

Committee General Purposes Committee	Date 19th December 2012	Classification Unrestricted	Report No.	Agenda Item No. 4.1
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 a further 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

- 5.1 The first and second stages of the Tower Hamlets review are now complete and the LGBCE published its draft recommendations on 13th November 2012. These are now subject to a final round of public consultation until 7th January 2013.

Council Size

- 5.2 As previously reported, following public consultation, the LGBCE confirmed on 14th June 2012 that it is minded to propose a council size for Tower Hamlets of 45 councillors, six fewer than the current 51.

Warding patterns

- 5.3 Public consultation then commenced on warding patterns. The Commission 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.

- 5.4 This consultation was scheduled to run from 20th June to 28th August 2012 but in response to requests from the Council and the political groups, the Commission agreed to extend the closing date to 11th September.
- 5.5 The Commission's stated aim is 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.
- 5.6 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'.
- 5.7 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 therefore published electorate projections for the borough to 2018, broken down into current polling districts. 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.
- 5.9 Following the close of consultation on 11th September, the Commission stated that it had received ten submissions prior to the deadline and five late submissions subsequently. The submissions, which are published on the LGBCE website, were from:-
- Mayor of Tower Hamlets
 - Labour Group
 - Conservative Group
 - John Biggs AM
 - Rushanara Ali MP
 - Jim Fitzpatrick MP
 - London Dockers Club
 - Frankcom J

- Madewell S
- Smith A

Late submissions were received from:-

- Community Network
- Hossain I
- Cllr Aston
- Limehouse Community Forum
- Tower Hamlets Labour Group

6. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The LGBCE published its draft recommendations for Tower Hamlets on 13th November 2012.

6.2 Summary of the proposals:

The Commission have held to their initial recommendation of a council size of 45; and have proposed a warding structure based on this. They state that all three of the borough-wide draft schemes that they received (from the Mayor, the Labour Group and the Conservative Group) provided good electoral equality, clear boundaries and evidence of community identity. They have therefore based their recommendations on a combination of all three schemes, subject to modifications in some areas to reflect other representations received. The draft proposals provide for a scheme of **20 wards** made up as follows:-

- 2 x single-member wards;
- 11 x two-member wards; and
- 7 x three-member wards.

6.3 The draft proposals would result in a number of wards with electoral variances greater than 10% from the borough average in 2012. This is due to the significant development planned between 2012 and 2018 especially in Bromley-by-Bow and the Isle of Dogs. For the purposes of the review the LGBCE has divided the borough into 4 sub-areas as below:-

6.4 **Tower Hamlets south:** In the southern part of the Isle of Dogs, they propose to adopt the Labour group's proposal for a two-member ward with Millwall Dock as the northern boundary and Seyssel Street and Storers Quay as the other boundaries. They have modified the Labour proposal so that the Storers Quay community is entirely included in the ward. They propose to call this Millwall ward. They also propose a single-member Limehouse ward using Westferry Road, West India Dock Road and Commercial Road as strong local boundaries. To the south of Limehouse, they propose largely to adopt the Conservative group's proposal for a three-member Blackwall & Cubitt Town ward subject to minor amendments as a result of their recommendations for neighbouring wards. They also propose to adopt the Conservative group's

proposal for a two member Limehouse & Canary Wharf ward. However, they propose to name this ward West India.

