

## ELECTORAL REVIEW – CONSULTATION ON WARDING PATTERNS

Governance Committee – 10 December 2024

**Report of:** Chief Executive

**Status:** For Decision

**Also considered by:**

- Council – 17 December 2024

**Key Decision:** No

**Executive Summary:** The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is undertaking an electoral review of the Sevenoaks District during 2024 and 2025. The LGBCE has announced its Council Size decision and has launched a consultation on the warding patterns within the District boundary. This report updates Members on the progress of the review and sets out that the Governance Committee Working Group, will provide an update on the development of warding patterns, to take effect from the next scheduled District Council elections in May 2027 at the meeting of the Committee.

**Contact Officer:** Lee Banks, Ext. 7161

**Recommendations to Governance Committee:**

- (a) The decision by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England for Sevenoaks District Council to have 48 Councillors from the May 2027 elections is noted;
- (b) Members views on the warding patterns for the Sevenoaks District are noted; and
- (c) Governance Committee note the options at paragraph 17 of this report and make a recommendation to Council on the submission of consultation responses to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

**Recommendations to Council:**

- (a) The decision by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England for Sevenoaks District Council to have 48 Councillors from the May 2027 elections is noted;
- (b) To approve the approach to the consultation on warding patterns for the Sevenoaks District as recommended by the Governance Committee

**Reason for recommendation:** To ensure that Members are aware of the progress of the electoral review and make any necessary recommendations in respect of new ward patterns for the District.

## Introduction and Background

- 1 At its meeting on 30 January 2024 the Governance Committee were informed that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) was to begin an Electoral Review of the District Council.
- 2 The timetable for the review meant that a Council Size submission would be required to be developed for submission on or before 2 September 2024.
- 3 To assist in developing a Council Size submission, the Governance Committee formed a Member Working Group to advise the Governance Committee over the duration of the review.
- 4 At its meeting on 25 July 2024, Council approved that a proposed Council size of 48 District Councillors to be implemented from the May 2027 District Council elections was submitted to the LGBCE.
- 5 On 15 October 2024, having considered the submissions made to them on council size, announced that they were proposing a Council Size for the Sevenoaks District of 48 Councillors.
- 6 At the same time the LGBCE launched its first public consultation, welcoming views from all interested parties, on the warding patterns that should be implemented in the Sevenoaks District for the new council size.
- 7 The consultation begun on 22 October and will run for eight weeks, ending on Friday 20 January 2025.

## Developing a proposal for warding patterns

- 8 In launching its public consultation on warding patterns, the LGBCE has set out that they can only make decision about new warding arrangements based on three specific criteria. Each of these criteria is said to have equal weight and it is for the LGBCE to strike the balance between the criteria having assessed all of the information they receive over the course of the review. This may also include the LGBCE making their own visit to the District.
- 9 The first of the three criteria is **electoral equality**. The LGBCE are required to make sure each councillor represents a similar number of electors. The law tells sets out that they must aim for electoral equality five years after the end of the review. For the Sevenoaks District review, this is the forecast number of registered electors to 2030, which totals 95,386 electors, or 1,987 electors per Councillor. The forecast seeks to take into account natural population growth and new housing developments over 20 electors in size that will be occupied by 2030. The LGBCE have published the electoral forecast on their website at <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/sevenoaks>
- 10 The second criteria is **community identity and interests**. The LGBCE sets out that "A sense of community is often shaped by the amenities and services people use: shops, places of worship, schools and other facilities. It can also be shaped by attachment to representative organisations like tenants and

residents associations, community organisations and local business forums”. The most effective consultation responses are supported by information and evidence about the strength of community identity in the ward or wards being proposed.

