

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL

13 June 2012

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters For Decision

**1 ELECTORAL REVIEW : WARDING ARRANGEMENTS
RESPONSE TO LGBCE PROPOSALS**

To approve the response by Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council to the warding proposals from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Members will be aware that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is currently undertaking an Electoral Review of the Borough of Tonbridge & Malling.

1.1.2 This review is split into two main stages.

- 1) The first was to set the Council Size (number of Borough Councillors) that will sit on Council from May 2015. The LGBCE were 'minded to' set the Council Size at 53 Councillors.
- 2) The second stage of the review, to consider warding arrangements, is now underway. This is to determine the warding arrangements to take effect from the 2015 elections.

1.1.3 Members will recall that the formal TMBC proposal was sent to the LGBCE following consideration by the Electoral Review Working Group (ERWG) and General Purposes Committee in January 2012. The proposals received strong support from across the Council and represented the best possible warding arrangement that we were able to develop. In so doing, the TMBC proposal required 54 Councillors overall to achieve good electoral equality.

1.2 Statutory criteria

1.2.1 There are three statutory criteria to be considered in developing warding arrangements, each of which carry equal weight. These are:

- To deliver electoral equality for voters (with a minimal variance)
- To provide boundaries that reflect natural communities
- To promote effective and convenient local government

1.3 LGBCE warding proposals

1.3.1 On 17 April 2012, LGBCE published their warding proposals for Tonbridge & Malling. Copies have been provided to all Borough Councillors.

1.3.2 Following analysis by Officers, and contributions from Members, three significant deficiencies in the LGBCE proposals have been identified:

- 1) LGBCE propose to disregard the major residential developments of Peters Village and Preston Hall from the electorate forecasts. Disregarding them will result in an electoral scheme that is not fit for purpose, and which will require another full review within 5 years. Trenport, the owners of the Peters Village site, have confirmed their timetable in a letter to TMBC; this is included in the draft response to the LGBCE and has also been submitted separately to the LGBCE.
- 2) LGBCE maintain that Tonbridge & Malling should be served by 53 Councillors rather than 54. We consider that our proposed warding arrangement, based on 54 Councillors, provides better electoral equality and better community representation than the LGBCE recommendation.
- 3) LGBCE's recommendations include splitting a number of existing historic parishes for the sake of providing some level of electoral equality. To do so ignores existing communities and severs local ties. It also prevents effective and convenient local government, both from the perspective of the elector and of the councillors representing them.

1.3.3 These three issues permeate throughout the proposals of the LGBCE.

1.4 TMBC Response

- 1.4.1 Based on the identified issues, and incorporating comments from Members, Officers have prepared a draft response to the LGBCE, attached at **Annex 1**. This has since been discussed at the Electoral Review Working Group meeting of 6 June 2012. A verbal update will be made by Officers at the Council meeting.
- 1.4.2 Once approved by this meeting of the Council, the response will be submitted to the LGBCE as the formal response.
- 1.4.3 Members are encouraged to respond individually to the consultation direct to the LGBCE. They may use information from the Council response as appropriate. It is very important that the LGBCE are aware of the strength and diversity of opinion.

1.5 Legal Implications

- 1.5.1 TMBC are not legally obliged to respond to the LGBCE proposals, although the warding arrangement would be adversely affected should we fail to do so.
- 1.5.2 Following the consultation period, the LGBCE will develop final proposals and these will be laid before Parliament for final approval.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.6.1 The costs associated with this stage of the Review are borne by the LGBCE. Consequential changes, such as to electoral registration, planning and GIS databases, will be absorbed in normal running costs.

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.7.1 No equality impacts associated with TMBCs involvement in this Review have been identified.

1.8 Recommendations

- 1.8.1 Members are invited:
 - 1) To consider and agree the response to the LGBCE (Annex 1 and as amended by the Electoral Review Working Group and agreed in this Council meeting).
 - 2) To respond individually to the consultation direct to the LGBCE.

Background papers:

contact: Richard Beesley

1. LGBCE proposals (circulated in April 2012)
2. The initial TMBC submission (circulated with EWRG and General Purposes reports in January).

David Hughes

Chief Executive

Screening for equality impacts:		
Question	Answer	Explanation of impacts
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	The Electoral Review is carried out by LGBCE in accordance with their procedures. The involvement of TMBC in developing draft warding arrangements does not affect, either positively or negatively, any particular groups.
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	No	
c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		

In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above.