

Council

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

29 September 2011

Report of Chief Executive

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To consider the proposals of the Oxfordshire County and Parliamentary Boundary Reviews and agree the council's submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on the Oxfordshire County Boundary Review.

To agree the recommendations from the Polling Place Review.

This report is public

Recommendations

Council is recommended:

- (1) To consider and endorse the response on the Oxfordshire County Boundary Review for submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England as set out in paragraphs 1.6 – 1.15 and Appendix 1 -1a of this report.
- (2) To delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the member working group, to finalise the Council's submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.
- (3) To consider the initial observations of the member working group on the Parliamentary Boundary Review which proposes the transfer of the Ambrosden & Chesterton and Launton wards of Cherwell District to the Henley constituency.
- (4) To agree that the member working group continues to meet to consider issues emerging from both boundary reviews.
- (5) To note the timetable for the Parliamentary Boundary Review and to request that officers represent the Council at the forthcoming public hearings.
- (6) To agree the recommendations from the Polling Place Review and to note that these findings will be revisited in the Community Governance and Polling District Review in 2012.

Executive Summary

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.
- 1.3 In summary the proposals as they relate to Oxfordshire and Cherwell are that:
 - OCC is proposing a single member scheme across Oxfordshire
 - The number of County Councillors will reduce from 74 to 63
 - Cherwell District will have 14 County Councillors instead of 16
 - In Cherwell new parish wards will be created in Banbury, Bicester, Bodicote, Chesterton and Kidlington.
- 1.4 Following the last meeting of Council a member working group, consisting of Councillors Beere, Emptage, Mallon, Rose, Sibley, L Stratford and Williamson, has met with officers to consider the implications of the review for the district. The working group's comments on the proposals for each individual district ward are set out at Appendix 1.
- 1.5 In addition to these specific comments the working group suggest that the submission includes the following general observations on the principles underlying the County proposals.
- 1.6 That Cherwell District Council supports the move to a single member scheme across Oxfordshire.
- 1.7 That Cherwell District Council supports the proposal to reduce the number of County Councillors from 74 to 63.
- 1.8 That Cherwell District Council supports the proposal to reduce the number of County Councillors for Cherwell District from 16 to 14.
- 1.9 That Cherwell District Council acknowledges the complexity of making amendments to the proposed county divisions due to the domino effect of the displacement of voters.

- 1.10 That Cherwell District Council is concerned that the merger of urban and rural electoral areas is less than ideal and does not reflect community identities and natural affiliations. However the Council acknowledges that as there will be a reduction in the total number of county councillors and that this process is essentially a numbers game, there will inevitably be the combination of urban and rural areas at some point within the Cherwell district.
- 1.11 The Liberal Democrat members of the working group have put forward a counter proposal for the Kidlington and Kirtlington divisions. This is attached at Appendix 1a. The proposal is within the agreed electorate variance and is contained within the two County divisions and therefore has no domino impact on the rest of the district. The Conservative and Labour members of the working group noted the proposal but reserved their position until discussion at the Council meeting. Finally the Council will wish to note that this same proposal will be submitted to the LGBCE by Kidlington Parish Council.
- 1.12 That Cherwell District Council wishes to highlight concerns with regard to the proposals for areas of housing growth on the edge of principle towns e.g. Bankside in Bodicote/Banbury and Southwest Bicester. The Council understands why it is proposed to create warded parishes in Bodicote and Chesterton which would allow for the areas of development to be more easily included within Banbury and Bicester if the Council were minded to change these boundaries as part of a future community governance review. The warding of Chesterton parish is allowable as construction work has started on site and imminently there will be residents living within the proposed boundaries of the warded parish area. However, this is not the case for the Bankside development. There have been delays to work starting on site, which means that by the end of the review it is highly unlikely that there will be any electors in the newly warded parish area of Bodicote. Therefore we proposed that this proposal should be dropped. We confirm that Cherwell District Council would revisit this proposal in their Community Governance and Polling District Review scheduled for 2012.
- 1.13 That Cherwell District Council is concerned that the proposed names of the new divisions and town council wards should not be lists of all the places that the electoral area comprises but should be unique, clearly identifiable names with a local connection. Currently some of the proposed names are too long and would cause practical problems in the production of ballot papers and statutory notices. It is suggested that the following names are used: Banbury Easington & Bloxham instead of the proposed Bloxham & Easington; Kidlington North & Kirtlington instead of the proposed Kirtlington & Kidlington North; Kidlington South instead of Kidlington. If the proposal at paragraph 1.11 is agreed then there will need to be further changes to the proposed names for the Kidlington and Kirtlington wards.
- 1.14 That Cherwell District Council believes that some of the proposed electoral areas in urban areas in Banbury and Bicester may make it difficult to identify suitable locations for polling stations but that this will be addressed in the Community Governance and Polling District Review scheduled for 2012.
- 1.15 That Cherwell District Council remains frustrated at the sequencing of boundary reviews and believes there is an urgent need for legislative change to address this. Ideally, these should be on a programmed basis starting at

