

Agenda item 3

Report title: Response to Local Government Boundary Commission's Draft Recommendations	
Report to: Boundary Review Committee	
Report author: Joanna Boaler, Head of Democracy and Transparency and Paul Turner Director, Legal and Assurance	
Date: 23 January 2024	For: Decision
Enquiries to: Joanna Boaler email joanna.boaler@essex.gov.uk or Paul Turner email paul.turner@essex.gov.uk	

1. Background and purpose of the report

- 1.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission) is an independent body established by Parliament in 2010 to undertake local government electoral reviews. An electoral review examines and proposes new electoral arrangements for the whole local authority. The review looks at the total number of councillors to be elected to the council, known as council size, the names, numbers and boundaries or divisions and the number of councillors to elected to each division.
- 1.2 As previously reported, the Commission decided to review ECC as it meets criteria for electoral inequality as 21 (30%) of our 70 divisions have a number of electors which is more than 10% above or below that of the average ECC division. Four divisions have a variance of more than 20% and one division has a variance of more than 30%. The Local Government Boundary Commission has a responsibility to review local authorities from time to time and Essex's last review took place in 2004. Therefore in 2021 the Commission decided to undertake a review of Essex County Council with the final recommendations being implemented at the May 2025 ordinary elections.

Council size

- 1.3 The electoral review has two distinct parts, Council Size and Division Boundaries. The first part has concluded and ECC's submission of 77 members was approved by Council in December 2022.
- 1.4 In December 2022 Council agreed the draft submission of a Council size of 77 councillors and sought a single member division review. These have been accepted by the Commission. However, following receipt of the finalised expected housing figures, it was agreed at the July 2023 meeting that 78 Councillors would be a better Council size. The Commission accepted our proposal of a revised Council size of 78 councillors.

Division Boundaries

- 1.5 In July 2023 this Committee met and submitted an initial submission to the Commission. This set out proposed boundaries for 78 divisions, each of which would return one member.
- 1.6 Drawing up a proposal is complex in a County Council, particularly one as large as Essex. The complicating factors are:
- Divisions cannot straddle district boundaries, meaning that we cannot achieve electoral equality as easily as districts, because we have to allocate a whole number of divisions to each district.
 - The Commission like to take account of ward boundaries, which has been made more complicated because the Commission has been reviewing the wards of number of district councils in Essex. We did not have access to final proposals for these districts in July 2023, but final proposals for have now been published.
 - Since ECC is not responsible for electoral administration, we do not have immediate unlimited access to the register of electors in a way that enables us to plot new boundaries easily.
- 1.7 Nonetheless a strong submission was made for 78 divisions. We have sought the views of all members throughout the proposal and the time that some members have given up to supporting the process has helped improve the submissions.

The Commission's draft recommendations

- 1.8 The Commission has considered our proposals and those submitted by others and formulated its own draft recommendation which has been published for consultation. ECC, alongside other organisations and the public, are now invited to comment on the Commission's draft proposals.
- 1.9 All ECC members have been invited to attend a briefing, and have been asked to provide feedback to the representatives of this Group or relevant officers by 2pm on 12 January 2024.
- 1.10 The Commission's draft recommendations would see 78 one member divisions. Of the 70 current divisions, only five¹ would remain the same, although many other divisions would remain broadly similar.
- 1.11 The final submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission will need to ensure that it takes account of the views expressed by members and the principles set by the Commission. The Commission gives equal weight to which are mainly that elector numbers should be as equal as possible and boundaries should reflect communities where this is achievable.

¹ Chelmsford Central, Great Baddow, Canvey East, Canvey West, Rochford West would remain the same, though Baddow would be renamed 'Great Baddow and Galleywood' and Rochford West would be renamed 'Rochford North'.

A draft consultation response is being worked on but given the tight time frame, is not ready at the time of issuing the agenda for the meeting. Submissions will be circulated to the Committee and placed on the website at the earliest possible opportunity. That will form Appendix 1 when it is available. Annex 1, included with this report, sets out the position at the time of publication.

- 1.12 Anyone is welcome to view the Commission's draft proposals and submit their own response at www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/essex. This can be done independently of ECC.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 Agree the consultation response to the Commission for the 12 districts/78 divisions at Appendix 1 (to follow)