# SOUTH HAMS DISTRICT COUNCIL

| NAME OF COMMITTEE | SPECIAL COUNCIL |
|---|---|
| DATE | 31 October 2013 |
| REPORT TITLE | Political Structure – Electoral Review and Webcasting |
| Report of | The Political Structures Working Group |
| WARDS AFFECTED | All |

**Summary of report:**
To consider a report that presents the recommendations of the Political Structures Working Group in respect of:

- The draft warding arrangements arising from the Electoral Review; and
- The merits of webcasting Member meetings.

**Financial implications:**
None directly arising from this report.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the Council RESOLVES that:-**

1. **the draft recommendations which have been published by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on the future electoral arrangements for South Hams District Council (as outlined at Appendix 1) be endorsed;**

2. **the Democratic Services Manager, in consultation with the Leader of Council, be given delegated authority to finalise the Council's submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England before the deadline of 11 November 2013; and**

3. **the principle of webcasting Member meetings has been explored and is not supported at this time.**

*Officer contact:*
*Darryl White, Democratic Services Manager (email: darryl.white@swdevon.gov.uk).*

*Lead Member contact:*
*Cllr Tucker, Leader of Council (email: cllr.tucker@southhams.gov.uk).*

1. **BACKGROUND**

1.1 The Political Structures Working Group is a standing body of Members appointed at the Annual Council meeting to undertake a comprehensive review of the workings of both the political structure and decision making processes.  The Group has no decision-making powers and is required to present its recommendations to the Council.

1.2 The Group last met on Wednesday, 18 September 2013 and considered agenda items in relation to:-

   - Electoral Review – Warding Arrangements;
   - The Merits of Webcasting Member Meetings; and
   - Transformation Programme – Potential Impact on Governance Structures.

1.3 Whilst the third item provided an opportunity for the Group to give some early thoughts on the potential impact on Governance Structures of the Transformation Programme, recommendations were made at the meeting in respect of the Electoral Review and Webcasting Member Meetings and are presented in this report.

2. **ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

2.1 **Electoral Review – Warding Arrangements**

2.1.1 On 20 August 2013, the Council received a letter from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) which introduced its draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for the Council (as attached at Appendix 1).

2.1.2 The Working Group considered in great detail the LGBCE recommendations and comments in support of and objection to were raised. Such comments included:-

| In Support | In Objection |
|---|---|
| LGBCE recommendations have taken into account all consultation responses. | The high number of multi-Member wards being proposed (particularly in rural areas).  For example, Yealmpton and Newton and Noss could be two single Member wards. |
| A number of town and parish councils are content with the proposals. | In many instances, suggested wards contain parishes which have no relationship with one another.  Most notably, Townstal should remain in a single Member ward and has no commonality with Dartmouth, Kingswear and Stoke Gabriel. |
| The relevance of the evidence provided by the LGBCE in support of their recommendations. | The lack of consideration of second home and holiday home number fluctuations. |

2.1.3  At the conclusion of the debate, the Working Group (by a vote of four votes in favour and one vote against) agreed to recommend that the arrangements as presented by the LGBCE should be recommended to Council for its ultimate endorsement.

**Potential Ward Names**

2.1.4  The Working Group discussed some potential ward names and it has been suggested that, assuming the recommendation to support the LGBCE proposals is agreed by the Council, then local Members will be given the opportunity to have an input into potential ward names which could be included with the Council Submission before it is sent to the LGBCE.

2.1.5  In light of the LGBCE consultation deadline being 11 November 2013, Members will be required to send their suggested names to the Democratic Services Manager before 5.00pm on Thursday, 7 November to ensure their inclusion with the Council submission.

2.2  **Merits of Webcasting Member Meetings**

2.2.1  Consideration of this issue has been prompted by the comments of the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, who has urged councils to 'open digital doors to meetings' (Appendix 2 refers).

2.2.2  Prior to being considered by the Working Group, feedback was sought from two authorities who were already Webcasting their Member meetings: Devon County Council (DCC) and Plymouth City Council (PCC).  General feedback from both authorities supported the benefits of Webcasting, but it is an expensive tool and the data drawn from hits made to the various broadcasts showed mixed results.

2.2.3  The Working Group concluded that, particularly in the current economic climate, Webcasting did not constitute good value for money and there was therefore no desire to support pursuing the principle any further at this time.

3.  **RISK MANAGEMENT**

The Risk Management implications are shown at the end of this report in the Strategic Risks Template.

4.  **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

| **Corporate priorities engaged:** | All |
|---|---|
| **Statutory powers:** | Local Government Act 2000<br>Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. |
| **Considerations of equality and human rights:** | None directly related to this report |
| **Biodiversity considerations:** | None directly related to this report |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Sustainability considerations:** | None directly related to this report |
| **Crime and disorder implications:** | None directly related to this report |
| **Background papers:** | The Council Constitution<br>Political Structures WG Agenda and Papers – 18 September 2013 |
| **Appendices attached:** | 1. LGBCE Draft Recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for SHDC; and<br>2. DCLG Statement on 'opening digital doors to meetings.' |

# STRATEGIC RISKS TEMPLATE

| No | Risk Title | Risk/Opportunity Description | Inherent risk status | | | | Mitigating & Management actions | Ownership |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Impact of negative outcome | Chance of negative outcome | Risk score and direction of travel | | | |
| 1 | Electoral Review | Failure to agree a recommendation on a set of warding arrangements will result in the Council losing its voice during this stage of the process. | 3 | 2 | 6 | ⇔ | Council agreement on a way forward will ensure that the Council has had an input and makes a formal submission during this stage of the process. | Democratic Services Manager |
| 2 | Webcasting | By not webcasting, potentially interested members of the public will feel that they cannot have a voice or influence what is going on at meetings unless they are able to physically attend them. | 1 | 2 | 2 | ⇔ | Local Members continue to be community champions and reflect the views of their parishioners and community groups at meetings and provide feedback to them as and when deemed appropriate. | Members |

**Direction of travel symbols ⇩ ⇧ ⇔**