and proposed) number of 78 members **this equates to an average electorate per member of 13,846**, a cumulative projected increase of 766 (5.9%) electors per member on the 2014 figures. Whilst the increase per district varies, an increase in electorate numbers is forecast in all eleven District Council areas.

4. EFFECT ON NFDC'S AREA

- 4.1 The projected 2021 electorate in NFDC's area is 142,910, which, based on the District's current 11 County members, would give an elector:member ratio of 1:12,992 across the District. This is 6.17% below the county average of 13,846. There would be significant variances in electoral equality in the divisions within the District, as shown below:

Division	Electorate 1 Dec 2014	Projected electorate 2021	Variance from County average (- = over- represented + = under- represented
Brockenhurst	11,400	11,302	-18.4%
Dibden & Hythe	14,640	14,371	+3.8%
Fordingbridge	11,417	11,300	-18.4%
Lymington	12,398	13,174	-4.9%
Lyndhurst	12,345	12,875	-7%
Milford & Hordle	13,774	13,877	+0.2%
New Milton	14,037	14,511	+4.8%
Ringwood	11,924	12,227	-11.7%
South Waterside	12,728	12,602	-9%
Totton North	13,012	12,890	-6.9%
Totton South & Marchwood	14,223	13,781	-0.5%

- 4.2 Variances in the remaining 10 Districts in Hampshire are shown in Appendix 3. In summary, it is estimated that the following districts will be under- or over-represented by the following in 2021:

District	Variance
Basingstoke & Deane	+1.02%
East Hampshire	-1.02%
Eastleigh	+8.2%
Fareham	-4%
Gosport	-6%
Hart	+6.9%
Havant	+1.69%
New Forest	-6.17%
Rushmoor	-2.07%
Test Valley	+1.98%
Winchester	+4.5%

- 4.3 A request has been made to Hampshire County Council by a member for Eastleigh to support his proposal to increase the number of Eastleigh county members from 7 to 8, with a concurrent reduction in New Forest members from 11 to 10. If that was done, the electoral equality in both Districts would be:

Eastleigh – 1:13,121 – 5.24% over-represented

New Forest – 1:14,291 – 3.21% under-represented

5. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

- 5.1 It is recommended that the Council should at this stage make strong representations to retain the current number of 11. Reasons are set out below:

- (a) While the main criterion of the LGBCE when undertaking reviews is to ensure electoral equality, it is considered that in large geographical areas such as the New Forest, equal weight should attach to community identity issues and to the size of a division. Very large divisions do not lend themselves to effective and convenient local government. In New Forest District there are two particularly large divisions – Fordingbridge (91.98 sq miles) and Brockenhurst (85.22 sq miles). These are 386% and 350% respectively larger than the average for the county. The LGBCE appears to recognise the need for exceptions to the electoral equality principle in that its guidance on “How to propose a pattern of wards” states “We will look at the geographic size of the ward or division and try to ensure that it is not so large that it would be difficult for a councillor to represent.”
- (b) Effective democratic representation of rural communities is more difficult and time-consuming than in urban areas. For example, the Fordingbridge Division comprises 13 whole parish councils and 1 ward of another. It is the second-largest Division (in geographical terms) in the county, while Brockenhurst is the fourth-largest. Despite the advances in and growth of electronic communication, Parish Councils, rightly, expect regular attendance by and feedback from their local councillors at their meetings. Attendance at parish council meetings in a large county division is extremely time-consuming for a single division representative, not just because of the time spent at meetings but also because of the travel time involved. This is a commitment not often replicated in urban areas where there are sometimes no parish councils, and if there are, they are few and travel time to them is minimal. It is also not easy to arrange regular and convenient face-to-face communication with electors through “surgeries”, because of the disparate nature of and distance between communities.
- (c) In order to achieve electoral equality, rural parishes are sometimes divided into wards, against the wishes of the parish council, so that they may be split between districts wards and/or county divisions. An example of this is the in the Fordingbridge Division where Copythorne Parish, comprising approximately 2,300 electors, is divided into wards with one ward, Copythorne North, in Fordingbridge Division and the other, Copythorne South, in the Lyndhurst Division.

