

Council



Forest Heath
District Council

Title of Report:	West Suffolk Council – Electoral Review	
Report No:	COU/FH/18/012	
Report to and dates:	St Edmundsbury Council	24 April 2018
	Forest Heath Council	25 April 2018
Portfolio holder:	Not applicable – electoral matters are not an executive function.	
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Purpose of report:	The purpose of this report is to approve the councils' (Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury) proposed options for the West Suffolk warding pattern. If approved then the options will be submitted to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government to be included as part of the electoral review to be carried out later by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.	
Recommendation:	It is recommended that Council: (1) considers the evidence received during the Council's consultation, and the advice of the Future Governance Steering Group, so that it can make the final decision required in respect of the Council's representation to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government on the proposed ward boundaries for West Suffolk; <i>Continued over....</i>	

	(2) authorises the Chief Executive to prepare and submit the Council’s representation based on the information contained in Report No: COU/SE/18/010 and its appendices and the decisions made by Council at this meeting[24 April 2018].
Key Decision:	<i>Is this a Key Decision and, if so, under which definition?</i> No, it is not a Key Decision - <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Consultation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A consultation was undertaken during January and February 2018 to identify community links in line with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England’s criteria. • This fed into the development of draft ward options, which were subject to consultation in March 2018.
Alternative option(s):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The councils could decide not to put forward options for the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) to consider as part of their work. The councils are recommended not to follow this option as it would lead to the LGBCE producing a warding pattern for consultation without any detailed understanding of community identity in West Suffolk. • This report proposes that the Council submits a range of options on proposed warding. Instead, the councils could decide to put forward one option for the West Suffolk wards. The councils are not looking to find a ‘single scheme’ but instead to find some workable options and highlight the pros and cons of each option for the LGBCE to consider. This is considered further within the options report at Appendix A.
Implications:	
<i>Are there any financial implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Are there any staffing implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Are there any ICT implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

<i>Are there any legal and/or policy implications? If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<i>Are there any equality implications? If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Risk/opportunity assessment:		<i>(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)</i>	
Risk area	Inherent level of risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual risk (after controls)
The LGBCE produces a warding pattern that does not take into account the wishes of the Councils and its communities	Medium	<p>Subject to approval, the councils will submit warding options that reflect the feedback received from the community survey, feedback received from the consultation on the warding options, and the need to adhere to the LGBCE's criteria.</p> <p>The LGBCE will consult on a proposed warding pattern and the councils and other interested groups will have the opportunity to provide detailed feedback at that stage.</p>	Low
Ward(s) affected:		All	
Background papers: <i>(all background papers are to be published on the website and a link included)</i>		<p>Single Council: Consequential and Transition Matters (St Edmundsbury Council on 17 October and Forest Heath Council on 18 October)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - St Edmundsbury: https://democracy.westsuffolk.gov.uk/documents/s22291/COU.SE.17.016%20Single%20Council%20Consequential%20and%20Transition%20Matters.pdf - Forest Heath: https://democracy.westsuffolk.gov.uk/documents/s22312/COU.FH.17.029%20Single%20Council%20Matters%20Report.pdf <p>Electorate forecast for West Suffolk Council – methodology and assumptions: https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/Council/single_council/upload/WestSuffolkElectorateForecastMethodology.pdf</p>	
Documents attached:		<p>Appendix A - options for the West Suffolk warding pattern</p> <p>Appendix B - comments received during the consultation on the options for the warding pattern</p> <p>Appendix C – LGBCE electoral review guide for Councillors</p>	

