

**CHESHIRE EAST BOROUGH COUNCIL
UNITARY AUTHORITY ELECTORAL REVIEW 2009/10**

Submission to the Boundary Committee on Warding Arrangements

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The Electoral Review of Cheshire East Council commenced on 24th February 2009, when Stage 1 representations were invited on Council size. The Council made a submission proposing a Council size of 82 Members. On 7th May the Committee wrote to the Council, confirming that the Committee was minded to adopt a Council size of 82.
- 1.2. The next Stage of the Review is the initial consultation on electoral arrangements, which commenced on 12th May and runs for a 12 week period until 4th August. Representations are now invited on the warding arrangements for the Authority, based on the Council size of 82 Members. This submission sets out Cheshire East Council's proposals for the Ward boundaries for the Authority, the number of Councillors to serve in each Ward, and the proposed Ward names. It also comments on proposals from other bodies and persons which were received before the Council finalised the document.
- 1.3. The submission follows the Technical Guidance for Electoral Reviews published by the Committee in February 2008 and is based on electoral data for 2008 with forecasts to 2013, as provided to the Committee at the start of the Review. Electorate forecasts for 2013 have been produced in line with the guidance from the Boundary Committee and to a common methodology with those for Cheshire West and Chester Council. The methodology is set out in detail in a document provided to the Committee at the same time as the forecasts. The forecasts include a realistic allowance for new housing development currently with the benefit of planning permission, and projected demographic changes.

2. CONTEXT

- 2.1. The need for the Electoral Review was raised by the decision of Government to abolish Cheshire County Council and the 6 District Councils in the area, and to replace these with 2 Unitary Councils, namely Cheshire East, and Cheshire West and Chester. This decision was brought into effect by the Cheshire (Structural Changes) Order 2008 which established Shadow Unitary Councils following elections in May 2008. Cheshire East Council became fully vested on 1st April 2009. The Order provided that the elections to the Shadow Council would be based on the former County Council Electoral Divisions in the area, and that 3 Unitary Councillors should be elected for each Ward (County Division) to the Unitary Council. This Electoral Review is now required with the aim of ensuring that appropriate new Warding arrangements are in place before the next Elections in 2011.

- 2.2. The Wards (County Divisions) on which the Shadow Elections were based were last reviewed under the Periodic Electoral Review of Cheshire County Council conducted in 1999. As such the Wards concerned had been reviewed relatively recently but inevitably some shifts in electoral numbers have taken place in the intervening period (see para 2.6. below).
- 2.3. The Council's Stage 1 submission (Section 1) contained some context and information about Cheshire East Council and its area. This indicated that Cheshire East is one of the largest Unitary Councils in England with a population of 360,700. The Council covers an area of 116,674 hectares, and has a diverse Urban/Rural profile. There are 8 towns in the area, but none of them are large enough to dominate. The main centres of population are Macclesfield (50,160), Crewe (49,520) and Wilmslow (30,070). Nearly 40% of the population lives in rural areas.
- 2.4. Other geographical features include the fact that the Borough is bordered by the Manchester conurbation to the north and east; Stoke-on-Trent to the south; and the new Unitary Council of Cheshire West and Chester to the west. Also to the east the Borough has strong physical boundaries with the Pennines and the Peak District National Park, and the Derbyshire and Staffordshire Moorlands. The main rivers of Cheshire East are the Bollin, the Dane and the Wheelock, with a number of canal systems including the Trent and Mersey and Macclesfield canals.
- 2.5. Other transport features include the motorway system which traverses the Borough both North-South (M6) and East-West (M56); the West Coast main railway line from London and the nationally important railway junction at Crewe; and Manchester Airport which lies partly within the Council's area.
- 2.6. The area administered by Cheshire East Council has an electorate of 286,942, which is projected to increase to 291,180 by 2013. The Council currently has 81 elected Members, and each Councillor has an average of 3542 electors. The intended Council size of 82 will give an average of 3499 electors per Councillor. Currently the disparity from the average elector ratio of 3542 ranges from 2975 to 4200, but of the 27 current Wards only 9 fall outside a +/- 10% disparity level.

3. PREPARATION OF THE BOROUGH COUNCIL'S SUBMISSION

- 3.1. The Council's response to the Review has been guided by a Members Task Group, consisting of Councillors representing all of the Political Groups on the Council. The Members of the Task Group are Councillors A. Arnold, G. Barton, T. Beard, D. Brown, P. Edwards, D. Flude, P. Mason (Chairman), R. Menlove, H. Murray and R. Westwood. Although the Task Group has no delegated decision-making powers, it has ensured that all of the necessary information has been brought forward and has supervised the drafting of the Council's submission at successive stages of the Review, for determination by the full Council meeting. The Task Group has been at pains to ensure that full consultation has taken place on the implications of the Review, and that all Elected Members of the

Council are aware of the issues. This is particularly so in relation to Town and Parish Councils (and other appropriate bodies in unparished areas) given the close working relationships with these bodies, including the Local Area Partnership arrangements which is a major feature informing this submission (see paras 3.7 – 3.11. below).

