



# Report to Standards and General Purposes Committee

<b>Date:</b>	<b>13 April 2023</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Buckinghamshire Electoral Review</b>
<b>Relevant councillor(s):</b>	<b>All</b>
<b>Author and/or contact officer:</b>	Nick Graham, Service Director, Legal and Democratic. Contact officer Glenn Watson, Principal Governance Officer.
<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All</b>

## **Recommendations:**

- (1) to adopt the recommendation of the Electoral Review Working Group that the proposals set out by the Local Government Boundary Commission in their further consultation (and summarised at Annex 1) be accepted;
- (2) to recommend Council to endorse the Commission's proposed wards and to inform the Commission accordingly.

## **Reason for decision:**

The Committee is tasked by Council to make recommendations to it on potential responses to electoral review consultations. In doing so, the Committee receives the advice of the Electoral Review Working Group. This report summarises the Working Group's recommendation in response to the Commission's latest consultation on four wards in the south-east of the county; namely, Chalfont St Peter, Farnhams & Stoke Poges, Gerrards Cross & Denham and Iver.

## **1. Background:**

1.1 It was expected that, on 28 February, the Local Government Boundary Commission would publish its final proposals for the pattern of wards for Buckinghamshire Council. Instead, the Commission launched a limited further consultation on revised proposals for four wards in the south-east of the county. These amendments were made by the Commission in response to a significant number of objections to their previous

proposals in this area. The Commission believes the revisions achieve the best balance of their criteria: community identity, acceptable electoral variance, effective local government and their wish to minimise the number of parishes which would be split across Buckinghamshire wards. The Commission's proposals and report can be found on their [website here](#).

1.2 The Commission has not indicated what position it has taken on the remainder of the county. Instead, it now intends to publish the final recommendations on all wards on 30 May. The consultation officially ends on 11 April but the Commission has given this authority an extension to 26 April to enable Council to consider the matter on that date, in the meantime noting the decision of this Committee.

1.3 The Electoral Review Working Group invited the ward members for the consultation area to give their views. Drop-in sessions for ward members were arranged with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman. The Working Group then met on 23 March to consider the Commission's proposals and the feedback from local members.

## **2. The Commission's proposals**

2.1 The Commission's report notes: "it has received sufficient evidence relating to the rest of Buckinghamshire to finalise its recommendations, so this [new] consultation is focused...only" on the four south-east wards.

2.2 In response to feedback, the Commission has changed each of the four proposed wards: Chalfont St Peter, Farnhams & Stoke Poges, Gerrards Cross & Denham and Iver. As the revised proposals were new, the Commission felt obliged to consult on them.

2.3 Annex 1 summarises the key changes envisaged by the Commission. In short, these are:

- A. To reverse the proposed extension of Chalfont St Peter southwards into Gerrards Cross Parish: based on "strong community-based evidence"
- B. Consequently, to reduce the number of Chalfont St Peter councillors by one: to achieve acceptable electoral variance for that ward (10%)
- C. To restore New Denham from Iver to Gerrards Cross & Denham: based on feedback that there were no "strong community or geographic links" between New Denham and Iver Parish. (The revision now aligns with this Council's original submission)
- D. To place Hedgerley and Fulmer within Farnhams & Stoke Poges: restoring Denham wholly to Gerrards Cross & Denham would result in that ward being out of variance; however, placing Fulmer & Hedgerley within the Farnhams & Stoke Poges Ward would achieve balance for both wards but would do so by expanding the latter from two members to three.

- E. To pluralise 'Farnham' to demonstrate that both Farnham Royal and Farnham Common are included in the name "Farnhams & Stoke Poges".

2.4 This results in one fewer councillor overall, 97 instead of the previously proposed 98. The Commission had indicated, throughout the review, that the "98" number may marginally increase or decrease depending on the final balance of criteria for each ward.

2.5 The representation and variance would therefore be:

Ward	Electorate	Variance*	Councillors
Chalfont St Peter	10069	10%	2
Farnhams & Stoke Poges	11990	-12.51%	3
Gerrards Cross & Denham	14304	4%	3
Iver	9308	2%	2

2.6 It is notable, from A-E above, that the revised proposals are interlocked, with a decision for one ward having some impact on another. This demonstrates the consideration at the heart of an electoral review: achieving a *balance* of the relevant criteria for each ward and for its neighbours.

2.7 The Commission considers their revisions achieve a working balance of the criteria: only one ward would exceed the variance, others coming well within it or at the acceptable limit of it; only one parish (Chalfont St Peter) would cross a Buckinghamshire Ward boundary; and each reflects an acceptable balance of community identity.

### 3. The Working Group's consideration

3.1 The Working Group met on 23 March to consider the Commission's proposals and the feedback from local ward members. Annex 1 includes an indication of ward member views.

3.2 The Working Group noted the interlocking nature of the proposals for each ward. It noted that the local ward members for three of the four proposed wards were largely supportive of the changes.

3.3 The Working Group noted that process of balancing the criteria necessarily involved a compromise between them. The Group concluded that the Commission's proposals presented the most workable balance of the criteria, having regard to the constraints of geography and the interlocking implications for each ward.

3.4 The Working Group received an alternative proposal from Councillors in Chalfont St Peter but did not support this. The Group's decision to support the Commission's proposal instead recognised that the proposals were interlocked and that a significant alternative proposal would impact the overall criteria for one or more of the adjacent

wards; not reflect the views from the majority of local ward members; and not be likely, in any case, to persuade the Commission.

3.5 The Group recommends the adoption of the Commission’s revised proposals.

#### 4. Next steps

4.1 Council will consider the recommendation of this Committee on Wednesday 26 April.

4.2 Thereafter, the Commission’s revised timetable is:

<b>Final report</b> We publish the Commission’s recommendations	May 2023
<b>Order laid in Parliament</b> This makes the recommendations law	To be confirmed
<b>Effective date</b> The new arrangements apply to elections after this date	May 2025

#### 5. Legal and financial implications

5.1 This report does not contain any financial implications. At present, the Council is participating in a consultation on the future electoral boundaries of the Council. There is no cost in responding to the consultation and any outcome will not be effected until the election of 2025.

5.2 In considering these recommendations, the Committee is fulfilling the delegation granted to it by Council. The Council is a statutory consultee to the electoral review.

#### 6. Corporate implications

6.1 The outcome of the electoral review will shape the nature of the Council’s elected member representation from the May 2025 elections and as such will have significant corporate implications at that time. For now, there are no current corporate implications.