

Report of Head of Legal and Democratic

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Electoral Review of Vale of White Horse District Council – submission on council size

Recommendation(s)

1. To consider and approve the draft Council Size Submission set out in Appendix A which recommends an increase in the size of the council from 38 to 41.
2. Authorise the head of legal and democratic, in consultation with the Leader of the council, to finalise the Council Size Submission for submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

Purpose of Report

1. To consider and approve the draft Council Size Submission for recommendation to Council.

Corporate priorities

2. The review's principle of establishing a structure for fair and accountable local democracy reflects the council's priorities of working in an open and inclusive way and working in partnership.

Background

3. The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 established the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (The Commission) as an independent statutory body with responsibility for ensuring electoral equality in English local authorities.
4. The Commission notified the council, in October 2022, that Vale of White Horse District Council would be subject to a periodic review because of electoral

inequality. Electoral inequality arises if electors are either over or under-represented by their members(s) when compared with average levels of representation across the district. Under the criteria adopted by The Commission, either of the following conditions are considered to warrant a review if the imbalance is unlikely to be corrected by foreseeable changes to the electorate within a reasonable period:

- Any local authority with a ward that has an electoral variance of 30% or over. This means a ward having 30% more or fewer electors per member than is average for the council as a whole.
- Any local authority where more than 30% of wards have an electoral variance of over 10% from the average for that authority.

5. In the case of Vale of White Horse District Council the current position is that:

- Ten of the 24 electoral wards (42%) have a variance of greater than 10%
- One of the electoral wards has a variance of over 30%

6. The map attached to this report shows those wards with an electoral imbalance.

7. The purpose of an electoral review is to consider the number of members elected to the Council, the names, number and boundaries of the wards, and the number of members to be elected to each ward.

8. There are two phases to the review. Phase one concentrates solely on council size. Phase two will consider and consult upon ward numbers and boundaries.

9. An all-member briefing was held on 7 June 2023 at which The Commission set out its timetable and remit for the review. Group Leaders also received a briefing on 5 June 2023.

10. At its meeting on 13 September 2023, the Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee considered an officer draft Council Size Submission document which recommended a council size of 38 members reflecting the current arrangements. The committee agreed that, because of the recent and anticipated population growth, the increased workload on current members arising from this growth, the additional community representative role arising from requests to join community groups and the new member champion appointments, the desire to ensure the role of councillor remains attractive to a wide section of the community, particular those in work, a council size of 41 would be more appropriate. The committee also agreed that an increase in the size of the council could facilitate the creation of two member wards in some of the larger rural wards. The minutes of the meeting are available [here](#).

11. The timetable for the review is set out below:

Council Size

Activity	Involvement		Key Dates
	Council	LGBCE	
Develop council size proposal	Council Political Groups	Officers will be available to answer any technical queries on making a submission.	Now until mid-November 2023
Submission of council size proposals	Council Political Groups	Officers will acknowledge receipt of submissions.	4 November 2023
Commission Meeting: Council Size	Not required	Commission	12 December 2022

Warding Patterns

Activity	Involvement		Key Dates
	Council	LGBCE	
Consultation on warding patterns	Council Political Groups General Public	Run consultation, collate & analyse responses.	19 December – 11 March 2024 (extra 2 weeks for Christmas)
Commission Meeting: Draft Recommendations	Not required	Commission	21 May 2024
Consultation on Draft Recommendations	Council Political Groups General Public	Publish draft recommendations. Run consultation, collate & analyse responses.	4 June 2024 – 12 August 2024
Commission Meeting: Final Recommendations	Not required	Commission	15 October 2024
Final recommendations published	Not required	Commission	29 October 2024

Order

Activity	Involvement		Key Dates
	Council	LGBCE	
Order laid	Not required	Commission	Winter 2024
Order made	Not required	Commission	Early 2025
Implementation	Council	Not required	2027

12. The first decision gateway for the Council is to agree its Council Size Submission to The Commission by 4 November.

Preferred Option

13. The Commission provides a template for the Council Size Submission. The template is for the council to make arguments about the number of members that it considers will deliver effective governance for the Vale measured by three key dimensions – strategic leadership, accountability, and community leadership.
14. Council is requested to review and approve the draft Submission attached at Appendix A, which is based on officer opinion, and authorise the head of legal and democratic to produce a final version for submission to the October Council meeting.

Climate and ecological impact implications

15. There are no climate and ecological implications arising from this report.

Financial Implications

16. There are no significant financial implications arising from this report. An increase in council size to 41 members would result in an 8% increase in the basic allowances budget.

Legal Implications

17. The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 sets out duty placed on the Boundary Commission to undertake an electoral review of every principal local authority in England ‘from time to time’. A review follows a prescribed process and the Council, as a body corporate, is one of the consultees.

Risks

18. The Commission’s review requires extensive officer support and input particularly from those in electoral services, policy, communications and the GIS team at various stages of the process which could impact on resources and service delivery. To mitigate this, officers from these areas have been briefed on the timetable, process and the information that will be required during the review by The Commission.