- 3.2. The Task Group has encouraged such bodies to make representations, and has sought, where possible, to take these into account in bringing forward the Council's own submission.
- 3.3. In addition, in its approach to the Warding Arrangements stage of the Review, the Panel considered at the outset the criteria which it would adopt in order to inform its draft Submission on the Warding arrangements. These principles were agreed as follows:-
 - (a) That existing ward boundaries should be maintained in those cases where the Councillor – Elector ratio is within tolerance.
 - (b) Where possible, weight should be given to ward boundaries “nesting within” Local Area Partnership boundaries.
 - (c) A preference for multi member wards in urban areas with single member wards in rural areas but recognising the need for flexibility so other criteria are met.
 - (d) That Polling Districts and Parishes should be used as the lowest level building blocks where possible; but recognising that there may be a few exceptions to this principle.
 - (e) That weight should not necessarily be given to the maintenance of numerical equality – for example if there was a natural community which would justify a proposal toward the extreme end of the tolerance.
 - (f) That weight should be given to the reflection of Community identity.
 - (g) Consideration should be given to natural or man made physical features when ward boundaries are drawn in cases where these features help to define the community.
- 3.4. With regard to the issue of multi – Member or single – Member Wards, the Council's approach reflects a preference for multi – Member Wards particularly in the urban areas, with proposals where appropriate for single – Member Wards in the rural areas. This recognises that there will be some smaller well populated areas which might be combined with a rural hinterland, leading to a two Member Ward configuration. Whilst taking account of all of the Boundary Committee's criteria, one of the Council's key considerations has been to ensure that natural

communities are not divided, which tends towards a multi – Member Ward approach.

3.5. In many respects multi – Member Wards offer advantages over single – Member arrangements (whilst recognising the clear electoral accountability provided by single – Member arrangements), such as:-

- (a) Members are able to share the workload created in the Ward, making it easier for electors to contact their Councillors, this maximises the level of Councillor capacity, experience and expertise available to the public.
- (b) Members are able to develop specialist knowledge of particular services (which is important in a large all purpose Authority such as Cheshire East).
- (c) The opportunity is preserved for electors' views on local issues to be conveyed through their elected representatives, even when an individual Councillor may have a conflict of interest in a matter, or is unable to participate in (eg.) a planning or licensing decision affecting the area – or even where a Member is unavailable due to other commitments or illness.
- (d) Councillor capacity to “cover” for each other is maximised, eg. Members in full time employment who cannot make some daytime commitments, or Members with a disability who cannot travel easily. This facility may also encourage people to stand for election if they know they could be working with other more experienced Councillors in the Ward.
- (e) There is more flexibility to make arrangements which achieve Councillor – Elector ratios closer to the average for the Council as a whole.

3.6. It is the case that the volume of Ward business will be higher in the more urban areas (especially elector caseloads, planning and licensing applications) and that there is more potential for conflicts of interest to arise in these areas. Even in the more rural areas the number of Town/Parish Council meetings to be attended by Councillors can be high, and more than one Member will deliver better capacity to do so. The need for Members to engage effectively with Local Area Partnerships (see paras 3.8 – 3.10 below) will make significant demands on their time in both urban and rural areas. These are good examples of where multi – Member Wards will help the Council to achieve its priorities of effective community engagement and partnership working.

3.7. The reference to Local Area Partnership (LAP) boundaries (principle (b) above) is important. The Council's policies with regard to Local and Partnership Working were set out in considerable detail in the Stage 1 Submission (Section 10). The setting up of the LAPs and their effective operation are a key priority for Cheshire East Council.

- 3.8. The 7 LAPs have been based on the main towns in Cheshire East and their surrounding areas (Congleton, Crewe, Knutsford, Macclesfield, Nantwich, Poynton and Wilmslow). The LAP boundaries are shown in detail in the attached Plan (Appendix 1). The intention that the proposed Ward boundaries should “nest” within the LAP areas is to promote local identity and local accountability for Ward Councillors in each LAP area. This approach will also help the Ward Councillors to build effective working relationships with the Town and Parish Councils and other bodies within each identified LAP area. Accordingly the proposals in this Submission are based on Warding arrangements for the 7 LAP areas. The Council intends to review the LAP boundaries again in the light of the final outcome of the Electoral Review, to ensure that the LAP areas are fully consistent with the Warding arrangements.
- 3.9. The LAPs are intended to deliver an effective and co-ordinated approach to tackling local needs and priorities, including responsive and locally managed services. They aim to improve engagement with and the empowerment of citizens, to enhance community governance and to enable more effective community leadership by elected Councillors. They will prepare an annual Area Delivery Plan which will reflect the Parish and Neighbourhood Plans produced more locally for the area. The LAPs will work closely with neighbourhood and community groups in the area as well as Town and Parish Councils. Therefore it is important that the Warding arrangements within each LAP will satisfy the community identity and effective local governance criteria to enable the LAP model to succeed.
- 3.10. LAPs will have a significant role in the deployment of resources locally – through ensuring that mainstream services are delivered to agreed standards and helping to identify service priorities for the area. In future they may be allocated a budget to be spent locally, and will be able to access additional resources to address priorities identified in the Area Delivery Plans. LAPs will engage and support Town and Parish Councils, Neighbourhoods and other Groups to deliver services directly, where this is appropriate and desired.
- 3.11. As part of developing the case put forward in the submission on Council size, the Authority looked very carefully at the number of Councillors which might best fit the LAP configuration, and came to the following conclusion:

