

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

07 December 2021

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1 - Public

Matters for Recommendation to Council

1 BOUNDARY COMMISSION REVIEW – RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT WARDING PATTERN.

This report provides an overview of the proposed response to the draft warding pattern put forward by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), which is currently out to consultation until 13 December 2021.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 In early 2020, the LGBCE contacted the Borough Council to state that due to electoral imbalances arising in Tonbridge and Malling Borough since the last review in 2011/12, the criteria for triggering a Boundary Review had been met, and as such the LGBCE would look to commence a review.
- 1.1.2 Since Autumn 2020, the LGBCE has been undertaking this review of the electoral arrangements in the borough. The review commenced with a consultation on Council size, which in April 2021 resulted in the LGBCE deciding that there should be 43 councillors serving the Council in the future.
- 1.1.3 Once Council size considerations had been undertaken, the next stage of the review involved formulating future warding patterns. The review of warding patterns commenced on 11 May 2021 with a consultation period that ran until 19 July 2021. During this consultation period, the LGBCE encouraged people and groups across Tonbridge and Malling to submit suggestions and ideas for future patterns based on 43 councillors. As part of this process, the Borough Council submitted a proposal that was approved at Full Council on 13 July 2021.
- 1.1.4 Having received 87 submissions in total, the LGBCE produced a draft warding pattern for the borough based on a council size of 44 councillors (in order to ensure a good balance in the statutory criteria across all wards), and is now seeking feedback through a further round of consultation which runs until 13 December 2021.

- 1.1.5 Once this deadline has passed, the LGBCE will consider the submissions received and publish their final recommendations in March 2022. An Order will then be made in Parliament in Summer 2022, in time for borough elections in May 2023.

1.2 The Draft Warding Pattern:

- 1.2.1 On 05 October 2021, the LGBCE released its draft warding pattern for Tonbridge and Malling borough. As mentioned in paragraph 1.1.4, this pattern was ultimately based on a council size of 44 councillors each representing an average of 2,248 electors. This pattern, including a map showing the extent of each ward, is set out in summary in Appendix 1.
- 1.2.2 Overall, the LGBCE has proposed a total of 19 wards, made up of a mixture of 1, 2 and 3 councillors, as shown below in Table 1:

	Electorate (2027)	No of Councillors	Variance from Average
Aylesford North with Burham, Eccles and Wouldham	7889	3	+8.3%
Aylesford South and Ditton	7254	3	-0.4%
Birling, Leybourne and Ryarsh	4886	2	+0.6%
Borough Green and Platt	4783	2	-1.5%
Bourne	4813	2	-0.9%
Cage Green	4684	2	-3.5%
East Malling, West Malling and Offham	7072	3	-2.9%
East Peckham, Mereworth and Watlington	5034	2	+3.7%
Higham	5097	2	+5.0%
Hildenborough	4612	2	-5.0%
Judd	7619	3	+4.6%
Kings Hill	7916	3	+8.7%
Larkfield	7430	3	+2.0%
Pilgrims with Ightham	4861	2	+0.1%
Snodland East and Ham Hill	4556	2	-6.2%
Snodland West and Holborough Lakes	4490	2	-7.5%
Trench	4559	2	-6.1%
Vauxhall	6738	3	-7.5%
Walderslade	2535	1	+4.4%
	106828	44	

Table 1: LGBCE Proposed Warding Pattern

- 1.2.3 The proposals set out by the LGBCE create a warding pattern where none of the wards go beyond a 10% variance.

