

**TITLE OF REPORT:**           **Local Government Boundary Commission for England - Electoral Review of Gateshead Council, Part Two (Warding Arrangements)**

**REPORT OF:**                 **Mike Barker, Strategic Director, Corporate Services and Governance**

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### **Purpose of the Report**

1. Following the report presented to Cabinet in January 2023 regarding the Council's submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission) on Council size, this report is to update Cabinet on the Council's draft submission to the Commission on Part Two of its review of Gateshead Council (Warding Pattern) and to seek agreement for the Chief Executive to make such amendments as required to the draft (appended to this report) following the Cabinet and full Council meetings.

### **Background**

2. In 2022 the Commission informed the Council of its decision to carry out an Electoral Review, comprising:
  - Council's size (number of elected councillors) and the number of wards
  - Ward boundaries for the Council.
  - Ward names
3. The last electoral review in Gateshead was undertaken in 2002 and resulted in the current Council size (66 Councillors across 22 wards) and the ward boundaries which presently exist across the borough.
4. Following agreement by Cabinet and Council in January 2022, the Council's submission, which proposed the status quo was maintained, was submitted in February 2023.
5. Due to alternative proposals being received by the Commission, there was a period of public consultation before the Commission made a decision on phase one of the electoral review. On 15 August the Commission made a determination that the Council remain at the same size, maintaining the existing 66 Councillors across 22 wards.
6. On 22 August, the Commission opened the public consultation on the new ward boundary arrangements. The Council is required to file its submission, which will propose new ward boundaries and a number of new ward names, by 30 October 2023.

7. In addition to the Council's submission, the Commission also welcomes comments from individuals and community groups.
8. In preparing a proposal on warding arrangements, the Council is required, as far as possible, to develop a warding pattern which fulfils the following:
  - (a) **Delivering electoral equality for local electors:** ideally, this means each ward in Gateshead would have an equal number of electors in it, so that there is equality of representation across the borough, i.e. the same number of electors per Councillor. The electorate in Gateshead is forecast to be 150,899 by 2030 (future housing developments and demolitions have been factored into this electorate forecast). The following electoral quotas refer to the mean number of electors in each ward. In proposing wards, a 10% variance in the electoral quota is acceptable as the Commission recognise that it is unlikely that any local authority will be able to have exactly this number in every ward:
    - i. 66 Councillors in 22 wards with 6,859 electors per ward (6,173 – 7,545 variance)
    - ii. 69 Councillors in 23 wards with 6,561 electors per ward (5,905 – 7,217 variance)
    - iii. 63 Councillors in 21 wards with 7,186 electors per ward (6,467 – 7,904 variance)
  - (b) **Interests and identities of local communities:** The Commission is interested in views on which communities should be part of the same ward, considering the following factors:
    - i. What facilities do people share, such as parks, leisure centres or schools and shopping areas?
    - ii. What issues do neighbouring communities face that they have in common, such as high numbers of visitors or heavy traffic?
    - iii. Have there been new housing or commercial developments that have changed the focus of communities?
    - iv. And are there roads, rivers, railways or other features that people believe form strong boundaries between neighbourhoods?
9. All Elected Members were invited to engagement events in the week commencing 4 September 2023. Initial proposals were considered along the following lines:
  - a. Retaining the same number of wards
  - b. Increasing to 23 wards should this better reflect local communities
  - c. Reducing to 22 wards should this better reflect local communities
10. The consensus of the Elected Members was to support the Council remaining at 66 Councillors, across 22 wards in line with the Commission's initial determination. It was accepted that even in remaining the same Council size, the ward boundaries would need to be redrawn to ensure greater electoral equality in terms of the electorate quota.

11. Given the new complexities of the shared Parliamentary constituency boundaries with three neighbouring local authorities, it was agreed that the new local ward boundaries should be coterminous with their Parliamentary boundaries. There are therefore no proposals for local ward boundaries to cross the Parliamentary boundaries.
12. New proposals were devised based on the feedback from these sessions. All Councillors were given a further opportunity to comment upon and make new suggestions up to 6 October.
13. The attached submission was prepared on the basis of a consensus of Councillors' views.

### **Proposal**

14. Cabinet is requested to consider the content of the attached submission and appendices (maps).
15. Cabinet is requested to endorse the proposed recommendation to the Commission that the Council retains 22 wards based on the new boundary arrangements, together with new suggested names for three wards, and recommends the same to Council for approval.
16. Cabinet may wish to express a view on the content and provide amendments to the proposed submission.

### **Recommendations**

17. Cabinet is requested to recommend that Council:
  - (i) agrees the recommendation of the draft Submission in terms of the Council size remaining the same at 66 Councillors, across 22 wards, based on the new warding pattern, with three new ward names being proposed; and
  - (ii) agrees that the Chief Executive, following consultation with the Leader of the Council, may make any amendments to the draft Submission she deems appropriate prior to it being filed with the Commission on 30 October 2023.

For the following reason:

This is a periodic review undertaken by the Commission that the Council must partake in with a requirement for the Submission to be filed on 30 October 2023.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Policy Context

1. The Review is a statutory process undertaken by the Commission, and the Council is obliged to participate and provide certain information. However, the warding pattern stage of the review process should also ensure that this aspect of the Council's governance arrangements reflect the needs of the community it serves and its long-term ambitions, thereby enabling the Council to fulfil its policy objectives and particularly its pledges to '*Support our communities to support themselves and each other*' and to '*Work together and fight for a better future for Gateshead*'.

### Background

2. This is a review of the Council's structure and electoral arrangements. The revised arrangements will take effect from the local elections in May 2026.

### Consultation

3. Initial consultation has taken place between the Commission, officers, political group leaders and Council members in September 2022.
4. All Elected Members were given the opportunity to contribute to the Submission in three engagement sessions which took place in the week commencing 4 September 2023.

### Alternative Options

5. There are no alternatives. This is a statutory review being undertaken by the Commission which the Council must take part in.
6. The Commission will welcome alternative submissions on warding patterns from individuals and groups.

### Implications of Recommended Option

#### 7. Resources:

- a) **Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director, Resources and Digital confirms there are no financial implications arising directly from this report. Had the proposal recommended the creation of another ward, this would have incurred further expenditure. Conversely, had the proposal recommended a reduction in ward numbers, this would have led to a financial saving on current expenditure. Given there are no changes proposed to the current number of Councillors / wards, there are no financial implications.
- b) **Human Resources Implications** – There are no human resource implications arising directly from this report.

- c) **Property Implications** - The outcome of the review process will result in properties being moved from one ward to another, but there are no other implications for the Council property.
- 8. **Risk Management Implications** – there are no risk management implications arising from this report.
- 9. **Equality and Diversity Implications** – The outcome of the review will result in a more balanced level of representation across the whole Borough
- 10. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report
- 11. **Health Implications** – There are no health implications arising from this report.
- 12. **Climate Emergency and Sustainability Implications** - There are no climate emergency and sustainability implications arising from this report.
- 13. **Human Rights Implications** - There are no human rights implications arising from this report
- 14. **Ward Implications** - The review process is applicable to all wards

#### **Background Information**

- 15. Local Government Boundary Commission for England Guide for Councillors