1. Background

- 1.1 Subject to parliamentary approval, West Suffolk Council will be created as a new district-level Council in April 2019, replacing the district-level councils for Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury (the councils). If Parliament approves the orders to create the new council for West Suffolk then a new set of wards will need to be created before the first elections to the new Council in May 2019.
- 1.2 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is responsible for determining the council size and setting the new wards for the new Council, including the names and boundaries for the wards. The LGBCE will start work on their electoral review in May 2018 (they are unable to start work until the Houses of Parliament have approved the establishment of the new Council).
- 1.3 The new Council must have its own pattern of wards. Due to the limited time constraints between the new Council being created, and the first elections being held in May 2019, it has been necessary for the councils, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the LGBCE to work together to develop an alternative methodology and timetable for the warding review, which importantly still provides opportunities for communities to be able to input to the process (this is explained further in section 2.5 below).
- 1.4 The councils, and other interested groups, have an opportunity to inform the work of the LGBCE and the councils have been working together through the Future Governance Steering Group (FGSG) to develop a proposed council size and some options for the new ward boundaries. Proposals for warding must be submitted to the MHCLG by 4 May 2018.
- 1.5 In October 2017 the councils proposed that the future number of Councillors for West Suffolk Council should be 64 (eight fewer than the current arrangements for Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury councils). In February 2018 the LGBCE confirmed that they were satisfied that this figure broadly reflected their guidance, and the Ministry have included this in the structural change order that is currently being considered by the Houses of Parliament. The LGBCE will provide a formal view on council size when they start their work in May 2018.
- 1.6 The FGSG developed a number of options for the West Suffolk wards which built on a community survey that the councils undertook in January and February 2018. The ward options were consulted on during March 2018 and the consultation feedback has been used to revise the ward options that are included at Appendix A of this report.
- 1.7 The feedback received during the consultation is included in full at Appendix B of this report and it is proposed that the councils submit both Appendix A and Appendix B to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, to be included as part of the electoral review of the West Suffolk district which will be conducted by the LGBCE.

2. Electoral review – process

2.1 Electorate forecast

2.1.1 As part of the electoral review, the councils produced and published a five-year electorate forecast for the West Suffolk area. Using an electorate forecasting methodology that was agreed with the LGBCE, the West Suffolk electorate is forecast to be 131,570 at December 2023. This takes account of projected future growth (based on approved planning permission and the local plan), and factors such as the large American population in West Suffolk. It should be noted that the ward options published for consultation were based on a projected electorate of 131,501 and that two windfall housing growth sites were identified during that consultation that met the electorate forecast criteria and had not been included in the original calculations. This had a minor impact on the electorate forecast for the St Marys parish ward of Newmarket (site at Nowell Lodge, increase of 16 from 1454 to 1470) and Haverhill West parish ward of Haverhill (site at Brickfield Drive, increase of 53 from 2801 to 2854).

2.1.2 The electorate forecast uses assumptions which have to be made and applied consistently, for example projected housing growth in West Suffolk. West Suffolk is an area that has already, and will continue to experience significant housing growth, given its location in the Cambridgeshire sub-regional housing market, and the relative affordability of property compared to Cambridge city and surrounding areas. A number of strategic growth sites are already being built out, with several more to follow, and these are concentrated in several key locations, principally on the edge of larger settlements, rather than being spread evenly. The councils’ five-year land supply documents and approved windfall sites of 10 units or more have been used to forecast the electorate and the forecasts have been calculated using the forecast build-out rate per-year as published in the land supply documents.

2.1.3 The councils’ proposal of 64 district councillors would require a new warding structure to achieve electoral equality of 2,056 (+ or - 10%) electors to each councillor. This is close to the current average for two-tier district councils in England.

2.1.4 The changes to the number of seats based on a council size of 64 members and ward size of 2056 (+/- 10%) reflected the following representation for a West Suffolk Council:

Area	Current seats	New seats	Effect
Brandon	5	3	Less 2
Bury St Edmunds	17	16	Less 1
Haverhill	10	10	Unchanged
Mildenhall	4	3	Less 1
Newmarket	8	6	Less 2
Rural	28	26	Less 2

2.1.5 With regard to the above table, it’s important to note that this is the creation of a new Council for West Suffolk; these are new district-level wards and therefore must reflect electoral equality for all of West Suffolk. The LGBCE, in a recent briefing to all members, highlighted that previous District / Borough boundaries

will cease to exist and they will expect to see proposed wards which span the previous boundary. It is also important to note that some of the changes in relative levels of representation across West Suffolk will reflect growth patterns over the last 20 years and forecast growth up to December 2023.

