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**IMPLICATIONS OF BOUNDARY CHANGES**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member -  
Councillor Stephen Harker, Efficiency and Resources Portfolio**

**Responsible Director - Catherine Whitehead, Assistant Chief Executive**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the final recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and to set out the steps necessary to ensure the effective implementation of the changes.

**Summary**

2. The LGBCE has published its final recommendations for new electoral arrangements for Darlington Borough Council. The recommendations propose that Darlington should be represented by 50 Councillors in the future, three fewer than the current arrangements. They also proposed that those Councillors should represent ten two-Member wards and ten three-Members wards across Darlington. This is four fewer than the current 24 wards and there are no one Member wards in the proposals.
3. As part of the proposals there are a number of wards which have changed shape, some which have been combined with neighbouring wards and others which have also had new names to describe the new areas covered by the wards.
4. The changes are available from the LGBCE website and details have been distributed to Libraries and other public places in hard copy and a summary is attached to this report as **Appendix 1**. The information is available via link through the Council's own website. There will also be an article in the October edition of the Darlington Together magazine which will set out the proposed changes and provide a map.
5. In order to implement the proposals, the Council will now need to take a number of steps. Further to the report considered by Council at its meeting on 17 July 2014, a Polling District, Polling Place and Polling Station Review commenced on 1 September 2014, and the initial stage of consultation, which was based on the existing Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations ceased on the 19 September 2014. Work is currently being undertaken to formulate draft proposals based on the responses received during this initial consultation period,

and proposals for both the existing wards, and the new ward boundaries, will be published for further consultation on 29 September 2014. The Council will also need to consider its responsibilities in relation to Community Governance and the arrangements for Parish Councils, and a separate report on this is being presented to this meeting.

### **Performance Data**

6. In addition to governance and election arrangements the Council holds much of its data on a ward basis and presents information to the public through the web site and other means on a ward basis. The data is collected via a range of IT systems including Lagan, Uniform and GIS. We can use GIS to enable us to move the areas affected by the review into their new wards so that data can continue to be collected on a ward basis. It is important to collect data on a basis that is smaller than Borough wide to enable us to measure the effectiveness of our work in narrowing the gaps between those in our most deprived wards and other areas of the Borough. We will continue to use a ward basis to provide this analysis.
7. The new ward boundaries will come into effect (subject to Parliamentary approval) in May 2015 at the next local election. This will mean that part of the financial year will be under the existing boundaries and part under the new. To enable the data to continue to be useful during the course of the new financial year we will start to record data under the new boundaries with effect from 1 April 2015 and do so on a shadow basis for the period between then and the implementation of the new boundaries in May.
8. Inevitably, however, as the data starts to influence the performance reporting, wards which have taken in new areas may show significant changes in performance due to the changed boundaries and will therefore not enable direct comparison until the new boundaries move into their second year of performance data.

### **Recommendation**

9. It is recommended that :-
  - (a) Members note the proposed changes.
  - (b) Members agree the proposed steps for the implementation and publication of the proposed changes.
  - (c) Members note the potential impact on data collection and performance data as a consequence of the changes.

### **Reasons**

10. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-
  - (a) To comply with the legislative requirements.

- (b) To keep the population of Darlington informed.
- (c) To enable the Council to continue to analyse and manage performance.

**Catherine Whitehead**  
**Assistant Chief Executive**

### **Background Papers**

None

C. Whitehead: Extension 2306

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no implications for Crime and Disorder
Health and Well Being	There are no implications for Health and Wellbeing
Carbon Impact	There are no specific carbon impacts as a result of the recommendations of the report.
Diversity	There are no implications for diversity.
Wards Affected	All wards are significantly affected by the proposals.
Groups Affected	Elected Members, parish councils.
Budget and Policy Framework	This does not affect the budget or policy framework. Electoral changes are a Council function.
Key Decision	This is not an Executive decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an Executive decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The recommendations reflect statutory requirements. Managing performance data is key to measuring the delivery of our overall vision.
Efficiency	There are no new efficiencies identified in this report, however there will be a reduction in Members and the number of wards.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

