



Report to Standards and General Purposes Committee

Date: 10 December 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: -

To note the update, including the work undertaken by the Member Working Group since 8 October 2020.

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 established as Councillors Waters (Chairman), Mordue, Adoh, Collingwood, Etholen, M Knight, Lambert, L Smith and Stannard.

- 1.4. Following consultation with the LGBCE, the initially proposed review timetable has been revised and is as follows:
- January 2021 – Deadline for submission of draft Council size number proposals
 - 25/2/2021 – Standards and General Purposes Committee – to approve the final Council size numbers submission to the LGBCE.
 - 1 March 2021 – Deadline for submission of final Council size number proposals.
 - March-April 2021 – LGBCE agree Council size (i.e. number of Councillors) to be elected to the Buckinghamshire Council in 2025.
 - June 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 It is the LGBCE's intention for the review as a whole to 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.
- 1.6 The MWG has met on 5 occasions since July and has received information from Officers who have populated the LGBCE's Council size numbers template with statistical / factual information such as the Council's profile (geography, demographics, population and forecast population growth, deprivation and housing costs, electorate forecasts), and on 3 broad aspects relating to the role of Councillors:
- Strategic Leadership.
 - Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulation and Partnerships).
 - Community Leadership
- 1.7 It is important that the submission is evidence based as much as possible and to this end all Members were invited to complete a survey during September-October 2020 to gain an insight into how they undertook their role, their involvement in Council work and the community, and the time commitment. In total, 103 (53%) of Councillors responded to the survey.
- 1.8 With regard to time commitment, Members were asked an additional survey question to verify to what extent they felt that an average of approximately 16 hours per week carrying out their community leadership role, responding to casework, attending meetings (including Council/Committee, community, Town and Parish Council) and supporting residents was an accurate reflection of their experience. The responses indicated that:
- 10% - spend less than 16 hours per week for their Councillor work.
 - 40% - spend, on average, about 16 hours per week for their Council work.
 - 50% – spent more than 16 hours per week for their Councillor work.
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- 1.9 Alongside the statistical / factual information in the Council size numbers template, the MWG has been putting together an Options Paper to clearly explain what the Council believes is the correct number of Councillors to represent the Buckinghamshire Council from 2025 onwards. The Options Paper will be considered by the MWG on Monday 7 December and, due to the timing of this meeting, then circulated to Committee Members with a supplementary agenda.

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 The Member Working Group would continue to meet over the coming months. The Standards and General Purposes on 25 February 2021 would be asked to approve the final Council size numbers submission to the LGBCE