

From: Graham Gibbens, Chairman of the Electoral and Boundary Review Committee

Geoff Wild, Director of Governance & Law

To: Electoral and Boundary Review Committee – 23 September 2013

Subject: **Electoral Review of Kent County Council's Area**

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report updates the Committee on the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's Electoral Review of Kent County Council's area.

Introduction

1. (1) As reported at the July meeting of this Committee, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has advised that because of perceived "electoral imbalances", KCC has been identified as requiring a Further Electoral Review of its electoral arrangements during 2014-15.

(2) The last electoral review of KCC took place in 2003/04 with the final recommendations being published on 27 April 2004.

Process

(3) In conducting its latest review, the LGBCE must adhere to certain rules contained within the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. Accordingly, the LGBCE can make recommendations for the following aspects of local authority electoral arrangements:

- (a) the total number of members to be elected to the council (known as 'council size');
- (b) the number and boundaries of divisions for the purposes of the election of councillors;
- (c) the number of councillors to be elected for each division; and
- (d) the name of any division

(4) In making recommendations, the LGBCE must have regard to:

- (a) the need to secure equality of representation;
- (b) the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
- (c) the need to secure effective and convenient local government.

(5) In reviewing two-tier local government areas, the LGBCE must have regard for the boundaries of district or borough wards.

(6) The LGBCE will require details of current electoral arrangements and details of the number of people registered to vote in KCC's area to provide them with the electorate from the 1st of the month during which the review formally starts. The electoral registers will also allow the LGBCE to verify electoral figures and consider the impact of warding proposals which cross polling district boundaries. The LGBCE should take into account any changes to the number and distribution of electors that is likely to take place within the five years following the end of a review.

(7) The LGBCE takes a view of the right council size for an authority by considering the following three areas:

- (a) The governance arrangements of the council, how it takes decisions across the broad range of its responsibility, and whether there are any planned changes to those arrangements;
- (b) The council's scrutiny functions relating to its own decision-making and the council's responsibilities to outside bodies, and whether any changes to them are being considered; and
- (c) The representation role of councillors in the local communities and how they engage with people, conduct casework and represent the council on local partner organisations.

(8) At the time of the May 2013 elections, the average number of electors per councillor was 13,000: the highest being 17,860 in Romney Marsh and the lowest 9,709 in Dartford East. **Appendix 1** sets out the electorate figures for the Council's whole area.

(9) The LGBCE's criteria for initiating a review are as follows:

- (a) more than 30% of a council's divisions have an electoral imbalance of more than 10% from the average ratio for that authority; (applies to Kent) and/or
- (b) one or more wards/divisions with an electoral imbalance of more than 30%; (applies to Kent) and
- (c) the imbalance is unlikely to be corrected by foreseeable changes to the electorate within a reasonable period.

(10) 36% of KCC's divisions (27 divisions) have an electoral imbalance of more than 10% from the average ratio for the authority.

(11) One division has an electoral imbalance of more than 30% (Romney Marsh: 37%). Dartford East has an imbalance of 25% under the average ratio for the authority.

(12) An initial meeting has been arranged for 17 September 2013 between Mr A Gail (Director of Reviews) and Mr M Caller (Commission Chair) from the LBBCE and the Leader to discuss the review. As this meeting will take place after the agenda for this meeting has to be despatched, the Director of Governance and Law will provide an oral update at the Committee meeting.

(13) The Committee will be kept fully informed of the progress with this review.

(14) **Recommendation:** The Committee is requested to note the report.

Background Documents

None

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