



Council

Date:	27 April 2022
Title:	Electoral Review of Buckinghamshire – Pattern of Wards
Lead Member:	Councillor Broom, Chairman – Standards and General Purposes Committee
Author and/or contact officer:	Nick Graham, Service Director – Legal & Democratic Services
Ward(s) affected:	All
Recommendations:	<p>(1) To approve the final submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on a future pattern of wards for Buckinghamshire Council based on the draft submission at Appendix 1 from the Standards & General Purposes Committee</p> <p>(2) For the avoidance of doubt, thereafter to delegate to the Standards & General Purposes Committee the responsibility for agreeing with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England the detail of the precise location of boundaries arising from the Council’s proposal, consistent with achieving the overall terms of the final submission; and</p> <p>(3) To ask the Standards & General Purposes Committee to report back to Council with any recommendations arising from any response or proposal from the Commission which would otherwise be inconsistent with the Council’s submission.</p>
Reason for decision:	To enable the Council to formally respond to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England

1. Background

- 1.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has held 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. The Commission is 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. As the 'council size' was determined at an earlier stage of the Commission's process, this question cannot be re-opened now.
- 1.3 The consultation ran until the 4 April. The LGBCE confirmed that it would be willing for Full Council formally to approve a submission at its scheduled meeting on 27 April. However, the Commission wished to receive a draft proposal by the end of 4 April and as delegated by Council, a draft submission was made to the Commission by the Standards & General Purposes Committee on 30 March. The draft submission is included as Appendix 1 to this report. The Committee has recommended Council to endorse the draft submission as the Council's formal submission.
- 1.4 This is on the understanding, as the draft submission says, that the details of certain boundaries to achieve the overall aim of the proposal will need to be finessed with the Commission.
- 1.5 In arriving at a draft submission, the Committee was supported by a cross-party Electoral Review Working Group of the Committee. This met twice, once online (24 February) and once in person (3 March) to work up the broad set of draft proposals for consideration by the Committee. The draft proposal was agreed by Committee on 17 March. Prior to this, the Commission 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.
- 1.6 The next formal phase of the review will be the consultation by the Commission on its proposed way forward.
- 1.7 If Recommendation 2 is approved by Council, the Committee would intend that the Electoral Review Working Group would continue throughout the next phases of the review to advise the Committee.

2. Pattern of wards - criteria

- 2.1 In arriving at its draft submission, the Committee 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 Committee 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.

3. Proposal and rationale

- 3.1 The Committee has proposed a pattern of 50 wards based, largely, on two-member representation for each ward, achieving 98 councillors overall. The draft submission is at Appendix 1. This gives a list of proposed wards and their names together with maps showing them, plus the underlying electorate data. The Committee considered the proposal to provide a sound basis, reflecting the balance of the statutory criteria.
- 3.2 The Committee was 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.
- 3.3 In certain cases, the existing ward structures were in any event not sustainable, due to projected development, as the 2027 forecast electorate, published by the Commission 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.
- 3.4 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 Committee 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.
- 3.5 Rather, each ward has been proposed based on the best balance of the three statutory criteria. That said, the Committee is aware that there are a small number of areas where further detailed work on certain boundaries is potentially necessary to achieve better community identity. The Committee has asked the Electoral Review Working Group to consider these further with a view to working them up in more detail in the next phases of the review, alongside the Commission.
- 3.6 The Committee 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.

- 3.7 The Committee considers it important that the wards have sufficient member resilience to sustain this community-based approach. As such, the Committee believes the proposals are consistent with sustaining the existing momentum and provide an effective means of contributing to local governance.
- 3.8 The Committee 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 Committee has felt it right to continue this, where appropriate, based on consolidating community identity and governance.

4. Next steps

- 4.1 If Council endorses the proposed pattern of wards, and the approach outlined in this report, then the submission at Appendix 1 will formally be sent to the Commission.
- 4.2 Thereafter, during April, May and June, 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 Committee believes it will be important for the Council to continue to liaise closely with the Commission during that phase, hence the inclusion of Recommendation 2.
- 4.3 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.
- 4.4 It would therefore be the Committee's intention that the cross-party Electoral Review Working Group should continue to play a key role in all the remaining phases of the review.
- 4.5 The pattern of wards would not become effective until the 2025 Buckinghamshire elections.

