

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL

**Council
3 November 2022**

Report Title	Local Government Boundary Review – Ward Pattern Submission
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Contributors/Checkers/Approvers

Monitoring Officer	Catherine Whitehead	26/10/2022
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List of Appendices

Appendix A – Ward Pattern Submission for West Northamptonshire Area (to follow)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval from the Council for the draft ward pattern to be submitted to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. The submission was prepared with input from a number of members including members of a cross-party working group established by the Democratic and Standards Committee, which has been meeting to consider draft proposals for the ward pattern submission as part of the second stage of review of electoral arrangements in West Northamptonshire.
- 1.2 Council is asked to note that this report makes recommendations to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) on ward boundaries and names of wards. The submission has been prepared on the invitation of the LGBCE, who are undertaking a public consultation on the above issues. The LGBCE will consider all responses received and publish a proposal for further consultation on 7 February 2023. Change to the electoral arrangements will take effect for the next ordinary election of councillors in May 2025.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The LGBCE are undertaking an electoral review of West Northamptonshire Council. This process requires the LGBCE to seek representations to assist it in formulating revised arrangements.
- 2.2 Under the terms of the Council's constitution, the Democracy and Standards Committee has responsibility for boundary reviews and with support from officers, the committee established a cross-party working group to formulate and consider recommendations for electoral arrangements for West Northamptonshire.
- 2.3 The Working Group met a number of times and reported back to the Committee with proposals concerning council size earlier this year. The Committee recommended a council size range of 77 to 82 Councillors. The Council approved this submission at its meeting on 30 June 2022. The LGBCE advised the Council that it is minded to recommend a council size of 77; a reduction of 16 councillors from present.
- 2.4 The Working Group has met a number of times since then and reported back to the Committee with initial proposals on 20 October 2022. The proposal, which is set out at Appendix 1 of this report, makes a recommendation to the LGBCE as to the number of wards, their boundaries and the number of councillors who should represent each ward, within the LGBCE's previously defined number (77).

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Council:
 - a) Notes the work of the cross-party working group and the Democracy and Standards Committee on the second phase of electoral arrangements for West Northamptonshire;
 - b) Approves the document set out at Appendix A for submission to the LGBCE; and
 - c) Delegates authority to the Director of Legal and Democratic Services in consultation with the Chair of the Democracy and Standards Committee to make any minor amendments to the wording of the proposed submission to the LGBCE and to finalise the submission in light of any comments from this Council and any minor or typographical changes identified.

4. Reason for Recommendations

- 4.1 To agree a submission to the LGBCE in response to their invitation.
- 4.2 To seek to ensure that the new pattern of ward boundaries reflects the communities of West Northants and
- 4.3 To ensure as far as possible, that the LGBCE receives detailed evidence to inform their decision in relation to the pattern of ward boundaries.

5. Report Background

- 5.1 The LGBCE is responsible for conducting reviews of local authority electoral arrangements through electoral reviews. Each review is divided into stages. The first stage relates to the overall

size of the Council. This concluded that the Council should have 77 members. During the first stage the LGBCE also requests detailed evidence from the Council in relation to the like population of the area in 2028. This is the date which is five years after the date of the review which the LGBCE uses as the relevant date. The Council submitted through Planning Policy and the Electoral Services team details of the likely growth and other population changes. The LGBCE then determine a population figure and arrived at a figure of 325,479. The figure is then divided by the number of proposed council members (77) to arrive at the average number of electors per councillor 4227. Each of the councillors for the new ward boundaries should be representing an electorate of around 4227.

