



Report to Standards and General Purposes Committee

Date:	24 August 2023
Title:	Buckinghamshire Electoral Review
Relevant councillor(s):	All
Author and/or contact officer:	Nick Graham, Service Director, Legal and Democratic. Contact officer Glenn Watson, Principal Governance Officer.
Ward(s) affected:	All

Recommendations: to note the final outcome of the Buckinghamshire Electoral Review.

Reason for decision:

This Committee had the primary responsibility for developing the Council's response to the Buckinghamshire Electoral Review at each stage. This report updates the Committee on the final outcome of the review.

1. Background:

1.1 The Buckinghamshire Electoral Review took place over the past two years. Its aim was to deliver electoral arrangements for Buckinghamshire Council which reflect electoral equality for all electors across the county. The stages of the review involved consultations on councillor numbers ('council size') and the future pattern of wards. The Council responded to each consultation, taking advice from this Committee. In May 2023, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England concluded its review and published the final recommendations which now go forward to Parliament. The outcomes will come into effect at the May 2025 elections.

2. The Commission's proposals

2.1 The Commission's [final recommendations](#) are:

- a) **Council Size:** residents should be represented by 97 councillors (50 fewer than now)
- b) **Pattern of Wards:** 49 wards (as now) but represented by a variable number of councillors (rather than the currently uniform three members per ward):
 - ten three-councillor wards
 - 28 two-councillor wards and
 - eleven single-councillor wards

2.2 Overall the Commission received 985 comments from local people and organisations in response to the review.

The Council's engagement

2.3 An electoral review requires the balancing of several factors:

- a) Community identity
- b) Electoral equality (i.e. that councillors should represent the same number of electors so far as possible)
- c) Effective and convenient local government

2.4 Bearing these principles in mind, this Committee appointed a cross-party Electoral Review working Group of the whole committee to work up the detail of the Council's potential responses at each stage. The Group's recommendations came to this Committee which in turn recommended proposals to Council. Consultation took place with all councillors and as needed with individual ward members.

2.5 This Council had originally proposed a council size of 120 councillors. Once the Commission had determined a council size approximating to 97/98 councillors the Council proposed a largely uniform pattern of two-member wards. The Commission did not accept that pattern. However over the next rounds of consultation (on the draft and final proposals), the Council engaged fully again with the Commission which then followed 18 of the Council's suggestions either in full or in part.

2.6 For example, the Commission accepted the Council's view for: New Denham remaining within the proposed Denham & Gerrards Cross Ward; an arrangement of parishes around Chesham, for community identity and equality reasons; and the merging of wards which the Commission would otherwise have proposed as smaller, single-member wards (e.g. the final Grendon Underwood & The Claydons ward). **Annex 1** to this report indicates the instances where the Commission's outcome matched a preference of this Council.

2.7 **Annex 2** to this report is a Table extracted from the Commission's final report. This lists the new ward names, their electorate and the number of councillors to represent each as from the May 2025 elections.

3. Next steps

3.1 The Commission's final proposals have now been laid as an Order in Parliament. Once approved, they will become operational at the next scheduled election in 2025.

4. Legal and financial implications

4.1 This report does not contain any legal implications. The financial implications of the reduction in the number of councillors by 50 represents a saving of £540k which is currently included in the MTFP from 2025/26. However, on latest member allowance rates and taking into account inflation, it is expected that this figure may increase to £710k.

5. Corporate implications

5.1 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 which will be considered over the coming months.