

PART A

Report to: Council
Date of meeting: 19 November 2014
Report of: Head of Democracy and Governance
Title: Boundary Commission Review

1.0 **SUMMARY**

1.1 To inform Council of the intention of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to carry out a review of the Borough Ward boundaries during 2015.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 To set up a working group of 5 members to consider how many councillors the Council should propose to the Local Government Boundary Commission to consider when conducting its review to report back to Council on 28 January 2015, and that this working group then go on to look at potential ward boundaries and ward names, reporting back to Council in June/July 2015.

2.2 To note the report.

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Report approved by: Managing Director

3.0 **DETAILED PROPOSAL**

- 3.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England has notified the Council that it intends to carry out a review of Borough Ward boundaries commencing in January 2015.
- 3.2 The Commission's powers come from the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.
The criteria it looks at when deciding whether to conduct a review are:
- More than 30% of wards have an electoral imbalance of more than 10% from the average ratio for that authority.
 - One or more wards has an imbalance of more than 30%
 - The imbalance is unlikely to be corrected by foreseeable changes to the electorate within a reasonable period.
- 3.3 The Commission is of the view that Watford meets bullet points one and three above as it currently has four wards within the Borough that have an electoral imbalance of either + or – 10%. The wards in question are Central (higher), Holywell (higher), Nascot (higher) and Tudor (lower)
- 3.4 The Commission will commence their review in January 2015 and will conclude it in December 2015.
- 3.5 When carrying out their review the Commission must take into account the following factors:
- The need to ensure equality of representation
 - The need to reflect identities and interests of local communities
 - The need to secure effective and convenient local government
- 3.6 When concluding their review they will recommend
- How many councillors the borough should elect
 - How many wards the borough should have and
 - The names of those wards.
- All of this will be put into a statutory instrument and the new council will be elected to in May 2016.
- 3.7 In order to commence the review the Commission have notified us that the first thing they require from the Council is it's view on how many councillors it should have (excluding the elected mayor).
As the Council currently elects by thirds they will make the presumption that elections will continue to be held by thirds and therefore any suggested reduction or increase in the number of councillors would need to be divisible/multiplied by 3.
- 3.8 The Council does itself have the legal power under the Local Government Public Involvement in Health Act 1987 to change how it elects from thirds to all out elections once every four years. If the Council wishes to consider doing this it would need to undertake a consultation with electors, political parties and anyone else the Council considers appropriate before agreeing to any change. In order to meet the Commissions timetable if Council were minded to consider this, it would need to agree to consult at this meeting with a view to having a report on the outcome of the consultation at a special meeting of Council on 28 January 2015 prior to the normal budget setting meeting.
- 3.9 If Council did choose to consider this option it would not necessarily have to have 3 councillor wards as an outcome of the review.
- 3.10 There are two ways Council might consider the question of how many councillors it should propose to the Commission. It could , as is recommended, set up a working party of 5 councillors to look at the issue and report back at January Council with recommendations or it could ask each party to make written submissions to the Head of Democracy and Governance by 10 January 2015 which would then be incorporated

into a report for January Council for Council to make a decision on.

Which ever of these options are agreed members should have regard to the last bullet point in 3.5 above namely the need to secure effective and convenient local government.

3.11 Next Steps.

Council has to provide the Commission with it's view on how many councillors (excluding the elected mayor) it should elect. This needs to be sent to the Commission by February 2015.

May/June 2015 the Commission will commence consultation about the review seeking views on the number of councillors, number of wards and names of wards. It will provide a time for responses and this will be the opportunity for Council to give its view. It should be noted that when making any recommendations the Commission will be looking at potential electoral numbers up to 2020.

Again officers would recommend that the working party set up to consider councillor numbers be used to consider potential ward boundaries and ward names, to make recommendations back to Council. It should be noted that as this group will be continuing to meet after the May 2015 local election members may like to bear this in mind when nominating to it.

The Commission will then publish it's recommendations following the results of the consultation and Council will have a further opportunity to comment.

The Commission will then make it's final proposal which will be transposed into a statutory instrument with a view to the new council being elected to in May 2016. This will be an all out election with a third of councillors being elected for 2 years, a third for three years and a third for four years (presuming we have not changed our electoral pattern).

4.0 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial

4.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that there are no financial implications at this time.

4.2 Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)

4.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that the Commission can, and has imposed the review on the Council as it satisfies their criteria for conducting a review. All decisions regarding this are for full council. The Commission will have the ultimate say on the outcome of the review.

4.3 Equalities

4.3.1 The Commission are under a legal duty to take into account the need to ensure equality of representation

4.4 Potential Risks

Potential Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Overall score
The Commission disregards the Councils views	2	4	8

4.5 Staffing

4.5.1 The review will need to be supported with existing staff

Background Papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report

File Reference

- None