

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

Geoff Wild, Director of Governance & Law and County Returning Officer

To: Electoral and Boundary Review Committee – 16 December 2014

Subject: Electoral Review of Kent County Council's Area – Progress Report

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report advises the Committee of the decision of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) on council size and confirms the revised timetable for Kent's boundary review.

1. Introduction

- (1) At its meeting on 17 July 2014, the County Council approved the formal submission on council size as recommended by this Committee. The submission concluded that Kent County Council should remain at 84 Members and the LGBCE was asked to note the County Council's preference for single Member divisions where possible. During the summer, the LGBCE sought further information from the Council to justify its view on council size and this was provided to the LGBCE, following consultation with Committee Members.
- (2) On 21 October 2014, the LGBCE wrote to the Head of Paid Service, advising that insufficient information had been provided to justify maintaining a council size of 84. However, whilst the LGBCE was provisionally minded to adopt a council size of 81, it wanted to give the Council a further opportunity to provide evidence to justify maintaining a council size of 84.
- (3) Accordingly, a meeting took place at County Hall on 10 November with Group Leaders, the Chairman of this committee, the lead Commissioner for Kent's review, Sir Tony Redmond, together with relevant officers. At the meeting, Members expressed the view that a council size of 84 was appropriate given the projected increase in Kent's population to 2020; the heavy and increasing workload of elected Members and the expanding role of Members in commissioning. A letter was sent on behalf of Group Leaders following the meeting (**Appendix A**).
- (4) The LGBCE's response was received on 1 December, which confirmed the decision for a council size of 81 (**Appendix B**).

2. Consultation timetable

- (1) In the letter sent on behalf of Group Leaders to the LGBCE on 13 November, a formal request was made for the phase 1 consultation on division boundaries to commence after the Christmas and New Year holidays. However, the LGBCE was unable to agree to that request on the basis that they did not want the end of the phase 1 consultation period to go into the purdah period for next year's Parliamentary and Local Elections. The revised timetable for Kent's review, as supplied by the LGBCE on 5 December, is therefore as follows:

Stage 1 consultation start	Stage 1 consultation end	LGBCE mtg	Draft recs consultation start	Draft recs consultation end	LGBCE mtg	End of review (final recs published)	Order Laying date
09/12/14	02/03/15	21/04/15	12/05/15	06/07/15	08/09/15	29/09/15	November 2015

- (2) The Committee will also be aware that there are a small number of District Councils in Kent, which are in the process of implementing their own boundary reviews and which has meant re-drawing ward and polling district boundaries in many areas. The LGBCE require electorate forecasts to 2020 down to polling district level for the phase 1 consultation on division boundaries, together with parish electorate numbers and full electoral registers. Regular communication has taken place between the Council and the LGBCE in relation to the likelihood of all of this work being completed by the District Councils in time for the start of the consultation period on 9 December. At the time of writing this report, the position is that the 12 District and Borough Councils in Kent have supplied all of the information requested by the LGBCE with the exception of Swale, which will not be able to supply its updated electoral registers and revised polling district data until February 2015. This delay means that the Business Intelligence Unit has been unable to provide forecasts for the new polling districts in Swale and that the return to the LGBCE is, at the present time, still based on the "old" Swale polling districts.
- (3) The LGBCE has stated that if not all of the required information is available by the beginning of the consultation period, they will press ahead with the phase 1 consultation and upload further information to their website as soon as it is made available to them.

3. Conclusions

- (1) It is disappointing that the County Council was unable to secure the LGBCE's agreement to the phase 1 consultation starting in the New Year, but the length of the phase 1 consultation (9 December 2014 to 2 March 2015) is reasonable, even bearing in mind the Christmas and New Year holidays. However, of most concern is the proposed completion dates for the new electoral registers and revised polling district data in Swale, which impacts adversely on the ability of respondents to the consultation to prepare and submit their own division boundary

proposals. The LGBCE has been made aware of this latest position with regard to Swale and has commented that, whilst it is far from ideal, they cannot support a further delay to the beginning of the phase 1 consultation. The LGBCE also states that information to be published on 9 December on its website: (www.lgbce.org.uk) will enable respondents to undertake some work in relation to their own proposals, but that this will be subject to change once the revised data is available in the New Year.

<p>Recommendation: The Committee is invited to note the progress on the Boundary Review of Kent County Council's area and comment accordingly.</p>

Background Documents:

Previous update reports to the Electoral Boundary Committee and the County Council

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