



Standards and General Purposes Committee

Date:	Thursday 17 March 2022
Title:	Electoral Review of Buckinghamshire – Pattern of Wards
Relevant councillor(s):	All Councillors
Author and/or contact officer:	Nick Graham, Service Director – Legal and Democratic Services
Ward(s) affected:	All Wards
Recommendations:	<p>(1) To approve a draft submission, in principle, to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on a future pattern of wards for Buckinghamshire Council based on the approach in paragraph 4 and Annex 1; and</p> <p>(2) To delegate the finalising of the draft submission, based on this proposal, to the Service Director for Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee and in liaison as necessary with the Commission; and</p> <p>(3) To recommend that Council endorses the proposal as the basis of the Council’s formal submission, at this Stage of the Electoral Review process; and</p> <p>(4) That the Electoral Review Working Group of this Committee continues to meet as necessary, to consider any ongoing liaison with, or proposals from, the Commission at further stages of the Review process.</p>
Reason for decision:	To enable the Council to respond to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on the second stage of the electoral review of Buckinghamshire Council.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has begun a [consultation](#) on the second stage of the electoral review of Buckinghamshire Council. The LGBCE is seeking views on a pattern of wards that should apply from the 2025 local election.
- 1.2 This follows the previous consultation on 'council size' by the LGBCE, which is now minded to recommend a membership of 98 councillors. Proposals are therefore being sought on a pattern of wards equivalent (so far as possible) to that number.
- 1.3 The consultation runs until the 4 April. The LGBCE would be willing for Full Council formally to approve a submission at its scheduled meeting on 27 April. However, the Commission would like to receive at least a draft proposal by the end of 4 April.
- 1.4 An Electoral Review Working Group of this Committee has met twice, once online (24 February) and once in person (3 March) to work up a set of draft proposals for consideration by this Committee. On the conclusion of the Consultation, the LGBCE will consider all representations, determine its own proposed pattern of wards and then consult again on its proposal.
- 1.5 The LGBCE was invited to deliver briefings to all Buckinghamshire Councillors, and to parish and town councils, on the statutory criteria for a review. These took place on 28 February and 7 March for this Council, and 2 March and 9 March for parish and town councils.

2. The Working Group – objective:

- 2.1 The Working Group was asked to develop a response to the consultation, making a recommendation to the Standards & General Purposes Committee as to a preferred pattern of wards. The Group has had regard to the three statutory criteria outlined below in paragraph 3. The Group recognised that no criteria 'outweighed' the other and that a balance of them was key. The Group also considered the electorate figures published by the LGBCE on their Buckinghamshire consultation pages.
- 2.2 The proposal, and the rationale, is explained in paragraph 4.

3. Pattern of wards – criteria:

- 3.1 The Working Group has had regard to the LGBCE's published guidance on [How to propose a pattern of wards](#). The three statutory criteria for determining a pattern of wards are:
 - i) **Delivering electoral equality for local voters** – ensuring that each local councillor represents roughly the same number of electors so that the value of a vote is the same regardless of where a person lives in the local authority

area. Given the total forecast electorate of 443,064 by 2027, the average number of electors per councillor, for this review, is 1 councillor per 4,521 electors. The Group has therefore sought to keep within +/- 10% of that notional figure.

- ii) **Reflecting the interests and identities of local communities** – establishing electoral arrangements which, as far as possible, maintain local ties and where boundaries are easily identifiable.
- iii) **Promoting effective and convenient local government** – ensuring that the new wards can be represented effectively by their elected representative(s), allows the authority to conduct its business effectively; and adequately reflects the electoral cycle of the council.

4. Proposal and rationale:

- 4.1 The Working Group has proposed a pattern of 50 wards based, largely, on two-member representation for each ward, achieving 98 councillors overall. The list of proposed wards and their names is attached at **Annex 1**. Maps showing the proposed wards, and underlying electorate data, will also be made available to the Committee ahead of the meeting. The Group believes the proposal provides a sound basis, reflecting the balance of the statutory criteria.
- 4.2 The Working Group has been mindful that ‘one size’ does not fit all. As a new unitary authority, it is important that the pattern of wards supports communities and provides the best possible reflection of community identity and effective government. This has resulted in a proposal that includes a mix of one- and two-member representation per ward.
- 4.3 In certain cases, the existing ward structures were in any event not sustainable, due to projected development, as the 2027 forecast electorate demonstrates. As such, the proposals include several suggested changes to boundaries, having regard to community identity and effective governance. These are marked accordingly in the Annex to this report.
- 4.4 The review represents an opportunity to provide a stable basis for electoral representation following a period of considerable structural change in local governance across Buckinghamshire. In framing its proposals, the Working Group has not thought it necessary to disregard existing ward arrangements where these already reflect good community identity. Equally it did not simply follow existing structures as an easy rule.
- 4.5 Rather, each ward has been proposed based on the best balance of the three statutory criteria. That said, the Group is aware that there are a small number of areas where the Group believes further detailed work on certain boundaries is potentially necessary to achieve better community identity. The Group is recommending that the Council engages with the LGBCE, and stakeholders, on these

proposals, with a view to working them up in more detail, particularly in the next phase of the consultation.

- 4.6 The Group has been mindful that Buckinghamshire is also a member-led authority which sees its democratic relationship with the electorate and local communities as pivotal to Buckinghamshire's future. This perspective has been important from the commencement of the Council last year: for example as expressed through our 16 innovative community boards, which provide action-based local forums where Buckinghamshire councillors meet regularly with parish and town councils, community groups and local stakeholders to identify key local priorities.
- 4.7 The Group considers it important that the wards have sufficient member resilience to sustain this community-based approach. As such, the Group believes the proposals are consistent with sustaining the existing momentum and provide an effective means of contributing to local governance.
- 4.8 The Group has also been mindful that the Council's experience of multi-member wards, since the inception of the Council, has been broadly positive, with certain geographies and community dynamics particularly benefitting from this collaborative approach, regardless of political affiliation. As such, having reviewed the basis of the wards and the communities within them, the Group has felt it right to continue this, where appropriate, on the basis of consolidating community identity and governance.

5. Next steps

- 5.1 If the Committee is minded to endorse the proposed pattern of wards, and the approach outlined in this report, then a draft submission will be made to the Commission, in principle, by the end of 4 April 2022. Council will be asked to endorse it as the Council's formal submission at the Council meeting on 27 April 2022.
- 5.2 Thereafter, during April, May and June 2022, the LGBCE will consider all submissions, undertake any research on the ground in Buckinghamshire and potentially undertake further localised consultation before determining its own proposal. The Group believes it will be important for the Council to continue to liaise closely with the Commission during that phase.
- 5.3 From 5 July to 12 September 2022, the LGBCE will commence consultation on its proposal during which this Council will be able to comment and work constructively with the Commission. The final report from the Commission, outlining its recommendation to Parliament, will be issued on 29 November 2022.
- 5.4 The pattern of wards would not become effective until the 2025 Buckinghamshire elections.