

## **Changing the names of Electoral Divisions**

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### **1. Summary**

- 1.1. This report sets out a proposed process for the Council to consider changing the names of electoral divisions to better reflect their local geographies and communities. It comes on the back of a request from the Leader for details of the process and whether it is within the Council's gift to make such changes.
- 1.2. This is a rather unusual item of business but has been brought before the Committee as one of the Committee's functions relates to the consideration of electoral review matters.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. **The Committee is asked to agree the proposed process leading to the Council's consideration of requests from members for changes to the names of electoral divisions.**

### **3. Background**

- 3.1 The Council currently has 55 members representing 54 electoral divisions (Street and Glastonbury being a 2 member division. The current pattern of divisions dates from 2011 / 2012 and the most recent review of the Council's boundary arrangements carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission. Such reviews tend to be carried out every 10 years or so or when the numbers of electors per division becomes unbalanced as a result of population changes. Although the County Council is a key consultee in the boundary review process the final decision in respect of the pattern of electoral divisions, their boundaries and names rests with the Government on the back of recommendations made by the Commission.
- 3.2 Following the request from the Leader as to the process to bring forward changes to the names of electoral divisions between boundary reviews, clarification was obtained from the Commission that changes can be made and the process that needs to be followed to bring about changes. The timing of our request for details of the process proved timely. The Commission referred us to the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and specifically section 59. The provisions in the legislation mean that given where we are between boundary reviews, if we wanted to make changes in advance of December 2017 then we would need the Commission's approval and this would include taking the proposals through the parliamentary process. The Commission advised leaving any changes until after December 2017 when the decisions in relation to changes rest with the Council. It is worth pointing out at this stage that the ability of the Council to make changes is limited to the names of the electoral divisions. It doesn't extend to changing boundaries etc.

### **3.3** The 2007 Act requires:

- (a) That the local authority must not pass a resolution to change the name of an electoral division unless it has taken reasonable steps to consult such persons as it considers appropriate on the proposed name.
- (b) That any changes are the subject of a Full Council resolution at a special Council meeting which is specially convened for the purpose, and have to be supported by a majority of at least two thirds of the members voting.
- (c) As soon as practicable after a resolution is passed, the local authority must give notice of the change of name to all of the following—
  - the Electoral Commission;
  - the Boundary Commission for England;
  - the Office of National Statistics;
  - the Director General of the Ordnance Survey;
  - if the local authority is a county council, the district council (if any) within whose area the electoral area lies;
  - if the local authority is a district council, the county council (if any) within whose area the electoral area lies.
- (d) The change of name does not take effect until the Electoral Commission have been given notice of the change.

Having considered these requirements, the following paragraphs set out a proposed way forward to deal with requests for changes as proposed by the local member.

**3.4** Following clarification of the process from the Local Government Boundary Commission, I wrote to all group leaders to inform of the possibility of revising electoral division names and to invite suggestions. I made the point that this should not be taken as a general opportunity to revise names but that if there were members who felt that the name of their electoral division was so out of kilter with the geography and the local community then this represented an opportunity to bring forward changes. I am currently waiting for final confirmation of any requested changes but it is likely to be restricted to a handful of requests. With this in mind it is necessary for the Council to have a process in place to take forward requests and ensure that the requirements of the legislation are met. This report proposes a process for consideration by the Committee.

### **3.5** Proposals:

This part of the process is all but complete. The onus has been put on the existing member to initiate a proposal and submit it to me via their group leader.

### **3.6 Consultation:**

- (a) need to give at least a 10 week period for consultation to comply with best practice
- (b) key focus on consulting organisations in the locality rather than individuals – but to also give individuals the ability to comment should they wish to do so via the Council’s website
- (c) key audiences proposed: relevant local councils (parish and town) and district councils
- (d) the political groups with Somerset
- (e) other groups that the local member considers appropriate.

I am very happy to take on board any other methods of consultation that members consider appropriate.

My proposal for consideration is that the outcomes of the consultation processes are fed back into this Committee for consideration. The Committee would then make recommendations to Full Council at a special meeting for any amendments to the names of electoral divisions.

### **3.7 Decision making process:**

My proposal is that the Committee having considered the outcomes of the consultation process would then make recommendations to a special meeting of the Council for any changes to electoral division names. My expectation is that the Committee would invite those members promoting changes to attend for the Committee’s debate.

The special meeting of the Council could be held immediately on the rise of either the February or May Council meeting to consider the recommendations of the Committee.

## **4. Implications**

4.1. Legal & Risk: None.

4.2. Impact Assessment: No implications.

4.3. Financial: It is anticipated that any costs of consultation will be contained within the existing budget. It will involve electronic communication in the main as part of business as usual.

4.4. HR: Not applicable.

## **5. Background papers**

5.1. None

**Note:** For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author.