11. The LGBCE wrote to the Council in 2012 identifying that the ward of Faverdale at least had a significant variance in population to Councillor ratio when compared with other wards within the Borough. It was proposed that a Further Electoral Review (FER) should take place. The LGBCE came to Council to brief all members at the meeting on 29 November 2012.
12. Members will recall that a FER is conducted where:-
  - (a) Where more than 30% of the wards have an electoral variance in excess of 10 % from the average of that authority.
  - (b) One or more wards has an electoral variance of more than 30%.
  - (c) Forecast changes to population are unlikely to correct the variance.
13. The LGBCE looked at population projections for 2019 five years after the completion of the review. The forecasts for this date were based on a number of assumptions and showed that the situation is likely to change in a number of wards with the result that as many as seven wards may have had a variance of 10% or more.
14. The LGBCE is established under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. It is directly accountable to Parliament through a Committee chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons.
15. The LGBCE's main role is to conduct electoral reviews of local authorities in England with the aim of ensuring that, within each council area, the number of electors represented by each councillor is approximately the same. The LGBCE is made up of a Chair, a Deputy Chair and four Commissioners.
16. The main aim of an electoral review is to try to ensure that each Councillor represents approximately the same number of electors as his or her colleagues on that Council. The LGBCE will conduct a review and make recommendations which will aim to improve any electoral inequality, while at the same time trying to ensure that communities in the area are reflected and that convenient and effective local government is provided for.
17. The LGBCE have three main considerations when conducting reviews:-
  - (a) Equalising the number of electors each councillor represents;
  - (b) Reflecting community identity; and
  - (c) Providing for convenient and effective local government.
18. These considerations are set out in the legislation and there is no scope for the LGBCE to decide on different considerations.

19. The 2009 legislation also requires the Commission to take into account any changes to the number and distribution of electors that are likely to take place within five years of the completion of the review.
20. The recommendations of the review will not determine the size and shape of polling districts or the location of polling stations but reviews of these will need to take place in 2014 following the completion of the review and in time to be in place for the 2015 May elections. Given the timetable for Parliamentary approval of any recommendations it is possible that a final order will not be made until the Autumn of 2014 after the Parliamentary recess. This will give a very tight timescale for the implementation of the recommendations, and the reviews of polling districts and polling stations.
21. The review considered and has made recommendations on:
  - (a) The total number of councillors
  - (b) The number of wards
  - (c) The name of any ward
  - (d) Boundaries of Wards

### **Final Recommendations and Implementation**

22. The publication of the final recommendations signifies the end of the electoral review process. There is no provision in the legislation for representations to be made on the final recommendations. Technical changes can be made to a draft Order before it is laid. The draft Order will show any new ward and Parish ward name and boundaries that are the subject of those final recommendations. The Draft Order will be laid before the Houses of Parliament and will be subject to a 40 sitting day procedure which could entail formal debate on the Order. However there is no provision to allow for modification of the Order it will be either accepted or rejected by Parliament. If an Order is made it will come into force at the Council elections in 2015.
23. It is proposed that the Order will be laid in the coming months however as there is no power to amend the review it is reasonable to begin the preparatory work before the Order is made. There will be significant preparatory work in the lead up to the elections in 2015 as well the usual work approaching an 'all out' local government election, parish elections as well as a parliamentary election
24. The final recommendations were published on 12 August 2014. They propose 50 Councillors allocated to 10 two member wards and 10 three member wards. There are no one member wards which there are currently. The proposals see a reduction of three members and a reduction in four wards.
25. Ward names which would no longer exist under the proposals are:
  - Central
  - Lascelles
  - Bank Top
  - Haughton North

- Haughton West
- Haughton East
- Lingfield
- Cockerton East
- Cockerton West
- Faverdale
- Sadberge and Whessoe
- Middleton St George

New ward names are:

- Whinfield
- Haughton and Springfield
- Stephenson
- Red Hall and Lingfield
- Bank Top and Lascelles
- Cockerton
- Brinkburn and Faverdale
- Sadberge and Middleton St George

26. Further details of the proposals are set out on the LGBCE website and will be widely publicised. The LGBCE have produced a number of packs which have been sent out which include a revised map and a report setting out their proposals. They have also produced a number of summary sheets which are being distributed to public places.
27. The Council will also be taking steps to raise public awareness about the new wards. At this stage we will be setting out in the next edition of the Darlington Together magazine (October) the summary map and description of wards. There is also information available on our website.
28. As we approach the election further communications will be carried out to ensure that people are alerted to their new wards and polling stations for voting.

### **Financial Implications**

29. There are no specific financial implications from this decision however there will be recruitment of temporary one additional staff member into the democratic team to deal with the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration at the same time as the polling district and polling station reviews and the necessary changes to the electoral register. Some additional funding has been provided by government to fund the IER work and some unfilled hours within the team enable the funding of the post from existing budgets.

### **Legal Implications**

30. The Council must implement the proposed boundary changes and carrying out the required statutory reviews form part of the prescribed implementation process.

## **Equalities Considerations**

31. The decision is made by Parliament and therefore the equalities impact of the new boundaries will have been the responsibility of the LGBCE. Equalities considerations, particularly those of disabled voters, will be at the heart of the review of the districts and polling stations.

## **Consultation**

32. Consultation will take place as part of the reviews with parish councils, school and community representatives. There will also be consultation with Darlington Association on Disability and others in relation to the suitability of polling stations in particular. The Association of Parish Councils has been alerted (at their meeting on 19 August 2014) to the proposed polling station and polling district review.

## **Outcome of Consultation**

33. The proposals set out by the LGBCE have followed extensive consultation in relation to both Council size and also the size and names of the proposed new wards.