Other Implications

19. None.

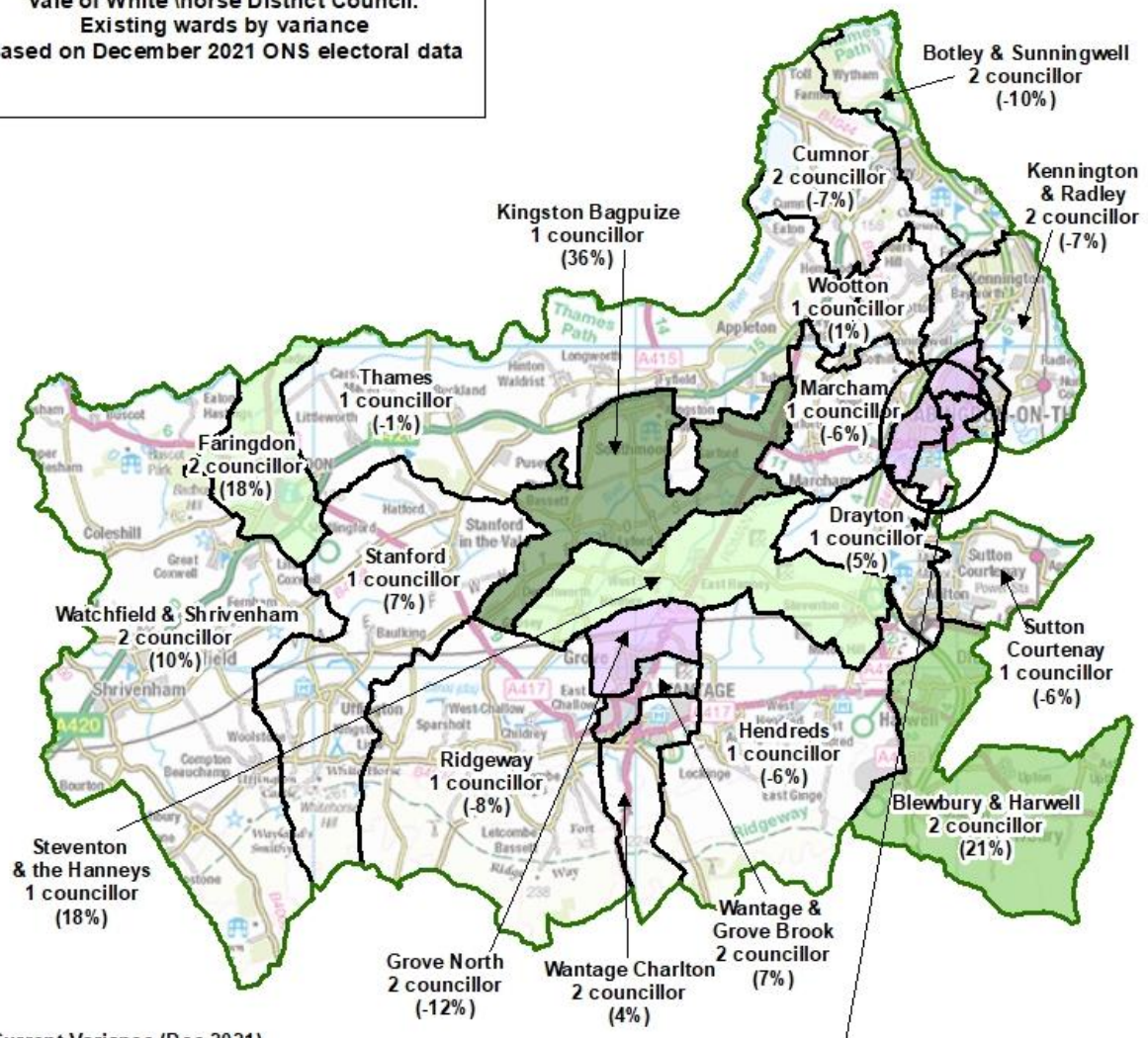
Conclusion

9. The Commission is undertaking an electoral review of Vale of White Horse District Council. The first decision The Commission will take is how many members the Council should have. Vale of White Horse District Council is invited to make a proposal for how many members it believes there should be in the future. To meet this stage in the review process Council is invited to agree a submission on the council size to the Local Government Boundary Commission.

Background Papers

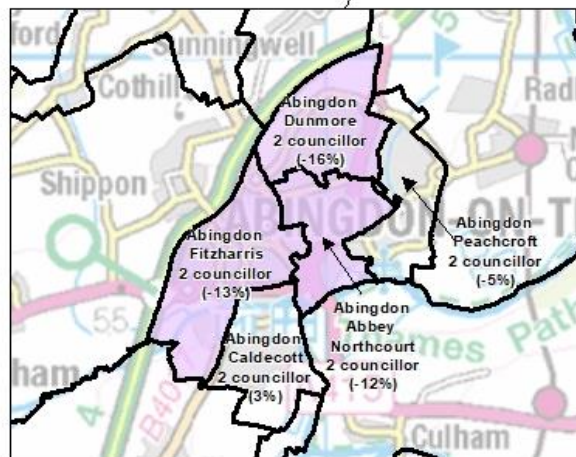
- None

Vale of White Horse District Council:
Existing wards by variance
Based on December 2021 ONS electoral data



Current Variance (Dec 2021)

- < -10% Variance
- Within Tolerance
- > + 10% Variance
- > + 20% Variance
- > + 30% Variance



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