

REPORT TO Executive and Council

Date of Meeting: 14 July 2015 & 28 July 2015

Report of: Corporate Manager, Democratic & Civic Support, Electoral Registration and Returning Officer

Title: ELECTORAL REVIEW OF EXETER

Is this a Key Decision?

Yes

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

1.1 This report details the Council's response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE)'s Draft Recommendations on new electoral arrangements for the City.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 That it be recommended to Council that the details in this report form the Council's official submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, in response to its current consultation on its draft recommendations for electoral review of Exeter.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

3.1 Members will be aware that Council on 20th January 2015 resolved that it felt that to effectively discharge its roles and responsibilities, the number of Councillors required for the City Council should be 39 and that it should continue with the cycle of elections by thirds.

3.2 This decision was conveyed to the LGBCE, which then undertook a public consultation exercise as to the ward boundaries in the City based on the above principles.

3.3 This matter was considered by the Executive on 17 March 2015, which recommended to Council on 25th March 2015 proposed wards for the City (14 in number being 12 three member wards, 1 two member ward and 1 one member ward), together with proposed boundaries and names. These were formally submitted to the LGBCE as the Council's submission.

3.4 In early June 2015, the LGBCE published its draft recommendations based on the comments received during the initial consultation exercise, and it is on these recommendations that the Executive is asked to prepare the Council's formal response, which will then be considered by Council on 28th July so as to meet the deadline of 10th August.

4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources.

4.1 There are no resource implications arising from this report.

4.2 Members are however reminded that additional temporary staffing has been employed within the Elections team to primarily support this process. All out elections in 2016

(which are a consequence of the decision to continue the practice of elections by thirds) will incur the Council in additional costs to those previously anticipated and budgeted for. These will be addressed as and when they occur.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

5.1 The need for an additional budget to enable the elections to take place in 2016 will be added to the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan as an unavoidable spending pressure. The funds will be drawn from the General Fund Working Balance.

6. What are the legal aspects?

6.1 Under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, the electoral arrangements for every principal authority in England must be reviewed from time to time.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

7.1 This report raises no issues for the Monitoring Officer.

8. Report details:

8.1 As part of a consultation exercise being undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) following the publication of its draft recommendations into future electoral arrangements in Exeter, the Council is asked to consider any response it may wish to make to these draft recommendations.

8.2 In consideration of this, the Council will need to consider the LGBCE's three criteria, namely:-

- To deliver electoral equality where each councillor represents roughly the same number of electors as others across the city (based on a projected electorate in 2020);
- That the pattern of wards should, as far as possible, reflect the interests and identities of local communities; and
- That the electoral arrangements should provide for effective and convenient local government.

8.3 It should be noted that the consultation is open to any interested person or organisations, and that each response (including the Council's) is given equal weighting by the LGBCE.

8.4 As has previously been the case, a cross party Electoral Review Working Group has been established to draw up a suggested response on the draft recommendations.

8.5 During the discussions, the Working Group considered the following issues:-

- The importance of local communities across the City and the need to ensure that as far as practicably possible, their identity be retained in any new electoral wards;
- The importance of the St James Neighbourhood Forum and the need to ensure that it be retained in one ward rather than being split over a number;
- A need to minimise any confusion to the electors with unnecessary changes;
- Comments received during a public exhibition held on 26th and 27th June (which attracted 50 visitors). In general, visitors wanted to see the proposals in more detail

and once they were explained to them, the majority were happy with what was being proposed. The exception to this was from those in the current St James ward who wanted the current situation to continue.

- 8.6 It is pleasing to note that 6 of the LGBCE's proposed wards match exactly those submitted by the Council as part of the initial consultation stage, with only a few small amendments to several other of the Council's proposals.
- 8.7 However, there were two notable and significant differences in the LGBCE's draft recommendations.
- 8.8 The first refers to the Duryard and St James areas of the City. Here, the Council had recommended that due to the importance of the St James Neighbourhood Forum, the current St James ward area (which shares its boundary with that of the neighbourhood forum) should continue to be a separate ward in the City, served by two Members. It also felt that due to the unique nature within the City of the Duryard area, that too should remain virtually as its current format, and be represented by just one Member. However, in its draft recommendations, the LGBCE says it has taken these views into account, together with others of a similar nature from other respondees, but decided that it could not support this, and has therefore recommended that these two areas be combined into one, three Member ward.
- 8.9 The Electoral Review Working Group has considered this matter in some detail, and feels that it wishes to recommend the continuation of the Council's original position that these two areas be separately represented.
- 8.10 The second major area of difference in the LGBCE's draft recommendations surrounds the Priory and Topsham wards, which, under the Council's initial submissions were left unchanged from those currently the position. The LGBCE's draft recommendations, however, made the Bridge Road and Rydon Lane the definitive boundary between the two wards, with the area north of Bridge Road being in the Priory ward, and the area south being in the Topsham ward.
- 8.11 Whilst accepting that Bridge Road and Rydon Lane make an obvious and strong boundary, the Electoral Review Working Group continues with the view that these two areas be left unaltered as they better reflect the local communities in both areas than that recommended by the LGBCE.
- 8.12 There are several other more minor proposed amendments as detailed in the appendix to this report.
- 8.13 Once the Council has submitted its proposals, these will be taken into account alongside all others received, with the LGBCE then publishing its final recommendations as to proposed ward boundaries, in September in readiness for all out elections in May 2016.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

- 9.1 The suggestions put forward here, will ensure that the Council maintains its ability to deliver its services efficiently and effectively without a detrimental impact on Members' perspective and workloads.

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

10.1 If the Council does not comment on the draft recommendations as to ward boundaries (as proposed), the LGBCE will be unable to take the Council's views into account, when drawing up its final recommendations. The Council may, therefore, end up having to work within something which may not best reflect the way in which the Council wishes to work. It is therefore in the Council's best interests to make a submission which, in its opinion, best reflects its own requirements.

11. What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity; health and wellbeing; safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, community safety and the environment?

11.1 The proposed decision will ensure that the Council maintains its ability to deliver its services effectively and efficiently without a detrimental impact on members' perspective and workloads, ensuring that elected councillors continue to best represent their local area and its interests, whilst bearing in mind the community's needs

12. Are there any other options?

12.1 None that are considered appropriate or favourable to the Council and its interests.

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

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