

Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee



Report of head of legal and democratic

Author: Steven Corrigan

Telephone: 07717 274704

E-mail: steven.corrigan@southandvale.gov.uk

To: Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee

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Local Government Boundary Commission for England Review of Vale of White Horse District Council Warding Arrangements

Recommendation: That the committee

1. considers the draft submission attached at appendix B to the report and agrees final proposals for submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England;
2. authorises the democratic services manager, in consultation with the Chair of this committee, to finalise the document for submission.

Purpose of Report

1. This report invites the committee to agree a submission on warding arrangements for Vale of White Horse District Council.

Background

2. In January of this year the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) commenced an electoral review of the warding arrangements for the district based on a council size of 38 members – the same as now. This was lower than the number that Council agreed to propose at its meeting in October 2023 – being 41.
3. This stage of the review is to develop warding proposals. At this time the Commission has published nothing, so the council have a blank canvass on which to make proposals. However, the number of councillors we put forward must add up to 38 (or conceivably higher or lower if there are particular reasons justifying such a variation) and best comply with the three criteria that govern electoral reviews, all of which carry equal weight. These are:

- to deliver electoral equality for voters
 - to provide boundaries that reflect natural communities
 - to provide effective and convenient local government
4. In June the Commission will publish its draft warding proposals and council will have an opportunity to decide its formal response to these. The benefit of making a submission now though is that it will hopefully influence the Commission to publish draft proposals that accord with the council's wishes.
 5. At its meeting on 19 February 2024, this committee considered a [report](#) setting out officer draft proposals, considered the proposals in light of comments submitted by members of the council, attached at appendix A, and agreed the following recommendations to Council:
 - (a) Request officers seek to address the comments raised by members on the draft proposals submitted to the Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee when drafting revised proposals.
 - (b) Request officers consult with relevant ward members where appropriate when drafting revised proposals.
 - (c) Request multi member wards are considered wherever practicable and community identity supports this.
 - (d) Request officers circulate the redrafted proposals to all members for comments prior to further consideration by the Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee.
 - (e) Delegate authority to the Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee to finalise the report to be submitted to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England by the deadline of 18 March 2024.
 6. At its meeting on 21 February 2024, Council considered and approved the above recommendations with three members requesting that their abstentions be recorded. Since the Council meeting officers have invited members to submit further views on the warding arrangements including proposals for multi-member wards.

Revised warding proposals

7. In light of the comments received on the draft proposals the Faringdon ward has been expanded eastward to include the parish of Littleworth. Some members expressed the view that the original officer proposal to include Littleworth within the Stanford ward failed to recognise that Littleworth has no natural community with the rest of the Stanford ward particularly recognising that the A420 creates a barrier between Littleworth and the rest of the Stanford ward.
8. In response to the Council resolution, officers emailed all members seeking proposals for multi-member wards. A further area for consideration was submitted in respect of combining the Marcham and Wootton ward to create a two member ward – Marcham & Wootton. Whilst both current ward members acknowledge that Marcham and Wootton do not share a community identity the residents of the

parish of St Helen Without, which is divided between the two wards, look to both Marcham and Wootton. The creation of a two member ward will facilitate St Helen Without sitting in one district ward. Both members also point out that the Dalton Barracks Garden Village development will impact on both current wards and that the creation of one ward may provide for better representation of residents as this project is taken forward.

9. Suggestions to consider combining other wards in the east of the district (Steventon with Drayton) have not been taken forward at this time due to the impact on electoral equality across the district, the need to redraw ward boundaries/impact on proposals already supported by Council.
10. A number of members made representations regarding the proposed Grove ward and the need to expand its area to bring about greater electoral equality. In light of the comments received the proposal has been revised to include the parishes of West Hanney and Denchworth.
11. Appendix B sets out a revised ward proposal submission document that the committee is invited to consider. The attached map shows the revised ward proposals.
12. As shown in the appendix, the revised proposal requires 39 members – an increase of one member on the council size agreed by the Commission. 39 members is necessary to both achieve electoral equality, provide boundaries that reflect natural communities and achieve effective and convenient local government.
13. The committee is requested to agree a proposal document for submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. Once the Commission publishes its draft proposals this committee and members will have an opportunity to further express their views.

Financial Implications

14. There are no financial implications directly arising from this report. However, if the proposal within it were to be accepted by the Commission there would be allowances and expenses for one additional member.

Legal Implications

15. There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

Climate and ecological impact implications

16. There are no climate or ecological impact implications directly arising from this report.

Equalities implications

17. There are no direct equalities implications arising from this report.

Conclusion

7. The committee is invited to consider and agree a proposal for submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and authorise the

democratic services manager in consultation with the committee Chair to finalise the document.

