

## **ELECTORAL REVIEW OF WEST DEVON BOROUGH**

### **Submission by West Devon Borough Council on the draft warding arrangements**

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This submission sets out the Council's response to an invitation from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) to make representations on the future electoral arrangements for West Devon Borough Council.
- 1.2 The draft recommendations were initially considered by the Council's Political Structures Working Group (with all Council Members also being invited to attend) at a meeting on 7 July 2014.
- 1.3 The recommendations which were generated from this meeting were subsequently presented to a Special Council meeting on 15 July 2014 for its endorsement.
- 1.4 Having been endorsed by the Council, this submission has been divided into two sections which are:
  1. Reasons why the Council does not support the LGBCE proposals; and
  2. The presentation of an alternative proposal, which is supported by evidence based reasons.

#### **2. Reasons why the Council does not support the LGBCE Proposals**

The Council wishes to cite four key reasons why it does not support the recommendations of the Commission. These are:

##### **2.1 Low Proportion of Single Member Wards**

The Council feels it to be unacceptable for the LGBCE draft recommendations to only make provision for 3 Single Member Wards in the Borough.

In such a rural setting, the Council feels that the revised warding arrangements should be striving for as many Single Member Wards as possible. Such is the small proportion of Single Member Wards being proposed, the Council considers that this is a very detrimental step and will severely affect the ability for effective democratic representation

The Council also wishes to reiterate the following comments made by the LGBCE in paragraph 51 of its draft recommendations in support of Single Member wards in Chagford, Drewsteignton and South Tawton:

*'While this Ward would have more clearly identifiable boundaries we considered that Single Member wards would provide for more convenient and effective local government given the very rural nature of the area and the lack of good road links between parishes in this part of the borough.'*

The Council is of the strong view that these comments made by the Commission are applicable throughout the Borough and the number of proposed Multi Member Wards is wholly contradictory to this paragraph.

## **2.2 Sheer Size of the Proposed Bridestowe and Dartmoor Wards**

### **(a) Bridestowe**

The Council considers that the proposed Bridestowe Ward (which consists of 9 parishes) is simply too large an area for a Borough Councillor to represent effectively.

In addition, locally in this proposed Ward, there is a significant community divide between the 'northern' and 'southern' areas. For example, those communities in the 'northern' part of this proposed ward look towards the town of Okehampton, whereas those communities in the 'southern' part associate themselves with the town of Tavistock. Therefore, the proposed ward would in effect have no commonality or natural synergy between its 'northern' and 'southern' communities.

Local residents in this proposed Ward are also very unhappy regarding this recommendation and question the need for the change and can see no benefits whatsoever.

### **(b) Dartmoor**

Similarly, the Council also believes that the proposed Dartmoor Ward is too large an area for a Borough Councillor to represent effectively. The proposed Dartmoor Ward will amount to 306 square kilometres, which is between 10 and 15 times the geographical size of other proposed Wards and is therefore totally unworkable.

Furthermore, there are no direct connecting roads between Lydford and Princetown and due to the road infrastructure, it is not possible to simply drive across the proposed Dartmoor Ward.

As a general point applicable to both of these proposed wards, the Council feels that such recommendations will not help to buck the trend whereby it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract prospective candidates to stand for Council. Furthermore, these proposals are also considered to be contrary to the spirit of Localism and are so vast and rural, with access to services (e.g. Broadband provision) often being very poor, which further increases the workload for Members.

The Council also wishes to highlight the sentence in paragraph 60 of the draft recommendations (relating to Hatherleigh, Bridestowe and Tamarside) whereby *'we considered the Council's proposed three-member ward to be too large to provide effective and convenient local government given the nature of the rural area.'* The Council feels that these comments are also applicable and relevant when considering the newly proposed Bridestowe and Dartmoor wards.

### **2.3 Scepticism Regarding the Projected Electorate Figures to 2019**

Whilst the Council acknowledges its involvement initially in compiling the projected electorate figures, Members have subsequently expressed a number of major concerns regarding their accuracy.

To expand upon this view, reference has been made to the latest 2014 electoral roll figures, which in a number of parishes, have seen a significant increase in electorate numbers from 2013. This, coupled with the anticipated level of development in the Borough to 2019, has led a number of Members to believe that the projected electorate figures do not demonstrate as significant an increase as is likely to be the reality, which therefore seriously brings into question their validity.

