

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

7TH DECEMBER 2023, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors H. D. N. Rone-Clarke (Chairman), J. Robinson (Vice-Chairman), S. R. Colella, C.A. Hotham, K.J. May and S. T. Nock

Officers: Mr D. Whitney, Mrs J. Bayley-Hill and Ms M. Bassett

MINUTE EXTRACT

15/23

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND
PRELIMINARY STAGE BOUNDARY REVIEW FOR BROMSGROVE -
COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION**

The Chairman agreed to this item being considered first.

The Committee considered a report which set out the stages for a review of the electoral boundaries in Bromsgrove, which would be carried out by the Local Government Boundaries Commission for England (LGBCE). There had been an update to the timetable to take into account the Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May 2024. The planned dates were now:

- Consultation on ward patterns 30th July – 30th September 2024
- LGBCE to meet on 17th December 2024 to decide its draft recommendations
- Consultation on draft recommendations between 14th January and 24th March 2025
- Publication of the LGBCE final recommendations on 24th June 2025
- Order to be laid in summer of 2025
- Implementation in May 2027.

If the Council wished to make a submission on council size, it should do this by 23rd February 2024 and the Committee was asked to decide whether the Council should make a submission and if so, what the indicative number of Councillors should be.

Officers had prepared an initial draft submission using the template provided by the LGBCE. The draft contained contextual information to aid discussion by the Committee.

The following were the main points discussed by the Committee during consideration of the report:

- it was suggested that reference on page 58 to 'require opposition members to be appointed as Chairmen of the Audit, Standards, and Governance Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Board' should be amended to acknowledge that this would be impractical if the Council was made up of only one political group
- further to a query, officers would check the ONS data available following the 2021 census to ensure that data quoted in the submission was as up to date as possible
- members queried whether the Council should aim to have an odd or even number of Councillors. It was acknowledged that for practical reasons many Councils preferred to have an odd number of Councillors. This tended to enable a majority administration to be formed in the event of an election outcome leading to political groups of the same size. However, the view was expressed that whilst this was a reasonable consideration, it should not be given more weight than improving the ratio of electorate to councillors across the District
- Members asked for details of the range between the lowest number of electors per Councillor currently and the highest
- It was noted that the previous review of Council size had reduced it from 39 to 31 Councillors and removed multi member wards. With this background Members agreed that there should not be any further reduction in the number of Councillors.
- The view was expressed that the estimated increase in electorate due to proposed development used in the previous review had not materialised, which meant there was an uneven distribution of the electorate across the District currently. Members were reminded that the review was carried out in stages. The LGBCE was looking at the total number of Councillors for the projected electorate as a whole at this initial stage and the Council should focus on that. There would be an opportunity to examine the distribution of wards at the next stage of the review
- The Committee was also reminded that the LGBCE guidance stated submissions should include challenges specific to the District, and examples suggested included an ageing population and increasing complexity of Councillor case work and decisions. It was suggested that this would mitigate against reducing the number of Councillors further.

- A member commented that the final number should take into consideration the need to attract a diverse range of councillors and keep individual workloads to a manageable level
- Whilst the projected increase in the number of electors indicated an additional councillor might be required, as developers might decide to 'landbank' land earmarked for development, it was possible that the number would not be reached in the timescale for the current review (2027) and at this stage an increase in the number of councillors was not justified
- It was suggested that the Committee could recommend the number of Councillors stay the same for the current review and suggest a further review in 8 years' time, by which time it would be known whether or not proposed developments would have been built out. However, it was noted that the timing of reviews was at the discretion of the LGBCE who responded to changes in electoral equality.

Having considered the views put forward, the Committee agreed that the Council put forward a council size of 31 to the LGBCE.

RECOMMENDED that the Council puts forward a council size of 31 in its submission to the LGBCE.

The meeting closed at 7.14 p.m.

Chairman