



Cabinet

Tuesday, 23 November 2021

Electoral Review of Rushcliffe – Draft Recommendations

Report of the Chief Executive

**Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Borough Wide Leadership,
Councillor S J Robinson**

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. The Council is participating in a periodic review requested by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE). In March 2021, Council approved the Review of Council Size before its submission to the LGBCE.
- 1.2. The LGBCE decided that Rushcliffe should retain 44 councillors and undertook its first stage of consultation between 11 May to 19 July. They asked for feedback on where the Borough's ward boundaries should be drawn.
- 1.3. The second stage of the consultation commenced on 5 October, with the publication of Draft Recommendations setting out where the LGBCE considers the Borough's ward boundaries should be drawn and how many councillors should be elected by each ward. Councillors have had the opportunity to consider these recommendations and Appendix One presents the Council's draft response ("draft response") to the second stage of the consultation.
- 1.4. The Cabinet is asked to consider the comments made by Councillors and contained in the draft response to the LGBCE consultation at Appendix One before the document is presented to Council in advance of the 13 December LGBCE consultation deadline.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet endorses the draft response to the second stage of the LGBCE consultation as the Council's response and recommends it for approval to Council.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

The draft response document contained at Appendix One draws together the views of Councillors to form the Council's response to the LGBCE consultation on its draft recommendations for the electoral arrangements in Rushcliffe. It is important that given the nature of the changes proposed that the Council

presents the local perspective to ensure that the decisions made by the LGBCE reflect Rushcliffe's local communities.

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1. The LGBCE published its Draft Recommendations for Rushcliffe on 5 October. This outlined where the Commission believes the ward boundaries for Rushcliffe should be and how many Councillors should be elected to represent each ward. The publication of the Draft Recommendations triggered a second stage of consultation which runs until 13 December.
- 4.2. In summary, the LGBCE recommends:
 - Council to stay at 44 councillors
 - 21 new wards – four fewer than there are now
 - More multi-member wards than currently
 - Boundaries of most wards changing (three stay the same)
 - Names of some wards changing
 - Two town / parish councils affected (Bingham and Radcliffe).
- 4.3. Councillors were invited to submit comments and observations to officers on the Draft Recommendations before 22 October. This feedback was then discussed by Group Leaders on 25 October, before being compiled into the draft response from the Council contained at Appendix One.
- 4.4. Councillors were keen to communicate the following key points to the LGBCE:
 - 4.4.1. There is clear agreement with the recommended ward boundaries for Ruddington, Leake, Radcliffe on Trent, Cotgrave, Abbey, Compton Acres, Musters, and Edwalton.
 - 4.4.2. There is broad agreement (minor alterations suggested) with the recommended ward boundaries for Keyworth and Wolds, Neville and Langar, Tollerton, and Gamston.
 - 4.4.3. A new name has been proposed for the reduced Lutterell ward – Wilford Hill.
 - 4.4.4. Minor concerns relating to the change from an East/West split of Bingham to a North/South division.
 - 4.4.5. The draft response raises significant concerns about the three geographically large multi-member rural wards proposed for Soar Valley, East Bridgford, and Aslockton and Cropwell. These concerns relate to the perception that all elected councillors are responsible for and accountable to the whole ward and the implication therefore that all have to attend all parish council meetings, respond to all planning consultations, and attend to all resident related casework. This spreads the elected members very thinly, causes confusion within the ward in relation to effective governance

and leads to further disengagement in local democracy. The Council believes that single member wards in large rural areas will result in more effective local governance.

4.4.6. The draft response further disagrees with the proposals for the new Barton in Fabis ward and Bunny ward and makes alternative suggestions for the LGBCE to consider. The Council is concerned about the creation of a new ward for Barton in Fabis which is significantly in advance of the population of the new Fairham community and does not take account of the emerging identity of that community which is likely (by the nature of the development) to be very different to other areas of the ward – instead it proposes the retention of the current Gotham ward for this area. In terms of the proposals for Bunny ward, the Council does not agree that Plumtree should move into the ward and proposes the inclusion of Widmerpool and Willoughby on the Wolds instead which have much stronger community ties to the existing ward.

4.4.7. Furthermore, the draft response disagrees with the recommended ward boundaries for the Trent Bridge ward as proposed by the LGBCE. The grouping of the primarily transient Trent Bridge student population and city-bound professionals with the close-knit and established academic and artistic Lady Bay community demonstrates a lack of local knowledge and understanding. This is not the fault of the LGBCE who, the Council accepts, have undertaken this exercise from a distance due to Covid-19 restrictions but given the local nuances the LGBCE are urged to reconsider this area of their recommendations. The Council suggests that the existing two wards are retained (but accepts that some internal boundaries may have to change).

4.4.8. As well as the observations summarised about and contained in more detail in Appendix One, the draft response strongly recommends the LGBCE visit both Bingham and the existing Trent Bridge and Lady Bay wards in light of the comments made by Councillors regarding their proposals. Covid-19 made it difficult for the LGBCE to undertake onsite visits during the earlier stages of consultation; however, visits are recommended to support the LGBCE's understanding of the diversity of community identity between very different but geographically coterminous areas.

5. Alternative options considered and reasons for rejection

Cabinet could choose not to respond to the consultation which would result in ward boundaries being imposed in the Borough that were electorally equitable but did not correlate with the communities Rushcliffe's Councillors represent.

6. Risks and Uncertainties

Failure to ensure electoral representation is fair and equitable restricts the Council's ability to deliver services reflective of local need, demand and choice. Disproportionate electorate to Councillor numbers reduces capacity to ensure

understanding of local representation and ensure it properly reflects community identity.

7. Implications

7.1. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications related to the recommendations of this report.

7.2. Legal Implications

If approved by the Commission, the electoral arrangements for Rushcliffe will be laid by draft order before Parliament in Summer 2022. If made, the order will come into force in 2023. Until such date, the existing ward boundaries and Councillor numbers will continue in their current format.

7.3. Equalities Implications

Adequate representation of the electorate is one of the primary drivers behind this review. A sense of 'community identity' is one of the LGBCE's key considerations when proposing a change of ward boundary.

7.4. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications

There are no Section 17 implications related to the recommendations of this report.

8. Link to Corporate Priorities

Quality of Life	Fair, equitable, and responsive democratic representation is a key element of quality of life for our residents.
Efficient Services	By ensuring that each Councillor represents a fairly equal number of electors, each Councillor will have the best opportunity to deliver efficient and effective representation for their ward.
Sustainable Growth	Whilst the Borough is expanding it is important to maintain fair, equitable, and responsive democratic representation
The Environment	

9. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet endorses the draft response to the second stage of the LGBCE consultation as the Council's response and recommends it for approval to Council.

For more information contact:	Charlotte Caven-Atack Service Manager – Corporate Services 0115 914 8278 ccaven-attack@rushcliffe.gov.uk
Background papers available for Inspection:	Review of Council Size – Council 4 March 2021 LGBCE New Electoral Arrangements for Rushcliffe – Draft Recommendations
List of appendices:	Appendix One – Council Response to LGBCE Draft Recommendations