

ELECTORAL REVIEW OF HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Local Government Boundary Committee for England (LGBCE) is undertaking an electoral review of Hampshire County Council. This Council, together with others in Hampshire, was consulted on the review, and the Council agreed initial views at its meeting on 13 July 2015. A copy of the Council's response to the LGBCE is attached at Appendix 1.
- 1.2 The LGBCE published its draft recommendations on 17 November 2015. These are available to view at http://www.lgbce.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/26883/Hampshire-draft-recommendations-2015-11-17-FINAL.pdf
The Committee is asked to give careful consideration to the proposals and to formulate the Council's response. Members will recall that, because of the short timescales applying, the Council has delegated power to the Committee to agree the Council's response.
- 1.3 All members of the Council and all Hampshire County Councillors representing Divisions within New Forest District have been invited to attend the meeting and to speak.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Committee is reminded that by law the LGBCE must follow three statutory criteria (summarised) when undertaking electoral reviews:
- Electoral equality (that is, the number of electors represented by each Councillor must, as nearly as is possible, be the same)
 - Community interests/identities with readily identifiable boundaries
 - Effective and convenient local government
- 2.2 No priority is placed on any one of these statutory criteria in either the law or in the Commission's guidance.
- 2.3 The LGBCE uses the estimated number of electors in an area five years after the date of their final recommendations as the basis for their reviews. Therefore, the recommendations for Hampshire are based on estimated 2021 electorates. The LGBCE should also recommend strong, clearly identifiable boundaries for each division.
- 2.4 The LGBCE points out that, in reality, the achievement of absolute electoral fairness is unlikely to be attainable and there must be a degree of flexibility. However, their approach is to keep variances in the number of electors each councillor represents to a minimum. It regards 10% as being an acceptable variance.

3. LGBCE'S RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 The LGBCE's detailed proposals for New Forest District are at Appendix 2 to this report. A map showing the recommendations is at Appendix 3.

3.2 It will be seen that the LGBCE is recommending that the total number of county councillors for Hampshire remains at 78, but that the number representing New Forest District be reduced from 11 to 10. Eastleigh Borough Council is to be allocated 8 County Councillors in place of the current 7. This has been done in order to achieve greater electoral equality across Hampshire. The proposed reduction in the number of Councillors in New Forest District involves the substantial redrawing of the Division boundaries in the district.

3.3 A reduction in the number of Councillors in the District from 11 to 10 would mean that the average number of electors represented by each County Councillor in the New Forest would be 14,291 (3.2% above the average for the County), compared with:

- average across the County - 1:13,846
- Eastleigh (which has smaller geographical divisions) - 1:13,121 (5.2% below the County average)
- If the number representing the District remained at 11 – 1:12,991 (6.1% below the County average)

3.4 In making its recommendations it appears that the LGBCE has given overriding priority to achieving electoral equality, which has resulted in recommendations that would split local communities in the District and would make local government less effective and convenient. These consequences do not accord with two of the three statutory criteria the LGBCE is required to follow.

3.5 Detailed Observations

3.5.1 It is significant that the LGBCE's recommendations mean that the proposed Lyndhurst & Fordingbridge Division would be the largest in geographical terms in the County, and would contain 15 whole and 1 part parishes. The proposed Brockenhurst Division would be the third-largest in the County in geographical terms, with 7 whole parishes and parts of 3 further parishes.

3.5.2 Some notable further consequences arising from the LGBCE's recommendations are:

- Copythorne Parish continues to be divided between two electoral divisions, with Copythorne North Ward of the Parish Council being in an amended Totton North Division, and the Copythorne South Parish Ward being in the proposed Lyndhurst & Fordingbridge Division;
- Netley Marsh Parish is divided between two different Divisions – Totton North; and Brockenhurst (the Parish is currently wholly within the Lyndhurst Division);
- A small area of Bransgore, but comprising approximately 1,522 electors (about 43% of the Bransgore electorate), is included in the proposed Ringwood Division, with the remainder of Bransgore in the revised Brockenhurst Division (Bransgore is currently wholly within the Lyndhurst Division).

