

CORPORATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

5 MARCH 2014

WARD BOUNDARY & POLLING PLACES REVIEW

Karen Whitmore: Director of Legal & Democratic Services

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. In June 2013, the independent Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission) commenced its electoral review of Middlesbrough Council. The Commission's final recommendations were published in November 2013 which will affect the ward boundaries of Middlesbrough. The Council also has a statutory duty to review and its Polling Places and districts. This report outlines those final recommendations and seeks approval for the proposals for implementation

BACKGROUND

Ward Boundary Review of Middlesbrough

2. In June 2013, the independent Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission) commenced their electoral review of Middlesbrough Council.
3. The aim of the review was to make local elections more balanced by ensuring that all councillors represent a broadly similar number of people across the borough and that the Council has the appropriate number of councillors to represent the area effectively.
4. Based on Middlesbrough's 2011 electorate figures 30% of the existing wards have 10% more or fewer electors per councillor than the borough average. Furthermore, Middlehaven ward had 35% fewer electors per councillor than the average for the borough
5. Prior to formulating their final recommendations the commission received and considered submissions from a cross section of the community on the size of the council and the ward boundary areas, this included submissions by the Council, political groups, individual members, community councils, a parish council, one local organisation, 35 local residents and one anonymous submission.
6. The Commission published its final recommendations for the new electoral arrangements for Middlesbrough in November 2013 and subject to Parliamentary approval these come in to force at the local elections in May 2015.

THE BOUNDARY COMMISSION'S FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

7. In summary, the recommendations for Middlesbrough are that the Council should have 46 members (reduction of 2 councillors) representing two single-member, 10 two-member and eight three-member wards (reduction from 23 wards to 20 wards).
8. None of the wards will have a variance of more than 10% from the average (constituents per councillor) for the borough by 2018.
9. Subject to Parliamentary approval these changes will take effect from May 2015.
10. Full details of the final recommendations can be found on the Commission's website, there are also a limited number of hard copy reports available from the Members' Resources Area in the Town Hall.
11. There have been some minor anomalies raised with the boundary commission that affect some individual houses for electoral purposes. However, the boundary commission have informed the Council that as the final recommendations have been published they are unable to make any further amendments.

Ward Implications

12. There is a recommendation that the number of wards in the borough will reduce by three. This will mean the merger of some wards and significant ward boundary reconfigurations and name changes.
13. These changes may impact on large sectors of the community, elected members and Council services. The community and elected members may need to realign democratic areas and community identities and review voting places and districts. Council services may need to consider the impact of the changes when planning future services, updating systems, producing statistical reports and building ward profiles etc.

Polling Places Review

14. As a result of the new warding arrangements and a requirement under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 the Council will also have to conduct a full review of its polling districts and places (polling stations). This requires a consultation exercise to be carried out and involve elected members, community groups and the public. This has to be completed by 31 January 2015.
15. Urgent consideration is also required for the change of an individual Polling Station within the Ayresome Ward prior to the European election in May 2014
16. Electoral Services are suggesting a change to the current Polling Station at Teesside and District Society for the Blind on Stockton Road for the following reasons:

- a. The centre have expressed some dissatisfaction with payment and initially refused the use of the centre. On further consideration they agreed use but significantly increased the price to £400 is well beyond anything that we currently pay for a polling station.
- b. Issues have previously been experienced at the Polling Station as electors access the station within the main hall of the society were staff and patrons cross the polling station at meal times as the society are insistent that the centre remains open on polling day.

17. An alternative has been identified at Goals Soccer Centre, Stockton Road

18. They have offered exclusive use of room for £300 which has been reviewed and is suitable as it has disabled access and facilities on site for staff and we feel it would be a better location for a polling station with less impact than we currently have on the Teesside and District Blind Society

PROPOSALS

19. Briefings are arranged for elected members and officers February to March 2014.

20. An area on the council website is created showing current and proposed new ward boundary maps. A street index will also be created which will enable elected members and the public to identify which ward electors fall into.

21. A public consultation exercise be conducted April to June 2014 giving the public and interested parties the opportunity to comment on the polling places review.

22. Following the consultation on the polling places and district review a further report will be presented to Corporate Affairs Committee who have delegated responsibility to approve any changes to polling places and districts.

23. Agree the move from Teesside and District Society for the Blind on Stockton Road to Goals Soccer Centre, Stockton Road with immediate effect.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

24. There may be minor financial implications as the number of polling stations recommended may affect the staffing costs of an election.

AUTHOR

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