- 5.2 The next stage relates to the pattern of ward boundaries. The LGBCE conduct a public consultation at this stage and the Council, as a consultee, is invited to submit a proposal for ward patterns by 7th November 2022. In order to assist with the preparation of the Council's submission, the Democracy and Standards Committee established a cross party working group. The working group met on 14th September 2022 to agree a timetable for the preparation of the submission. A further working group meeting was set up on 13th October 2022 to consider the draft proposed pattern of wards. By 26th September 2022 limited information had been received by officers in relation to evidence of the boundaries and therefore a letter was also sent to all members of the Council inviting them to submit evidence in relation to the proposed boundaries. A number of submissions were received as a result of the letter and a number of members also arranged for meetings with the Interim Electoral Services Manager to make use of the computer software to help him build a pattern of wards.
- 5.3 By 13th October although a number of patches of ward patterns had been developed there was no single whole map for the area. The progress was shared with the members of the working group. It was explained that detailed evidence was required in order to evidence any pattern of boundaries. It was agreed that the covering report and the style of submission would be submitted to the Democracy and Standards Committee and further work would be carried out to finalise the pattern of wards.
- 5.4 Late submissions continued to be received right up to the time of the Democracy and Standards Committee itself and it was not possible to present a complete pattern of wards to the meeting on 20th October 2022. A further meeting of the working group was therefore held on 25th October 2022. Further work was carried out after the meeting to reflect the comments of the working group.
- 5.5 The document included at Appendix A sets out factual and contextual information about the Council, together with information regarding proposals for ward patterns that take account of the statutory criteria applicable to electoral reviews, namely:
 - 5.5.1 The new pattern of wards should mean that each councillor represents roughly the same number of voters as elected members elsewhere in the authority.
 - 5.5.2 Ward patterns should – as far as possible – reflect community interests and identities and boundaries should be identifiable.
 - 5.5.3 The electoral arrangements should promote effective and convenient local government and reflect the electoral cycle of the council.

6. Issues and Choices

- 6.1 The committee and its working group have considered the implications of a range of possible ward patterns. The working group considered a large amount of information submitted by groups and individual members. The working group was able to include many , but unfortunately not all, suggestions from members. This was due to a variety of factors including the implications of suggestions on the overall submission and the statutory requirements that set the parameters of the review.
- 6.2 Since the committee considered the report on 20th October 2022 a number of additional changes were identified and agreed by the members of the committee at a working group that took place on 25th October. These have been included under the delegation to the Director and are detailed in the Appendix on the front page.
- 6.3 It is recommended that Council approves the recommended pattern of wards set out in the submission document set out at Appendix A (with the highlighted changes). The only other option open to the Council would be to not submit a view about ward patterns to the LGBCE, but this is not recommended.
- 6.4 The Committee would like to remind members that political groups, individuals, members of the public and other interested parties may also submit proposals and evidence to the LGBCE for consideration. The Committee hopes that as many people as possible will take up this opportunity.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1 Resources and Financial

- 7.1.1 There are no financial implications arising directly as a result of the review process. The resource requirements of the next stage of the review will be met from within the West Northamptonshire staffing structure. Technical expertise required for the gathering of statistical information, mapping and forecasting will be met from existing budgets.

7.2 Legal

- 7.2.1 The Democracy and Standards Committee has delegated authority for the preparation of submissions in relation to boundary reviews. The Committee established a cross-party working group to assist it in the formulation of proposals. The statutory responsibility for determining the new pattern of wards sits with Parliament on the recommendations of the LGBCE. The LGBCE will consult on their proposals before reaching their final conclusions and recommending these by draft statutory order to Parliament.

7.3 Risk

- 7.3.1 There are no significant risks associated with the proposal. If the Council did not provide a submission as part of the consultation process there is a risk that the new pattern of boundaries would not reflect communities and would be difficult for members to serve their communities because of the disjointed nature of the constituencies. It may also mean that there are issues

for local governance and electoral administration. These risks are avoided if comprehensive comments are made to the LGBCE to ensure that they have the full information about West Northamptonshire before drawing up proposals.

7.4 Consultation

- 7.4.1 Formal consultation on the next stage of the review will be conducted by the LGBCE as part of the review process.

7.5 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny

- 7.5.1 This is a submission document and the Council has no direct decision making in relation to the substantive decision, and it is therefore not suitable for scrutiny. Members of Scrutiny were encouraged alongside all members to submit evidence to inform the draft submission.

7.6 Climate Impact

- 7.6.1 There is no climate impact to consider in relation to the recommendation.

7.7 Community Impact

- 7.7.1 The primary objective of the review is to improve electoral equality across West Northamptonshire ensuring that each voter has roughly the same representation on the council and to ensure the pattern of wards reflects local communities. Citizens will also have the opportunity to engage with the review process and submit their own proposals and comment on recommendations as part of the review process.

8. Background Papers

- 8.1 Democracy and Standards Committee – 16 June 2022:
[Agenda for Democracy and Standards Committee on Thursday 16th June 2022, 6.00 pm - West Northamptonshire Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)
- 8.2 Democracy and Standards Committee – 30 September 2021:
[Agenda for Democracy and Standards Committee on Thursday 30th September 2021, 6.00 pm - West Northamptonshire Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)