

Report title	Boundary review	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Sandra Samuels OBE Governance	
Key decision	No	
In forward plan	No	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Mark Taylor, Deputy Chief Executive	
Originating service	Governance	
Accountable employee(s)	Martyn Sargeant	Head of Governance
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Report to be/has been considered by	n/a	

Recommendations for decision:

The Governance Committee is recommended to:

1. Review the proposed governance arrangements for management of the Council's input to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's boundary review in Wolverhampton.

Recommendation for noting:

The Governance Committee is asked to note:

1. That funding has been identified to provide project management support for the Council's work on the boundary review.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to ensure that the Governance Committee is aware of and able to review the proposed governance and management arrangements for the Council's submissions to the boundary review.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 In July 2019, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England advised its intention to carry out a review of the number of Councillors in Wolverhampton and the ward boundaries within the city. The review arose because of the period of time that had elapsed since the Commission's previous review (it has a statutory duty to conduct a periodic review of every local authority – the last review in Wolverhampton was 2003/2004) and because the number of voters in some wards in the city was significantly adrift of (either above or below) the average number per ward.
- 2.2 Following an initial explanatory meeting in July, briefing meetings have now been held with an officer working group, the Leader/Leader of the Opposition and all Councillors. The Council now has an understanding of the work that will be required on its part to facilitate the review, the significant majority of which will need to be completed by May 2020.

3.0 Principal workstreams

- 3.1 Although political groups may wish to put in individual submissions, the Council will need to make representations in three key areas:
- (1) The number of Councillors that the Council feels are required in order for it to effectively discharge its responsibilities. Due by 4 Feb 2020
 - (2) The expected number of voters in 2026 in each current polling district, based on current trends and known future developments. Due by 4 Feb 2020
 - (3) A detailed analysis of community geography across the city, identifying where the boundaries lie between one area and another. Due by May 2020
- 3.2 The primary contributing service areas are expected to be Electoral Services (for electorate data), Insight and Performance (for general data analysis and forecasts), GIS (for mapping) and Planning (for housing forecasts).
- 3.3 The first element will require detailed analysis of the Council's local and regional responsibilities and the eventual submission will inevitably be politically sensitive. The opposition group has already indicated that its position is likely to be different to that of the administration.
- 3.4 Although the second is relatively straightforward, it will require a significant collation of data, that Councillors will wish to approve prior to submission.

3.5 The third element is probably the most involved piece of work, which will require input from and consultation with every ward Councillor, and will also be politically sensitive, meaning the approval process will be involved.

4.0 Governance

4.1 There will be significant political interest in the review and its outcomes, and therefore the Council's submissions. Given the timeline, particularly in the initial stages through to the end of the first consultation period, it will not be possible to take each draft submission through multiple layers of political oversight. It is therefore recommended that the Governance Committee assumes primary responsibility for overseeing the work of employees to prepare each submission. This falls within the existing terms of reference for the Committee:

The Governance Committee shall consider and advise the Council on elections and electoral arrangements, including boundary reviews, and polling districts, places and stations, where these are not the sole responsibility of the Returning Officer.

4.2 Whilst the Committee may wish to refer some matters on to Council for consideration and/or approval, this is not likely to be practical in all instances, given the timetable. It is therefore recommended that Council delegates authority to the Committee to prepare the submissions, prior to final sign-off by Council.

5.0 Resourcing

5.1 In normal circumstances, a project like this would probably be overseen by the Electoral Services Manager or the Head of Governance, with oversight from the Director of Governance. The first and third of these posts are currently vacant and unlikely to be occupied before spring 2020; and the Head of Governance is already overseeing the Council's Brexit preparations and its readiness for an expected snap general election (in the absence of a service manager).

5.2 Each of these programmes of work (Brexit, boundary review and general election) carries significant statutory and reputational risk for the Council if not delivered properly. In light of this, the Council will appoint a Project Manager to oversee the Council's work on the boundary review, reporting jointly to the Heads of Governance and Strategy, whose teams are responsible for the majority of the required work.

5.3 The government has made available funding to councils to support Brexit preparations. Were the Head of Governance not leading on Brexit, he would be able to manage the boundary review, so it is suggested that Brexit funding is used to cover the Head of Governance's salary for time spent working on Brexit and the resultant saving used to fund the proposed Project Manager.

5.4 The expected length of the required support is about eight months (October 2019 to May 2020), which will cover the period during which the Council has to make its major submissions to the Boundary Commission. By the end of May it is likely that local, regional and national elections will have been concluded, and (probably) the exit stage of Brexit, which will release the Head of Governance to oversee the latter stages of the review.

6.0 Financial implications

- 6.1 Support will be provided for the Boundary Review from a range of services utilising existing resources with oversight from a proposed temporary project manager. The cost of this project manager is estimated to be in the region of £60,000. This will be funded by reducing the net cost of the Head of Governance through the application of Brexit funding and budget held for vacant posts within Governance.
[GE/09102019/V]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England was established under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 with a brief 'to provide electoral arrangements for English principal local authorities that are fair and deliver electoral equality for voters'. The Council has a duty to support the Commission's work and provide input in so far as that applies to Wolverhampton.
[TS/07102019/W]

8.0 Equalities implications

- 8.1 There are no equalities implications for the Council arising from this review and the Council's input to it. The Boundary Commission will have an obligation to consider its recommendations in the light of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

9.0 Climate change and environmental implications

- 9.1 There are no climate change and environmental implications arising from this report.

10.0 Human resources implications

- 10.1 There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

11.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 11.1 There are no corporate landlord implications arising from this report.

12.0 Health and Wellbeing implications

- 12.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications arising from this report.

13.0 Schedule of background papers

- 13.1 None.