

REPORT OF THE
Chief Executive

PART I

**140. FURTHER ELECTORAL REVIEW OF HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL –
PATTERN OF ELECTORAL DIVISIONS SUBMISSION TO THE LOCAL
GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND**

1. On 29 August 2014 the Local Government Boundary Commission for England ('the Commission') advised the County Council that the Commission had determined that a Further Electoral Review of the County Council's Electoral Arrangements should take place. A Further Electoral Review is a review by the Commission carried out under Section 56 (2) of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 ('the 2009 Act'), and is triggered where the Commission consider 'significant' electoral inequality exists.

2. So far as the County Council is concerned Electoral Arrangements means:
- (a) the total number of County Councillors elected to the County Council;
 - (b) the number and boundaries of Electoral Divisions in the County Council;
 - (c) the number of County Councillors in respect of any Electoral Division; and
 - (d) the name of a new Electoral Division of the County Council.

Electoral Review Process

3. A Further Electoral Review has two distinct parts. The timetable for the Further Electoral Review is attached Annex 1 to this Report. Part 1 is consideration of Council Size. As Members will recall a submission on Council Size was approved by the County Council at the Extraordinary Council Meeting on 13 April 2015. The submission of the County Council was that the County Council should remain with 78 County Councillors. Subsequent to the meeting the Commission advised the County Council on 26 May 2015 that it was minded to recommend that the size of the County Council should remain at 78 County Councillors, as per the County Council's submission.

4. Part 2 of the process is consideration by the Commission of proposals for new electoral division patterns and formulation of their recommendations. In drawing up its recommendations on electoral division patterns, the Commission carries out two phases of public consultation. The first phase of consultation is where the Commission asks for proposals on new electoral division patterns, and whether any changes to electoral division names are proposed. The main purpose of this Report is for Members to consider the County Council's response to that consultation.

5. Responses to the consultation are used by the Commission to draw up draft recommendations for a new pattern of electoral division boundaries. These draft recommendations are then published by the Commission. There then follows a second

stage of consultation on the Commission's draft recommendations where responses can be made thereon.

Electoral Division Patterns

6. In consideration of its recommendations as to a pattern of electoral divisions, the Commission is required to have regard to three statutory criteria, as set out in the 2009 Act. These are:

(a) Electoral equality, that is that each County Councillor should represent roughly the same number of registered electors as other County Councillors across the County Council;

(b) that the recommended pattern of electoral divisions should, as far as possible, reflect the interests and identities of local communities and have readily identifiable boundaries; and

(c) that the Electoral Arrangements of the County Council should provide for effective and convenient Local Government.

7. It should be noted that no priority is placed on any particular one of the three statutory criteria in the 2009 Act. Neither is any priority placed on the criteria in the Commission's guidance. It is recognised that the first of the three statutory criteria is an objective test, and thus more readily quantifiable, whilst evaluation of the second and third criteria are subjective and as a consequence require subjective evidence. It is recognised by the Commission that whilst the aim would be to achieve perfect electoral equality for all electoral divisions, in practice this is unlikely, and advice from the Commission is that when making a submission on proposed electoral division patterns, Authorities are advised to ensure that evidence provided in the submission addresses all three statutory criteria. The higher the level of electoral variance proposed for an electoral division, the stronger the evidence of the other two statutory criteria needs to be.

8. It is also recognised that on occasions the statutory criteria can contradict each other, for example a proposed electoral division might reflect the shape and interests of local communities and provide the best fit in respect of effective and convenient Local Government, but deliver poorer levels of electoral equality. In such cases the Commission will use its discretion, and the quality of evidence presented to it, in coming to a conclusion. This is a particular consideration when looking at the third statutory criteria of effective and convenient Local Government. Guidance from the Commission is that this criteria is often overlooked as a consideration in proposals made to the Commission on electoral division patterns. The impact of proposals on the workload of individual Councillors thus needs to be considered in both numerical terms of registered electors, but also in terms of the physical extent of the size of proposed electoral divisions, and the ability of Councillors to effectively represent the people in it.