2.2 Community links survey

2.2.1 The councils undertook a community survey in January and February 2018 to help with the initial work to shape some options for the new West Suffolk Council ward boundaries. Local people, groups and councils were asked to share considerations on their community links so that they could be taken into account when drafting the options for the ward boundaries.

2.2.2 In total 58 survey responses were received from parish/ town, district and county councillors and from local residents and residents associations and were taken into consideration as part of the development of the initial set of ward options that were published for consultation. These views will also be incorporated into the final supporting narrative submitted to MHCLG (see 2.5.1 below)

2.3 Developing ward options for consultation

2.3.1 When developing the ward options for consultation the FGSG were requested to take into consideration the LGBCE three statutory criteria for an electoral review:

2.3.1.1 Electoral equality for voters

2.3.1.2 Community identities and interests

2.3.1.3 Effective and convenient local government

2.3.2 The FGSG also used the feedback from the community survey to ensure that the options for the council wards reflect, as far as possible, the interests and identities of communities across West Suffolk. The FGSG also aimed to create wards with no more than three members and they developed a ward naming protocol to assist with the naming of the proposed wards.

2.3.3 Both councils have completed Community Governance Reviews which are due to come into effect from April 2019 and these changes were also taken into account as part of the work to develop options for the West Suffolk wards.

2.3.4 It's important to note that a district ward crossing through a parish boundary does not change the external boundary of a parish. However, where the ward boundary crosses through a parish boundary then this parish area becomes a parish ward. If the district-wards within large parish areas are changed then this will create a consequential change to the parish wards as they currently follow the existing district/ borough ward boundaries (this would particularly apply to larger settlements such as Brandon, Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill, Mildenhall and Newmarket). The LGBCE will change the parish ward arrangements and allocate number of parish councillors using the forecast electorate. The relevant councils have been briefed so that they understand the changes that will be made before the May 2019 election.

2.4 Public consultation

2.4.1 The councils published ward options for a public consultation which ran from 7 March until 28 March 2018. It was recognised that this was not a long period for consultation but the timescales were unavoidable to meet the 4 May LGBCE deadline for submitting some initial proposals for them to consider; parish councils and community groups had been pre-informed of the consultation dates in January 2018.

2.4.2 The consultation was open to anyone who wanted to have their say on the options for the ward boundaries and the ward names for the new West Suffolk Council. The ward options, background information and a survey to provide feedback was made available on the councils website and hard copies of the maps were made available to view at the Council offices in Brandon, Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill, Mildenhall and Newmarket. Drop in sessions were also arranged for councillors to look at the maps and to provide their feedback.

2.4.3 In total 87 responses were received, a summary of the feedback is below and the consultation responses can be viewed in full at Appendix B.

Category of those responses are:-

- Parish Councils and Councillors - 31
- Borough/District Councillors - 16
- County Cllr - 2
- Community groups - 6
- Residents - 32

Wards or parishes responses have been about:-

- Rural - 53
- Brandon - 1 (also received feedback from 2 councillors at a drop in session)
- Bury St Edmunds - 13
- Haverhill - 10
- Mildenhall - 3
- Newmarket - 2
- General - 5

2.4.4 The feedback received during the consultation was considered against the LGBCE criteria for electoral equality, community identity and interests and effective and convenient local government. Changes were made to the ward options where the feedback showed improvements against the LGBCE criteria and where the change didn't adversely affect over wards. Suggested changes which had a significant impact on other wards have not been made but have been included in the narrative for the ward option so that the LGBCE can take the feedback into consideration as part of their work to develop a single option for the West Suffolk wards.

2.4.5 The changes made as a result of the consultation are summarised as part of the options at appendix A and all responses to the consultation can be viewed in full at Appendix B.

