

# Boundary Review

## Consideration of the Council's Initial Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England

### Report of Councillor Kevin Bentley, Leader of the Council.

#### 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 April 2020 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 be elected to each division.
- 1.2 Essex County Council meets the Commission's criteria for electoral inequality as 21 of our 70 (30%) divisions having an electoral variance outside 10% from the average. 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 the Commission have decided to undertake a review of Essex County Council. The Commission is currently looking at a number of district councils in Essex. ECC divisions cannot cross a district boundaries but they do not need to align with district ward boundaries.
- 1.3 The electoral review has two distinct parts, Council Size and Division Boundaries. This report relates to the first part on Council size. By the end of January 2023 we are required to present the Commission with our case for a future council size to be implemented in May 2025, that we believe is right for the authority. Following this the Commission will come to a view on the total number of councillors to be elected to the council before the next stage on the division pattern.
- 1.4 In addition to the Council size submission, we can consider submitting a request for a single-member division review, whereby the Commission will seek to introduce single member division – currently we have five divisions which return two councillors. If we wish to formally request a single-member division review, we must do so in advance of, or at the same time as the formal council size submission.
- 1.5 Following the member briefing by the Commission in the summer of 2023 a cross party member working group was been set up to support the review. The members of this group are:
  - Cllr Tom Cunningham
  - Cllr Lewis Barber

- Cllr Dave Harris
- Cllr Jaymey McIvor
- Cllr Stephen Robinson
- Cllr Kerry Smith
- Cllr Holly Whitbread

The Group are supported by the Head of Democracy and Transparency and the Director, Legal and Assurance with the assistance of the Democracy team and Intelligence Teams. We will continue to work on the Boundary Review through the next stages.

- 1.6 We have carried out a survey which all members were invited to complete. This was completed by 36 Members giving their views. Other members have been consulted via their political or non-political Groups.
- 1.7 The Group have considered feedback from members and have recommended that we seek a single member division review, seeking assurances from the Commission that the divisional pattern supports this without a negative impact on communities.
- 1.8 The Group have also provisionally proposed an increase in the council size from 75 to 77 members to address the electoral imbalance across Essex whilst enabling provision for growth.
- 1.9 The Council is required to submit a completed form to the Boundary Commission. The latest draft is appended to this report. Unfortunately, it is not possible to present a final version to this meeting as some information is missing or incomplete. The final submission needs to be made before the February council meeting. We are therefore asking Council to delegate authority to the Director, Legal and Assurance to finalise the document after consulting Group Leaders and the Boundary Review Member Working Group mentioned above. The final version will still reflect the Council's formal resolution.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 That Council agrees to formally request a single member division review and that the Director, Legal and Assurance formally writes to the Local Government Boundary Commission to request a such a review.
- 2.2 That Council approves the draft submission appended to this report with a recommendation of 77 members, and agrees that the Director, Legal and Assurance is authorised to submit the final submission in January 2023 after consultation with the Group Leaders and the Boundary Review Member Working Group.