

Divisions affected – All

COUNCIL

12 DECEMBER 2023

ELECTORAL REVIEW: LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

Report of the Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Council is RECOMMENDED** to support the draft recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) relating to the boundaries for 69 single-member divisions with the exception of those divisions in Cherwell District covering the area in and around Banbury for which the following response is proposed:
 - a) To request that the areas affected by the community governance review determined by Cherwell District Council on 17 October 2022 be included within the Banbury divisions.
 - b) To request adoption of the boundaries included in the Council submission on 28 March 2023 relating to Cropredy and Wroxton, Adderbury, Bloxham and Bodicote, Deddington and Hook Norton, and Fringford and Heyfords.
 - c) To request adoption of the boundaries included in the Council submission on 28 March 2023 relating to Banbury as they better reflect the identity of local communities, subject to one minor amendment: the area to the west of the railway line and to the east of the canal should become part of Banbury Calthorpe (rather than Grimsbury and Castle).

Background

2. The Electoral Review is formally split into two phases:
 - a) Council size including development of electorate forecasts
 - b) Division electoral arrangements setting the boundaries for each county division.

Timeline

3. Timeline:

LGBCE consultation on division arrangements – 28 February to 8 May 2023.

LGBCE consultation on draft recommendations – 3 October to 11 December 2023.

Final recommendations published – March 2024

Recommendations laid before Parliament and become effective for the next County Council Election in May 2025.

4. To tie in with the date of the Council meeting, the Commission has agreed that the Council can respond on 12 December 2023, the day after the official end of consultation on the draft proposals.

Council size

5. The Commission has decided that the Council size should be increased by six members from 63 to 69 members. It has also agreed that there should be 69 County divisions meaning that there will no longer be any multi-member divisions. The Commission's decisions are in line with the response made by the Council in December 2022.
6. The number of elected members in each District area reflects the higher levels of population growth in towns and villages outside the City of Oxford. These include Abingdon, Banbury, Bicester, Didcot, Henley, Kidlington, Thame, Wantage and Witney.
7. The changes are as follows:

	63 members	Change	69 members
Cherwell	14 members	+2	16 members
Oxford City	14 members	-1	13 members
South Oxfordshire	13 members	+2	15 members
Vale of White Horse	12 members	+2	14 members
West Oxfordshire	10 members	+1	11 members

Division electoral arrangements – draft recommendations

8. The Commission's draft recommendations on boundaries are largely based on the submission by the Council in March 2023. There are a small number of changes due to errors in electorate forecasts where some developments were incorrectly tagged. The Commission resolved this, with help from County Council officers. As a result, some division boundaries had to be adjusted to maintain electoral equality.
9. The Commission has tried to ensure divisions are as similar to district ward patterns as possible, so some boundaries have been amended to reflect this.
10. The areas of most significant change are:
 - a) Cherwell - Changes in Bicester divisions based on visits by Commission representatives.

- b) Cherwell - Changes in Banbury due to electorate equality issues. However, the Commission has not yet taken into account the community governance review around Drayton Parish (which moves a large development from Drayton into Banbury).
- c) Oxford City - Minor changes to align with the existing wards, and in the city centre.
- d) Vale of White Horse - Minor changes around the parishes outside of Grove.
- e) South Oxfordshire - No obvious changes to the Council submission
- f) West Oxfordshire - Changes to the parish alignment south of Witney

Council response

11. The cross-party working group established to develop the Council response to each phase of the electoral review comprises the following members:

Liberal Democrat Green Alliance –	Cllrs Robin Bennett, Neil Fawcett, Freddie van Mierlo and Alison Rooke
Conservative Independent Alliance –	Cllrs Kieron Mallon, Ian Snowdon and Ted Fenton
Labour and Cooperative Party Group –	Cllrs Brad Baines and Andrew Coles (later replaced by Cllr Michael O'Connor)
Non-aligned Independent –	Cllr Stefan Gawrysiak