Background papers

There are no background papers. The LGBCE's website provides comprehensive details of the review to date – <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/vale-white-horse>

Local Government Boundary Commission for England Review of Vale of White Horse District Council – Member responses to draft officer proposals submitted to 9 February committee meeting.

Abingdon-on-Thames

Councillor Helen Pighills - A previous boundary commission proposal some years ago had a ward boundary across Northcourt Road somewhere near the football club entrance. The current ward boundary runs across our driveway - so our neighbour who has access over our drive is in Abbey Northcourt and our house is Dunmore.

The proposed 3 ward setup for Abingdon makes far more sense to me.

Faringdon

See comments on Stanford Ward proposal also.

Councillor Coleman - Perhaps Faringdon Ward could be extended further east and to the north of the A420, to make it a three seat Ward? I note that Faringdon is above the average quota for two seats, so this option might help redress the balance.

Councillors Edwards and Thomas supportive of the above view.

Grove

Councillor Crawford Significantly under average.(-15%) I would add Goosey and Denchworth to Grove rather than Ridgeway and possibly also West Hanney

Councillor Batstone - My first thought is that I think Grove has closer links to the Hanneys than Denchworth and Goosey. I do not think two small villages would work well with a growing population centre.

Wantage

Councillor Crawford - The report suggests both a 4 member Ward (para 8) but also 2 x 2 Member Wards (para 12) I would support the latter but we need to ensure clarity – presumably a Wantage West and East with revised polling districts if this is necessary to produce balance. But see also para 14

Councillor Batstone - Wantage should split into two but make sure it is a clear boundary between the wards. The existing boundary in Grove is very confusing.

Blewbury & Harwell Ward

Councillor Gascoigne - In support of splitting my current ward, as it has one of the largest variances currently and will see a lot of growth in the coming years

- In support of multimember wards as a more inclusive/favourable experience for councillors so would recommend more of this across the district
- Although not part of this review, in favour of review the boundary between South and Vale and therefore warding with that future in mind

Botley & Sunningwell

Councillor Smith - In relation to Botley and Sunningwell Ward, I am contents that there is no change. I would be open to looking at whether Sunningwell and Wootton should be merged, but as others have said that would require Wootton to have two members, and I think the remaining part of my ward would still need two given how many people live in Botley.

Cumnor

Councillor Coleman – I am not too familiar with Cumnor Ward, but it does seem to make sense to merge Appleton with Eaton, and Besselsleigh with Cumnor.

Councillor Smith - Thames ward is a big ask for one person to cover given the geographic spread of the villages within it, so moving Appleton into Cumnor seems sensible.

Drayton

No comments received.

Hendreds

Councillor James - I am in favour of including Harwell Campus in the new Harwell and Western Valley ward, removing it from the Hendreds Ward where it currently sits. This is a part of Harwell Parish that is already physically separated from the main village and is very small in number of residents compared to the main village. Because of that it's my feeling that sitting in a different ward to the main part of Harwell village isn't particularly helpful to that community.

I note that this proposal will mean that Harwell Campus will sit in 3 different district council wards. It currently sits across 3 parish councils and 2 council wards. Harwell Campus has an impact that is felt across this part of the district, so that may be no bad thing.

Kennington & Radley

No comments received.

Kingston Bagpuize

Councillor Coleman - Merging the other five parishes of Thames Ward with Kingston Bagpuize will make the new Ward a very large area. Even with the additional member I think this is quite a large area to represent, just my opinion, having covered Thames for nearly a year.

Perhaps Faringdon Ward could be extended further east and to the north of the A420, to make it a three seat Ward? I note that Faringdon is above the average quota for two seats, so this option might help redress the balance.

Councillor Rayner - I think the changes will be a positive for my ward as the boundaries for Kingston Bagpuize especially with Fyfield/Tubney are very unclear and actually boundary changes are being suggested by the Parish on this topic currently.

The growth within my ward has been phenomenal exceeding any other in the district and the range of issues are very different between the high growth areas and the surrounding villages so my only concern is that although other wards may have more numbers, they are in close proximity, unlike the suggested geographical spread which not on a day to day basis, but certainly for canvassing, even with 2 representatives is very wide.

Overall though I believe it is quite a positive recommendation for the future.

Councillor Smith - I support additional members for Kingston Bagpuize which is too big for one member currently, and Thames ward is a big ask for one person to cover given the geographic spread of the villages within it, so moving Appleton into Cumnor seems sensible.

Marcham

Councillor Clegg - I would like to object to this proposal. In my view, generally, splitting a parish between two separate district wards is cause for confusion. In this specific case, however, there is the added complicating factor of the proposed redevelopment Dalton Barracks Garden Village, which will be a major upheaval to the communities immediately adjacent to it, namely Shippon and Dry Sandford (i.e., the parish of St Helen Without). It is my view that supporting these two communities through this transition would be achieved best by having one district councillor represent the entirety of St Helen Without parish as a whole.

