

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

From: Chief Executive	Report Number: S47
To: Council	Date of meeting: 26 July 2016

ELECTORAL REVIEW FOR BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) will be carrying out an intervention Electoral Review of Mid Suffolk District Council, which will seek to deliver electoral equality for voters in local government elections. The aim of the review will be to recommend ward boundaries which mean that each Councillor represents approximately the same number of electors.
- 1.2 For Babergh District Council there is currently some degree of electoral inequality across the area, at present some Councillors represent more electors than other elected members elsewhere in the district. This is likely to be exacerbated by future growth projections for the area and will lead to a future review.
- 1.3 The report provides an officer perspective on the rationale for and opportunities offered by carrying out an Electoral Review alongside Mid Suffolk District Council at this time, and a summary of the key stages of the electoral review along with an indicative timetable (Appendix 1).
- 1.4 At the Council meeting on 26 July 2016 the Local Government Boundary Commission for England will provide a detailed explanation of the context for an Electoral Review and the statutory process undertaken including the role of Councillors. There will also be the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification on key aspects of the review.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That Council considers a request to The Local Government Boundary Commission for England to carry out an Electoral Review for Babergh District Council alongside Mid Suffolk District Council.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 These are no direct costs to the Council in relation to the work of LGBCE in carrying out this review, as all Electoral Reviews and the work of the LGBCE is funded through the Consolidated Fund. At this stage it is envisaged that the project can be resourced by the Council without additional cost, however this may depend on the nature of data requirements and level of scenario planning required.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 The LGBCE will conduct the review working to the relevant provisions of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

5. Risk Management

- 5.1 This report is closely linked with a number of the Council's Significant Business Risks. Key risks are set out below:

Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Measures
Babergh Communities are not engaged with the review	Unlikely	Bad	Developing an effective engagement and consultation programme alongside the review process
The review does not deliver Electoral Equality or an effective governance model for the Council	Unlikely	Bad	The LGBCE are very experienced in carrying out a very robust review process to deliver the outcomes of electoral equality and effective governance models for Councils
Councillors are not provided with timely information and opportunities to contribute to the process	Unlikely	Bad	Developing an effective Communications and Engagement plan to ensure Councillors are provided with timely updates on all aspects of the review and have the opportunities to engage in developing the Councils responses to the LGBCE

6. Consultations

- 6.1 With Council Leaders and Deputy Leaders for Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

7. Equality Analysis

- 7.1 An equality analysis has not been completed because there is no action to be taken on service delivery as a result of this report.

8. Shared Service / Partnership Implications

- 8.1 Both authorities continue to work closely together with particular attention given to effective governance and robust decision making processes. It is recommended that the reviews are carried out separately for each sovereign Council however in tandem recognising the unique nature of the shared services model.

9. Links to Joint Strategic Plan

- 9.1 Ensuring that the Councils make best use of their resources is what underpins the ability to achieve the priorities set out in the Joint Strategic Plan. This review will aim to align the Officer and Councillor resources to achieve the best outcomes for our communities.

10. Key Information

Why carry out an Electoral Review?

- 10.1 Carrying out an Electoral Review at this time will allow the Council to analyse the discharge of its functions at this time of significant change for local government. The added value of LGBCE as “critical friend” in this process will ensure an objective assessment of the issues and an outcome grounded in our communities.
- 10.2 Mid Suffolk District Council are required through an intervention to carry out an Electoral Review as the level of electoral inequality in some areas has triggered the review process. The unique nature of the shared service arrangement with Mid Suffolk including a shared workforce and aligned governance arrangements means that not having a review could impact on the current equilibrium within the overall relationship.
- 10.3 As both Councils last reviewed the size and shape of the Council in 2001, it is likely that the Babergh review will follow in the future as part of the LGBCE periodic review programme. However taking the opportunity at this time allows Babergh control the timing of the review.
- 10.4 The review will require both officer and Councillor time and resource commitment in carrying out the review and providing information and data for the LGBCE. However the added value of the review process will inform the work of the Council and help to further align resources to support the achievement of Council priorities.

Oversight of the Electoral Review process

- 10.5 It is proposed that the Strengthening Governance Group be tasked with providing regular oversight of the Electoral Review process as the group consists of Group Leaders and Scrutiny Committee members .The Current Membership of this group is as follows, Councillors:
- Jennie Jenkins
 - Simon Barrett
 - Sue Carpendale
 - Clive Arthey
 - Margaret Maybury

Electoral Reviews

- 10.6 Babergh District Council last carried out an Electoral Review in June 2001. Since that time the pattern of settlement development and population growth has changed the overall electoral equality across the district.
- 10.7 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) was established by Parliament with the objective of providing electoral arrangements for English principal local authorities that are fair and deliver electoral equality of votes.
- 10.8 An Electoral Review is a review of the electoral arrangements for principal local Councils (in this case District Councils). The review will consider the number of Councillors along with the names, number and boundaries of wards and the number of Councillors to be elected to each ward.

Electoral Review procedure

- 10.9 The Electoral review procedure undertaken by LGBCE is based on adherence to certain rules contained in primary legislation and the Commissions guidance and procedures based on experience in conducting reviews over of significant time.
- 10.10 The review procedure for requested and intervention reviews is very similar consisting a range of statutory steps culminating in the Commission drafting a statutory instrument which will implement the new electoral arrangements which will then be used as the basis for future Council elections.
- 10.11 In determining Council size the LGBCE will be considering the key elements of how the Council functions, including the nature of our interaction with communities and the role of the local Councillor as an advocate and representative for the area. The developing community leadership role will also be a significant factor along with the nature of the Councils governance architecture and decision making processes.
- 10.12 The key stages of the Electoral Review process are outlined below with an indicative timetable for the review at Appendix 1:

Stages for electoral reviews

Preliminary period –

Initial informal dialogue between the Council and the Commission, gathering information, initial meetings with key stakeholders. Council develops a proposed model for Council size based on range of factors and community needs, followed by submission to the Commission.

Council size decision-

Commission analysis of submissions and “minded” decision on Council size.

Formal review process

Consultation on future warding arrangements-

Commission publishes initial conclusions on Council size, initial invitation to the Council to submit warding proposals.

Development of draft recommendations-

Commission determines draft recommendations.

Consultation on draft recommendations –

Public consultation on draft recommendations.

Further consultation (if required)-

Usually only following significant changes to the recommendations.

Development of final recommendations-

Analysis of representations and development and publication of final recommendation.

Evidence based approach

10.13 A key element of the approach that the LGBCE will take in undertaking the Electoral Review is that that any recommendations will be based on a robust analysis of information and intelligence. The Council will provide the Commission with a range of information on the current and projected electorate for each ward, parish and polling district (projections through to 2022).

10.14 In considering the size of the Council the Commission will review information on Council governance and scrutiny arrangements and the representational role of Councillors. However the key focus will be a fundamental review of the role of the Councillor in a 21st century Council which may or may not result in reduction of number of Councillors.

10.15 The legislation provides rules on the nature of and format for consultation on the overall process and individual elements of the review including the draft recommendations. Parish and Town Councillors are seen as valuable consultees in the process and their active involvement is encouraged.

11. Appendices

Title	Location
APPENDIX A - Indicative Timetable for the Electoral Review	Attached

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