



POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Thursday, 7th October 2021

REPORT TITLE:	Electoral Review of Wirral Council
REPORT OF:	Director of Law and Governance

REPORT SUMMARY

This report informs the Committee of a letter received by the Chief Executive on 25th August 2021 from Jolyon Jackson, Chief Executive of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England which informed that the Commission has now decided to undertake an electoral review of Wirral Council.

This is not a key decision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Policy and Resources Committee is recommended to request the Chief Executive to formally respond on behalf of the Council to the Local Government Boundary Commission informing that the Council would like the proposed review to commence in 2023/2024 with a view to any changes being implemented at the 2026 Local Government Elections.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 The Committee is requested to consider and comment on the report to enable the Chief Executive to respond to the request from the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wirral Council to indicate when it would like the electoral review which considers the number of councillors elected to the council, the names, number and boundaries of the wards, and the number of councillors to be elected to each ward to take place.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 This report is presented to enable the Committee to comment before a formal response is sent to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, therefore no other options have been considered. Alternative suggestions to when the review should be undertaken could have been suggested.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission

- 3.1.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission) is an independent body responsible for determining the electoral arrangements of local authorities across England. The Commission wrote to the Chief Executive on the 25th August informing that the Commission had decided to undertake an electoral review of Wirral Council.

3.2 Purpose & Objectives

- 3.2.1 The purpose of an electoral review is to consider the number of councillors elected to the council, the names, number and boundaries of the wards, and the number of councillors to be elected to each ward.
- 3.2.2 The last electoral review of Wirral Council was undertaken in 2003. Accordingly, the Commission considers that a review of Wirral Council should start within the next one to three years. The Commission are asking for initial views on when the Council prefer for this review to take place within that period.

3.3 Process

- 3.3.1 The first decision the Commission will take is how many Members the Council will have. The Commission will invite the Council (and groups on the council) to make proposals for how many members they believe there should be in the future. Once the Commission decide on the total number of councillors, they will then move to the warding pattern part of the process which starts with a full public consultation where they ask what people think the ward boundaries should be. The Commission will then publish their draft recommendations which they then consult on again.
- 3.3.2 The publication of the Commission's final recommendations marks the end of the

review process. An Order will then be laid before Parliament and the Commission will seek to do so no later than the Autumn preceding the Council's scheduled May election. The new electoral arrangements will then be implemented at an 'all out' election before returning to the usual cycle of elections 'by thirds'.

- 3.3.3 The Commission has confirmed that as the Council currently elects 'by thirds' they will seek to return a uniform pattern of three-member wards. If before the electoral review starts the Council resolves to change its electoral cycle to elect 'all out' the Commission will be able to return a mixed pattern of one, two or three member wards. The electoral cycle is entirely a matter for the Council and the Commission takes no view on what it should be. It should be noted that this issue is raised by the Commission as if there is an appetite to change the Council's electoral cycle this should be agreed before the review starts so that the Commission can invite warding proposals with the appropriate number of councillors.
- 3.3.4 In advance of the first public consultation, there will be a preliminary period during which the Commission will gather information from the Council. When preparing for and during the course of the review there are three main areas of work for the Council:
- a) Preparing electorate forecasts, mapping and details of housing developments. The Commission expects the Council to prepare five-year electorate forecasts broken down to polling district level. This reflects the statutory duty to consider forecasts five years from the end of the review.
 - b) Preparing and submitting a warding pattern during the first public consultation and responding to the Commission's draft recommendations
 - c) Supporting the Commission in publicising the review including by sharing details of interested parties and supporting meetings with community and residents' groups.

3.4 Context

- 3.4.1 The Commission have written to 15 other Metropolitan districts in a similar capacity. These authorities have also not been reviewed since 2003 and the Commission intends to review all of them. The Commission hope that early notice of a review and the invitation for the Council to outline when it would prefer for the Review to be conducted will ensure that the Review takes place at a time that works best for members and officers. The Commission have indicated that they will try to accommodate the Council's request but do state that they will need to balance all of the views of the 16 authorities in order ensure the Commission's programme of work is met.
- 3.4.2 Having considered the electoral cycle and planned elections for the forthcoming years (noting that there is a fallow year in 2025) officers are of the opinion that the best time to commence the ward boundary review would be in 2023/2024 with a view to implementation in 2026. The rationale for that suggestion is as follows:
1. It would allow time for any recommendations that arise from MHCLG report to be fully considered and addressed.
 2. The Commission have already indicated that it will not be possible to conduct the review in time for all-out elections in 2023.
 3. It would avoid the prospect an all-out local election in 2024. Combined Parliamentary (on new Constituency Boundaries), Local, PCC and Combined Authority Mayor

Election and potential introduction of Voter ID in polling stations will make that a challenging year to administer.

4. It would enable any recommendations of the Parliamentary Boundary Review to be implemented.
5. The Local Plan proposals for housing development and regeneration will result in changes to the distribution of population which will be of relevance to the boundary review.
6. It is anticipated that the Election Bill will come into force fully by 2024 and potential impacts on future elections would be to –
 - require voters to show photo ID at polling stations before a ballot paper is issued.
 - require Electoral Registration Officers based in local authorities to issue free voter identification documents to those without a valid form of photo ID.
 - require postal voters to reapply for a postal vote every three years, replacing current rules of refreshing their signature every five years.
 - restrict the handling of postal votes, including limiting the number of postal votes an individual can hand in at a polling station.
 - further limit the number of people someone may act as proxy.
 - extend accessibility to elections including requiring Returning Officers to take all reasonable steps to provide support for those with a disability in polling stations.
 - change the voting and candidacy arrangements for EU voters.
 - allow all British citizens living overseas to vote in UK Parliamentary elections, regardless of when they left the UK.

Having consulted the Local Government Boundary Commission, they have advised that all-out elections will take place at the next ordinary scheduled local elections following the passing of the order in Parliament.

A normal review will take 12 - 18 months to complete, the time can vary depending on the consultation periods, the work programme for the Boundary Commission and how quickly they report on the consultations and recommendations.

The Commission confirmed that once a commencement date has been confirmed, they will work with the Council to establish the timetable for the review and will consult on optimum times for delivery while taking account of any representation made by the local authority in relation to the timing of the all-out local elections.

It should be noted that colleagues at Sefton M.B.C have responded to the Local Boundary Commission expressing the view that they would wish to follow the same timetable as that proposed with a view to any changes being implemented in 2026.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising from the report.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 sets out the duty placed on the LGBCE to undertake an electoral review of every principal local authority in England 'from time to time'.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

6.1 There are no direct resource implications arising from this report.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 There are no risks arising from this report.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 The Chief Executive informed Group Leaders of the receipt of the letter and confirmed that a report would be presented to the Policy & Resources Committee prior to a formal response being made.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no equality implications arising from this report.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no direct environment or climate implications arising from this report.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING

11.1 There are no direct Community Wealth Building implications arising from the report.

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APPENDICES

None

BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Technical Guidance | LGBCE Site](#)

The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date