- 6.5 **Tower Hamlets east central:** The LGBCE proposes to adopt the Conservative group's proposal for a single-member Poplar South ward with some small changes to reflect ground detail. They also propose a three-member Poplar North ward which would have the western edge of Bartlett Park either side of Lindfield Street as its western boundary. These arrangements would help achieve high levels of electoral equality for the proposed three-member Mile End ward. The Commission noted during their tour of the area that the overground railway provides the strongest boundary in the Bromley-by-Bow area. As such, they believe a north-south divide would deliver the best warding pattern in this area to create a two-member Bromley North and a two-member Bromley South ward. They propose to adopt Councillor Aston's proposal that Bromley North ward's northern boundary should be the A11 and that the ward should extend west to encompass the British Estate.
- 6.6 **Tower Hamlets west central:** For the Stepney area, the LGBCE propose largely to adopt the Labour group's scheme for a two member Stepney East and a two member Stepney West ward. They have made some modifications to the proposal so that the southern boundary of Stepney West ward is Commercial Road as well as some further modifications to deliver electoral equality for voters. They have chosen to adopt the Conservative group's proposal for a two-member Shadwell ward which has strong, identifiable boundaries. They also propose to adopt the identical proposal by the Mayor and Conservative group for a St Katharine's & Wapping ward. As a result of these proposals, they also propose a three-member Whitechapel ward which is bounded by The Highway, Whitechapel Road and Sidney Street.
- 6.7 **Tower Hamlets north:** To the north west of the borough, the Commission propose a three-member Weavers ward which crosses Bethnal Green Road. The Commission believes that Bethnal Green Road is a uniting factor in the local community. To the south of our proposed Weaver's ward, all three boroughwide schemes proposed a similar warding arrangement for the Spitalfields area. The Commission believe that the Mayor's proposal for an eastern boundary running along Cambridge Heath Road, Darling Road and the western edge of the Burial Ground delivers the clearest boundary. They propose to call this ward Spitalfields. As a result of their decision not to use Bethnal Green Road as a boundary between wards, the LGBCE propose to adopt the Mayor's scheme for a three-member St Peter's ward as well as a three member Bethnal Green ward which uses strong boundaries as well as linking communities to the north and south of Roman Road. Finally, they propose to adopt the Labour group and Mayor's proposal for the Bow area by creating a north-south boundary to form a three-member eastern ward and a two-member western ward, called Bow East ward and Bow West ward.

6.8 Next steps

The draft recommendations are now open for a final public consultation until 7th January 2013. Full details of the draft recommendations are available to view on the LGBCE website at <https://consultation.lgbce.org.uk>, including detailed maps of the proposed and existing wards. The Commission encourages all interested organisations and individuals in the borough to comment. As always, the LGBCE ask that any submissions state *why* a boundary or name is good or bad, based on the three statutory criteria of electoral equality, effective and convenient local government, and community identity.

6.9 Following the close of public consultation, the Commission expect to publish their final recommendations in March 2103. These will then be the subject of an order that will be laid in both houses of parliament. Parliament has 40 days to consider the matter before the recommendations are implemented with effect from the Council elections in May/June 2014.

7. COUNCIL MEETING, 28TH NOVEMBER 2012

7.1 The LGBCE's draft recommendations have already been the subject of much discussion within the borough and two motions were submitted on the subject to the Council meeting on 28th November 2012.

7.2 Following debate, the Council voted in favour of one of the motions submitted and resolved as follows:-

This Council Notes:

- The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has recently released its draft recommendations for new ward boundaries and names in Tower Hamlets.
- That the LGBCE is recommending renaming the successor ward for the current 'Spitalfields and Banglatown' as 'Spitalfields' doing away with the 'Banglatown' name.
- That the LGBCE made its decision following the Conservative Group submission which argued that: *'the Bangladeshi community lives across the borough' and that to include 'Banglatown' in the name 'implies that the Bangladeshi community in Tower Hamlets is restricted to the Spitalfields area alone'*
- The strong local public opinion in support of the retention of the Banglatown ward name.

This Council believes:

- The Banglatown name was introduced to reflect the significant Bangladeshi population and the cross-cultural nature of our community.
- Removing the name would be entirely wrong, especially as local residents have not been consulted by either the Conservative Group or the LGBCE.
- The Banglatown name reflects not only the geographic location but the role of Brick Lane as the cultural heart of Britain's Bangladeshi community.
- The Mayor's proposal, adopted by the Boundary Commission, to reduce the number of councillors from 51 to 45 was a mistake and that with the fastest growing population in the country Tower Hamlets will suffer as a result of the reduction in councillors.
- Were the number of councillors still set at 51, then Spitalfields and Banglatown may have remained a three member ward and the debate over the name could have been avoided.

This Council resolves:

- To call on all political parties to argue in any further submissions to the LGBCE for the reinstatement of the Banglatown ward name.
- To support residents in making appeals to the LGBCE not to abolish the Banglatown ward name.
- For the Council to write to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on behalf of residents calling on them to reverse their decision to reduce the number of councillors from 51 to 45.

8. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

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

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

9.1 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.

10. IMPLICATIONS FOR ONE TOWER HAMLETS

- 10.1 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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