3.5.3 Whilst it has been necessary in the past to divide parishes, especially the larger parishes with large electorates, between county divisions in order to achieve electoral equality, it is not desirable. Currently the following parishes in the District are divided across more than one county division:

- Copythorne (north ward in Fordingbridge Division, south ward in Lyndhurst Division)
- Totton (Totton East and Totton South Wards in Totton South & Marchwood Division; Totton Central; Totton North and Totton West wards in Totton North Division)
- Hythe and Dibden (Furzedown ward in South Waterside Division; remainder in Dibden & Hythe Division)
- New Milton (Barton, Becton and Milton wards in New Milton Division; Fernhill ward in Milford & Hordle Division; and Bashley Ward in Brockenhurst Division)

3.5.4 The LGBCE's proposals continue to divide the above parishes (although, in the case of Copythorne, in a different way), while dividing the following further parishes:

- Netley Marsh (North Ward in Totton North Division; South Ward in Brockenhurst Division)
- Bransgore (part in Ringwood and part in Brockenhurst Divisions). This will involve creating a separate polling district and a separate parish ward. Bransgore Parish Council elects ten councillors. The LGBCE intends to recommend that the new parish ward be represented by four parish councillors, and the remainder of the parish by six parish councillors. The projected electorate total by 2021 for Bransgore is 3,533, while the estimated electorate in the area proposed to be included in Ringwood Division is 1,522, 43% of the total. In the circumstances a ward returning four councillors would be appropriate.

3.6 HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S CONSIDERATION

3.6.1 Hampshire County Council established a Working Group to oversee the review and to make detailed recommendations to the Group Leaders and then to the County Council. The County Council will be considering recommendations on 7 January 2016 – the report is available to view at http://www3.hants.gov.uk/councilmeetings/advsearchmeetings/meetingsitemdocuments.htm?sta=&pref=Y&item_ID=7200&tab=2&co=&confidential=

The County Council's decisions will be reported to the Committee on 8 January, but the following are the main recommendations which are likely to have a bearing on the Committee's consideration of the issue:

- That representations be made to the LGBCE for the number of county councillors in Hampshire to be increased to 79 to enable the continued allocation of 11 Councillors to New Forest District; or, if this is not agreed –
- the revised pattern of divisions set out in the map at Appendix 4, with their recommendations at Appendix 5.

3.6.2 The report to the County Council once again stresses the land mass of the New Forest and the fact that the inner New Forest has a widely dispersed population that leads to the largest and the third-largest Divisions across the County, with many

Parish Councils within some Divisions. These require the attendance of their County Councillor at their meetings, if good local governance is to be achieved.

3.6.3 The County Council's draft recommendations differ from the LGBCE's recommendations in the following respects:

- The proposed **Lyndhurst and Fordingbridge Division** excludes the parishes of Ellingham, Harbridge & Ibsley and Hyde, moving them to the **Ringwood Division**, but includes the Copythorne North Ward of Copythorne Parish Council, removing it from the **Totton North Division**
- The proposed **Totton North Division** includes Netley Marsh South Ward, removing it from the **Brockenhurst Division**
- The proposed **South Waterside Division** includes Exbury & Lepe Parish, removing it from the **Brockenhurst Division**
- The proposed **Brockenhurst Division** - excludes Netley Marsh South Ward, Exbury & Lepe Parish, and part of the Bashley Ward of New Milton Town Council; and includes the whole of Bransgore Parish
- The **Milford and Hordle Division** includes part of the Bashley Ward of New Milton Town Council
- The proposed **Ringwood Division** includes Ellingham, Harbridge & Ibsley and Hyde Parishes but excludes part of Bransgore Parish.

4. COMMENTS ON RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COUNTY COUNCIL

- 4.1 The recommendations to be considered by the County Council have the advantage that the Copythorne, Netley Marsh and Bransgore Parishes would be wholly contained within single Divisions. There is, however, the disadvantage of splitting the Bashley ward of New Milton Town Council between two County Divisions (Milford & Hordle and Brockenhurst). It would necessitate creating a further ward of New Milton Town Council. The Town and the District Council wards would then no longer be co-terminous. However, under the proposals, New Milton would continue to be divided across three different County Divisions, as at present.
- 4.2 There is also some concern at placing the Ellingham, Harbridge & Ibsley and Hyde Parishes within the Ringwood Division. Anecdotally, these parishes, and particularly Hyde, have more community of interest with Fordingbridge than with Ringwood.
- 4.3 While the reasons for recommending that the Exbury & Lepe Parish be moved from the existing Brockenhurst Division to the South Waterside Division are understood, it is considered that Exbury and Lepe has little community of interest with the larger parishes of Fawley and Hythe & Dibden that comprise the South Waterside Division. The projected electorate in Exbury & Lepe in 2021 is only 136, and this number does not make a significant difference to the projected electorates in either County Division.

5. POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 To overcome some of the disadvantages set out in paragraph 4, the Committee might wish to consider the following alternatives (using the recommendations to HCC as the base):

- Hyde Parish remaining in the Lyndhurst & Fordingbridge Division;
- Burley Parish moving to the Ringwood Division
- The whole of Bashley ward of NMTC remaining in the Brockenhurst Division;
- Exbury & Lepe Parish remaining in the Brockenhurst Division.

These are shown on the map at Appendix 6. The composition of the Divisions is shown in Appendix 7.

- 5.2 These suggested changes would have the effect of increasing the projected 2021 electorate in Brockenhurst to 15,100, which would then be the largest Division in the New Forest in electorate terms. However the electorate would be 9% above the county average of 13,846, within the tolerance of 10% generally acceptable to the LGBCE.

6. PROPOSED DIVISION NAMES

- 6.1 With the likely change in the composition of the County Divisions, different names for some of the Divisions might be appropriate. The following proposals are put forward:

LGBCE Proposal	Suggested alternative
Lyndhurst & Fordingbridge	North Forest
Brockenhurst	Mid-Forest
Ringwood	West Forest

- 6.2 It is noted that Hampshire County Council is also recommending the following change:

LGBCE Proposal	HCC recommendation
Milford & Hordle	Milford, Hordle and Fernhill

7. CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 It is disappointing that the LGBCE is recommending that the number of County Councillors representing New Forest District be reduced to 10. The District is the largest geographically in Hampshire and the LGBCE's recommendations for the pattern of Divisions will mean that the proposed Lyndhurst and Fordingbridge Division will be the largest in the County, and the Brockenhurst Division the third-largest. The size of the Divisions and the number of parishes within each makes effective representation difficult. The fact that the LGBCE appears to have given inordinate weight to electoral equality, at the expense of the other two statutory criteria of community of identity and effective and convenient local government, has led to an increase in the number of parishes divided across more than one County Division. This is contrary to the principle of achieving effective and convenient local government. It will increase the workloads of most county councillors in the District, because many will represent electorates in more parishes than previously, and will mean that they will be attending more parish council meetings than at present.

- 7.2 The proposals being put forward for consideration by the County Council reduce the number of parishes to be divided across County Divisions. There are, however concerns about the proposals
- for Ellingham, Harbridge & Ibsley and Hyde parishes to be part of the Ringwood Division.
 - for the division of the Bashley ward of New Milton Town Council;
 - to include Exbury & Lepe within the South Waterside Division.
- 7.3 Further proposals that address the issues in paragraph 7.2 are made for members' consideration.

8. FINANCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Enlarging the County Divisions and dividing parishes across different divisions will mean more and longer journeys by County Councillors to attend Parish Council meetings or to attend to other Parish issues, with resulting increased travel distances and higher travel claims by County Councillors.

9. CRIME & DISORDER AND EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are none.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 That the Committee considers whether it wishes to support the proposal to make representations to the LGBCE that the number of County Councillors for Hampshire be increased to 79, and that an extra County Councillor be allocated to New Forest District;
- 10.2 That the Committee considers and agrees the Council's response to the LGBCE's recommendations for the electoral review of Hampshire County Council in the light of the proposals being submitted to that Council on 7 January 2016, and possible alternatives set out in paragraph 5;:
- 10.3 That the Committee considers names for the proposed Divisions as set out in paragraph 6.

Further information:

Rosemary Rutins
Democratic Services Manager
Tel: (023) 8028 5588
e-mail: rosemary.rutins@nfdc.gov.uk

Background Papers:

Published documents