



Report to Standards and General Purposes Committee

Date: 8 October 2020

Title: Local Government Boundary Commission for England – Update on Electoral Review of Buckinghamshire Council

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Ward(s) affected: All

Recommendations:

The Committee is asked: -

- 1. To note the update, including the work undertaken by the Member Working Group since 2 July 2020.**
- 2. To agree to an additional meeting of the Standards and General Purposes Committee being held on 25 February 2021, to approve the Council's final submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) on Council size numbers.**

Reason for decision: To ensure that work is progressing satisfactorily to prepare the necessary statistical and other information, and other arrangements are in place, for the Council's final submission to be made to the LGBCE by the start of March 2021.

Background

- 1.1.** The Committee received a report on 2 July, 2020, explaining that with the establishment of the new unitary Council the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) had indicated that it intended to conduct an electoral review of Buckinghamshire Council.
- 1.2.** The LGBCE have indicated that any changes would not come into effect until the 2025 Buckinghamshire Council elections but the precise timeframe for the stages of the Review still needed to be confirmed.

- 1.3. The Committee agreed that a Member Working Group (MWG) of 9 Members (to allow for cross party representation) would be established to oversee the work of officers in the preparation of the statistical and other information required by the LGBCE. The membership has now been confirmed as Councillors Waters (Chairman), Mordue, Adoh, Collingwood, Etholen, M Knight, Lambert, L Smith and Stannard.
- 1.4. On 4 August, 2020, the MWG met remotely with the LGBCE and received a presentation on their approach to the Review, the process that would be followed and the timetable. This was similar to the presentation given by the LGBCE to all Members on 23 September. The initial review timetable proposed by the LGBCE was:
- October 2020 – Deadline for submission of draft Council size number proposals
 - November 2020 – Deadline for submission of final Council size number proposals.
 - December 2020 – LGBCE agree Council size (i.e. number of Councillors) to be elected to the Buckinghamshire Council in 2025.
 - 11 May 2021 – Commence second part of review looking at Warding arrangements for the Buckinghamshire Council.
 - Early-Mid 2022 – Review concluded, LGBCE publish final recommendations on the Warding arrangements (
- 1.5. The MWG expressed concerns that the Council had being given very little time to prepare a proper submission (draft submission by October, final submission by November) on the Council size numbers. There were also concerns that the second part of the review was timetabled to commence immediately after the May 2021 elections. This would be before Members, many of who were likely to be brand new Councillors, had the opportunity to settle into their new roles. As such, the MWG authorised the Service Director: Legal and Democratic Services, to write formally to the LGBCE to enquire whether there was scope for revising the Electoral Review timeline.
- 1.6. Subsequently, a response was received from the LGBCE informing the Council that the LGBCE had considered the MWG's request and were content to defer the submission date for the Council size numbers from November 2020 until the beginning of March 2021. A further response was received that the LGBCE would be more than happy to accommodate a little extra time (until June 2021) to allow things to settle after the elections before commencing on the part of the Electoral Review looking at the Warding arrangements.
- 1.7. The LGBCE's response also stated that it was their intention that the review as a whole would still be completed fairly early in the term of the new Council, allowing plenty of time for both preparing for subsequent elections based on the new wording scheme and any consequential community governance arrangements that the Council might wish to introduce in time for that election.

- 1.8 The Standards and General Purposes Committee will need to approve the final Council size numbers submission to the LGBCE in due course and, as such, it is recommended that an additional meeting is held on 25 February 2021 for this purpose.
- 1.9 The MWG has met on 3 occasions and has received information from Officers who have started to populate the template that has been provided by the LGBCE and that they require the Council's submission to be made on. The template and information is still at a draft stage and it is hoped that a fuller version will be able to be reported to the Standards and General Purposes Committee next meeting in December.
- 1.10 It is important that the submission is evidence based as much as possible and to this end the information provided by the Officers has focussed on statistical / factual information. However, part of the template (Section 9) relates to the community involvement and leadership role of Councillors, where the LGBCE requires information on how Members undertake their role, their involvement in Council work and the community, and the time commitment. This includes the range of meetings attended and how Members deal with their casework. A survey (Appendix 1) was sent to all Members on 24 September following the all Member briefing with the LGBCE. Members have been asked to complete the survey by 12 October. The survey results will be used to inform the Council's submission so it is important that as many Councillors as possible respond to it.
- 1.11 Separately, the MWG has also been engaging with the Cabinet to help include information with the submission on what the future expectations will be for the Cabinet and the Cabinet Member role, and what other support the role might require.
- 1.12 As mentioned at paragraph 1.10, the LGBCE held a briefing session (MS Teams meeting) on Wednesday 23 September for all Members which provided:
- an overview of the purpose of electoral reviews and the review process.
 - an overview of the involvement: how Members could get involved, how they could encourage others to get involved, and how they could influence the outcome.
 - an opportunity to ask questions.
- 1.13 The briefing session was attended by 90 Councillors. It was also recorded so that those Members who were unable to attend could also view it. On 24 September, all Members were sent a link to the recording of the meeting, a copy of the LGBCE's presentation, and a link to access the survey.

Other Options considered

- 2.1 None, the Standards & General Purpose Committee has agreed that the Members Working Group will be involved in the development of the proposals designed to facilitate the Review.

Legal and financial implications

- 3.1 The proposed electoral review is a statutory process instigated by the LGBCE and driven by their timetable and requirements. The Council has no choice but to support and provide a significant amount of information for the review to ensure that the outcomes are in the best interests of the people of Buckinghamshire.
- 3.2 The governance arrangements the Council puts in place to enable it to respond to the review and discharge its responsibilities is a matter for the Council.
- 3.3 There are some resource implications relating to officer time to prepare the necessary statistical and other information and develop and implement a communication and engagement strategy. An Officer Working Group has been established, led by the Service Director (Legal and Democratic Services) which is undertaking the work to provide the necessary information to the MWG.

Corporate implications

- 4.1 The Electoral review will impact on all Councillors and all communities within Buckinghamshire. To maximise participation for Councillors, residents and all relevant stakeholder group it will be important to ensure a thorough consultation exercise is undertaken.

Next steps and review

- 5.1 A further update will be provided to the next Committee meeting in December 2020.



Appendix 1: Member Survey questions

1. On average, approximately how many times are you contacted (via email, phone call, by mail) on a **weekly** basis?
2. On average, how many hours do you spend on casework on a **weekly** basis?
3. On average, how many hours of representation and support to your community do you undertake on a **weekly** basis?
4. How many Town / Parish Councils do you represent and, on average, how many hours do you spend in attendance at their meetings on a **weekly** basis?
5. How much time do you spend preparing for and attending meetings of outside bodies on a **monthly** basis?
6. How much time do you spend preparing for and attending Community Boards and their Working Groups on a **monthly** basis?
7. How much time do you spend preparing for and attending Council/Committee meetings (other than the Community Boards) on a **monthly** basis?
8. FREE TEXT - Is there anything about the Councillor role (e.g. community representation, time commitment) that you would like highlighted to the LGBCE?
9. To verify the above information, a further question
To what extent do you feel that an average of approximately 16 hours per week carrying out your community leadership role, responding to casework, attending meetings (including Council/Committee, community, Town & Parish) and supporting residents is an accurate reflection of your experience?
 - Too much
 - About right
 - Not enough