

# Council

## Oxfordshire County Boundary Review, Parliamentary Boundary Review and Cherwell District Council Polling District and Polling Place Review

26 July 2011

### Report of Chief Executive

#### PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update Members on the Oxfordshire County and Parliamentary Boundary Reviews and the council's Polling District and Polling Place Review and to seek agreement to establish an informal Members' Boundary and Polling District and Polling Place Review Working Group.

This report is public
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#### Recommendations

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Council is recommended:

- (1) To note the update on the County and Parliamentary Boundary Reviews.
- (2) To agree the establishment of a Boundary and Polling District and Polling Place Review Working Group, with 2 nominated representatives from each political group.
- (3) To request officers to submit draft consultation responses to the September 2011 meeting of Council following consultation with the Boundary Review Working Group and political groups.

#### Executive Summary

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##### Introduction

##### County Boundary Review

- 1.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is responsible for reviewing local authority electoral arrangements, defining boundaries for local elections and the number of councillors to be elected, as well as conducting reviews of local government external boundaries and structures.

- 1.2 In October 2010 the Commission began an electoral review of Oxfordshire following its decision to review Oxfordshire Council's electoral arrangement to ensure that the number of voters represented by each councillor is approximately the same across the authority. On 19 July 2011 the LGBCE published its draft recommendations with a consultation closing date of 10 October 2011. A summary of the review and recommendations is attached at Appendix 1.

### **Parliamentary Boundary Review**

- 1.3 The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) is an independent and impartial non-departmental public body which is responsible for reviewing Parliamentary constituency boundaries in England.
- 1.4 The BCE has the task of periodically reviewing all the Parliamentary constituencies in England. It is currently conducting a review on the basis of new rules laid down by Parliament which involves a significant reduction in the number of constituencies in England and requires constituencies to comply with new parameters so far as the number of electors in each constituency is concerned.
- 1.5 The parliamentary boundary review will be published on 12 September with a consultation closing date of December 2011.

### **Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places**

- 1.6 In addition to the two boundary reviews, from 1 August 2011 the council will also be conducting a review of polling districts and polling places.
- 1.7 These reviews happen every 4 years in line with the Electoral Administration Act 2006. It is important for the council to take the opportunity to ensure that boundaries remain appropriate in the light of development which has taken place, and any development which is known will take place in the reasonably near future.

### **Details**

#### **Oxfordshire Boundary Review**

- 1.8 In October 2010 the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) started an electoral review of Oxfordshire County Council. Full details of the review to date can be found at [www.lgbce.org.uk](http://www.lgbce.org.uk) and a hard copy of all documents is available on deposit in the Members' Room.
- 1.9 A preliminary consultation was held between 12 October 2010 and 22 November 2010. Between 11 January 2011 and 4 April, the second period of consultation on the pattern of divisions for Oxfordshire was undertaken.
- 1.10 On 19 July 2011 the LGBCE published its draft recommendations for the electoral review of Oxfordshire County Council.
- 1.11 The Commission's draft recommendations propose that Oxfordshire County Council should have 63 councillors – a reduction of 11 from the current arrangements. The proposals would mean those county councillors would represent 59 single-member divisions and two two-member divisions across

the county. The full recommendations and maps are available on the Commission's website at [www.lgbce.org.uk](http://www.lgbce.org.uk).

- 1.12 Between 19 July and 10 October 2011 a public consultation on the recommendations is being undertaken in which the LGBCE is inviting comments, in particular, on the following questions:
- Do the proposed electoral divisions reflect local communities?
  - How do you think the proposals can be improved whilst maintaining electoral equality?
  - Are the names of the proposed divisions right
- 1.13 The LGBCE will consider all submissions and aims to publish its final recommendations in January 2012. Once the LGBCE agrees its final recommendations it will lay a draft order in both Houses of Parliament. Parliament will then have 40 days in which to consider the recommendations. If both Houses are satisfied with the recommendations, the draft order will be 'made' and the new electoral divisions will come into effect at the county council elections in May 2013.

