

Committee General Purposes Committee	Date 13 October 2011	Classification Unrestricted	Report No.	Agenda Item No.
Report of: Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services)		Title: Local Government Boundary Commission for England – Electoral Review 2012		
Originating Officer(s): Isabella Freeman		Ward(s) affected: All		

REASONS FOR LATENESS AND URGENCY: This report was not circulated with the Committee agenda as information required to complete the report was not available at that time. The report is nevertheless recommended for consideration at this meeting as the next meeting of the General Purposes Committee is scheduled to take place after the commencement of consultation with Councillors on the proposed electoral review.

SUMMARY

1. The council was informed by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) in April 2011 that Tower Hamlets has been identified as potentially requiring an electoral review as the authority appears to meet the required criteria. The Review will commence in January 2012.
2. Through development and the natural move of people, some wards in Tower Hamlets have become much larger than others. There are six wards that have an electoral variance of more than 10% from the average as at the September 2011 figures (see appendix A). One ward, Millwall, has an electoral variance of nearly 36%.
3. In considering the electoral arrangements, the following criteria should be considered:
 - Total number of councillors (council size);
 - Boundaries of all wards for the purposes of the election of councillors;
 - Number of wards; and
 - Names of any ward
4. The LGBCE will take decisions on the basis of statutory criteria:
 - To deliver electoral equality for voters
 - To provide boundaries that reflect natural communities
 - To promote effective and convenient local government

RECOMMENDATIONS

5. This is a noting report. Representatives of the LGBCE will address Councillors prior to the next full Council meeting and the political groups on

the Council will then be consulted by the LGBCE and invited to submit proposals on ward patterns in November/December this year prior to the start of the Review in January 2012.

BACKGROUND

6. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is an independent body set up by Parliament in April 2010 by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.
7. The LGBCE are responsible for reviewing local authority electoral arrangements, administrative boundaries and structure.
8. Councils cannot change their own boundaries; the LGBCE are a facilitator of change in circumstances where councils believe such change is in the interests of the efficient and effective delivery of local government services to communities and individual residents.
9. Under the criteria adopted by the Commission, any local authority with a ward that has an electoral variance in excess of 10% of the average, will be considered for a review.

THE REVIEW PROCESS

10. The initial stage of the review is to determine a preferred council size. This is the number of councillors required to deliver effective and convenient local government (choosing the appropriate number of councillors to allow the council and individual councillors to perform effectively).
11. This will subsequently determine the average (optimum) number of electors per councillor to be achieved across all wards of the authority. This number is reached by dividing the electorate by the number of councillors on the authority,
12. Preliminary stage: 6-8 weeks (starts January 2012). Issues to be determined during this stage:
 - View taken on council size
 - Determination of review 'type'
13. Depending on outcomes of the preliminary stage. The LGBCE will then determine the type of review for Tower Hamlets:
 - A – No expectation of change in council type: Typical length: 26-30 week
 - B – Expectation that any change in council size will be small: Typical length: 42-50 weeks
 - C - Expectation that a change in council size could be substantial: Typical length: 52-62 weeks.
14. If the preliminary stage proposes significant change, there will be a further information gathering period (10 weeks) to:

Invite warding patterns from council, public, resident associations and everyone who takes an interest
Welcome proposals for whole borough or a certain area
LBGCE tours area

15. The LGBCE will publish draft recommendations and posters will be provided to the council to publicise the review. This will open a consultation on draft recommendations (10-12 weeks)
16. The LGBCE will publish the final recommendations, which will be implemented by order in the Houses of Parliament.

CALCULATING THE COUNCIL SIZE

17. Guidance issued by the LGBCE suggests that the following issues should be considered when developing a proposal for council size:
 - Managing the business of the council – the model of local governance used by the local authority impacts on the workload of councillors and the working practices of the council, and therefore will have an effect on the number of councillors needed by the council.
 - The functions of Scrutiny, regulatory committees, outside bodies and others – the structure and responsibilities of these functions impacts on the workload of councillors
 - Representation role: representing electors to the council and the council in the community – the role and responsibility of councillors

POPULATION AND ELECTORATE

18. The 2001 census population total for Tower Hamlets was 196,106. Population growth up to 2001, for the ten years since the 1991 census, represented the second largest percentage increase for this period of all the London boroughs at 17.9 per cent, or over 45,000 people.
19. The Tower Hamlets resident population at mid-2010 was 237,900 – this is the latest estimate from the Office for National Statistics.
20. Tower Hamlets has a high level of population turnover and churn. In 2009/10 the rate of change was 237 per 1000 population – 11th highest in England
21. GLA estimates for 2011 show that 47 per cent of the borough's population are from BME groups. This is high compared to the London average (34 per cent) and is the fifth highest in London, after Newham (70 per cent), Brent (58 per cent), Harrow (53 per cent) and Redbridge (49 per cent).
22. Within the borough's BME population, the largest ethnic group is the Bangladeshi population, who make up 30 per cent of all residents. Tower Hamlets has – by far – the largest Bangladeshi population in both London and England.

23. In addition to the impact of this volume of population on council business and council workload, the diversity of the population, its complex needs and levels of disadvantage within the community adds to the demands on councillors in neighbourhood working and case load.
24. The Tower Hamlets population is expected to grow significantly in the future. Projections from the GLA predict that the borough's population will rise from 254,200 (the current estimate for 2011) up to 326,100 by 2026. This would be a 28 per cent increase, more than double the rate of expected increase across London (11 per cent). If realised, it would make Tower Hamlets one of the fastest growing areas in the capital, alongside Greenwich.
25. The electorate in Tower Hamlets has increased from 132,996 in 2001 to 169,397 in 2011. Currently, each Councillor on average represents 3,322 residents.

CONSULTATION

26. All proposals on council size, whether for changing the existing or not, should be justified and evidence must be provided in support of the proposal

COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

27. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (LEGAL)

28. There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ONE TOWER HAMLETS

29. There are no immediate implications for One Tower Hamlets arising from this report.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2000 (SECTION 97)

LIST OF "BACKGROUND PAPERS" USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

Brief description of "background paper"

Name and telephone number of holder and address where open to inspection

Correspondence from LGBCE

Louise Stamp
020 7364 3139