# Electoral Division name change proposals- outcome of the public consultation process

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## 1. Summary

**1.1** This report summarises the outcomes of the public consultation process on changes to the names of 4 electoral divisions as agreed by the Committee at its meeting on 9th February 2018. The Committee had previously agreed the process for considering changes at its meeting on 6th October 2017. The report asks members to consider and decide on the way forward for the proposals.

## 2. Recommendations

**2.1 The Committee is asked to decide whether any of the proposed name changes should be recommended to a special meeting of Full Council on Wednesday 18th July (to meet immediately following the 'ordinary' Full Council meeting) for approval.**

## 3. Background

**3.1.** The Committee will recall that we are half way through the 10 year timetable for 'fundamental' boundary reviews and therefore under the legislation the Council can amend electoral division names in accordance with the required process.

**3.2.** As a reminder, the legislation (Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007) requires in summary:

(a) That the Council must take all reasonable steps to consult such persons as it considers appropriate on the proposed name before it passes a resolution.

(b) That name changes must be agreed at a special Full Council meeting 'specially convened for the purpose', and must be supported by a majority of at least two thirds of the members voting.

(c) Once a decision is taken the Council has to notify the change to:

- the Electoral Commission;
- the Boundary Commission for England;
- the Office of National Statistics;

- the Director General of the Ordnance Survey;
- all of the District Councils in the area affected by the changes.

The change of name does not take effect until the Electoral Commission have been given notice of the change.

**3.3.** The Committee agreed at its meeting in February to put 4 proposals for name changes submitted by local members out to public consultation. The consultation requirements agreed by the Committee were as follows:

(a) a minimum 10 week consultation period 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.

## 4. Consultation outcomes

**4.1** The consultation period ran from 12th March to 25th May 2018. The consultation was open to the public but was targeted at key local organisations who may have a view on such matters. Local councils were an important grouping from which to seek views and a number responded although this varied from division to division. No formal responses were received from the local political party structures or the district councils with the exception of an officer response from South Somerset District Council. The overall response rate was low which was not surprising in the circumstances. In additions to the comments about the specific proposals, there were several comments from members of the public questioning the use of resources on this exercise at a time of financial constraint and whether changes would represent value for money as there would be costs incurred in changing printed documents etc. The intention from the outset was to minimise the costs of the consultation exercise which was carried out 'on line' and therefore at no direct additional cost beyond the officer time involved. In respect of any costs of making changes which might be agreed, again this would be minimal given the biggest impact will be on updating on-line content rather than reprinting documents.

**4.2** Taking each area in turn the results can be summarised as:

<u>Cary Electoral Division proposal</u>

- two parish councils responded – one has no objection and the other and the other is not in support
- the South Somerset District Council response in favour is an officer response only

<u>Quantock Coast Electoral Division proposal</u>

- Only one local council responded - Watchet Town Council – against the proposal

Wellington and Rockwell Green Electoral Division proposal

- Only one response – Wellington Town Council – in support of the the proposal

Neroche and Wellington East Electoral Division proposal

- Wellington Town Council in favour
- Better response from parish councils but all but one is against the proposal
- Consistent response from parish councils and the public who oppose the change against dropping 'Blackdown' from the name on the basis that a large area of the Electoral Division includes the Blackdown Hills and the Neroche area itself doesn't have the same status.

**4.3** Conclusions. It is hard to draw firm conclusions from a low response rate but based on the responses received it could be argued that the 'Wellington and Rockwell Green' proposed name change has the strongest case for recommendation to Full Council for approval given that the Town Council as a key respondent has indicated support for the change. However, support and opposition for the other proposals is more balanced both in terms of responses from the key consultees as well as the public. In the case of the 'Neroche and Wellington East' proposal there is a clear level of opposition to including 'Neroche' in the title at the expense of 'Blackdown'. Members may therefore feel unable to support making recommendations for changes to Council in respect of these proposals as there is not a consistent level of support from key consultees. Members views are invited on whether any of the name change proposals should be recommended to a special Full Council meeting for approval based on the public consultation outcomes. If the Committee decides to make no changes to the names of the electoral divisions then no further action will be taken on the matter.

## 5. Consultations undertaken

5.1 As detailed in the report in respect of the public consultation exercise.

5.2 The Council's Liberal Democrat group have subsequently submitted the following comments in relation to the proposals. The Lib Dem group believe that Divisional names and any suggested changes are a matter for the residents and Councillor of each Division. No one knows their area better than the local people and they should be the voices that are heard in these decisions.

## 6. Implications

6.1 Legal: The legal implications are detailed in the report.
6.2 Financial: As detailed in the report
6.3 Business risk: Not applicable.
6.4 Impact Assessment: There are no direct impacts on any of the protected characteristics falling under the definition of the equalities legislation or the local additional protected characteristics adopted by the Council. There are also no direct impacts in other impact assessment categories of community safety, sustainability or privacy.

## 7. Background Papers

7.1 None

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