

BOUNDARIES COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

Recommendation:		
1. That council provide guidance to officers as to whether a submission to Boundaries Commission for England should be prepared.		
	Yes	No
Does the decision involve new expenditure?		No
Is there an existing budget for the proposed expenditure (insert code)	N/A	
What procurement level is required?	N/A	
Are there equalities impacts / an equalities assessment required?		No
Does this require a full council decision? (Reports for full council decision should still be sent to the relevant committee where possible.)	Yes	
Is there a background paper or papers? (provide links below).		No
Background		
<p>1. The Boundaries Commission for England (BCE) is undertaking a review of the boundaries of electoral divisions for Northumberland County Council (NCC). This could lead, via consultation, to new wards being created, or the boundaries of existing wards being moved.</p> <p>2. The three principles applied by BCE to the creation of new wards are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. New wards should leave each councillor representing roughly the same number of electors as other councillors elsewhere in the authority. (The average number of electors required for a ward is sometimes referred to as the quota). b. New wards should – as far as possible – reflect community interests and identities, and boundaries should be identifiable. Consider transport links, community groups and facilities, natural or physical boundaries, parishes and shared interests. c. New wards should promote effective and convenient local government. Consider the number of councillors for, the geographic size of, and the links between parts of the ward. <p>3. For the benefit of elected members, each ward (or division) is made up of one or more polling districts; the boundaries of parishes are expected to conform to one or more polling districts. The boundaries of polling districts may reflect either an established community, or an administrative convenience in terms of organising polling stations. In the case of Berwick-upon-Tweed, the polling divisions reflect the boundaries of the old Borough Council wards; as this organisation has been removed it is hard to discern the underlying logic of those boundaries. Council has previously agreed that it would be appropriate to merge polling divisions within the existing communities to create three wards for Town Council purposes; Tweedmouth, Spittal and Berwick North.</p> <p>4. A wealth of statistical detail about electoral arrangements in Northumberland can be found here - https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/lgbce/Reviews/North%20East/Northumberland/Warding/Northumberland%20Council%20Size%20Submission.pdf – concerning both the demographics of Northumberland and NCC’s perception of its own needs and performance.</p> <p>5. Council has previously recognised that the boundary between Berwick and Ord Parishes, which reflects pre 2008 boundaries used in Berwick Borough Council elections, is not fit for purpose, dividing neighbours between the two parishes for no discernible reason. Council has also previously been advised that Ord Parish Council believe that they had been assured in 2008 that the boundary issue had been resolved, since the problem was known about then, although no evidence to this effect has so far been forthcoming.</p>		

Attempts to resolve both this issue and the parish wards situation (above) have been delayed by the BCE process.

6. Council is entitled to make submissions to the BCE, arguing for changed boundaries where necessary. It may also wish to use this opportunity to raise the issue of the boundary between Ord and Berwick, even when it may make the task more difficult for BCE since polling districts are the building blocks of electoral divisions.
7. These are not moot points, and it may help if we provide some context regarding this issue.
8. Boundaries are likely to change county wide as a result of this review. The focus of house building in the south-east of the county has produced a situation where wards such as Cramlington West, Pegswood, Seaton with Newbiggin and Seghill are all 'overquota' whilst, for instance, all three Berwick wards are under quota. Some measure of redistribution within settlements can address the issues that arise from these variances, but it is likely that there will be a need for at least one seat to be transferred to the south-east of the county from the rural areas.
9. In such circumstances it is essential that the electoral divisions / wards reflect the realities on the ground – that is to say, that communities are reflected in the electoral arrangements by, for instance, bringing within the Berwick divisions those communities, such as Scremerston, which have a strong relationship to Berwick. Berwick East is under quota, but moving Scremerston within it would help resolve that issue, and would reflect the close relationship between the two places.
10. Similarly it is the view of officers that if one adopts, as a rule of thumb, the notion of wards having a strong relationship to a place that acts as a service centre, the ward that is hardest to justify in north Northumberland is Norham and Islandshire, and it is arguable that the removal of Norham and Islandshire, along with a clearer restatement of boundaries around Wooler, Alnwick and Rothbury, would enable the other existing wards in north Northumberland to be brought up to quota.
11. It should be stated clearly that there is no right answer to this problem. However, the existence of boundaries that seek to capture the need for a place to be represented where at all possible is both important, and a contribution to good governance.

Rationale for recommendation.

Not applicable.