

**PARISH ELECTORAL REVIEW
(Report by the Director of Central Services)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to acquaint members with details of the process involved with the parish electoral review of the District and to provide details of the results of the initial consultation.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The District Council has a duty to keep under review the electoral arrangements of its parishes to ensure that parishes continue to reflect the identities and interests of local communities. The Local Government and Rating Act 1997 requires all district and unitary authorities to review the parish pattern in their area. However, there is no requirement for a review to be carried out within any particular time frame. The last parish electoral review in Huntingdonshire was completed in 1980.

- 2.2 As part of the review the Council may consider –

- ◆ the alteration of the boundaries of parishes and parish wards;
- ◆ the formation of new parishes and parish wards;
- ◆ the dissolution of parishes and parish wards;
- ◆ the establishment of parish councils for new parishes;
- ◆ the amalgamation or grouping of parishes; and
- ◆ changes to parish electoral arrangements, including a review of the number of councillors to be elected for each parish or ward of a parish.

- 2.3 Following the transfer of functions, responsibilities relating to parish reviews and associated electoral arrangements have been divided between the Secretary of State and the Electoral Commission. The Secretary of State has retained all responsibilities relating to administrative boundaries of local authorities (including town and parish councils). In the context of parishes this relates to the creation of new parishes, the abolition of parishes and the alteration of parish areas.

- 2.4 The Electoral Commission has assumed nearly all responsibilities in relation to local authority (including town and parish councils) electoral arrangements. In this context electoral arrangements means the number, names and boundaries of electoral areas and the number of representatives for each electoral area in a local authority.

- 2.5 The Boundary Committee for England is a statutory committee of the Electoral Commission and is responsible for conducting electoral reviews of local authority (parish, district and county council) areas and to make recommendations to the Commission.

2.6 The Secretary of State has no powers to create parish councils; this can be undertaken by district councils and unitary authorities.

3. CONSULTATION

3.1 In carrying out the review, the Boundary Committee expects the Council to follow a four stage consultation process as outlined below–

Stage 1	Minimum of 12 weeks	Announcement of the direction and period for representations.
Stage 2	Typically 8 weeks	Preparation of draft recommendations
Stage 3	Minimum of 12 weeks	Publication and consultation on draft recommendations
Stage 4	Typically 8 weeks	Preparation of final recommendations and submission to the Electoral Commission

3.2 The review commenced at the end of March 2006 by way of an article in the District Wide publication. In addition to this preliminary consultation with interested parties was undertaken to –

- ◆ explain and raise awareness of the reviews;
- ◆ identify the matters which can (and cannot) be considered; and
- ◆ ensure that the Council's eventual conclusions and submission is inclusive and commands wide ranging support.

3.3 The range of interested parties included District Councillors, Town and Parish Councils, Political Parties, Members of Parliament, County Councillors and representative groups such as the Cambridgeshire Association of Local Councils.

3.4 The initial consultation period closed at the end of July 2006 and allowed interested parties to submit any proposals for changes to parish arrangements. The Council received 20 responses from Town and Parish Councils, a response from a District Councillor and various other representations. Officers in Departments throughout the Council were invited to comment on the review and as a result have also submitted plans outlining anomalies with parish boundaries around the District where the parish boundary cuts directly through properties. A summary of these responses has been attached at Annex A and maps will be available at the meeting.

4. FURTHER CONSULTATION

4.1 Following the formulation of draft proposals there will be a further period of consultation up until the end of November 2006. This will allow another opportunity for representations to be made. The Panel

will be invited to consider any representations arising from this consultation before determining whether or not, and, if so, formulating final proposals to be sent to the Secretary of State and Electoral Commission towards the end of the year.

- 4.2 A series of public meetings will be scheduled at venues across the District towards the end of October 2006 for consultation on the draft proposals.

5. COUNCIL SIZE

- 5.1 Although the minimum number of councillors that can be elected to a parish council is five, in practice there is a wide variation of council size between parish councils. Currently no national policy exists regarding the ratio of electors to councillors for parishes of different electorate sizes. The Council, at their meeting on 20th November 1974, approved a scale of parish council representation, as outlined below –

<u>Electorate</u>	<u>Members</u>
Up to 250	5 Members
251 to 500	7 Members
501 to 1000	9 Members
1001 to 1500	11 Members
1501 to 2000	13 Members
2001 to 3000	15 Members
3001 to 5000	17 Members
5001 to 10,000	19 Members
over 10,000	21 Members

- 5.2 This scale has remained in place despite significant changes to the size of parishes over the years. As part of the review, the Panel are invited to consider whether any changes are necessary to the scale.

6. ELECTORATE AND FIVE YEAR FORECAST

- 6.1 Attached at Annex B are details of the current electorates broken down by parish and number of councillors, together with a five year forecast which has been prepared by the County Council's Research Unit. The forecast electorate figures will be used to predict electorate growth in each parish and assist in formulating the eventual submission.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 Having regard to the comments received during the preliminary consultation and the forecast of electorate, Members of the Panel are invited to

- a) consider the initial responses in detail and formulate draft proposals for further consultation; and
- b) consider any revisions to the scale of parish council representation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Local Government and Rating Act 1997

Guidance and Procedural Advice for Periodic Electoral Reviews – The Electoral Commission July 2002

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