(d) Other cases where communities are divided across count divisions are:

- **New Milton Town Council**, with its Bashley Ward in Brockenhurst Division; its Fernhill ward in Milford & Hordle Division; and the Becton, Barton and Milton wards in the New Milton Division
- **Hythe & Dibden**, with its Furzedown ward in the South Waterside Division, while the whole of the remainder of the parish is in the Dibden & Hythe Division
- **Totton & Eling**, with two wards of Totton & Eling being combined with Marchwood, to form the Totton South and Marchwood Division

None of these is easy to address because:

- Placing the Copythorne South ward within the Brockenhurst Division would split Ashurst & Colbury Parish from the rest of the Lyndhurst Division, a position that is unacceptable.
- The New Milton wards outside of the New Milton Division are too large to be accommodated within the New Milton Division, and together are too small, with a projected electorate of 6,080 in 2021, to form a second New Milton Division
- Likewise, the Totton & Eling Town area is too large to be accommodated within a single Division but the two wards (Totton East and Totton South, with projected electorates of 9,740) that are combined with Marchwood are too small to form a second Totton Division
- Hythe and Dibden Parish Council also too large to form a single division, and it has been necessary to include its Furzedown Ward (1,592 electors) in the South Waterside Division.

For these reasons it is suggested that no representations regarding these unsatisfactory positions be made.

- (e) The complexities arising from the existence of the New Forest National Park and division of decision-making in some areas further complicates “effective and convenient local government”. It places more onerous burdens on councillors representing areas partly or wholly within the National Park.
- (f) There is some uncertainty as to the accuracy of the forecast electorates in 2021. While the methodology used by Hampshire County Council for its Small Areas Population Forecasts (SAPFs) is highly regarded, the forecasts must, of necessity, rely largely on information regarding projected housing developments to arrive at probable changes in population and electorate numbers. To do this, HCC must rely on information on likely new housing supply, including types and phasing. New Forest District Council has an up to date adopted Local Plan which provides certainty over the nature and location of future housing delivery in the area. In contrast, Eastleigh has not been able to deliver the growth required in its area through an up to date local plan. The absence of a planned strategy to deliver development in Eastleigh will inevitably result in uncertainty surrounding the population forecasts relating to the Borough. Population forecasts which have been based on a planning strategy for housing delivery which has not been approved could result in those forecasts being over-optimistic. In the absence of a planned strategy there will be considerably less certainty over the delivery of housing, and therefore population, in Eastleigh Borough over the next few years.

(g) New Forest District Council has commenced a review of its Local Plan which will make provision for new development over the period 2016 to 2036. Indications are that an increase in housing provision in New Forest District will be required in order to meet the objectively assessed housing needs arising in the area. The Council will have to consider new development areas and housing allocations as part of this process. The Council considers that given this context of uncertainty over future development levels in its own district it would be premature to reduce the Council's representation at County level.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 Based on 2021 projected electorates, New Forest District Council's area has the highest level of over-representation within Hampshire County Council, with a projected member:elector ratio of 1:12,991, compared with a county average of 1:13,846 – an over-representation of 6.17%. It is estimated that two of the divisions, Fordingbridge and Brockenhurst, will be over-represented by 18.4% by 2021.
- 6.2 The LGBCE has, by law, to take the three following factors into account:
- To deliver electoral equality where each county councillor represents roughly the same number of electors as others across the county
 - That the patterns of divisions should, as far as possible, reflect the interests and identities of local communities
 - That the electoral arrangements should provide for effective and convenient local government
- 6.3 The LGBCE has indicated that it is minded to recommend that the total number of councillors elected to Hampshire County Council should remain at 78.
- 6.4 It is considered that, because of the large geographical nature of the district and the sparsely-populated nature of some of the Divisions, the more complicated democratic representation issues arising from the existence of the New Forest National Park, and other reasons set out in paragraphs 3 and 5, the County Council representation in the District should remain at 11 members. serve the District.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The review of the county boundaries was not anticipated and no financial provision has been made for it. However, resources should be confined to officer time and limited expenditure on the production of reports and maps, all of which should be contained within existing budgets.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL, EQUALITY & DIVERSITY AND CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are none.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 9.1 That strong representations be made to the LGBCE to retain the 11 county councillors for New Forest District Council's area, for the reasons set out in paragraphs 3 and 5 of this report.
- 9.2 That the LGBCE be advised that the Council would not wish to see further division of parishes for the purposes of achieving electoral equality as this mitigates against achieving effective and convenient local government.

Further information:

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Background Papers:

Published documents