Quite how this might be achieved, I am less certain, but the options that spring to mind are:

- Include the whole of St Helen Without parish within Wootton ward, and 'compensate' Marcham ward by reassigning Frilford parish and/or Garford parish to Marcham.
- Include the whole of St Helen Without parish within Marcham ward, and 'compensate' Marcham ward by reassigning Sunningwell parish to Wootton.

Councillor Shaw - Whilst I have some sympathy with Robert's suggestion that all of Dry Sandford should be in his Ward, historically it has always been divided between the two Wards – at least since I first came on to the Council in 2007.

With regard to the suggestion of moving Sunningwell into my Ward that would return the Ward to its boundaries when I was first elected (2007). At that time the Sunningwell and Wootton Ward was considered to need 2 councillors and, without knowing the overall figures if Sunningwell came back into my Ward, it may well need 2 councillors again.

On the whole, I think it better to leave the boundaries as they are currently.

Ridgeway

Councillor Crawford - A very rural Ward which already has 7 parishes – a large workload for one Councillor. Although it has a proposed -1% deviance by moving Goosey and Denchworth to Grove the variance would still be within bounds.

Stanford

Councillor Sue Caul - Regarding Stanford ward, I can find no reason why Littleworth should be included within this ward as it simply has no 'natural community' with the rest of the Stanford ward given the dividing aspect of the A420. The other wards have a very close bond in that they interact with each other and share resources where possible, and whilst I recognise that is as a result of the current boundaries, there is a natural cohesiveness and accessibility that makes those bonds that much stronger.

It seems much more in keeping with the locality aspect that Littleworth is included within the Faringdon ward. Accepting this would mean Faringdon would likely then become a 3 member ward, I would suggest this is much more in keeping with the population of Faringdon, and means Members are better able to represent the needs of the many residents there.

Councillor Coleman - Merging Littleworth with Stanford will make the new Ward quite long and although there is a road connection between the existing Ward and Littleworth, I feel the A420 could represent a barrier between the two.

Councillors Edwards and Thomas supportive of the above view.

Steventon & the Hanneys

No comments received.

Sutton Courtenay

No comments received.

Thames – recommendation to remove

Watchfield & Shrivenham

No comments received.

Wootton

See Marcham comments.

Vale of White Horse District Council

Revised Warding Proposals

Introduction

1. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE – the Commission) is currently undertaking an electoral review of Vale of White Horse District Council. This is considering the warding arrangements for the district taking effect from the May 2027 elections.
2. The Council previously submitted a proposal to the Commission for a council size of 41. In December 2023 the Commission advised that they had agreed a council size of 38 members (no change from the current council size) although with flexibility up or down to facilitate a stronger more equal warding pattern, although the aim should be to achieve electoral equality with 38 members.
3. The Commission provided guidance and figures on the current electorate situation and electorate forecast for 2029.
4. In developing our proposal, we have taken account of the three statutory criteria that the Commission must consider when devising new warding arrangements;
 - to deliver electoral equality for voters
 - to provide boundaries that reflect natural communities
 - to provide effective and convenient local government

Development of the council's proposed warding arrangements

5. These draft proposals reflect the member views submitted to this committee at its February meeting and views expressed since the Council meeting.

Warding proposals

6. The table below sets out in summary form the warding proposals. There is a brief commentary on the rationale for each proposal where this has altered from the previous officer proposals.

Ward Name	Number of members	Projected electorate 2029	% variance from average
Abingdon North	3	9,533	2%
Abingdon South	3	9,372	0%
Abingdon East	3	9,743	4%
Blewbury	1	3,164	2%
Botley & Sunningwell	2	5,683	-9%
Cumnor	2	6,443	4%
Drayton	1	3,140	1%
Faringdon	2	7,892	18%
Grove	3	8,645	-7%
Harwell & Western Valley	2	6,157	-1%
Hendreds	1	3,159	2%
Kennington & Radley	2	6,087	-2%
Kingston Bagpuize	2	5,444	-4%
Marcham & Wootton	2	5,869	-6%
Ridgeway	1	2,788	-10%
Stanford	1	3,336	7%
Steventon & East Hanney	1	2,836	-9%
Sutton Courtenay	1	2,897	-7%
Wantage	4	12,278	-1%
Watchfield & Shrivenham	2	6,909	11%

Abingdon-on-Thames

7. Currently all of the wards in Abingdon are predicted to have negative variances in 2029 (electoral equality is predicted to range from -2%, -5%, -6% and two at -19%). The electorate forecast for 2029 suggests Abingdon should have nine members).
8. Having regard to the Commission recommendations for the county divisions in Abingdon, officers propose that Abingdon comprises three wards of three members mirroring the county division boundaries. This arrangement will provide for the same boundaries at county council and district level and facilitate the retention of the existing town wards supporting convenient and local government.

