

DEMOCRACY AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

16th November 2021

Report Title	LGBCE Review of Electoral Arrangements for North Northamptonshire
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List of Appendices

None

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To draw members' attention to the forthcoming review of electoral arrangements in North Northamptonshire by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The purpose of the report is to advise members of the forthcoming review of local government electoral arrangements in North Northamptonshire.
- 2.2 To seek approval to establish a cross party member/officer working group to formulate and consider new electoral arrangements within the scope of the review.
- 2.3 To outline the draft timeline for the process.
- 2.4 To outline the key considerations of the review

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Democracy and Standards Committee:
- (i) Approves the establishment of a cross party member/officer working group (as detailed in the report) to formulate and consider recommendations for electoral arrangements for North Northamptonshire; and
 - (ii) Approves the draft timeline for completion of the initial stage of the review (preparation and delivery of the high-level submission).

Reasons for Recommendations

- Approval will enable an effective and coherent approach to engaging with this largescale review.

- Provide the opportunity for members and parties to input into the new electoral proposals and respond to LGBCE recommendations.
- Establish a timeline for the preparation of proposals and enable the group to make best use of technical expertise from within the council.

4. Report Background

- 4.1 The Northamptonshire Structural Changes Order 2020 established the electoral arrangements for North Northamptonshire Council.
- 4.2 The arrangements that were put in place reflected the Northamptonshire County Council electoral divisions, as those divisions existed on 31st March 2020. The number of Councillors for each ward was prescribed as 3. These were intended to be interim arrangements until such time as a boundary review was undertaken.
- 4.3 Following the creation of North Northamptonshire Council, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) indicated its intention to conduct a review of the electoral arrangements for North Northamptonshire.
- 4.4 The LGBCE is independent of government and reports directly to the Speakers Committee. It has a membership of 6 Commissioners and is responsible for carrying out reviews of local authority electoral arrangements.
- 4.5 An electoral review is an examination of a council's electoral arrangements. The review will look at:
- a) the total number of councillors elected to the local authority.
 - b) the number and boundaries of wards for the purposes of the election of councillors.
 - c) the number of councillors for any ward; and
 - d) the name of any ward.
- 4.6 The primary reason for undertaking a review is to improve electoral equality across the council area.
- 4.7 The outcome of the review will be implemented in time for the 2025 full council elections.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1 The review will follow a statutory process involving the submission of proposals and consultations on recommendations.
- 5.2 A working group comprised of members from across the whole council will enable broader political engagement.
- (i) The working group to include 5 elected members (3 Conservative, 1 Labour and 1 Green Alliance);
 - (ii) The Leaders of the respective Groups to confirm Group representation; and
 - (iii) The working group to elect its chair and vice chair at its first meeting.

- 5.3 It should also be noted that Councillors, members of the public and other interested parties may also submit their own proposals, recommendations, and evidence to the LGBCE for consideration.
- 5.4 When considering ward areas, the review will look at effective, reflective, and convenient boundaries taking into consideration community identity, behavioural impacts, and physical barriers such as roads, rivers etc.
- 5.5 The draft timeline for the initial phase of the review (preparation of the high-level submission) is as follows:

Timeline	Activity
November 2021	Seek approval for the establishment of a cross party member/officer working group
December 2021 – February 2022	Collection of data forecasts and review of governance options
March 2022 – July 2022	Preparation and consultation on high level submission
July 2022	High level submission delivered to LGBCE for consideration
30 th August 2022	The formal review process begins (as per table below)

- 5.6 Following preparation and delivery of the high-level submission the LGBCE review will begin and will follow the timetable below:

Timeline	Activity
30 August – 7 November 2022	Invitation to submit warding patterns
7 February – 17 April 2023	Publication of draft recommendations & consultation
4 July 2023	Publication of final recommendations
Summer 2023	Draft order seeking to implement the recommendations
2025	Implementation of final recommendations

- 5.7 The electoral arrangements for West Northamptonshire Council will also be reviewed, however, the LGBCE will treat the two reviews separately.

6. Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Resources and Financial

6.1.1 The resources required to undertake the review are available within the existing North Northamptonshire Member and staffing structure.

6.1.2 Technical expertise in the collation of statistical information, mapping and forecasts will also be required from colleagues in planning services.

- 6.1.3 The member/officer working group will have representation from across the Council (as detailed above) and a timetable of meetings will be agreed.
- 6.1.4 Specialist mapping software is available to assist with detailing proposed boundary changes. The electoral services team are currently investigating the estimated cost, and should a decision be taken to acquire the software it is anticipated the cost would be met from the existing Electoral Services budget.
- 6.1.5 Additional staff overtime costs may become payable in relation to attendance at evening meetings/briefings and to cover any additional hours required in the preparation of the initial submission and future proposals/ responses to recommendations

6.2 Legal

- 6.2.1 There are no legal implications arising from the proposals.

6.3 Risk

- 6.3.1 The absence of a cross party member/officer working group could lead to a disjointed approach to the review resulting in limited options and evidence for the LGBCE to consider.
- 6.3.2 The existing Electoral Services Management Software contract is due to expire in August 2022. A procurement exercise is currently underway to source a new Electoral Management Software System. If an alternative supplier is selected this could have a negative impact on data processing and any mapping facilities that may have been procured to assist with the technical aspects of the review

6.4 Consultation

- 6.4.1 The following meetings have been arranged with the LGBCE
 - 5th November 2021 – LGBCE officer level briefing meeting
 - 15th November 2021 – LGBCE Group Leader briefing
 - 29th November 2021 – LGBCE briefing to NNC Members

Formal consultation on the draft recommendations will be conducted by the LGBCE as part of the statutory review process.

6.5 Consideration by Scrutiny

- 6.5.1 This has not been reviewed by the Scrutiny Commission; therefore, no comments or recommendations have been received. This is a non-Executive matter, and the Democracy and Standards Committee are charged to co-ordinate a council response.

6.6 Climate Impact

- 6.6.1 No immediate environmental impact has been identified. When undertaking the review, the project team will consider the environmental and climate impact of the project, in line with the council's priorities in this area.

6.7 Community Impact

- 6.7.1 The primary objective of the review is to improve electoral equality across North Northamptonshire ensuring that each voter has roughly the same representation on the council.
- 6.7.2 Members of the community will have the opportunity to engage with the review process and submit their own proposals and comment on recommendations as part of the review process.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None.
- 7.2 Further information in respect of the LGBCE and the conduct of electoral reviews is available at <https://www.lgbce.org.uk>

