


Agenda Item No:	<b>11</b>	
Committee:	<b>Council</b>	
Date:	<b>08 December 2021</b>	
Report Title:	<b>Council Consultation Response in relation to the Fenland Electoral Review - Proposed Future Warding Arrangements</b>	

## 1 Purpose / Summary

- For Members to consider and agree the formal Council consultation submission in relation to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) Electoral Review of Fenland District Council. This report forms the Council's response to the second part of the electoral review process regarding the proposed future warding arrangements, including future ward boundaries, number of elected representatives per ward and future ward names.

## 2 Key issues

- The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is an independent body established by Parliament in April 2010. One of its objectives is to work with principal local authorities to help them deliver effective and convenient local government to citizens. Every year, the LGBCE assesses electorate data for each local authority in England with the intention to intervene where "significant" electoral inequality exists. As a result the LGBCE intervention would be in the form of an electoral review should significant electoral inequality have been identified.
- An electoral review is an examination of a council's electoral arrangements. This means:
  - the total number of members to be elected to the council;
  - the number and boundaries of electoral areas (wards / divisions) for the purposes of the election of councillors;
  - the number of councillors for any electoral area of a local authority; and
  - the name of any electoral area.
- During the Annual Council meeting in May 2021, Full Council agreed to approach the LGBCE to commence an Electoral Review of Fenland District Council given the predicted electoral inequality that would be apparent by the next round of all out elections in 2023. The LGBCE subsequently agreed to this request and Fenland was added to the Electoral Review Programme.
- The LGBCE then subsequently made a request to the District Council to submit a proposal regarding the future total number of Councillors to be elected to the Council, known as Council Size. Considerations regarding the future Council size form the initial part of the electoral review process
- During the September 2021 Council meeting, Members agreed that a proposal should be submitted to the LGBCE that the future Council size should contain 42 elected representatives. In addition, Members were also asked to note the following principles to help inform the second stage of the electoral review process, regarding future warding arrangements and the formulation of future ward boundaries:

- No ward should have an electoral variance greater than 10.00%
  - No Parish Council Area should be split between two different wards
  - Where unavoidable whilst adhering to the first two rules, a Parish Council Area may be joined with part of an adjoining Town Council Area in a single ward (as we have now with Benwick, Coates & Eastrea Ward).
- The LGBCE Commissioners met to discuss the Council Size proposal and later confirmed they were minded to support the suggestion of 42 Members. Members were advised that the LGBCE Commissioners 'minded to' decision reflects the Commission's intentions as to the future council size for Fenland, not its final decision. The Commission are prepared, during the course of the review, to consider whether it might be necessary to change the proposed number of councillors slightly to achieve better levels of electoral representation across the authority area.
  - On 26 October the LGBCE commenced the public consultation process in relation to the formal second stage of the electoral review process, namely the formulation of the new district ward boundaries, seeking consultation submissions regarding where the new boundaries should be. This initial round of public consultation concludes on 10 January 2022.
  - The aim of the review is to improve electoral equality. This means as far as is reasonable that each district councillor represents the same number of electors. In addition, the further two criteria of effective and convenient local government and community identity, are considered and given equal weight.
  - Fenland District Council decided that it would seek to put forward its own proposals at each stage of the LGBCE review project, to be ratified by Full Council. As a result the District Council formulated a cross party Member Working Group to lead the Council through the LGBCE process. The Member Working Group was informed by in depth consultation feedback from two cycles of member Focus Groups based on geographical which involved all 39 Councillors. In total 9 workshops were held.
  - The cross party Member Working Group was convened to consider the current and future district warding arrangements including specific warding options informed by the Member Focus Groups. The Member Focus Groups have played a key role in identifying and refining warding options within the extensive consultation which has been carried out as part of this stage of the project.
  - Following conclusion of the workshops, the Member Working Group considered two future warding proposals which emerged during the Member Focus Groups; the first of those proposals achieved warding boundary arrangements to reflect the future Council size of 42 elected representatives, which the LGBCE previously confirmed they were minded to agree. The second proposal contained future ward boundaries for 41 elected representatives. Both proposals contained a mix of single member, dual member and three member warding arrangements, both proposals believed the variation to best reflect local established communities.
  - The Member Working Group agreed by a majority that the recommended proposal to be put forward to the December Council meeting would be for the future warding arrangements which achieved the future Council Size of 42 elected representatives, as the group concluded that this scheme achieved the optimum level of electoral equality, with electoral variants of within +/- 10% from the average number of elected representatives per elector, with all wards closer to the +/-5% electoral variant figure , whilst also being the most credible in terms of the other LGBCE statutory criteria, Communities of Interest and Effective and Convenient Local Government. The proposed future warding arrangements can be viewed via the following link [https://rds.statmap.co.uk/map/map.html?login=fenland\\_viewer&scenario=OVERALL\\_SUGGESTED\\_SCHEME\\_VERSION\\_1&sid=3e4d59f185b8126f13d28acf90236b3c](https://rds.statmap.co.uk/map/map.html?login=fenland_viewer&scenario=OVERALL_SUGGESTED_SCHEME_VERSION_1&sid=3e4d59f185b8126f13d28acf90236b3c)

### 3 Recommendations

- For Members to consider and approve the proposed future district warding arrangements which achieve a future Council size comprising 42 elected representatives.
- To delegate to Officers in conjunction with The Leader of the Council to add in the rationale and supporting evidence for the preferred proposed warding arrangements following debate at Full Council, prior to formally submitting the Council consultation submission to the LGBCE for consideration by the deadline of 10th January 2022.

Wards Affected	All	
Forward Plan Reference	N/A	
Portfolio Holder(s)	Member Working Group: Cllr Chris Boden Cllr Jan French Cllr Steve Tierney Cllr Sam Hoy Cllr Ian Benney Cllr Will Sutton Cllr Gavin Booth	
Report Originator(s)	Paul Medd - Chief Executive Carol Pilson - Corporate Director Anna Goodall - Head of Transformation, Customer Services and Democracy	
Contact Officer(s)	Paul Medd - Chief Executive Carol Pilson - Corporate Director Anna Goodall - Head of Transformation, Customer Services and Democracy	
Background Paper(s)	Full Council Paper - Electoral Review for Fenland District Council - 19/05/21 Full Council Paper - Fenland Electoral Review - Council Size Report - 30/09/21	