

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL DEMOCRACY AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

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Report Title	Local Government Boundary Review
Report Author	Catherine Whitehead, Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer catherine.whitehead@westnorthants.gov.uk

Contributors/Checkers/Approvers

Monitoring Officer	Catherine Whitehead	
Section 151 Officer	Martin Henry	
Other Director	Anna Earnshaw	

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Spreadsheet of variances and council size data

Appendix B – Draft terms of reference of the Boundary Review Task and Finish Group

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the Democracy and Standards Committee about the process for conducting a Local Government Boundary Review.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report seeks to establish a task and finish group to prepare the draft submissions on behalf of the Council in relation to the forthcoming Local Boundary Review which will be presented to the Committee and full Council.

3. Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that the Democracy and Standards Committee:

- a) establishes a Local Government Boundary Review Task and Finish Group to prepare the necessary submissions in relation to Council Size and Ward Boundaries when required before consideration by the Committee and Full Council;
- b) appoints Members of the Committee to the Task and Finish Group in accordance with the recommended composition set out;
- c) agrees the draft Terms of Reference of the Boundary Review Task and Finish Group as set out in Appendix B;
- d) notes the guidance for preparation of the submission on Council size and agrees to have regard to the guidance in relation to the preparation of the draft submission.

4. Reasons for Recommendations

4.1 The reasons for the recommendations are as follows:

- a) West Northamptonshire Council was established by the Northamptonshire Structural Changes Order 2021 which adopted the existing County Council divisions as wards for the new Council with an expectation that a Ward Boundary Review by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) would follow in the first term of the new Council.
- b) The County Council divisions demonstrate variances in electorate per Councillor which had it not been for reorganisation would have triggered a Ward Boundary Review in West Northamptonshire.

5. Report Background

5.1 The ward boundaries of West Northamptonshire were set by the Structural Changes Order to provide 3 member wards for each of the County divisions of West Northamptonshire with a total of 93 members. When a transition is undertaken in the way it has in Northamptonshire without a Ward Boundary Review to establish the wards for the new Council, the LGBCE will conduct a boundary review in the first term of the new Council to take effect at the next elections which in Northamptonshire will be in 2025.

Electoral Variances

5.2 The LGBCE will also contact Councils where the electoral variances in the area would be likely to trigger a review. In West Northamptonshire an analysis of the new wards shows that there are 3 wards which have 20% variances and a further 9 wards which have 10% variances. The usual rule is a single ward with a 30% variance or more than 3 wards with a 10% variance will trigger the contact. On this latter criteria the Council would have triggered a ward boundary review. Variances are calculated by showing the average number of electors per councillor based on the number of seats on the council and the total electorate. This average is then compared with the actual number of electors per councillor for each of the wards. Where there has been significant housebuilding the population will have gone up since the last review and therefore the number of electors per councillor is higher than in other wards. The LGBCE conduct reviews to ensure that Councillors on any local authority are representing similar numbers of electors. They do not ensure that Councillors in different local authorities are representing similar numbers of electors.

The variances for West Northamptonshire are attached at **Appendix 1** and these show the wards with the variances.

The Review

5.3 Once the LGBCE have decided to conduct a review they will contact the local authority to explain the process and discuss how the review will be conducted. The review is conducted in two stages:

- Council Size
- Ward Boundaries

Consultation will take place at each stage of the review with the Council and the public. The timeframe for the review will be determined by the LGBCE. The review itself will take some time to complete and the results of the review will need to be published in time to ensure that arrangements can be made including the arrangements for polling stations etc before the election in 2025. The initial indication is that the submission on Council Size will need to be made by April 2022 with the wider ward boundary review to follow.