1.3 Proposed Response to the Draft Warding Pattern:

- 1.3.1 A draft response to the warding pattern proposals produced by the LGBCE is set out in Appendix 2.
- 1.3.2 The draft response starts by acknowledging that a number of the 'key local criteria' set out in the Council submission are ultimately met in the draft warding pattern, including:
- Parish boundaries being respected where at all possible.
 - Creating self-contained ward areas or clusters, particularly at Kings Hill, Snodland, Larkfield and Hildenborough and Tonbridge.
 - Keeping together a number of parished areas that have a close relationship, either in wards by themselves or kept together within larger wards.
- 1.3.3 In addition, the draft proposals do take a similar approach to establishing 'building blocks' within the borough as a starting point for creating the proposed pattern. However, differences arise from the decision by the LGBCE to allocate 14 councillors rather than 13 to the 'Tonbridge and Hildenborough' block, which then has wider implications for the warding pattern across the rest of the borough, particularly in moving away from a 'Larkfield and East Malling' block. Despite there being a number of differences from the Council's own proposals, it is accepted that there is a clear rationale, based on the three statutory criteria, for the vast majority of these differences.
- 1.3.4 However, there are a couple of areas where it is felt that improvements could be made to the draft proposals. The first relates to south and central Tonbridge. The LGBCE has proposed a Judd ward that stretches north in to the existing Castle ward and east of the High Street into the existing Medway ward (and also accommodating the entirety of Quarry Hill Parade), with Vauxhall ward expanding north to the railway line.
- 1.3.5 Although the boundary to create the new Vauxhall ward is accepted, it is proposed that amendments be made to the relationship between the proposed Judd and Cage Green wards. With the High Street having been an established boundary within the warding pattern for Tonbridge for many decades, it is proposed that this boundary should be retained in order to create a Judd ward that goes as far as the High Street, with Cage Green (which already has a sizeable part east of the Shipbourne Road) instead extending south into this area.
- 1.3.6 This proposed arrangement for south and central Tonbridge would:
- Create a 2 councillor 'Judd' ward with an electorate of 5,027 and a variance of 3.5%

- Create a 3 councillor 'Cage Green' ward with an electorate of 7,276 and a variance of 0.1%

- 1.3.7 In terms of electoral equality, this would therefore create an even better level of equality than the existing LGBCE proposals.
- 1.3.8 As mentioned by at least a couple of residents in the previous round of consultation, the use of the High Street as a boundary would be deemed suitable and in fact has been accepted as a clear and obvious boundary in previous reviews. It would also seem inconsistent to use Quarry Hill Parade as a boundary (albeit moving the buildings all into Judd ward) and yet not apply a similar logic to the main High Street itself. Indeed, whilst it is accepted that there is a reasonable argument to extend Judd ward north of the Botany Stream due to shared facilities and community identity, the extension to the east of the High Street on the basis that the whole area has a common issue around flooding is a much weaker argument.
- 1.3.9 Instead, given the existing boundary between Judd ward and Cage Green east of the High Street is not represented by a strong boundary, there is a clear argument to extend Cage Green into this area east of the High Street, creating a ward that has the A26 (and to some extent Shipbourne Road) as a central focus, and establishes better community identity by linking facilities, such as the Cannon Lane Retail Park, to residents that use them in Cage Green.

1.4 Proposed Ward Names

- 1.4.1 There are a number of ward names suggested in the LGBCE proposals that are relatively long-winded, and as such appear to go against the requirement to keep such names as succinct as possible. The longest ward name has been given to 'Aylesford North with Burham, Eccles and Wouldham' and it is therefore proposed that this name be shortened to 'North Downs'.
- 1.4.2 It is recognised that there are at least a couple of other ward names that could potentially be shortened including:
- East Malling, West Malling and Offham
 - East Peckham, Mereworth and Wateringbury

However, alternative names have not been suggested as it is felt that this could not be achieved without losing some of the identity of the ward.

1.5 Legal Implications

- 1.5.1 The LGBCE has functions under Part 3 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. Under S56(1) of the 2009 Act, the LGBCE must, from time to time, conduct a review of the area of each principal council, and recommend whether a change should be made to the electoral arrangements. In this regard, "electoral arrangements" means:

- a) The total number of members of the Council;
- b) The number and boundaries of electoral areas for purposes of the election of Councillors;
- c) The number of Councillors to be returned by any electoral area in that area;
- d) The name of any electoral area.

1.5.2 The 2009 Act does not set out how many councillors each authority (or type of authority) will have. It is the LGBCE's responsibility to determine the appropriate number of councillors for each authority.

1.5.3 In making its recommendations, Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act requires the LGBCE to have regard to the following statutory criteria:

- (a) The need to secure that the ratio of the number of local government electors to the number of councillors is, as nearly as possible, the same in every electoral area of the council;
- (b) The need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities and, in particular
 - (i) the desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and
 - (ii) the desirability of fixing boundaries so as not to break any localities
- (c) The need to secure effective and convenient local government.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.6.1 None at this stage.

1.7 Risk Assessment

1.7.1 Not Applicable

1.8 Equality Impact Assessment

1.8.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

1.9 Recommendations

1.9.1 That the report **BE NOTED**

1.9.2 That the draft response as set out in Appendix 2, **BE RECOMMENDED** to Council.

Background papers:

None

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