

**REPORT TO:** East Lothian Council

**MEETING DATE:** 21 April 2015

**BY:** Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services)

**SUBJECT:** Local Government Boundary Review

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## **1 PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To inform the Council of the Local Government Boundary Commission's (LGBC) proposals to reduce the number of councillors in East Lothian from 23 to 21 and its proposal to make changes to current ward boundaries in East Lothian.
- 1.2 To seek authority to respond to the consultation, opposing the proposal to change ward boundaries.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 To note the LGBC's proposals to reduce councillor numbers in East Lothian from 23 to 21 and to change ward boundaries.
- 2.2 To authorise officers to write to the LGBC requesting an extension of the time limit for responses from 19 May until 24 June to enable a further report to be brought to Council on the proposed response to the consultation on ward boundaries.
- 2.3 In the event that an extension until 24 June is refused, to authorise officers to respond to the consultation.
- 2.4 To invite Members to make suggestions as to what they feel should be incorporated in the response to the LGBC.

## **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The current review of local government electoral arrangements in Scotland formally began on 21 February 2014. East Lothian Council responded to the consultation on a reduction in Councillor numbers in April 2014. The consultation was then opened to members of the public

until August 2014 and a considerable number of citizens of East Lothian responded opposing the proposal.

3.2 When reviewing electoral arrangements the law requires the LGBC to take account of:

- the interests of effective and convenient local government
- that each councillor should represent the same number of electors as nearly as may be
- local ties that would be broken by making a particular boundary
- the desirability of fixing boundaries that are easily identifiable
- special geographical considerations.

3.3 The LGBC report that they have taken into account the likely changes in the number of electors by considering forecast electorate counts in 2019 and have considered the impact of the inclusion of 16 and 17 year olds on the electoral register and they are content that would not affect their proposals. They assert that they have used population distribution and levels of deprivation to group similar councils into categories but that population size is the biggest determinant of councillor numbers and the design of wards.

3.4 The maps showing the proposed changes to ward boundaries in East Lothian have been lodged in the Members' Library (Ref 52/15, April 2015 Bulletin), and can be accessed via the following link:

[http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/5674/members\\_library\\_service](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/5674/members_library_service)

Twenty-one Councillors are proposed representing three 3-member wards and three 4-member wards reducing the number of wards in the area by 1 and reducing councillor numbers by 2.

3.5 It should be noted that overall the LGBC's proposals will result in a reduction in the number of elected members in Scotland from 1222 to 1217. East Lothian Council's request that the number of councillors in this authority remain unchanged could therefore be accommodated without breaching the Scottish Government's ruling that the boundary review should not result in an increase in the total number of councillors in Scotland.

3.6 The LGBC asserts that these proposals:

- address forecast disparities in existing ward 1 (Musselburgh West)
- place Musselburgh in a single ward to improve local community ties
- make changes to ward boundaries by Inveresk, Macmerry and Pencaitland

- make no changes to existing ward 5 (North Berwick Coastal) and 7 (Dunbar and East Linton)
  - name new wards: Musselburgh; Prestonpans, Seton, Gosford and Macmerry; and Tranent and Wallyford, but make no changes to other ward names
- 3.7 The Council's cross-party LGBC Steering Group meeting on 31 March was strongly and unanimously of the view that the Council should maintain its opposition to the proposed reduction in the number of councillors as set out in within the Council's previous submission to the LGBC. The cross-party group was of the view that the LGBC has failed to adequately answer the concerns raised by the Council as to the inappropriate application of a deprivation factor, especially since the LGBC has failed to provide any robust evidence to support the use of deprivation as a factor to determine councillor numbers.
- 3.8 The cross-party group was particularly concerned that the workload of councillors in the wards most affected by the proposed boundary changes would increase given the larger electorate and the larger number of community organisations they would be expected to work with. It is notable that the wards most affected by the proposed boundary changes are the wards which have the greatest number of areas of deprivation so that perversely the number of councillors representing these three wards would reduce by two even though the LGBC proposals are meant to be based on the need to increase representation in areas of deprivation.
- 3.9 The cross-party group was also concerned that the new ward boundaries proposed by the LGBC cut across existing high school catchment areas and sever a number of long-standing local ties.
- 3.10 The cross-party group therefore recommended that the Council again call upon the LGBC to drop its proposal to reduce the number of East Lothian Councillors from 23 to 21 and the resultant need to make any alteration to ward boundaries. The response to the consultation is required by 19 May. It is recognised that Members may be unable to give this proposal the consideration that is required to respond thoroughly given the imminent General Election and it is therefore proposed that officers request an extension until after the June Council meeting so that a report on the proposed response can be considered at that meeting. If an extension is refused it is proposed that officers, in consultation with members of the LGBC Steering Group, prepare and submit a response to the consultation.

#### **4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 None

## **5 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 5.1 This report is not applicable to the well being of equalities groups and an Equalities Impact Assessment is not required.

## **6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Financial - None  
6.2 Personnel - None  
6.3 Other - None

## **7 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 7.1 Report to Council, 22 April 2014 – Boundary Commission Review: Response to Statutory Consultation  
7.2 Correspondence from the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland  
7.3 Maps showing proposed changes to ward boundaries (Members' Library Bulletin – April 2015, Ref: 52/15)

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