

## **Constitution Committee**

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**Date of Meeting:** 19 September 2019

**Report Title:** Community Governance Review: Electorate Forecasts

**Senior Officer:** Brian Reed, Head of Democratic Services and Governance

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### **1. Report Summary**

- 1.1. The Council is required to produce forecasts of the future electorate for the parishes and other smaller areas in the Borough as part of its Community Governance Review (CGR) work. The main rationale for the forecasts is to assess how the size and geographical distribution of electors is likely to change in the coming years, so that electors can be fairly distributed between councillors. For example, housing developments can result in some small areas seeing much faster population and electorate growth than others – and hence the electors in these areas will be increasingly under-represented unless there is a change in electoral boundaries or the number of assigned councillors. Similarly, councillors representing areas of high population and electorate growth may become increasingly over-burdened unless boundaries or councillor numbers are revised.
- 1.2. These electorate forecasts have now been produced in general accordance with the relevant guidance and the results can be found in the technical report in appendix A, which also includes information on the methodology and assumptions used.
- 1.3. The key outcomes identified in the report relate to the forecast period between 2018 and 2025 and to a large extent reflect the expected volume and distribution of future housing development. They include:
  - The electorate of the Borough is forecast to increase by around 26,300 (or 8.7%) to 328,300;
  - The largest electorate change at polling district level is expected to be at Henhull (near Nantwich) which is forecast to experience a

562.5% rise in electors and in one of the Central Crewe polling districts, which is predicted to experience a 4.3% fall in electors;

- The largest electorate change at parish level will also be at Henhull which is forecast to increase by 562.5% and at Lyme Handley (near Disley) which is predicted to see a 1.6% fall in electors;
- The largest electorate change at parish ward level is again predicted to be at Henhull, an increase of 562.5%, with the largest fall being at St Barnabas ward on Crewe Town Council at 3.1%.

- 1.4. Consideration will now need to be given to whether any parish, parish ward or boundaries should be changed to take account of the forecast results and other factors as part of the CGR review. This will form part of the next stage of the CGR review and the initial findings will be reported for member consideration in due course.
- 1.5. This report was considered by the Community Governance Review Sub-Committee at its meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2019. Since then some additional information has been added for completeness to the accompanying Technical Report to look at the impact of the ONS variant population projects. This has resulted in additional text to pages 21 to 23 of the report and includes a new Table 5. However, it does not change the findings of the report as considered by the Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee recommended as follows.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. That the Constitution Committee approve:
- 2.2. the methodology and assumptions used in the Council's CGR Electorate Forecasts Technical report attached in Appendix A, which it is acknowledged involves making some variations to the general approach outlined by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's guidance (as summarised in paragraph 5.2 below), and that its findings are taken forward for consideration as part of the next stage of the community governance review process; and
- 2.3. that the proposals for new housing identified in the Council's Local Plan be used as a sense check against the figures forecast by the technical report in Appendix A, and they be used as a further consideration at the next stage of the community governance review process.

## **3. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1. To ensure that the Community Governance Review Sub-Committee and the Constitution Committee are in agreement with the electorate forecasting

work that has been undertaken and its findings, as these form an important consideration in the future decision making process for the potential review of boundaries. The consideration of the overall levels and locations for new housing identified in the Council's Local Plan will also provide an appropriate sense check in the CGR process, since it provides further guidance on likely growth in the immediate 5 year period beyond that identified in the electorate forecast work i.e. from 2025 to 2030.

#### **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1. The Council is required by national guidance to prepare electorate forecasts as part of any community governance review process. The technical report in Appendix A identifies the methodology used and explains why a particular approach has been taken where an alternative option is possible.

#### **5. Background**

- 5.1 Undertaking electorate forecasting work is a necessary step in the process of undertaking a community governance review since it provides information on likely changes to the size of the electorate within existing boundaries. This can then be used as a relevant consideration when making judgments around whether to make changes to parish boundaries and electoral arrangements, so they best reflect community identity and enable effective / convenient community governance.
- 5.2 The forecasting work that has been undertaken is based on national Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) guidance. Where any variations in approach are considered necessary to reflect the particular circumstances of Cheshire East, these are clearly highlighted and explained in the technical forecasting report. In particular, the main variation in approach is not to constrain the forecasts to Office for National Statistics population projections, as suggested in the LGBCE guidance. This is because such an approach is considered likely to underestimate the level of growth in Cheshire East's electorate and because it produces some very implausible changes in electorate numbers for some small areas, as explained in section 6 of the technical report. This variation is consistent with the approach taken by Cheshire West & Chester Council (and accepted by the LGBCE) for its 2017 Electoral Review. The Council tested the application of the ONS population projections constraint and argued that it produced forecasts that were incompatible with expected levels of housing development and which generated some results that were not robust and credible, particularly for some small areas. The LGBCE reviewed this methodology and considered it fit for purpose.

- 5.3 National guidance requires forecasts to look at the potential electorate changes in the five year period after the review has been completed, so the Council's forecasts cover the period up to 2025. This does not match the end period of the Council's recently adopted Local Plan Strategy (LPS) which runs to 2030. For this reason it is considered important that any likely variation in growth, between the forecasts and that shown in the LPS for a particular area, be taken into account as a sense check when considering potential boundary changes.

## **6. Implications of the Recommendations**

### **6.1. Legal Implications**

- 6.1.1. The forecasting work has been undertaken in general conformity with national guidance and it is appropriate that its outcomes are considered as part of the CGR process.

### **6.2. Finance Implications**

- 6.2.1. The forecasting work has been done in house by the Strategic Planning Team and any financial implications for town and parish councils will only be known later in the process once any changes to boundaries have been proposed.

### **6.3. Policy Implications**

- 6.3.1. There are no direct policy implications

### **6.4. Equality Implications**

- 6.4.1. There are no direct equality implications.

### **6.5. Human Resources Implications**

- 6.5.1. There are no direct HR implications.

### **6.6. Risk Management Implications**

- 6.6.1. Accepting the electorate forecasts are a necessary step in progressing the CGR and so any delay will have implications for the timetable.

### **6.7. Rural Communities Implications**

- 6.7.1. There are no direct implications for rural communities at this stage since it is not yet known the extent to which the forecast findings will result in proposed changes to boundaries.

## **6.8. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children**

6.8.1. There are no direct implications for children and young people.

## **6.9. Public Health Implications**

6.9.1. There are no direct implications for public health.

## **6.10. Climate Change Implications**

6.10.1. There are no direct implications for climate change at this stage.

## **7. Ward Members Affected**

7.1. All wards.

## **8. Consultation & Engagement**

8.1. Consultation and engagement are critical factors in this review process in order to demonstrate the validity of any change proposals. The forecasting work will be made available as background evidence as part of any consultation process.

## **9. Access to Information**

9.1. Supporting documents are available upon request to the report's authors.

## **10. Contact Information**

10.1. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

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