

Report of the Chief Executive

Report to Full Council

Date: 11 November 2015

Subject: Electoral Review of Leeds City Council

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): All	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has informed the council of its decision to carry out an Electoral Review of the Council size (number of elected councillors) and the number of Wards and Ward boundaries for Leeds City Council.
2. The LGBCE is currently in the preliminary period for the review and is in the process of collating the information required before the review formally starts.
3. The review is due to start in March 2016 and be completed by January 2017. Any changes that may be made will come into effect for the local government elections expected in May 2018.

Recommendations

4. Full Council is asked to note the arrangements and timetable for the Electoral Review.

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report gives details of the arrangements and timetable for the LGBCE's Electoral Review of Leeds City Council.

2 Background information

- 2.1 Electoral Reviews are reviews of the electoral arrangements of local authorities which determine: -
- the total number of councillors to be elected to the council;
 - the number and boundaries of wards;
 - the number of councillors to be elected for each ward; and
 - the name of any ward.
- 2.2 Electoral Reviews are initiated primarily to improve electoral equality. This means ensuring, so far as is reasonable, that for any principal council, the ratio of electors to councillors in each electoral ward or division is approximately the same.
- 2.3 Electoral Reviews can also be carried out at a local authority's request, for example to look at council size (the total number of councillors) or provide for single-member wards. The LGBCE is responsible for putting any changes to electoral arrangements into effect and does this by undertaking a review following by the making a Statutory Instrument or Order which then needs approval by Parliament. The local authority then conducts local elections on the basis of the new arrangements as set out in the Order.
- 2.4 When the electoral variances in representation across a local authority become notable, an Electoral Review is required. The criteria for initiating a review in those circumstances are as follows: -
- more than 30% of a council's wards/divisions having an electoral imbalance of more than 10% from the average ratio for that authority; and/or
 - one or more wards/divisions with an electoral imbalance of more than 30%; and
 - the imbalance is unlikely to be corrected by foreseeable changes to the electorate within a reasonable period.
- 2.5 The LGBCE must have regard to statutory criteria when conducting an Electoral Review which includes the need to secure equality of representation; the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and the need to secure effective and convenient local government.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 The LGBCE wrote to Leeds on 10 June 2014 to advise that on the basis of the electoral data they held for our authority, City and Hunslet Ward had an electoral variance from the average for our authority of 35.33%. As this met the criteria

above the LGBCE advised its intention to conduct an Electoral Review. At the time, all Lead Members agreed that such a review would be beneficial for Leeds. The LGBCE wrote again on 5 September 2014, having taken account of the comments we provided, and confirmed that it would be undertaking a review.

- 3.2 The LGBCE advised that the review would commence in early 2016, with final recommendations being made in early 2017 for implementation of changes that may be made during elections in May 2018. The expected timetable for the review is: -

Stage	Action	Dates
Preliminary Period	Informal dialogue with local authority. Focus on gathering preliminary information including electorate forecasts ¹ and other electoral data. Commissioner-level involvement in briefing group leaders on the issue of council size. Meetings also held with officers, group leaders, full council and, where applicable, parish and town councils. At the end of this process, the council under review and its political groups should submit their council size proposals for the LGBCE to consider.	Current stage until January 2016
Council Size Decision	LGBCE analyses submissions from local authority and/or political groups on council size and takes a 'minded to' decision on council size.	Expected February 2016
Formal Start of Review		
Consultation on future warding/division arrangements	The LGBCE publishes its initial conclusions on council size. General invitation to submit warding/division proposals based on LGBCE's conclusions on council size.	Expected March 2016 for up to 12 weeks
Development of draft recommendations	Analysis of all representations received. The LGBCE reaches conclusions on its draft recommendations.	Expected June 2016 For up to 12 weeks
Consultation on draft recommendations	Publication of draft recommendations and public consultation on them.	Expected September 2016 for up to 8 weeks
Further Consultation (if required)	Further consultation only takes place where the LGBCE is minded to make significant changes to its draft recommendations and where it lacks sufficient evidence of local views in relation to those changes.	Expected November 2016 for up to 5 weeks
Development of final recommendations	Analysis of all representations received. The LGBCE reaches conclusions on its final recommendations.	Expected January 2017