In further emphasising this point, Members simply cannot see how (when considering local, regional and national population trends) in a number of parishes, the projected electorate figures which are being used to 2019 are showing an actual population decrease from the 2013 figures and urged these figures to be re-considered prior to such significant changes to the warding arrangements being imposed.

As an example, the electorate figures which are being used for Tamarside ward show a decrease in electorate numbers by 18 (from 1299 to 1281) between the years 2013 and 2019 yet the latest (2014) electoral roll figures show the electorate numbers for this ward having increased in the last twelve months by 27 to 1326.

The Council also wishes to highlight that it cannot find reference in the draft proposals to the 313 Harrowbeer electors, who appear to have been omitted from the LGBCE recommendations.

### **2.4 The Need to Keep Communities Together**

In addition to the comments expressed above regarding the proposed Bridestowe Ward, there are a number of other Wards which would result in communities being divided rather than kept together. For example, there is a natural and identifiable commonality and community relationship between Brentor and Mary Tavy parishes (e.g. the local Primary School is called Mary Tavy and Brentor Community Primary School). This commonality is not reflected in the LGBCE draft recommendations, which proposes that these are no longer in the same Ward.

The Council also wishes to point out that paragraphs 70 and 78 of the LGBCE draft recommendations are contradictory. Whilst paragraph 70 states that the Commission has not adopted the Council's proposal to include Whitchurch, paragraph 78 in fact illustrates that the recommendations have done so in part, leaving half within the Tavistock South East ward, whilst attaching the Middlemoor half to Sampford Spiney etc..

### **3. The Council's Alternative Evidence Based Proposal**

In light of the aforementioned concerns, the Council wishes to propose the following alternative warding arrangements:-

*'The Council wishes to see an increase in Council Size by 1 Member to 32 Members, with the additional Member representing a ward within the existing Hatherleigh and Lew Valley wards. In addition, the ward boundaries within Tavistock should be revised to ensure greater electoral equality within the existing wards, with all other wards and levels of representation remaining as per the current arrangements, with the exception of minor changes also being made to the Walkham and Buckland Monachorum (as outlined below).'*

In support of this alternative, the Council wishes to state that:-

- the Review was initially prompted by the electoral inequalities in the Hatherleigh and Lew Valley Wards. By adding another Member into this area, will ensure that this inequality is addressed;
- for the overwhelming majority of current Council Wards, there is a belief amongst residents, community groups and local town and parish councils that, subject to addressing some minor anomalies (see below), the current warding arrangements are effective, working well and already meet the key criteria which a Review requires (e.g. by delivering effective local government to local people and reflecting the interests and identities of local communities). As a consequence, the overriding view is that the LGBCE draft recommendations will result in a far worse pattern of warding than the existing arrangements.

#### **The Hatherleigh and Lew Valley Wards**

When considering the Council wish to maximise the number of single Member wards and the desire to not create additional parish wards, the following solution is proposed:

Hatherleigh and Meeth – Projected Electorate to 2019: 1675 (1 Member);  
Inwardleigh and Okehampton Brightley – Projected Electorate to 2019: 1731 (1 Member); and  
Beaworthy, Highampton and Northlew – Projected Electorate to 2019: 1698 (1 Member).

Whilst each of these wards will be outside of the 10% variance from average, they are each well within the 30% variance trigger point for a Review.

## **Tavistock Wards**

To ensure greater electoral equality within the Tavistock wards, it is suggested that the following be moved out of Tavistock South West Ward and into Tavistock South Ward:-

- Whitchurch Road (Nos 204-218 evens) – PL19 9DQ;
- Orchard Court, School Road (the flats) – PL19 9SR;
- The Halt School Road – PL19 9SR;
- Anderton Close, Whitchurch – PL19 0RA;
- Anderton Court, Whitchurch – PL19 9EX;
- Anderton Lane, Whitchurch – PL19 9DX (up to Railway Line);
- West View, Whitchurch – PL19 9EE; and
- James Road, Whitchurch – PL19 9NJ.

## **Walkham and Buckland Monachorum Wards**

In addition, the Council recognises that this review also provides the opportunity to 'tidy up' any other perceived anomalies in the current warding arrangements. In particular, the Council recommends that the following roads which are currently situated in the Walkham Ward be relocated into the Buckland Monachorum Ward (Polling District AL refers):

- Clonway;
- Cox Tor Close;
- Grange Road;
- Great Mis Tor Close;
- Harrowbeer Lane;
- Ingra Tor;
- Langton Road;
- Leather Tor Close;
- Pew Tor Close;
- Tavistock Road; and
- Vixen Tor Close.