Cllr Stefan Gawrysiak was appointed as chair

12. The working group met on 17 October and 10 November 2023 to consider how the Council should respond to the Commission's draft recommendations.
13. The working group welcomed the general approach of the Commission as it had taken the Council's submission into account in a very significant way. Members of the working group support the Commission's draft recommendations with the exception of Cherwell District where realignment is required to take the community governance review for Banbury into account.
14. There was a difference of opinion among members of the working group on the best approach to realigning the boundaries in Cherwell District. The majority of members supported boundaries following the arterial routes into Banbury with adjustments to division boundaries in Cherwell to reflect population figures. One adjustment is proposed to division boundaries in Banbury: the area to the west of the railway line and to the east of the canal should become part of Banbury Calthorpe (rather than Grimsbury and Castle). Please refer to the attached map with the area affected highlighted in red. This takes account of updated electorate projections that have been developed by the Commission.
15. This will result in the following variances in Cherwell District:

Division	Electorate 2029	Variance 2029
Adderbury, Bloxham & Bodicote	8,011	-5%
Banbury Calthorpe	8,690	3%
Banbury Easington	7,956	-6%
Banbury Grimsbury & Castle	9,437	12%
Banbury Hardwick	8,314	-2%
Banbury Ruscote	8,766	4%
Bicester East	7,801	-8%
Bicester North	8,637	2%
Bicester South	7,757	-8%
Bicester West	8,685	3%
Cropredy & Wroxton	7,534	-11%
Deddington	7,957	-6%
Fringford & Heyfords	7,909	-7%
Kidlington East	8,953	6%
Kidlington North & Otmoor	8,732	3%
Kidlington West	8,966	6%

16. Two divisions are outside the Commission's normal electoral population tolerance of 10% from the average. It is noted, however, they are still significantly less than the variances included in the Commission's draft recommendations for other parts of the county.
17. Individual councillors and groups are free to make their own response to the Commission's consultation.

Corporate policies and priorities

18. The electoral review is an essential part of good governance for the Council and will ensure that the electorate is represented fairly across the county.

Financial implications

19. There is no specific budget for undertaking the review so costs are being met from General Balances as a supplementary estimate – it is unplanned expenditure but necessary. The costs will be monitored by Law and Governance and reported through the Business Management Monitoring report. The increase in Council size from 2025 will result in additional costs relating to members including allowances, travelling and officer support estimated to be approximately £100,000. This will need to be addressed as part of the Budget and Business Planning process for 2025-26.

Comments checked by: Lorna Baxter, Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer

Legal implications

20. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is established under Section 55 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Consultation Act 2009 (the 2009 Act) and under Section 56 of the 2009 Act 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 for that area. The Council is requested by the Commission to respond to the electoral review and in doing so must meet the deadlines set by the Commission for each phase of the review.
21. Following the completion of the full consultation process and review the Commission will under section 58(4) of the 2009 Act publish a report stating its recommendations for changes to the electoral arrangements for the county of Oxfordshire. This will in due course be brought into legislation by laying an Order before both the House of Commons and the House of Lords using the Negative Procedure. The Order will automatically become law unless there are objections to it within a specified period (usually 40 days).
Comments checked by: Anita Bradley, Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

Staff implications

22. Limited staff resources are available in Law and Governance to support the review. Extra capacity has been sourced from the Association of Electoral Administrators to allow a specialist with electoral review knowledge to be engaged on a part-time basis to coordinate activities and ensure that critical deadlines are met.

Equality and inclusion implications

23. The electoral review will help in ensuring that the electorate in Oxfordshire, including minority and protected groups, are fairly represented.

Anita Bradley

Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

Annex: Annex A – Banbury map

Background papers: a) Electoral Review report to Council on 7 October 2022
b) Council size report to Council on 13 December 2022
c) Division patterns report to Council on 28 March 2023
d) Local Government Boundary Commission for England website
- <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/south-east/oxfordshire/oxfordshire-county-council>

Contact officer: Simon Harper, Head of Governance
Email simon.harper@oxfordshire.gov.uk

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