- 3.3 The LGBCE advises that the time periods shown are the expected typical duration of stages. They are not standards or undertakings. The LGBCE are clear that the progress of a review will be determined by the nature of the issues to be addressed and the availability of information to underpin sound decision-making, not by a determination to complete a review within any given period.

¹ Election forecast figures are based on expected changes to population from information on known housing developments, and business growth, etc

- 3.4 We are currently in the preliminary period of the review. The Council is required to decide whether to continue to elect in thirds with a fallow year every fourth year, or to alternatively move to all-out elections every four years, and also to make an initial submission on Council size.
- 3.5 Following the initial meetings between the LGBCE and the Leader and Chief Executive, further consultation with all group leaders and meetings of the Electoral Working Group, the Chief Executive will inform the LGBCE that the Council intends to make submissions to the effect that there should be no changes to the electoral cycle and retain elections by thirds with a fallow year every fourth year.
- 3.6 Work is currently ongoing by Members of the Electoral Working Group to agree the evidence required to submit to the LGBCE in January 2016 so they can make a fully informed decision regarding Council size that supports local needs.
- 3.7 On receipt of our submission regarding Council size, the LGBCE will take a view and make a formal proposal, and as soon as this proposal has been consulted upon and a final decision reached, considerations for proposed ward boundary arrangements can then be progressed.
- 3.8 The design of new ward boundaries will be based on forecasted electorate figures for 2022, five years on from when the review is due to be completed in 2017.
- 3.9 This review is for local government ward boundaries only and is not in any way connected to the separate Parliamentary constituency boundary review which will be undertaken by the Boundary Commission for England (BCE) commencing in 2016.
- 3.10 The LGBCE has arranged to provide briefings about the Electoral Review to all Members of Full Council, MPs, MEPs, the PCC and parish/town councillors.
- 3.11 The council's Elections Working Group will be used to collate the required information for the review, analyse it, and provide recommendations on the council's opinion to help inform the review. This does not prohibit any group or individual Member providing their own representation to the LGBCE as part of the public consultation. An officer Project Board has been established to monitor and coordinate activities required for the review.
- 3.12 Further details on how a review is conducted, including full details of each stage listed above, can be found in the guidance published by the LGBCE at the following link: -

https://www.lgbce.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/10410/technical-guidance-2014.pdf

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 Consultation will be carried out by the LGBCE in accordance with the timetable set out above. All groups will be consulted on any submission the council makes in connection with the review through their representatives on the Electoral Working Group.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 The review is conducted by the LGBCE and they are responsible for ensuring any equality, diversity, cohesion and integration issues are identified and addressed as part of the review process.

4.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan

- 4.3.1 The review is an independent review conducted by the LGBCE and is not linked to any council policies or the Best Council Plan.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 This is an external review and the LGBCE is responsible for any expenditure incurred.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.5.1 The powers for the LGCBE to conduct an Electoral Review are contained within the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. This consolidates and amends provisions previously contained in the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1992 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 The risk to the council is that any changes the LGBCE may make to council size and ward boundaries may not allow the council to properly represent its constituents and respond effectively to local needs. The review process allows the council to provide evidence in support of the number of councillors it feels is necessary to continue to properly represent constituents and to effectively conduct all aspects of council business. This, and the public consultation periods, should be used to ensure the LGBCE can make a properly informed decision.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 Any changes to Council size or the number of wards or their boundaries will come into effect for the local government elections expected in May 2018.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 Full Council is asked to note the arrangements and timetable for the Electoral Review.

7 Background documents²

- 7.1 None.

² The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.