Congleton 21
Crewe 17
Knutsford 6
Macclesfield 16
Nantwich 8
Poynton 6
Wilmslow 8

This partly informed the conclusion that a Council of 82 was the best proposal, and this approach is now confirmed in this submission and set out in detail in section 4 below.

- 3.12. As required by the Boundary Committee, the following information has been produced and provided for them since the commencement of the Review.

Paper based map information:

Map of Cheshire East showing Local Area Partnership boundaries

Map of Crewe town showing ward and parish boundaries

Map of Macclesfield town showing ward and parish boundaries

Digital GIS data

MapInfo tables of polling districts for the Cheshire East area.

Submission on Council Size and Supplementary Submission

Summary of Responses to Consultation on Council Size

Electoral Registers as at December 2008

Electorates for Parishes and Polling Districts for December 2008

Forecast of Electorates for 2013

Methodology behind the Forecasts

- 3.13. Copies of the appropriate maps and data have been made available to all Town and Parish Councils in the area and to interested persons. This information is also available on the Boundary Committee website. The Council has ensured that local MP's, Strategic Partners, individual Councillors and the Political Parties have been engaged in the Review and encouraged to make a response. The Council's draft Submission has been sent to these bodies or individuals and comments invited. In addition, on 30 June the Boundary Committee itself arranged briefing in a workshop format directly to Town and Parish Councillors on the process to be followed during this stage of the Review, and how individual representations can be made. The workshop illustrated the need for evidence based submissions and how submissions have influenced the Boundary Committee's decision making in other Electoral Reviews.
- 3.14. Since the commencement of the Electoral Review, the Council has received a valid Petition (under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007) for a Community Governance Review (CGR) of the unparished area of Crewe Town. The CGR involves the review of the local governance arrangements for the area concerned, and can lead to the creation of new Parish or Town Council(s) and the alteration of existing Parish boundaries. The CGR will cover similar ground to the issues raised in a Boundary Committee review, and potentially it could produce a result which is inconsistent with the Boundary Committee's proposals for the area. Accordingly, the Boundary Committee discourages the conduct of an elective CGR during the period of an Electoral Review. These may follow the Electoral Review in other unparished areas of Cheshire East and in other areas.

- 3.15. However the 2007 Act places the Council under a legal duty to complete the CGR within 12 months of the receipt of the Petition. This means that the CGR process in Crewe will have to be carried out during the period of the Electoral Review, the timetable for which has been established with the aim of having new Warding arrangements in place for elections in 2011 and therefore there is little scope for alteration to accommodate Crewe CGR.
- 3.16. Informal and without prejudice discussions have taken place with the Boundary Committee's officers, to examine the respective public consultation timetables and to try to minimise the potential for confusion which might arise from the reviews in the Crewe area. Although the Boundary Committee cannot take into account the possible outcome of an incomplete CGR in making their formal recommendations, they have confirmed in writing that, if necessary, further representations can be made by the Council (and indeed other persons). This will be possible at the stage on consultation on the Boundary Committee's own proposals, and would be based on the outcomes and evidence from the CGR public consultation. It is therefore intended that the CGR consultation should be substantially completed before the Boundary Committee formally consults on its draft recommendations on Warding arrangements, which is scheduled to be from 10 November for a 12 week period. This timetable will enable outcomes from the CGR to be taken into account as evidence by the Boundary Committee.

4. PROPOSED WARDING ARRANGEMENTS

- 4.1. The Council's proposals for Warding Arrangements are set out in detail in the remainder of this submission, and take fully into account the Boundary Committee's requirements on electoral equality, community identity and convenient and effective local governance. The detailed proposals for each Ward are described in Appendix 4 attached; The Wards are grouped under each of the 7 LAP areas. Where alternative proposals were made and known to the Council during the initial consultation, these are referred to under the information for the Ward concerned, together with the Council's views on the proposal. A summary of representations received are attached as Appendix 5 to this Submission. (to follow)
- 4.2. The attached Map (Appendix 2) and Table (Appendix 3) describe the proposed Warding for the whole of Cheshire East Council. The Table contains a summary of the proposals for each Ward, including the proposed Ward name, the current and forecast electorate, and the numerical and percentage differential from the average Councillor/Elector ratio of 3499 per Member.
- 4.3. In summary, the Council is proposing sixteen 3 – Member Wards, twelve 2 – Member Wards and ten single –Member Wards, resulting in a total of 38 Wards for the 82 Councillors. All but one of the proposed Wards conform to the +/-10% tolerance on electoral equality, both currently and during the five year projection.