Council size

5.4 The question of Council size is dealt with first as this will enable the second stage to agree the number of electors per councillor. Any number of councillors can be decided on and although there are large number of councillors (eg Buckinghamshire currently has 147 Councillors) where as some Councils have fewer than 30 Councillors. There has been some research on the average number of electors per Councillor across the different types of Councils. Unitaries for example tend to have a larger number of electors per Councillor than district councils. Appendix 1 shows the average number of electors per Councillor with different numbers of Councillors in West Northants. It also shows some figures for the average number of electors per Councillor in other similar councils including those that have been recently transitioned to unitary.

5.5 When the LGBCE conduct a review they will request that the Council itself and anyone else can make a submission as to what they think should be the Council size. They have produced helpful guidance on how to prepare a submission on Council size and what matters should be considered. The LGBCE will recommend a council size that, in its judgement,

'enables the council to take its decisions effectively, to discharge the business and responsibilities of the council successfully, and to provide for effective community leadership and representation'.

5.6 The full guidance is available at the following link <https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/lgbce/Corporate%20Documents/Guidance/Council%20Size%20Submission%20Guidance.pdf>

Ward Boundaries

5.7 Until the Council Size question has been agreed it is not possible to determine the average number of electors per Council and therefore ward boundaries cannot be determined. The question of ward boundaries will only come up at the second stage. Once the Council Size has been agreed further submissions can be made by interested parties including the Council. At

that stage detailed analysis of all relevant information will help to determine the boundaries of the wards.

- 5.8 The preparation of the submissions will require regular member engagement and it is therefore recommended that the Committee establish a Boundary Review Task and Finish Group to carry supported by relevant officers. The Task and Finish Group would prepare draft submissions which would then be considered by the full Committee before being referred to Council for approval and submission.
- 5.9 It is recommended that the Task and Finish Group be composed of at least 5 members and that it is cross party and representative of a variety of wards in different parts of the area.
- 5.10 It is recommended that the Committee approves the draft Terms of Reference of the Task and Finish Group as set out at Appendix B.
- 5.11 The alternative choices are not to make a submission. The LGBCE welcomes submissions as it helps them to understand the views of the Council. The Boundary Review will happen whether or not the Council prepares a submission.

6. Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Resources and Financial

- 6.1.1 There are staffing implications in terms of the officer time required to support the review process. However, these requirements can be met with existing staff resources.
- 6.1.2 There are no financial implications arising directly as a result of the review process.

6.2 Legal

The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 ('the 2009 Act') s56 gives the LGBCE the power to review the electoral arrangements of all, or any, principal councils in England.

6.3 Risk

- 6.3.1 There are no significant risks arising from this report.

6.4 Consultation

- 6.4.1 There are no consultation implications arising from this report. When the review is conducted by the LGBCE there will be extensive public engagement which will be carried out by the LGBCE not the Council. The Council, individual members and residents can participate as consultees.

6.5 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny

6.5.1 The responsibilities of the Council in relation to the conduct of the Council's response to the review sits with the Democracy and Standards Committee. Further review can be carried out by all members when the report is submitted to full Council.

6.6 **Climate Impact**

6.6.1 No climate or environmental impacts have been identified as arising from this report.

6.7 **Community Impact**

6.7.1 There are no direct community impacts arising from this report. However, any specific community impacts that arise from the review will be considered at the time that the preparation of the submission is made.

7. **Background Papers**

7.1 None.

Democracy and Standards Committee

Boundary Review Task and Finish Group

DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE

In accordance with the review principles approved by the Democracy and Standards Committee:

1. To consider, in conjunction with officers, the evidence in relation to Council Size and to have regard to the guidance from the LGBCE in relation to the preparation of the submission.
2. To prepare, through officers, a draft submission on the issue of Council Size and to recommend a Council Size which is supported by the submission.
3. To support the Commission in carrying out consultation on Council Size.
4. To consider, in conjunction with officers the evidence in relation to the ward boundaries and to have regard to relevant guidance from the LGBCE in relation to the preparation of the submission.
5. To prepare, through officers, a draft submission on a pattern of ward boundaries and to which is supported by the submission.
6. To support the Commission in carrying out consultation on the ward boundaries.
7. To support the implementation of the ward boundary review.