

Worcestershire

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Comment text:

Related subject: Wyre Forest

The response in the attached file is from Wyre Forest District Council and was approved at a meeting of full council held on 21 February 2024.
The response sets out the District Council's comments.

Attached Documents:

- 20240222-lgbce-response-wfdc.pdf

RESPONSE TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND'S DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS – NEW ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Response from Wyre Forest District Council (WFDC)

This response was approved at a meeting of Wyre Forest District Council on 21 February 2024.

WFDC welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Boundary Commission's proposals.

Proposed electoral divisions for Worcestershire County Council

WFDC supports the retention of 10 county councillors for Wyre Forest and has no objection to the proposed boundaries or proposed names of the electoral divisions. It notes that all but one of the proposed divisions lie within 10% variance which the Commission considers to represent "good electoral equality".

Proposed alterations to electoral arrangements of town and parish councils

WFDC notes that the Commission's proposals to alter electoral arrangements for Kidderminster Foreign Parish Council, Kidderminster Town Council, Stourport on Severn Town Council and Wolverley and Cookley Parish Council arise directly from the statutory requirement in paragraph 1(2) of Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009: "every ward of a parish having a parish council (whether separate or common) must lie wholly within a single electoral area of the county council, and every parish which is not divided into parish wards must lie wholly within a single electoral area of the county council".

The changes in respect of parish and town councils would not take effect until the next ordinary elections of parish councils in May 2027 (May 2028 in the case of Kidderminster Town Council). As noted in paragraph 99 of the Commission's report, the District Council has powers under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to conduct community governance reviews to effect changes to parish electoral arrangements – indeed the powers can also be used to create new parish councils and adjust parish council boundaries. WFDC intends to undertake community governance reviews for each of the four parishes in good time before the next elections in 2027/2028.

Community governance reviews would allow much fuller local consultation than can be undertaken by the Commission, including the option of local advisory polls, and would have the advantage of decisions about areas in Wyre Forest being taken by the elected body for the district rather than a national body. The statutory straitjacket within which the Commission operates has produced results that may not enjoy local support, and the Commission is not able to look at options that would be available to the District Council in a community governance review (such as whether to create a separate parish council for Lea Castle).

WFDC cannot object to the proposals in respect of Kidderminster Foreign, Kidderminster and Stourport-on-Severn because it cannot submit workable, alternative proposals that meet the legal requirements within which the Commission has to operate. WFDC feels that community governance reviews would not be likely to produce the same outcomes as the Boundary Commission's proposals. In particular it is concerned about the loss of alignment of the town and district wards in Kidderminster.

In respect of Wolverley and Cookley, WFDC **objects** to the proposal that the area of Wolverley and Cookley (other than Lea Castle) would be covered by one parish ward. No rationale is presented for such a change. There have been separate wards for Wolverley village and Cookley village for many years - each ward also includes more sparsely populated areas surrounding the main villages. There is no need to merge the two "village" wards (other than to create a separate ward for Lea Castle) as this would disrupt the long-standing arrangements under which each has had separate representation on Wolverley and Cookley Parish Council.

WFDC recognises that the Boundary Commission does "not normally" change the number of councillors for a parish council when making its recommendations. However we believe that there is a strong case for doing so in respect of Wolverley and Cookley. The 2029 estimates of electors which the Boundary Commission has used show that the Cookley ward would grow by almost 1700 electors, which will relate mainly or wholly to the development at Lea Castle. In total, 1,400 dwellings are expected at Lea Castle in accordance with the adopted local plan, of which 600 already have permission with an application for the remaining 800 expected to be considered this year. Once all 1,400 dwellings are built, there is every expectation that the number of electors in Lea Castle will comfortably exceed the 2,000 or so in each of the present Wolverley and Cookley wards. On that basis, WFDC **objects** to the representation of 4 councillors for the new Lea Castle ward and submits an alternative proposal that the appropriate representation should involve parity of representation for the three wards, comprising at least 5 councillors for each of Wolverley ward, Cookley ward and Lea Castle ward.