- 11 The final criteria is **convenient and effective local government**, which aims to ensure that proposed wards use clearly identifiable boundaries, have appropriate names, and make it as easy as possible for the councillors to do their jobs.
- 12 Members may also wish to note that the LGBCE cannot create or abolish parish councils. At the start of this first public consultation stage the LGBCE has written to, and provided a short briefing for Town & Parish Councils. A link to the briefing was provided to those that were unable to attend, and also shared with all District Councillors. Whilst, the LGBCE may seek to build warding patterns in so far as possible on existing parish boundaries, if this cannot be achieved community governance reviews would be required to be undertaken by the District Council following the completion of the electoral review.

### **Submitting a warding pattern to the LGBCE**

- 13 As Members may recall, the Governance Committee formed a Member Working Group to advise the Governance Committee over the duration of the review.
- 14 The working group was reconstituted at the Governance Committee on 11 July 2024. The membership of the Group is as follows:
  - Cllr Michael Horwood (Chairman)
  - Cllr Kim Bayley
  - Cllr Graham Clack
  - Cllr Laura Manston
  - Cllr Elizabeth Purves
  - Cllr Lynda Harrison (consultant member)
  - Cllr Margot McArthur (consultant member)
- 15 The Member Working Group advised on the Council Size submission and has met since the launch of the warding patterns consultation. Officers attend the Member Working Group to seek to provide the information that the working group require to inform their work.
- 16 The Chairman of the Working Group would welcome the opportunity to update the Governance Committee in respect of the warding patterns consultation.

### **Next Steps**

- 17 Noting the update from the Member Working Group, the Governance Committee will be required to make a recommendation to Council to either endorse a pattern of wards to be approved for submission to the LGBCE, or,

may make a different recommendation. This may be to recommend that individual members or groups of members make their own submissions to the warding patterns consultation. Council will consider the recommendation arising from Governance Committee at their meeting on 17 December 2024.

18 Following the decision of Council, the timetable for the remainder of the review is currently set out as:

- First consultation on warding patterns ends – 20 January 2025
- LGBCE announce draft ward patterns – 15 April 2025
- Second consultation on draft ward patterns – 13 May 2025 to 21 July 2025
- LGBCE Final Recommendations – 28 October 2025
- Implementation – District Council elections 6 May 2027

### **Further information and guidance**

19 A wide range of information about the electoral review process is available on the LGBCE website, at <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/changing-wards-number-councillors-council-has>

20 This includes a short guide for Councillors which is available at <https://online.flippingbook.com/view/84147699/>

### **Other options Considered and/or rejected**

None.

### **Key Implications**

#### Financial

There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations to this report.

#### Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

The LGBCE are required by regulation to undertake an electoral review of the District Council and to follow a defined process in reaching their decisions.

#### Equality Assessment

There are no equality impacts arising from the recommendations to this report.

However, when considering submissions through the electoral review process Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the

Equality Act 2010, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups, and (iii) foster good relations between people from different groups.

### Climate Change Implications

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the council's ambitions to tackle the challenge of climate change. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the district, or supporting the resilience of the natural environment.

### Community Impact and Outcomes

An electoral review provides an opportunity to deliver improved electoral equality across the District, whilst ensuring our communities continue to benefit from strong representation and support from their District Councillors.

At relevant stages through the electoral review, working with the LGBCE, residents' views will be encouraged in relation to warding patterns that suit community needs.

### **Conclusions**

The LGBCE has announced that the District Council should have 48 Councillors from its next District Council elections in 2027. As a result, and to ensure electoral equality across the District, a new pattern of wards must be developed. The LGBCE has opened a public consultation, which closes on 20 January 2025, and provides an initial opportunity for Members to submit their views on the most appropriate ward boundaries for the district.

#### **Appendices**

None

#### **Background Papers**

Report to Governance Committee – 30 January 2024

<https://cds.sevenoaks.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=289&MId=3116&J=4>

Report to Council – 20 February 2024

<https://cds.sevenoaks.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=121&MId=3175&J=6>

Report to Governance Committee – 11 July 2024

<https://cds.sevenoaks.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=289&MId=3332&J=3>

Report to Council – 25 July 2024

<https://cds.sevenoaks.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=121&MId=3307&J=3>

**Dr Pav Ramewal**  
**Chief Executive**