2.5 LGBCE review

- 2.5.1 Subject to Council approval, both Appendix A and B will be submitted to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. Other interested parties may also make their own submissions now. As part of the proposed delegation to the Chief Executive, Appendix A will be further refined to develop the supporting narrative for the various options in respect of community cohesion –reflecting the consultation results and also any comments made at this meeting.
- 2.5.2 The LGBCE will start work on drafting their proposals during May 2018 so that they are ready for public consultation at the start of July. For the purposes of the LGBCE review the councils will be a consultee. The councils will support the LGBCE with their consultation activities through their communications channels, for example the LGBCE has requested a briefing with all parish and town councils.
- 2.5.3 Once the LGBCE consultation on draft recommendations has concluded, the Commission will consider all the evidence before drawing up its final recommendations for the new electoral arrangements. A draft order seeking the implementation of the final recommendation will be laid in both Houses of Parliament in November 2018 and will come into effect at the elections to the new Council on 2 May 2019.
- 2.5.4 The timetable for the LGBCE review and further details can be viewed at Appendix C.

2.6 Consideration at Council meetings

- 2.6.1 The ward options at Appendix A, include a range of options that are considered to meet the LGBCE criteria identified in 2.3 above.
- 2.6.2 The options in Appendix A have been subject to consultation with the Future Governance Steering Group. The FGSG recommended that all options should be submitted to MHCLG for consideration, and that:
- a) The “other options” for the rural wards should include the potential of moving Icklingham to the Manor Ward, albeit recognition should be given that the current proposal – including Icklingham in a Risby Ward – follows the A1101 giving a natural community cohesion corridor;
 - b) Option A for Brandon should be the preferred option in light of the feedback received from local members at the Councillors drop-in session;
 - c) Option B for Haverhill should be a preferred option in light of feedback from the consultation;
 - d) Option A for Mildenhall should be a preferred option as it reflects the views of the recent Mildenhall Parish Council meeting; and
 - e) Option A for Newmarket should be a preferred option (reflecting the views of Newmarket Town Council)
- 2.6.3 It is proposed that the Council considers each option in turn as outlined at Appendix A as a self-contained ‘mini-debate’. To assist in the conduct of the meeting, a draft motion to be used for each option is set out below:

A: Adopt option for submission to the LGBCE

That option [*insert option reference*] be adopted for submission to the MHCLG with no changes to the proposed boundaries, ward name or other options to consider, as set out in appendix A to this report.

NB comments made on the option as part of the debate will be included as part of the Council submission to the LGBCE.

Or

B: Amend the option for submission to the LGBCE

That option [*insert option reference*] at appendix A be amended on the basis that [*insert reason for changing recommendation*] and that the revised option be included in the submission to the MHCLG.

Or

C: Delete an option

That the option [*insert option reference*] be removed from the submission to the MHCLG on the basis that [*insert reason for removing the option*].

NB It is important to note that, to delete an option now, the Council will have to agree that there are strong reasons why this option should not be considered alongside any others, with reference to the LGBCE criteria and responses to the consultation. For completeness, the submission will also still have to cross-reference to the consultation and record that this option was considered and then rejected.

- 2.6.4 Once all options have been considered, then there would be the option for councillors to propose that additional options are considered to those published with this agenda and to propose any "preferred" options. Members are strongly encouraged that if they wish to submit additional options, these are provided to officers by midday the day before the Council meeting so that they can be circulated to other members for consideration, and so that officers can also provide their opinion on the adherence to the LGBCE's criteria. Where officers are of the opinion that further information or a more detailed assessment would assist in ensuring the criteria are met, they will liaise with the member submitting the proposals accordingly.
- 2.6.5 After each option has been considered and voted upon, Council will be asked to consider the second, general, recommendation which will authorise the Chief Executive to prepare and make the submission.
- 2.6.6 All proposed amendments and deletions agreed by St Edmundsbury Councillors will be provided to Forest Heath Councillors for consideration at their meeting on 25 April 2018. Should Forest Heath propose further modifications, then these will be added as a supplemental item to Appendix A. Any submission will also be able to reflect where the two councils took differing views on any particular matter.