

Report to: Policy and Resources Committee, 23rd May 2023

Report of: Corporate Director – Planning and Governance

**Subject: LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND:
ELECTORAL REVIEW- WARDING ARRANGEMENTS FURTHER
CONSULTATION**

1. Recommendation

That the Committee:

- 1.1 notes the proposed further consultation on a number of specific warding arrangements for Worcester City Council, published by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England; and**
- 1.2 authorises the Corporate Director- Planning and Governance, to submit a consultation response on behalf of the Council which is confined only to points on which all four Political Group Leaders have reached consensus.**

2. Background

- 2.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission (“the Commission”) is undertaking a periodic electoral review of Worcester City Council. The review commenced in 2021 and as part of the first stage of the review, the Council made a submission to the Commission in February 2022, as to the number of councillors that Worcester City Council should have.
- 2.2 Simultaneously the Council resolved that, taking effect in May 2024, it should change its electoral cycle from elections by thirds, to whole-Council elections. One consequence of this decision to move to whole-council elections is that, for the purposes of the Commission’s review, the number of councillors representing each ward in the city may be any number from 1 to 4, with 3 councillors typically being the highest number representing each ward.
- 2.4 In May 2022 the Commission notified the Council that it is minded to recommend to Parliament that the Council size should be 35 councillors and so the Commission’s review then moved to the second stage; to determine revised warding arrangements, based upon 35 councillors representing the district.
- 2.5 The Commission undertook a public consultation on warding arrangements from 17 May until 25 July 2022. The three main criteria set by the Commission in determining warding arrangements are essentially:
 - (i) Delivering electoral equality for local voters;
 - (ii) Reflecting the interests and identities of local communities;
 - (ii) Promoting effective and convenient local government.

- 2.6 The Council at its meeting in July 2022 voted unanimously in favour of a submission document made on behalf of the whole Council, which was the product of extensive workshops and discussion between Members and officers. The Council's submission highlighted to the Commission where there was consensus across all four Political Groups and where there was not consensus, but options could be considered.
- 2.7 On 1 November the Commission published its proposals for warding arrangements in Worcester, which can be viewed on their website or in the appendix to the Policy and Resources Committee meeting of November 2022.
- 2.8 This consultation ran until 9 January 2023. The Council produced and submitted another consultation response, working through consensus with all four Political Groups, and this was debated and agreed at full Council in November 2022. Where points were not agreed by all four Political Groups, the Council's corporate submission stated this fact and said the Council would not take a formal position on those points. This enabled Political Groups to make their own separate representations on these points to the Commission.

3. Further Proposals

- 3.1 On 9 May, the Commission announced that it would be consulting on a further set of proposals. The Commission's letter to the Council states:

"The Commission is now undertaking a further limited consultation on proposals for Worcester. The Commission is satisfied with the evidence received for most of the City, and is therefore not seeking further opinions and comments (submissions) on areas other than Battenhall, Cathedral, Gorse Hill, Nunnery, Rainbow Hill and the south-west of Worcester.

More information regarding the further limited draft recommendations for Worcester can be found on our website: www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/worcester"

- 3.2 The proposals are set out in Appendix 1. They do not represent a wholesale revisiting of the Commission's previous work, but rather a set of proposed adjustments impacting on specific wards. Nevertheless, the proposals are quite significant.
- 3.3 The further consultation period runs until 19 June. The Commission has stated that it expects to conclude its work and publish its final recommendations in August. Thereafter, the recommendations need to be laid before Parliament before they can be adopted.

4. Preferred Option

- 4.1 There is no requirement for the Council to submit a response; however any agreed response which the Council is able to submit, will be helpful for the Commission's review and gives the Council the opportunity to have what will probably be a final say.
- 4.2 The preferred option is for officers to work with the Political Group Leaders to produce a consultation response on behalf of the Council, which indicates to the Commission those aspects of its proposals which are supported by all of the Political Groups on the Council and provides commentary on any aspects which are not universally supported.

- 4.3 In view of the short timescale for response, it is not possible to take a draft submission to full Council for an all-member debate, as has been done with the previous responses. Therefore on this occasion, the Policy and Resources Committee is requested to mandate the Corporate Director to submit a response which receives the support of the four Political Group Leaders. If consensus on a response cannot be achieved, then no response at all will be submitted. A more likely scenario is that it will be possible to submit a response, but covering only points on which all four Political Groups have confirmed their agreement.
- 4.4 This process does not prevent Political Groups or individuals from supplementing the Council's submission with their own responses to the Commission.

5. Alternative Options Considered

- 5.1 The alternative options are to not submit a formal Council response at all, or to submit a response which is not supported by all four Political Groups. These options are not preferred because the Council operates a committee system of governance and also is in no overall political control.
- 5.2 It is consistent with the Group Leaders' Protocol and the approach taken to date to prepare and respond to the Commission's review of Worcester, for the Council to continue to attempt to achieve a consensus on governance matters as far as possible, and identify for the Commission the areas where there is not consensus, rather than simply producing a Council-wide submission through a majority vote at a meeting.

6. Implications

6.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications

None identified.

6.2 Legal and Governance Implications

The legal and governance implications are as set out in the main part of the report. This is a review led by an independent statutory organisation, with the Council being a participant and consultee in the process.

6.3 Risk Implications

There is a risk that the Commission's proposals do not accord with what Council Members and officers consider would work well for Worcester. This risk is mitigated by making a submission which represents the collective view of the Council.

6.4 Corporate/Policy Implications

The Council will need to make practical arrangements to respond to any final warding arrangements which are implemented, but no significant corporate or policy implications are identified at this stage.

6.5 Equality Implications

No specific implications for equality, diversity and inclusion have been identified, except to note that community identities were considered at a very localised level by officers and Members when reviewing warding arrangements.

6.6 Human Resources Implications

None identified.

6.7 Health and Safety Implications

None identified.

6.8 Social, Environmental and Economic Implications

The overall objective of the review of warding arrangements is to ensure electoral equality, which is intended to have a positive impact on individuals' satisfaction with local government representation.

Ward(s): All
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Background Papers: None