

Broseley Town Council

Submission on the Electoral Review of Shropshire, January 2023

Background

Shropshire Council has commissioned a review of its electoral Divisions with a view to reducing inequalities in numbers of electors between wards (with a target of around $\pm 10\%$ of the average) and, where possible, eliminating or reducing multi-member Divisions. It is understood that there is no intention to increase the number of Shropshire Councillors.

It is also understood that changes to the numbers or boundaries of wards within Divisions will only be considered in this exercise if changes are proposed to the boundaries of the relevant Division.

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England's Technical Guidance document¹ is very explicit about the objectives of such exercises. Section 3.18 states:

A misalignment of electoral boundaries for county, district and parish elections is both confusing for electors and an impediment to effective and convenient local government. In those cases, we will recommend that the parish be divided into parish wards with boundaries that are common, or coterminous, with the district ward and/or county division boundary. We will also consider the number and distribution of electors across that parish before deciding on the need for and extent of parish wards, but this concern will not take precedence over the need to secure good levels of representation at district ward or county division level.

Broseley Division – current boundary

Broseley Town currently has around 4,037 electors. At some time in the past (precise date uncertain), a small sliver on the western edge of the town (currently containing 134 properties and 245 electors) was removed from the Broseley Division and added to Much Wenlock Division, in a bid to reduce inequalities in elector numbers. This area is designated as Broseley Wood Ward within Broseley Town Council and is represented by a single town councillor.

Broseley Town Council considers this situation to be highly unsatisfactory and anomalous for the following reasons:

- Residents in Broseley Wood Ward are confused and do not understand why, when they are part of Broseley, they are not represented by Broseley's Shropshire Councillor.
- Whilst the member of Much Wenlock works hard to represent their electors in Broseley Wood, it is inevitable that these electors enjoy fewer opportunities to engage with their Shropshire Councillor than those in the rest of the town, for example via town council meetings, councillor surgeries and other events.
- The need for the Much Wenlock representative to attend meetings in Broseley adds to their workload.

¹ Electoral Reviews Technical Guidance (Updated April 2022) <https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/lgbce/Corporate%20Documents/Guidance/technical-guidance-2021.pdf>

- The boundary between the Much Wenlock and Broseley divisions is purely arbitrary. It does not follow any recognisable geographical feature and runs through a quite densely-populated part of the town, with adjacent properties in different Divisions. This can have unfortunate consequences: for example, a recent small planning application required input from both Shropshire Councillors, as the boundary runs through the middle of it.

Broseley Division – internal wards

At some time in the past – perhaps at the same time as Broseley Wood was moved to Much Wenlock Division – the remainder of Broseley, with around 3,792 electors, was divided into two wards; Broseley East is represented by six town councillors and Broseley West by four. Broseley Town Council considers this arrangement brings unnecessary complexity and does not promote the exercise of democracy within the town. It has been common for elections to be required in one ward whilst the other ward has too few candidates, or just enough to fill the seats without an election. In reality, none of the town councillors feels any affiliation to the ward for which they were elected – all the councillors consider that they represent everyone in the town.

Recommendations

Firstly, Broseley Town Council strongly recommends that the residents of Broseley Wood Ward be returned to the Broseley Division. Aligning the town and Shropshire Division boundaries will improve the representation at Shropshire Council for these electors. Restoring the boundary to its previous position the west of Speeds Lane and Simpsons Lane will create a clear geographical division between the two divisions.

It is recognised that this move will slightly increase the imbalance in size between Broseley and Much Wenlock divisions but, as the Technical Guidance documents makes clear, this consideration takes second place to restoring ‘common or coterminous’ boundaries and ensuring a ‘good level of representation’ for electors. Fundamentally, under the present guidance, the move of Broseley Wood to Much Wenlock would never have been countenanced. It should also be noted that the forecast shows the current disparity between the two divisions will close, as more future housing development is expected in Much Wenlock than Broseley.

Secondly, if the boundary of the Broseley Division is to be revised, we wish to make a plea for the present warding to be removed, creating a single ward with 11 town councillors and a single Shropshire Councillor, within a common boundary.

Ian West
Broseley Town Mayor
January 2023