#### **Parliamentary Boundary Review**

- 1.14 The Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 received Royal Assent on 16 February 2011. The Act requires the four UK Boundary Commissions to conduct a review of parliamentary constituencies in their respective parts of the UK and submit final reports on the reviews to Government before 1 October 2013.
- 1.15 The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) began its current review of parliamentary boundaries on 22 February 2011. Full details of the review can be found at <http://boundarycommissionforengland.independent.gov.uk>. A hard copy of the guidance is available on deposit in the Members' Room.
- 1.16 The BCE develops and publishes initial proposals for constituencies across England. Representations from the public about these proposals are then taken both in writing and at public hearings in each region of England. In light of all the views expressed about the initial proposals, the BCE may revise them and then conduct a further round of written consultation on the revised proposals.
- 1.17 The BCE is required to make a formal report to the Government by 1 October 2013, recommending any changes that it believes are appropriate to the distribution, size, shape, name or designation of constituencies in England. The review is therefore referred to throughout this booklet as 'the 2013 Review'.
- 1.18 The Government will turn the recommendations of the BCE into draft legislation, which is then presented to Parliament. If Parliament approves the legislation, the recommended changes will be implemented for the next General Election after the date on which the legislation is passed.

#### **Polling District and Polling Place Review**

- 1.19 The Electoral Administration Act 2006 requires local authorities to review their

UK Parliamentary polling districts and places every 4 years. The review is the responsibility of the Returning Officer.

- 1.20 The review process provides for consultation with the electorate, councillors, parish councils, voluntary organisations, and other interested stakeholders such as political party agents.
- 1.21 The conclusions and recommendations of the review must be presented to Full Council for their comments and approval.
- 1.22 The last polling place review in Cherwell was in 2007 and it took about 3-4 months to complete.
- 1.23 The next review will commence on 1 August 2011 and must be completed by 31 December 2011. Any amendments will be implemented in the Electoral Register published on 1 December 2011. These amendments will take effect for any election held after that date.
- 1.24 However, given the close correlation between any proposals made as part of the County Boundary review and any recommendations made as part of the Council's own review, it is suggested that the timescale for the Council's Polling District and Polling Place Review should be accelerated to coincide with that of the County Boundary Review.
- 1.25 The Council will publish the findings of the review and its proposals for any changes by mid September and Council will make the final decision on at its meeting on 29 September 2011.

#### **Boundary and Polling District and Polling Place Review Working Group**

- 1.26 Under Cherwell District Council's Constitution the power to deal with the issues outline above rests with full Council. In order to meet the consultation response dates for the Boundary review, Council will need to agree responses at its meeting of 29 September 2011.
- 1.27 To ensure that all Members have an opportunity to consider the proposals and draft responses, it is proposed that an informal Member Working Group comprising two representatives of each political party be established to help shape and steer the process.
- 1.28 Officers would produce briefing notes on each review for consideration by the Working Group, who would then lead a discussion with their respective political groups and feedback to the Working Group. The outcomes of these discussions will inform the recommended consultation responses which Council will consider on 29 September 2011.

#### **Conclusion**

- 1.29 To ensure that Council agrees a response to the Oxfordshire County and Parliamentary Boundary reviews and approves the Council's own polling district and polling place review within the required timescales officers recommend the establishment of a Member Working Group to steer the process with responses and review decisions agreed by Council on 29 September 2011.

## **Key Issues for Consideration/Reasons for Decision and Options**

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The following options have been identified. The approach in the recommendations is believed to be the best way forward

**Option One** To agree the recommendations as set out

**Option Two** Not to agree the recommendations

**Option Three** To amend the recommendations

## **Consultations**

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None

## **Implications**

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**Financial:** Costs associated with this review ie consultation and postage can be met from the existing elections and electoral registration budget.

Comments checked by Karen Muir, Corporate System Accountant 01295 221559

**Legal:** No legal implications arising directly from this report regarding the Boundary reviews.

Polling Place Review - All authorities across England are legally required to carry out reviews every four years. Cherwell District Council completed its last review in 2007 and so it must have completed the process by the publication of the 2012 register on 1 December 2012.

Comments checked by James Doble, Democratic, Scrutiny and Elections Manager 01295 221587

**Risk Management:** No risk implications arising directly from this report regarding the Boundary reviews.

The polling place review ensures that the Council is meeting requirements to keep polling districts under regular review.

Comments checked by James Doble, Democratic, Scrutiny and Elections Manager 01295 221587

## **Wards Affected**

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All

## **Document Information**

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<b>Appendix No</b>	<b>Title</b>
Appendix 1	Oxfordshire Boundary Review Summary

<b>Background Papers</b>	
None	
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