

BRIEFING NOTE TO CHORLEY LIAISON AT ITS MEETING ON 17 OCTOBER 2018 ON THE ELECTORAL REVIEW OF CHORLEY COUNCIL

PURPOSE

The purpose of this briefing note is to provide an update on the electoral review of Chorley Council and the next steps.

BACKGROUND

In June 2017, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) informed Chorley Council that it would be conducting an electoral review during its 2018/19 work programme to correct an electoral imbalance across the borough.

An electoral review is conducted if a local authority meets one of the two intervention criteria:

1. If one ward has an electorate of +/-30% from the average electorate for the authority
2. If 30% of all wards have an electorate of +/-10% from the average electorate for the authority.

Based on the electoral data given to the LGBCE, Chorley Council met both criteria in that six of its wards have an electorate with a variance greater than 10%, with one of the wards having a variance of over 30%.

The LGBCE delivered a series of presentations (which included one to parish and town council representatives, on 6 December 2017) to raise awareness of the review process and encourage participation in the consultation.

In anticipation of the commencement of the review, the council formed a cross party committee to consider various aspects of the review and develop the authorities response to the LGBCE.

LGBCE CONSIDERATIONS

While undertaking a review the LGBCE have to take account of three main considerations:

- Improve electoral equality by equalising the number of electors each councillor represents;
- Reflect community identity;
- Provide for effective and convenient local government.

PROCESS

An electoral review is split in two distinct stages:-

1. **Council size** – before the LGBCE re-draws ward boundaries, it will come to a view on the total number of councillors to be elected to the council in future. A conclusion on council size will be drawn after hearing the council's (and/or councillors') views during the preliminary phase.
2. **Ward boundaries** – the LGBCE will re-draw ward boundaries so that they meet their statutory criteria. The council, along with any other interested bodies or individual, will have the opportunity to put forward its ideas to the LGBCE in two phases of public consultation.

STAGE ONE – DECISION ON THE COUNCIL SIZE

On the 26 June 2018, the LGBCE announced that it was minded to approve Chorley Council's proposal on a reduction in its size from 47 councillors, to 42; and to continue to hold elections by thirds.

The proposal had been formulated by the Electoral Review of Chorley Council Committee, to ensure a full and equitable representation of the electorate across the borough. It had been developed following a review of the council's governance, scrutiny, quasi-judicial commitments, its duties to external bodies and individual wards. The council's proposal was agreed by a majority decision at its meeting on 10 April 2018.

With the size of the council being reduced to 42 members and as a consequence of maintaining its elections by thirds, each ward is required to be served by three councillors. This also dictated the number of wards across the borough being reduced to 14 wards, from the present 20 wards.

The minded to decision by the LGBCE brought stage one of the review to a close.

STAGE TWO – NEW WARD PATTERNING ARRANGEMENTS

First consultation

At the same time the LGBCE announced its' minded to decision on council size it launched a public consultation on ward patterning which ran (from 26 June) until 3 September 2018. Although it should be reiterated that the public consultation was that of the LGBCE and not Chorley Council, the authority has actively encouraged interested groups and individuals to respond to the consultation by placing articles on its web site, through press releases, via social media, and in the Council's e-zines (intheknow and intheboro). Leaflets have also been circulated to those outlets which distribute the council's 'What's happening' magazine.

With this consultation the LGBCE invited views from interested groups and individuals as to which areas of the borough should be included in a ward based on historical connections and/or practical links (such as bus routes, main roads etc).

Due to its existing meeting timetable, Chorley Council was granted an extension to submit its proposals on warding arrangements later. This was so councillors could discuss Chorley Council's proposal at a meeting of full council on 18 September 2018. At that meeting, the council's proposal was agreed by majority decision and submitted to the LGBCE for its consideration.

At this stage it is worth clarifying that Chorley Council is only one of many organisations that the LGBCE has consulted with. The council has been informed that its submission would carry the same weight as any other consultee.

The LGBCE will now be considering all submissions with a view to formulating its draft recommendations. It is also understood as part of their deliberations, representatives of the LGBCE will be visiting areas of the borough unannounced. This will provide crucial information to the LGBCE on natural boundaries which can be used to separate each ward and consider the community links.

Second consultation

On 6 November 2018, the LGBCE will publish its draft recommendation and launch a second consultation.

This will be the first time anyone will be able to see which areas of the borough the LGBCE will suggest which areas of the borough should be placed together to form each ward. At the same time, a public consultation will be launched on the draft proposals, which will run from 6 November 2018 until 14 January 2019. This will be the last opportunity for anyone to put forward any comments before the final recommendations are published.

It is crucial that parish and town councils review the draft recommendations and respond directly to the LGBCE before the deadline. Even if the ward arrangement is agreeable, it is important for the LGBCE to receive confirmation of this. Otherwise should an objection be raised the LGBCE may decide to change its decision in the final recommendations.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Once the deadline for the second consultation has expired, the LGBCE will review all responses it has received to its draft recommendations, and where required amend the wards accordingly. The final recommendations will be announced on 12 March, no further consultation will take place.

It is expected the new warding arrangements to be laid before the Houses of Parliament over the summer months.

On 7 May 2020, a whole of council election will take place on the new warding arrangements, after which the council will revert to electing its membership by thirds.

FURTHER COMMENTS

It has come to the council's attention that many of the comments being made to the first consultation were based on the current ward boundaries or the council's proposal for new warding arrangements which was approved on 18 September 2018.

As previously mentioned, Chorley Council is only one of a number of consultees that has put forward a proposal. The LGBCE informed the council that any proposal it submits has no added weight (because it is the council's proposal) than any other submission. The LGBCE could therefore choose to ignore part or the entire proposal in favor of an alternative submission that has more compelling evidence.

It is therefore important that interested groups and/or individuals wishing to respond as part of the second consultation do so based solely on the LGBCE's draft recommendations, direct to them before 14 January 2019.