

AGENDA ITEM NO.13	
COUNCIL	
Date	26 JULY 2012
Title	BOUNDARY COMMISSION FENLAND ELECTORAL REVIEW: REVIEW OF FENLAND WARD BOUNDARIES - FDC SUBMISSION

1. PURPOSE/SUMMARY

In June 2011 the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) confirmed its intentions to carry out a review of electoral arrangements in Fenland. The following report summarises Member feedback in relation to the Council’s proposed submission to the LGBCE regarding future warding arrangements for Fenland..

2. KEY ISSUES

- The LGBCE is an independent body, set up by Parliament in April 2010, responsible for reviewing local authority electoral arrangements, administrative boundaries and structure. Fenland’s review was triggered by more than 30% of the existing district wards (9 of the 27) having an electoral variance greater than 10% from the district average, with one ward carrying a variance of 34%. Reviews are governed by guidance and statutory criteria which include:
 - The review covers the whole district not just wards directly affected by electoral imbalance
 - The scope of the review covers Council size (number of Councillors), number of wards (single or multi member) and names of wards
 - The statutory criteria cover electoral equality (both now and to 2018 to ensure the proposed arrangements are future proof), effective and convenient local government, community identities and interest.
- In the view of the LGBCE, hallmarks of a good review is a scheme which gives good electoral equality while balancing the other criteria and has cross party support. In addition representations need to be evidence based.
- A cross party Member Working Group was established to steer the development of Fenland District Council’s response, which was informed by the extensive and comprehensive consultation input from three rounds of Member Focus Groups which have involved all 40 District Councillors.
- The resulting Council submission has sought to meet the characteristics of a good review as identified by the LGBCE and is based around the following principles:
 - Ward sizes have been determined with a range of criteria to ensure they are compact, reflect the geographical features of the area, the community facilities,

- community identity and the electorate size.
 - Electoral equality has been achieved in the main and is within the LGBCE tolerance of +/- 10%, and where this is not the case, substantial evidence has been submitted.
 - Where possible we have utilised existing parishes as building blocks for the proposed warding arrangements
 - Communication networks within wards are effective and there are no major barriers within wards
 - The mixture of single member wards in addition to multiple member wards ensures accountability, reflect communities whilst also ensuring ease of access to elected representatives.
 - The structure and arrangements are understandable and meet the objectives of the review without diluting the benefits of the current structure.
- The proposed scheme effectively reflects the LGBCE criteria, the needs of the community we represent and ensures the Council can operate effectively and to the highest standards. Informal feedback from the commission is that the resulting report represents an example of best practice.
- Through the series of Member Focus groups a general consensus of opinion has been reached in relation to the future warding arrangements for the District. There are two areas however where the Council's membership were not able to reach a consensus, therefore in the spirit of openness and transparency, it is recommended the options considered should be put forward including their respective benefits to the LGBCE for consideration. As a result the final Council submission is to retain between 24 – 26 District Council Wards represented by 39 District Councillors.

3. RECOMMENDATION(S)

To approve the proposed electoral arrangements set out in the Council's draft submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

Wards Affected	All
Forward Plan Reference No. (if applicable)	
Portfolio Holder(s)	Councillor Alan Melton, Leader of the Council
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Background Paper(s)	Boundary Commission Fenland Electoral Review – Council Size Submission