

PART A

Report to: Council
Date of meeting: 24 June 2015
Report of: Head of Democracy and Governance
Title: Review of Ward Boundaries

1.0 SUMMARY

1.1 To inform Council of the deliberations of the Boundary Review Group on Ward Boundaries for Watford

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Council note that the Boundary Review Group have been unable to make a unanimous recommendation to Council on any changes to Watford's boundaries but have agreed that Council should consider any individual submission from the party Groups presented to it.

Contact Officer:

For further information on this report please contact: Carol Chen Head of Democracy and Governance
telephone extension: 8350 email: carol.chen@watford.gov.uk

3.0 DETAILED PROPOSAL

3.1 Council at its meeting on the 28 January 2015 agreed to make a submission to the Boundary Commission that the number of councillors for Watford should remain at 36.

3.2 The Boundary Commission on 12 May 2015 published its consultation on Boundary change for Watford and indicated it was minded to keep 36 councillors. It also indicated that as Watford elects by thirds it would expect that each ward should contain 3 members.

3.3 Members will recall that the reason for the review is the fact that at present Watford has 4 wards where the electoral imbalance is over or under 10%.

3.4 When making any recommendations the Council will need to have regard to the criteria that the Boundary Commission require to be satisfied.

These are:

- Delivering electoral equality for local voters-this means ensuring that each local councillor, or in this case ward represents roughly the same number of people so that the value of their vote is the same regardless of where they live in Watford.
- Reflecting the interests and identities of local communities-this means establishing electoral arrangements which, as far as possible, maintain local ties and where boundaries are easily identifiable.
- Promoting effective and convenient local government-this means ensuring that the new wards can be represented effectively by their elected representatives and that the new electoral arrangements as a whole allow the council to conduct its business effectively.

3.6 Delivering Electoral Equality

This is the only criterion that the Boundary Commission can actually measure.

They have published on their web site details of the current number of electors in each ward and we have given them figures of anticipated growth up to 2020 (based on projections on extant planning permissions) which was the date they specified they would consider.

It should be noted that the Council should be aiming for an average of 2,165 electors per councillor or 6,494 per ward by 2020.

3.7 Reflecting the Interests and Identities of Local Communities

The Commission will be looking for evidence to support any new wards based on this factor, things they will have regard to are, transport links, existence of local community groups, what areas do such groups cover. Local facilities. Identifiable boundaries such as natural features such as rivers or major roads and railway lines forming well known barriers between communities. Shared interests between communities.

3.8 Promoting effective and convenient local government and reflecting electoral cycles

We have already made a submission relating to this when making our recommendation on councillor numbers. The Commission have indicated they are minded to accept this number. As we elect by thirds the premise we will be working under is that each ward will comprise 3 councillors.

3.9 The Council appointed the Boundary Review Group to consider any proposals put forward and if possible come to Council with recommendations on a submission. The Review Group has met three times on the 11, 17 and 22 June (minutes of those meetings are attached as Appendix 1). It was discovered at the 11 June meeting that the Boundary Commission had not published the figures the Council had provided for

it for projected electors up to 2020 correctly, this was pointed out to the Commission who have apologised and corrected the figures.

- 3.10 All Groups submitted proposals for altering the ward boundaries to try to achieve both better electoral balance and retain the identity of communities and recognised boundaries. Each of the proposals had merit, however there was no common ground between all three. After much debate the Review Group reached the conclusion that it was not going to be able to put forward any proposals that had unanimous agreement. It therefore agreed not to make any recommendation at all to Council but to leave it to any of the Groups to put forward their submission for consideration by Council.
- 3.11 Council is reminded that whatever set of proposals Council decides to adopt must be supported by evidence to satisfy the Boundary Commissions criteria.
- 3.12 Submissions have to be made by 6 July 2015. The next steps for the Boundary Commission after the close of this round of consultation will be for them to draft their recommendations for new Ward patterns for Watford. These will be published for consultation on or around 26 August with a closing date for comments of 24 October. It is proposed that the Boundary Review Group will be reconvened once the proposals are published to consider the Council's response. Council will consider its response in October Council. The Boundary Commission will publish its final decision on 3 December 2015.

4.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 **Financial**

- 4.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that there are no financial implications in this report

4.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

- 4.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that members need to be mindful of the Boundary Commissions guidance when making any recommendations

Appendix

Minutes of Boundary Review Group 11, 17 and 22 June 2015

Background Papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.

File Reference

None