Faringdon

9. Currently Faringdon is a two-member ward covering the whole of the town and parish of Faringdon. With the removal of the Thames ward, and following member feedback, it is proposed that the ward includes Littleworth parish.

Wantage and Grove preamble

10. Proposal is for a three member ward for Grove and two two member wards for Wantage.

Grove

11. The proposal is for a three-member ward covering the parish of Grove and, following feedback from members, the parishes of West Hanney and Denchworth to the north and west, to achieve greater electoral equality.

Wantage

12. The proposal is that Wantage is represented by four members split across two member wards, an east and west ward, reflecting the increase in population since the last review. If this is supported officers suggest that the warding arrangements are formulated with the Commission if it is supportive of the proposal.

Current Blewbury & Harwell Ward

13. At the last review this ward had one of the smallest electorates of any ward, reflecting the fact that it would grow rapidly over time as future housing schemes came to fruition. With this growth the proposal is that the existing two-member ward of Blewbury and Harwell is split to create the following:

- a one member Blewbury Ward covering the parishes of Blewbury, Chilton and Upton in the south-eastern corner of the district.
- A two member Harwell and Western Valley ward covering the parishes of Harwell and the newly created Western Valley parish. This proposal reflects that much of the population growth is within the parish of Western Valley (formerly within the parish of Harwell). Officers propose that part of Harwell parish (Harwell Oxford campus) currently excluded from the Blewbury and Harwell ward (and included in the Hendreds ward) is included in this ward.

14. At the last review the council argued against linking Blewbury with Harwell in the same ward. The above recommendations ensure discrete representation for these communities.

Botley & Sunningwell

15. The proposal is for no change to this ward which was created at the previous review and comprises the parishes of Botley and North Hinksey, South Hinksey, Sunningwell and Wytham.

Cumnor

16. This ward currently comprises the whole of Cumnor parish. The proposal is to expand the ward to include the parishes of Appleton-with-Eaton and Besselsleigh.

Drayton

17. The proposal is to retain this ward which comprises the whole of Drayton parish with that part of Milton parish that includes Milton Village. Milton parish is already divided in this manner under the current and previous electoral arrangements with

Milton Heights in the Hendreds ward. The communities of Milton village and Milton Heights are separated by a business park, railway and the A34. They are distinct from each other.

Hendreds

18. Officers propose the retention of this ward which comprises four parishes (including East and West Hendred) that contain villages sitting at the foot of the North Wessex Downs. The only change is to place that part of the Harwell Oxford campus that lies in Harwell parish, currently within the Hendreds ward, within the Harwell and Western Valley ward.

Kennington & Radley

19. Officers recommend the retention of the two-member ward covering the parishes of Kennington and Radley.

Kingston Bagpuize

20. This ward currently comprises the parish of Kingston Bagpuize with a string of five smaller parishes to the south and east. The ward has witnessed significant growth since the last review with a current variance 38% above the average. The proposal is that the ward is expanded to include the parishes of Fyfield and Tubney, Hinton Waldrist, Longworth and Pusey. Including these additional parishes within the ward will help achieve electoral equality. The proposal is that the ward becomes a two-member ward.

Marcham & Wootton

21. Following member views, the revised proposal is for a two member ward covering the existing Marcham and Wootton wards providing for the whole of St Helen Without to be placed in one ward.

Ridgeway

22. This ward currently comprises a collection of seven parishes to the west of Wantage and Grove. With no dominant settlement the ward name reflects the fact that the ancient Ridgeway path passes through five of the seven parishes. No change is proposed to the current ward arrangements.

Stanford

23. This ward comprises six parishes, of which Stanford-in-the-Vale is the largest by some margin, hence the proposed retention of the ward name. There are good road connections between the main villages. No change is proposed to this ward.

Steventon & East Hanney

24. Proposal for two changes to the existing ward – the transfer of Denchworth and West Hanney to the Grove ward. The proposed name reflects the fact that the ward covers two large settlements.

Sutton Courtenay

25. This ward comprises two parishes in the east of the district and mirrors the ward already in existence.

Thames – recommendation to remove

26. As described in various proposals above, the proposal is that the existing ward of Thames is removed with the various parishes becoming part of neighbouring wards to achieve acceptable electoral variances across the wards. There is good communication in respect of the individual proposals and that effective and convenient local government is retained.

Watchfield & Shrivenham

27. Proposal is to retain this two-member ward which comprises the parishes of Watchfield and Shrivenham and a number of rural parishes over a large geographical area and which are well connected with each other.