

For publication

Local Government Boundary Review Changes – developing a communications Plan

Meeting:	Community, Customer and Organisational Scrutiny Committee
Date:	21.07.22
Cabinet portfolio:	Leader / Deputy Leader / Governance
Directorate:	Corporate

1.0 Reason for inclusion on the work programme – focussing on ensuring the public are informed and to avoid confusion, consider the draft communications plan.

- 1.1 To consult with scrutiny members for a wider view on how to share information with the public for consideration as part of the development of the communication plan.
- 1.2 To provide scrutiny support for an effective communication plan.
- 1.3 Initial opportunity for scrutiny involvement.

2.0 Summary

- 2.1 This report considers the challenges and opportunities around communicating to the electorate the changes around electoral boundaries following the Local Government Boundary Commission Review.

3.0 Report details

3.1 Background

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is a parliamentary body established by statute to conduct boundary, electoral and structural reviews of local government areas in England. The Commission is independent of government and political parties. It is directly accountable to the Speaker's Committee of the House of Commons.

- 3.2 An electoral review examines and proposes new electoral arrangements for the whole local authority. These are:
 - The total number of councillors to be elected to the council: council size
 - The names, number and boundaries of wards
 - The number of councillors to be elected from each ward

3.3 Phase 1

Chesterfield Borough Council's submission on phase 1 of the review – Council Size was submitted to the Local Government Boundary Commission on 04.03.21 following Full Council approval 24.02.21. The proposal recommended a Council Size of 40 equalling a reduction of eight elected members.

3.4 All parties were engaged in the development of the review but took different approaches. Labour Group proposed and supported the recommendations, Lib Dems abstained and submitted their own very similar proposal but with a Council Size of 38. One independent member attended Full Council and voted for the Chesterfield Borough Council proposal. The remaining two independent members did not attend the Council meeting and did not submit alternative proposals.

3.5 The Local Government Boundary Commission confirmed in May 2021 that following careful consideration of the evidence and consultation responses it would be recommending that 40 councillors should serve Chesterfield Borough Council in the future. This will come into force from May 2023 elections.

3.6 Phase 2 and beyond

Phase 2 of the review includes the names, number and boundaries of the wards and the number of councillors to be elected from each ward. The consultation phase took place during May 2022 to July 2022 and we are expecting final recommendations in August 2022. The draft proposal consulted upon included a reduction in wards from 19 to 16, significant boundary changes and new ward names. Once this phase is completed parliamentary orders will need to be made – likely to be in late 2022 for implementation in May 2023 from the next full borough and parish elections.

3.7 Communication challenges

The following communication challenges have been identified for the new arrangements including:

- It has been over twenty years since the last boundary review and residents have become familiar with the current scheme – this will be a change for the majority of residents
- In the past, we have had to change polling stations due to availability and suitability. This always presents challenges as residents have often used the same polling station for many years and despite the new venue being printed on poll cards, in pre-election publicity and through lots of signage on the day of poll, residents do sometimes attend the wrong station. We are seeking to minimise polling station changes but we cannot guarantee this for all residents
- The Commission will undertake publicity mainly through press releases and their social media accounts but these have limited reach (1,400 Facebook and 1,000 Twitter followers nationally)

- Chesterfield Borough Council and indeed parties, candidates and agents will have a major role to play in communicating changes

3.8 Developing the communications plan

We cannot develop a full communications plan until the final recommendations are available and we are able to spend some time looking at the implications for Chesterfield Borough Council and our residents. However, the type of communication tools and techniques we are likely to use include:

- Supporting the boundary commission media approach including re-posting re-tweeting etc. to our larger local audience across our social media channels
- Focus in Your Chesterfield Magazine in November and February/March 2022/23
- Developing our campaign which will include media release, social media and web content including key changes, maps, videography, where to get help and ask questions
- Additional physical campaign materials including posters and leaflets available at key interaction points including Libraries, customer service centre, leisure and cultural venues, GP surgeries etc.
- E-mail and campaign materials for community and voluntary sector groups, faith organisations, equality and diversity groups etc. with an ask to promote with their service users / members
- Information via aspire intranet (many of our staff are also residents)
- Ensuring that residents are aware of postal and proxy voting options should they be unable to (or do not want to) vote in person – this is particularly important if there are polling station changes

4.0 **Potential barriers**

- 4.1 The challenges around communications are identified at 3.7. In addition, we need to consider cost benefit analysis, climate change impact and accessibility for any further proposals.

5.0 **Future plans and areas for further scrutiny involvement**

- 5.1 We would welcome ideas from scrutiny members for consideration as part of the development of the communication plan.

6.0 **Implications for consideration**

- 6.1 Financial – we have a limited communication budget for elections which we will utilise to support the communication plan.
- 6.2 Climate Change – we will undertake a climate change assessment of the overall communications plan and will consider individual proposals from a climate change perspective.

- 6.3 Equality and Diversity – accessibility issues will be considered when developing campaign resources with alternative formats being available.

Document information

Report author
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Background documents These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when the report was prepared.
None.