

## **ELECTORAL REVIEW OF NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL – DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS – CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

### **1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Cabinet recommends to Full Council that:-

- (a) the attached “Electoral Review – LGBCE Draft Recommendations – Consultation Response” (Appendix 1) be approved and submitted to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England as the Council’s official response to the LGBCE consultation; and
- (b) authority be delegated to the Executive Head of Governance and Housing, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to make further editing changes, corrections and updates to the document prior to submission.

### **2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND DETAIL**

- 2.1 As part of the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBCE) consultation on warding patterns for the Electoral Review of the District Council, the Council submitted a District wide pattern of proposed wards, agreed at the Council meeting on 24 February 2020. The proposal was based on a 49 councillor scheme, to ensure that all proposed wards had no greater than +/-10% variance from perfect electoral equality.
- 2.2 Including the Council’s District wide scheme, the LGBCE received a total of 51 consultation responses, including a number of localised responses from councillors, Town and Parish Councils, local residents and other interested parties. The District Council’s proposal was the only District wide scheme.
- 2.3 The LGBCE contacted the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive in April 2020 to confirm that, in light of the national situation regarding COVID-19, the LGBCE had decided to pause consultations temporarily, although internal preparations towards the publication of draft recommendations would continue. At its meeting in May 2020, the LGBCE considered all of the consultation responses including the Council’s District wide scheme and agreed draft recommendations.
- 2.4 On 30 June 2020, the LGBCE published the draft recommendations and launched the next stage of a formal public consultation, seeking views on these draft recommendations. This consultation ends on 7 September 2020. To ensure that the Council’s views are adequately represented when the LGBCE meets to develop the final scheme, the Council is invited to submit a formal response.
- 2.5 The Council should continue to have regard to the three statutory criteria applied by the LGBCE in responding to the draft recommendations:-
  - Electoral Equality
  - Community Interests and Identities
  - Effective and Convenient Local Government

### **3. LGBCE DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 The LGBCE draft recommendations are summarised as follows:-

- New Forest District should be represented by 48 councillors, 12 fewer than there are now.
- New Forest District should have 25 wards, nine fewer than there are now, comprising:-
  - Four three-councillor wards.
  - 15 two-councillor wards.
  - Six one-councillor wards.
- The boundaries of all wards should change.

3.2 The LGBCE examined the Council's proposals as part of the consultation on warding patterns and noted that it generally enables strong boundaries and secures good levels of electoral equality. However, Boldre Parish Council raised concerns about the proposals to transfer part of Boldre Parish to a ward within Lymington town, arguing that this did not reflect community identity. The Parish Council put forward alternative proposals for this area, reflective of an overall Council Size of 48. The LGBCE considered that the amendment provided a stronger warding pattern in this particular area whilst still facilitating good electoral equality across the rest of the District.

3.3 The tables and maps on pages 9-24 of the LGBCE report (see background papers) detail the draft recommendations for each area of the New Forest and how the proposed arrangements reflect the statutory criteria.

### **3. PROGRESS TO DATE**

3.1 On receipt of the notification from the LGBCE that it intended to launch its consultation on the draft recommendations, the Electoral Review of the District Council Task and Finish Group met to review the draft recommendations and agree an approach to consulting all councillors.

3.2 The Task and Finish Group agreed to issue a consultation questionnaire to all councillors, aligned to the "zones", representing the five clearly identifiable areas within the District that formed the basis of both the Council's proposals and the LGBCE draft recommendations, using the Town and Parish Councils as building blocks.

3.4 A total of 23 responses to the questionnaire were received. Of those responses 16 were wholly supportive of the draft ward boundaries for their local area, with some suggested amendments to the names of wards. A number of responses were received from the South East zone, proposing alternative warding patterns and names for the Hythe and Dibden Parish area.

3.5 The Electoral Review of the District Council Task and Finish Group met on 19 August 2020 to consider the outcome of the questionnaire consultation with councillors and invited local ward councillors to attend where proposed amendments had been made. The Group agreed to incorporate a number of proposed changes to ward names as part of the attached consultation response.

3.6 There are contrary views from local councillors in the Lymington and Pennington, Hythe and Dibden and Totton South areas on ward boundaries. Local councillors for Lymington and Pennington and Hythe and Dibden continue to consider alternative proposals, which if brought forward for consideration by the Council, would not have an impact on the viability of the overall District scheme. It is acknowledged that any alternative proposals in Totton South would have a significant impact on the viability of the overall District scheme.

#### **4. CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

- 4.1 For each of the proposed wards in the LGBCE draft recommendations, a response has been formulated by the Task and Finish Group, and where appropriate, alternative proposals outlined. Appendix 1 outlines these in detail as the Council's proposed response to the consultation.
- 4.2 Whilst there are alternative proposals in respect of the names of certain wards, it is not currently proposed that the ward boundaries are amended from the LGBCE draft recommendations as they largely enable strong boundaries and enhance Town and Parish identities.

#### **5. NEXT STEPS**

- 5.1 It is anticipated that the LGBCE will publish final recommendations on 1 December 2020, after which the necessary parliamentary orders will be laid and then made from late 2020 into 2021. The new electoral arrangements will be implemented from the May 2023 quadrennial district elections.

#### **6. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 6.1 The LGBCE will finalise recommendations for the New Forest, regardless of the responses made by the deadline. Therefore, whilst the Council could choose not to submit a response, it would not be in the Council's interest, as the final recommendations could be made without regard to the Council's views on the current draft recommendations.
- 6.2 Whilst the warding pattern in the draft recommendations differs from the Council's proposals in February 2020, the Task and Finish Group welcomes the LGBCE decision to relax the +/-10% tolerance for electoral equality in the Bransgore, Burley and Sopley ward to allow for a warding pattern that supports a Council Size of 48 and removes the proposal to split the parish of Boldre which enhances the overriding ambition of the Council to preserve and enhance the Town and Parish arrangements as part of the Electoral Review.
- 6.3 The Cabinet and Council may need to consider and determine alternative proposals for both the Lymington and Pennington area and the Hythe and Dibden area, should they come forward from local councillors, as identified at paragraph 3.6 of this report.

#### **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

#### **8. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 There are none directly arising from this report.

#### **9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 There are none directly arising from this report.

#### **10. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 A successful Electoral Review of the District Council will bring about more representative democracy in the New Forest, as electoral inequality would have been addressed as far as possible as part of the review. Currently, six wards have greater

than +/- 10% of the average with one ward greater than +/- 20%. Just one ward within the LGBCE draft recommendations has a ratio greater than +/- 10%, which is Bransgore, Burley and Sopley at -11%. The Task and Finish Group welcome the avoidance of splitting a further Town or Parish to make the minor adjustment that would be required to bring all wards within +/- 10%.

## **11. PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS**

11.1 I would like to thank the Members of the Task and Finish Group, alongside all Members of the Council for their contribution to the process. Whilst the proposals do not please everybody, this appears to be a sound consultation response. We now await the final recommendations in December 2020.

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Electoral Review – LGBCE Draft Recommendations – Consultation Response

#### **For further information contact:**

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#### **Background Papers:**

[Cabinet report – 5 June 2019](#)  
[Cabinet report – 2 October 2019](#)  
[Cabinet report – 19 February 2020](#)  
[NFDC webpage](#)  
[LGBCE webpage](#)  
Task and Finish Group documents

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