

Executive summary

Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Welwyn Hatfield in Hertfordshire

The Boundary Committee for England is the body responsible for conducting electoral reviews of local authorities. A further electoral review of Welwyn Hatfield is being undertaken to provide improved levels of electoral equality across the district. It aims to ensure that the number of voters represented by each district councillor is approximately the same. The Electoral Commission directed the Boundary Committee to undertake this review on 12 May 2005.

Current electoral arrangements

Under the existing arrangements, seven wards currently have electoral variances of more than 10% from the district average. Due to development in Hatfield North ward it currently has 23% more electors than the district average; by 2009 this is expected to rise to 59% more electors than the district average if the existing arrangements remain in place.

This review will be conducted in four stages, outlined in the table below.

Submissions received

We received nine submissions during Stage One. The District Council, Welwyn Hatfield Conservatives and Welwyn Hatfield Liberal Democrats proposed district-wide schemes

and Welwyn Hatfield Labour Party proposed a partial scheme. We also received submissions from Charles Walker MP, two parish councils, a parish councillor and a joint submission from two local residents.

Analysis and draft recommendations

Electorate figures

The District Council has forecast an increase in electorate of approximately 7% between 2004 and 2009, most of which is anticipated in Hatfield North ward. Having discussed these figures with the council officers, the development which is currently under construction and received details of how the District Council calculated these figures we are satisfied that they currently provide the best

Stage	Stage starts	Description
One	6 September 2005	Submission of proposals to us
Two	13 December 2005	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	7 November 2006	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	13 February 2007	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

estimation of the 2009 electorate of Welwyn Hatfield that can reasonably be made at this time, and we have used them when making our draft recommendations.

Council size

During Stage One we received proposals from the District Council, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats for council sizes of 48, 48 and 49 respectively. The District Council and the Conservatives provided good council size argument. The Liberal Democrats' arguments proved less convincing. After further investigation we were satisfied that the District Council's proposed council size of 48 would provide for the best representation of the district. Therefore we propose to retain the current council size of 48 members.

General analysis

We are making recommendations based largely on the District Council's proposals with amendments proposed by the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party, as well as some of our own in Hatfield town and Welwyn Garden City in order to form wards that secure good levels of electoral equality and strong boundaries. We are proposing to adopt the District Council's proposals in full in the rural areas to the north and south of the district. We are recommending 17 wards in the district; 14 three-member and three two-member wards.

What happens next?

There will now be a consultation period, during which we encourage comment on our draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Welwyn Hatfield contained in the full report. We welcome views from all parts of the community and believe that the more feedback we receive, based on clear evidence, the better informed we will be in forming our final recommendations. We will take into account all submissions received by 12 February 2007. Any received **after** this date may not be taken into account.

We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Welwyn Hatfield and welcome comments from interested parties. In particular, we found our decisions regarding the boundary between Peartree and Hollybush wards a difficult judgement between the various strands of the statutory criteria. This was due to conflicting proposals put forward as to which areas should be transferred between the wards. We would particularly welcome local views, backed up by demonstrable evidence, during Stage Three. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

Express your views by writing directly to us:

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Further information

The full report is available to download at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.