Members' Working Group

9. As Members will recall following the Extraordinary Council Meeting on 13 April 2015, a Members' Working Group with representation from all Political Groups represented on the County Council was convened. Each Member of the Working Group

was given a local co-ordinating role in respect of each District/Borough Council area, and to thereafter make recommendations to political Group Leaders on a proposed pattern of electoral divisions, having regard to the three statutory criteria. A copy of the Terms of Reference of the Members' Working Group, as approved by the County Council, is attached at Annex 2 to this Report.

10. In the course of their work Members of the Members' Working Group have conducted consultation with all other County Council Members within the District/Borough Council area allocated to them, with Leaders of District/Borough Councils, and with local community groups and organisations. Members of the Members' Working Group have also used their local knowledge in formulating proposals.

11. A copy of the draft submission to the Commission containing proposals of the Members' Working Group to the Leader's Working Group is attached at Annex 3 to this Report. The proposals of the Members' Working Group were considered at meetings of the Group Leaders' on 23 and 29 June 2015.

Leaders' Working Group

12. Whilst Group Leaders were overall supportive of the majority of the proposals, there was not a universally favoured option for the Eastleigh district area. As Members will note from the draft submission two options are proposed, a Seven division model ("Eastleigh 7") and an Eight division model ("Eastleigh 8"). Of the Group Leaders, the Eastleigh 7 model is favoured by the Leader's of the Conservative, UKIP and Independent Groups personally and as Group Leaders. The Eastleigh 8 model is favoured by the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group personally and as Group Leader. The Eastleigh 8 model is also favoured by the Leader of the Labour Group personally, but who indicated that this was not necessarily the view of the Labour Group Members. Both options are set out in the Report for transparency, accuracy, and for the benefit of the Commission.

Commentary

13. It is recognised that any submission of the County Council on a new pattern of electoral division boundaries may not have universal support from all Members. It is also recognised that on occasions alternative options, either in respect of individual electoral division(s) or affecting a whole district within the County Council's area may be proposed. In such cases it is understood that the Commission's advice would be for the alternative options to be presented in the submission, but if there is a preferred option this can be indicated. As detailed above, there are two options proposed for the overall Eastleigh district area, and for the Alton Town Division in the East Hampshire district area, and for the Fleet Division in the Hart district area.

14. As indicated to Members at the Extraordinary Council Meeting on 13 April 2015 and above in this report, ultimately the draft recommendations on new electoral division patterns, on which the Commission will consult at the next stage of the process, will be those drawn up by the Commission. In formulating these recommendations the Commission consults widely, and whilst the County Council is an important consultee, the Commission will receive submissions from a wide variety of other stakeholders, and from the public at large. It is therefore open to any individual Member of the County

Council who might have an alternative view either in part or in whole from that set out in this submission, to make their own submission to the Commission.

15. It is important however to recognise that whilst the County Council is not required to make a submission to the Commission on proposed new electoral division patterns, if no submission is made then the Commission will have no view from the County Council as to what the County Council's options and preferences might be as to new electoral division boundaries.

Next Stage in the Process

16. Following conclusion of the period of consultation on Electoral Division Patterns, the Commission will consider the proposals it receives and complete its own process. The Commission will then publish its draft recommendations, at which stage the County Council together with other stakeholders and members of the public will have opportunity to comment on the draft recommendations. As indicated in the timetable attached at Annex 1, consideration of the draft recommendations will be undertaken by the Members' Working Group, and a draft response prepared for consideration by the Leader's Working Group, and thereafter full Council at its meeting on 7 January 2016. Thereafter the final stage of the process is a set out in the timetable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the County Council:

- (a) Considers the draft and agrees that the proposed Electoral Division Patterns document (attached at Annex 3 to this Report) be submitted in its entirety, which is the Commission's preferred approach, setting out the argument and evidence supporting the submission including options for the Eastleigh district area and for the Alton Rural and Alton Town Divisions (East Hampshire) and the Fleet Division (Hart).
- (b) Where there is more than one option available, the Council is requested to indicate which option is preferred.