the parish and polling district level, then district ward and finally county division. With the current process county divisions are being determined at the same time that parliamentary polling districts are being reviewed, both of which are likely to require further amendment following this Council's Community Governance and Polling District Review scheduled for 2012.

Parliamentary Boundary Review

- 1.16 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.
- 1.17 The BCE has the task of periodically reviewing all the parliamentary constituencies in England. In February 2011 it commenced 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. The BCE will make final recommendations to Government by October 2013.
- 1.18 The BCE timetable for the 2013 review is:

13 September 2011	Initial proposals published
13 September – 5 December 2011	Consultation open; includes regional public hearings
Spring 2012 (4 week period)	Publication of representations received on initial proposals
Late 2012 (8 week period)	Publication of revised proposals and public consultation; no public hearings
By 1 October 2013	Final recommendations to Government

- 1.19 The parliamentary boundary review proposals for the South East were received by Cherwell District Council on 13 September 2011. Copies of the documents which relate to Oxfordshire and Cherwell are on deposit in the Members Room. Information for the rest of the South East region is available from the Democratic and Elections office.
- 1.20 In summary the proposals as they relate to Oxfordshire and to Cherwell are that:
- Oxfordshire retains 6 constituencies.
 - There will be no change to the Wantage (electorate; 79,775) and Witney (electorate; 78,220) constituencies as they are within 5% of the electoral quota.
 - The Banbury and Oxford East constituencies are above the 5% limit and

must be reduced.

- The Henley and Oxford West & Abingdon constituencies are also within the 5% of the electoral quota but it is proposed that they should take up the surplus from Banbury and Oxford East.
 - To reduce the electorate of the Banbury constituency it is proposed that the Ambrosden & Chesterton and Launton wards of Cherwell District Council are transferred to the Henley constituency. This will be in addition to the existing Kirtlington and Otmoor wards of the Cherwell District.
 - The new Henley constituency (electorate; 80,320) will also take in the Radley ward of the District of the Vale of the White Horse.
 - The current Oxford West and Abingdon constituency will be renamed Abingdon and Oxford North (electorate; 79,704) and will continue to include the Kidlington North, Kidlington South and Yarnton, Gosford and Water Eaton wards of the Cherwell District.
 - The current Oxford East constituency will be renamed Oxford (electorate; 77,769) and will transfer the Carfax Ward to the Abingdon and Oxford North constituency.
- 1.21 Maps illustrating the impact of these proposals for Cherwell are attached at Appendix 2 a – c.
- 1.22 Members of the working group have considered the proposals and wish to make the following observations at this time:
- Conservative members – no objections to BCE proposals
 - Labour members – no objections to BCE proposals
 - Liberal Democrat members – reserved position regarding BCE proposals for the Banbury, the Abingdon and Oxford North and the Henley constituency.
- 1.23 It is proposed that the working group continue to meet to consider these proposals as they develop and update Council accordingly.
- 1.24 The Oxfordshire proposals will be discussed at public hearings in Milton Keynes on 24 and 25 October 2011. Representatives from the other Oxfordshire local authorities will be at those hearings. Therefore it is proposed that the Council be formally represented by officers at those public hearings to present the views of this Council and equally to hear the comments and observations from the other local authorities and other interested parties. The officers will report back to the working group, which will in turn report back to the next Council meeting on 1 November 2011 with a final proposal for submission to the BCE.
- 1.25 The timetable is necessarily tight as the December Council meeting falls after the closing date for the submission of comments to BCE on 5 December 2011.

Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

- 1.26 In addition to the two boundary reviews, from 1 August 2011 a polling district and polling place review has been carried out. 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.
- 1.27 In view of the potential overlap between any proposals made as part of the polling district and polling place review and proposals arising from the current County and Parliamentary boundary reviews the polling district and polling place review has been light touch focusing on known problem areas which would require resolution before the scheduled elections in May 2012.
- 1.28 The working group noted that a further, more detailed review of polling districts, places and stations would need to take place in 2012 as part of the proposals and recommendations arising from the County and Parliamentary boundary reviews and the Council's own Community Governance and Polling District Review scheduled for 2012.
- 1.29 Consultation letters were sent to the following individuals and organisations:
- All Cherwell District Council councillors
 - All County Councillors for Cherwell District
 - Returning Officer, Oxford West and Abingdon Constituency
 - Returning Officer, Henley Constituency
 - Town and Parish Councils in Cherwell District
 - Political Agents for Cherwell District
 - MPs for Banbury, Henley and Oxford West and Abingdon Constituencies
 - Banbury Citizens Advice Bureau
 - Bicester Citizens Advice Bureau
 - Frank Wise School
 - Deaf community: Lexicon | SignStream
 - Leonard Cheshire Disability
 - Mental Health - Restore
 - Visual Impairment - Oxeyes
 - Refugee Resource Training/Education/Employment/Counselling
 - Age UK Oxfordshire

In addition a public consultation was set up on the Council's website; and one comment was received.

- 1.30 We received responses from 7 district councillors and 22 town and parish councils. Tony Baldry, MP and Councillor Keith Mitchell, Leader of Oxfordshire County Council both provided positive responses.
- 1.31 The detailed comments and responses are set out set out in Appendix 3. The document records the comments submitted by polling station staff following the elections in May 2011, the observations and responses from consultees and the proposed action to be taken by the CDC Elections team.
- 1.32 The majority of comments are related to concerns about the adequacy of

signage, disabled access, parking or the facilities available for polling station staff. All of these have been, or will be investigated by members of the Election team in advance of the scheduled elections in May 2012 and remedial action taken where appropriate. The action required is shown in Appendix 3.

- 1.33 In addition there have been some comments from Parish Councils expressing concern about the possible merger of polling stations across two parishes in the future and also a request for a return to a separate polling station in the case of Clifton. The whole issue of the possible merger or de-merger of polling stations will be considered in detail as part of the Council's Community Governance and Polling District Review scheduled for 2012, which will be looking at the size of all parish councils and parish meetings and reviewing parish boundaries in the light of the changes proposed by the Parliamentary and County boundary reviews.
- 1.34 There is one significant issue which requires immediate attention. This is regarding the identification of a polling station in Caversfield. We have previously used the "Old DLO Caversfield" building but the site has now been sold and members of the Election team will need to visit the polling district to search for a suitable site. At the same time members of the Election team will open discussions with the new property owners, the Ward Councillors and the Parish Council to consider options for a suitable polling station location for use in May 2012.
- 1.35 Council is requested to note these comments and the immediate actions required to address the problems identified and to note that all of the polling stations, polling places and polling districts will be subject to further scrutiny as part of the Community Governance and Polling District Review scheduled for 2012.

Background

Oxfordshire Boundary Review

- 1.36 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 and a hard copy of all documents is available on deposit in the Members' Room.
- 1.37 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.
- 1.38 On 19 July 2011 the LGBCE published its draft recommendations for the electoral review of Oxfordshire County Council.
- 1.39 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.

- 1.40 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?
- 1.41 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

- 1.42 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.
- 1.43 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>.
- 1.44 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.
- 1.45 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 as 'the 2013 Review'.
- 1.46 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

- 1.47 The Electoral Administration Act 2006 requires local authorities to review their UK Parliamentary polling districts and places every 4 years. The review is the

Option Two Not to agree the recommendations

Option Three To amend the recommendations

Consultations

None

Implications

Financial: Costs associated with this review ie consultation and postage have been 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

All

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
Appendix 1	Proposed CDC submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on the Oxfordshire Boundary Review Summary
Appendix 1a	Liberal Democrat proposals for Kidlington and Kirtlington
Appendix 2 a	Map of proposed Banbury Constituency

Appendix 2 b	Map of proposed Henley Constituency
Appendix 2 c	Map of proposed Abingdon and Oxford North Constituency
Appendix 3	Submission on the Polling Place Review
Background Papers	
OCC and BCE boundary review maps and reports which are on deposit in the Members Room.	
Report Authors	Louise Aston, Elections Officer Catherine Phythian, Senior Democratic & Scrutiny Officer
Contact Information	01295 221583 catherine.phythian@Cherwell-dc.gov.uk