

Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee



Report of head of legal and democratic

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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 A to the report and agrees proposals for consideration by Council;
2. authorises the democratic services manager, in consultation with the Chair of this committee, to finalise the submission for consideration by Council.

Implications (further detail within the report)	Financial	Legal	Climate and Ecological	Equality and diversity
	Yes	No	No	No
Signing off officer	Maggie Xu	Pat Connel	Jessie Fieth	Equalities Team

Purpose of Report

1. This report invites the committee to agree and recommend a submission for consideration by Council 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.

Warding proposals

5. Members were invited, via email on 10 January with a reminder on 23 January, to submit any ideas/views on warding patterns by Friday 26 January. No views were received.
6. Appendix A sets out an officer drafted submission that the committee is invited to consider. In drafting the attached submission, officers have had regard to the current warding patterns and the previous review documents, including consultation responses, from the review undertaken in 2013. The attached map shows the ward proposals.
7. The majority of the draft ward proposals reflect the existing warding patterns with minor alterations primarily to balance elector numbers to achieve electoral equality and to reflect electorate growth in certain areas of the district.
8. The main change to the existing warding arrangements is the proposal to delete the Thames ward (frees up one member) with impacted parishes joining neighbouring district wards, and an additional member for the Kingston Bagpuize ward to reflect both the increase in electorate within the current ward and the inclusion of additional parishes within the proposed ward. Officers also propose a reduction of one member to represent Abingdon with an additional member to represent Wantage and separate representation for Grove. As shown in the appendix, officers are proposing a scheme that requires 39 members – an increase of one member on the council size agreed by the Commission. Under this proposal officers consider that 39 members is necessary to both achieve electoral equality, provide boundaries that reflect natural communities and achieve effective and convenient local government. This is particularly the case in the southeast corner of the district where an additional member is proposed (Harwell and Western Valley) to reflect the population growth.
9. The committee is requested to agree a draft submission for consideration by Council.

10. The Commission will want to know the level of support for particular proposals and whether counter views were based on party politics or local factors. The debate at Council will, therefore, be structured to enable votes on each proposal.

Financial Implications

11. 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

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

Climate and ecological impact implications

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

Equalities implications

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

Conclusion

7. The committee is invited to consider and agree a draft submission for consideration by Council.

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>

Vale of White Horse District Council

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 were developed by the electoral services team for consideration by the Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee which will make a submission to the full Council for approval.
6. In addition to the statutory criteria, officers had regard to the current warding arrangements agreed as part of the 2012/13 review, particularly the consultation responses in respect of the interests and identities of communities, and also applied a number of subsidiary criteria, as follows:
 - to keep urban parishes (Abingdon-on-Thames, Faringdon, Wantage and Grove) separate from the surrounding rural parishes unless local circumstances dictated otherwise;
 - to use whole parishes as building blocks wherever possible.

Warding proposals

7. 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 existing arrangements. In respect of Wantage officers have set out a principle for a proposal and propose that if supported by the committee officers work with members to define precise boundaries (and electorates) for submission to Council.

8. Officers propose in the majority of cases the retention of the existing ward names the rationale for which were agreed as part of the previous review (using the names of larger settlements to define wards – usually one but occasionally two where this was considered or generic names because there were no dominant settlements).

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	7,123	14%
Grove	3	7,962	-15%
Harwell & Western Valley	2	6,157	-1%
Hendreds	1	3,159	2%
Kennington & Radley	2	6,087	-2%
Kingston Bagpuize	2	5,884	-5%
Marcham	1	2,847	-9%
Ridgeway	1	3,068	-1%
Stanford	1	3,543	14%
Steventon & the Hanneys	1	3,361	8%
Sutton Courtenay	1	2,897	-7%
Wantage	4	12,278	-1%
Watchfield & Shrivenham	2	6,909	11%
Wootton	1	3,022	-3%

Abingdon-on-Thames

9. 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).
10. 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

11. As is currently the situation the proposal is a two member ward covering the whole of the town and parish of Faringdon. Although the electorate per councillor is higher than the average at 2029, officers support the view of the council at the last review that Faringdon is a natural community in its own right. To remove part of the town and place it in another ward to achieve electoral equality, would represent a wholly artificial construct that the local electorate would not recognise. Further,

officers do not consider that there is any merit in an artificial sub-division of the town into two wards, as it tends to see itself as a single entity.

Wantage and Grove preamble

12. Officers propose a three member ward for Grove and two two member wards for Wantage.

Grove

13. Officers propose the three member ward should be coterminous with the parish of Grove. Currently part of the parish of Grove is included in the Wantage and Grove Brook ward. A ward coterminous with the parish will facilitate discrete representation thus providing for the ward members to focus on Grove specific issues.

Wantage

14. Officers propose that Wantage is represented by four members reflecting the increase in population since the last review. If this is supported officers suggest that any possible warding arrangements are formulated with the Commission if it supports the proposal.

Current Blewbury & Harwell Ward

15. At the last review this ward had one of the smallest electorate of any ward, reflecting the fact that it would grow rapidly over time as future housing schemes came to fruition. With this growth officers propose 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.

16. 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

17. Officers propose 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

18. This ward currently comprises the whole of Cumnor parish. Officers propose that the ward is expanded to include the parishes of Appleton-with-Eaton and Besselsleigh.

Drayton

19. Officers propose the retention of 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

20. 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

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

Kingston Bagpuize

22. 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. Officers propose that the ward is expanded to include the parishes of Hinton Waldrist, Longworth, Fyfield and Tubney, Pusey and Buckland with Goosey parish becoming part of the Ridgeway ward. Including these additional parishes within the ward will help achieve electoral equality. Officers also propose that the ward becomes a two-member ward.

Marcham

23. Officers propose the retention of the current ward which comprises the parish of Marcham together with the southern part of the parish of St Helens Without (taking in the village of Shippon). There are good road links between the various communities.

Ridgeway

24. 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. Officers propose that the ward is enlarged to include Goosey (currently in Kingston Bagpuize) and Denchworth (currently in the Steventon and the Hanneys ward).

Stanford

25. Officers propose that the existing ward is extended to include the parish of Littleworth (currently in Thames Ward). 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.

Steventon & the Hanneys

26. Officers propose one change to the existing ward – the transfer of Denchworth parish to the Ridgeway ward. This is a collection of three parishes forming a well-connected ribbon of villages north and east of Grove. As stated in the previous review, the proposed name reflects the fact that there is no single largest settlement and helps to define what is a somewhat linear ward.

Sutton Courtenay

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

Thames – recommendation to remove

28. As described in various proposals above, officers propose 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. Officers consider that there is good communication in respect of the individual proposals and that effective and convenient local government is retained.

Watchfield & Shrivenham

29. Officers propose the retention of 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.

Wootton

30. Officers propose no change to this ward which comprises Wootton parish with the northern part of St Helens Without parish that contains the village of Dry Sandford. This combination reflects the natural community.