

Committee General Purposes Committee	Date 13th September 2012	Classification Unrestricted	Report No.	Agenda Item No. 4.2
Report of: Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services) Originating Officer(s): John Williams, Service Head, Democratic Services		Title: Local Electoral Review 2012 - update Ward(s) affected: All		

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Committee is aware that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is currently undertaking an electoral review of Tower Hamlets. The aim of the review is to establish the most suitable number of councillors for the authority; and within this to propose the number and boundaries of wards to deliver:-
- electoral equality for voters;
 - boundaries that reflect natural communities; and
 - effective and convenient local government
- 1.2 The recommendations agreed as a result of the electoral review will be implemented with effect from the next local elections in May 2014.
- 1.3 This report provides an update on progress of the review for the Committee's information.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the information in the report, and any further verbal update to be provided at the meeting, be noted.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is an independent body established by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. The LGBCE are responsible for reviewing local authority electoral arrangements, administrative boundaries and structure.
- 3.2 Tower Hamlets has been identified as requiring an electoral review in the current year in accordance with the Commission's criteria relating to electoral variances between wards. Since the last review in 1998/9, the levels of

electoral representation in the borough have become unbalanced due to housing development and other population changes. As a result, currently the number of electors represented by the councillors in six of the 17 wards varies by more than 10% from the borough average. In one ward (Millwall, which has 14,798 electors) councillors represent 47% more electors than the borough average, whilst in Spitalfields and Banglatown (which has 7,096 electors), the figure is 30% below the average.

- 3.3 The review commenced on 29th November 2011 when representatives of the LGBCE addressed the Mayor and Councillors prior to the full Council meeting.

4. THE REVIEW PROCESS

- 4.1 A local electoral review is conducted in two main stages. At the first stage the Commission makes an initial determination on the future size of the council – i.e. the total number of councillors required to deliver effective and convenient local government in the borough. This initial finding determines the duration of the review and the extent of consultation to be undertaken. If a significant change in council size is proposed (i.e. a change of more than one or two councillors), a further period of public consultation is held on this question.
- 4.2 The second stage of the review focuses on the proposed division of the borough into wards, to achieve within the total number of councillors proposed, the optimum number of electors per councillor across all wards of the authority. Submissions on warding patterns are sought from the Mayor and Councillors, political parties, the public, residents associations and community groups before the LGBCE publish their draft recommendations.

5. PROGRESS ON THE TOWER HAMLETS REVIEW

Council Size

- 5.1 As previously reported, the 'Council Size' stage of the Tower Hamlets review is now complete. Following public consultation, the LGBCE website indicated that it is minded to propose a council size for Tower Hamlets of 45 councillors rather than the current 51.

Warding patterns

- 5.2 The second stage of the review is currently underway, with a further public consultation exercise on warding patterns which commenced on 28th June 2012. The Commission has invited local people and other interested parties including councillors, local political and community groups to submit information for a new pattern of wards – i.e. proposals as to where new ward boundaries should be placed and for ward names - based on a council size of 45 members.
- 5.3 In response to requests from the Council and the political groups, the Commission agreed to extend the period of this consultation which will now

close on 11th September 2012. The Commission has publicised the consultation via their website and in the media.

- 5.4 The Commission state that they aim to recommend a pattern of wards that:-
- achieves good electoral equality (i.e. as far as possible, the member to elector ratio in each ward should be the same or within an acceptable tolerance level);
 - reflects community identities and interests; and
 - provides for effective and convenient local government.
- 5.5 They also seek to use strong, easily-identifiable ward boundaries. The Commission states that 'all proposals for warding patterns should demonstrate how any pattern of wards aids the provision of effective and convenient local government and why any deterioration in equality of representation or community identity should be accepted. Representations that are supported by evidence and argument will carry more weight with the Commission than those which merely assert a point of view'.
- 5.6 The Commission needs a good understanding of community identity in Tower Hamlets and has invited consultation responses to address this. They are particularly keen to understand which areas communities identify with, how and why they do so. They are interested in all relevant information, for example economic or demographic data and mapping; community usage mapping; local place surveys and partner/stakeholder details.
- 5.7 There is no requirement for all wards to return three members – submissions may include proposals for wards electing one, two or three councillors. New wards do not have to follow existing ward or polling district boundaries
- 5.8 The population of Tower Hamlets is planned to grow significantly and it is important that the review provides substantial equality for some years to come, so the aim is to achieve an equality of representation based on projected figures 5 years from the end of the review - i.e. in March 2018. The Commission has therefore published electorate projections for the borough to 2018, broken down into current polling districts. These can be viewed on the LGBCE website at:-
<http://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/south-east/greater-london/tower-hamlets-fer>
- 5.9 The projected total electorate for the borough in March 2018 is 198,777. Based on a council size of 45 members, this means that each councillor will represent an average of 4417 electors. Therefore the target size for a two-member ward in the new arrangements would be 8,834 electors and for a three-member ward 13,251 electors.
- 5.10 A detailed guidance document, 'Electoral reviews: Technical guidance' is available on the Commission's website at www.lgbce.org.uk.
- 5.11 Officers have assisted members as required in preparing their respective submissions to the LGBCE, in particular by plotting projected electorate

figures onto proposed new ward divisions where these do not follow existing polling district boundaries.

Timetable for the remaining stages of the review

- 5.12 After the current consultation on warding patterns closes on 11th September, the LGBCE will take a provisional decision on warding arrangements and will share this with the Council. It is intended that draft recommendations for Tower Hamlets will be published in November 2012. There will then be a further eight week period of consultation on the draft recommendations before final recommendations are published in March 2013.
- 5.13 Given the proximity of the consultation closing date to the GP Committee meeting on 13th September, it is unlikely that any substantive feedback will be available by then from the Commission. However, it may be that outline information will be available such as the number of warding submissions received, and officers will report any update received verbally at the Committee's meeting.

6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

7. CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (LEGAL)

- 7.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is established by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 and the electoral review of Tower Hamlets is conducted in accordance with that legislation and associated regulations. There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

8. IMPLICATIONS FOR ONE TOWER HAMLETS

- 8.1 The aim of the electoral review is to secure appropriate and as far as possible equal representation for electors across all wards of the borough.

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

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