

COPYTHORNE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING TUESDAY JANUARY 14TH 2020

ITEM No: 10 – To outline the process for arriving at a Parish Response to the NFDC Boundary Review

As Councillors will be aware and as discussed at our meeting in November, New Forest District Council (“NFDC”) has asked the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (“LGBCE”) to conduct a Boundary Review. This task involves considering how best to divide the NFDC’s area into District Wards and the number of councillors that should serve those wards. The last such review took place around 20 years ago.

NFDC has been involved in preparatory work on this task for some time, the result of which is that they has recommended to LGBCE that the number of District Councillors should be reduced from 60 to 48.

With a total current NFDC electorate of circa 142.7k (forecast to be 147.6k), these 48 District Councillors would each serve an average electorate (based on 2025 forecast) of 3075 rather than the current 2379. The number of voters in each ward should ideally be within a range of +/- 5% of the average.

As it isn’t possible to divide the electorate neatly into parcels of 2973 the next stage of the review has been for NFDC to consider what Parishes should form the District Wards and how many District Councillors should serve each.

(NOTE: This process WOULD NOT involve the changing of current parish boundaries and existing parishes would not “merge”. It might though involve changing the “warding patterns” within a Parish, ie Copythorne North and Copythorne South might be in the same District Ward)

In undertaking this stage of the review NFDC have considered the following community identities and interest areas:

- Transport Links
- Community Groups
- Facilities
- Identifiable boundaries
- Parishes
- Shared Interest

These issues are the key headings for NFDC under which any responses would need to be made within the next stage of consultation. For more information, see LGBC Considerations below.

Currently the Parish of Copythorne is divided into two parish wards as follows:-

1. Copythorne North sits in the NFDC ward of “Bramshaw (545 voters), Copythorne North (1,008) and Minstead (600)”, a total electorate of 2153 served by one District Councillor
2. Copythorne South sits in the NFDC ward of “Ashurst (1735 voters), Copythorne South (1272) and Netley Marsh (1703)” which has a total electorate of 4,710 served by two councillors (2,360 each).

(NOTE: There are currently only three Parishes in the whole of NFDC that are split across two District Council wards. NFDC have already stated that ideally they wish to remove these anomalies where possible).

The initial; i.e. working, thoughts of the NFDC team tasked with preparing the NFDC's proposal to LGBCE for our local area (using expected electorate numbers for 2025) is as follows:-

1. The whole of the Parish of Copythorne to be included in a new NFDC ward of "Copythorne (2363 voters), Netley Marsh (1768) and Ashurst (1797)" which has a total electorate of 5,928 voters served by two councillors (2,964 each, 96% of target average).

(Note: The understanding is that the two District Councillors would represent the ward as a whole)

2. Bramshaw and Minstead become part of a new NFDC ward of "Rural Central" which also include (amongst others) Lyndhurst & Brockenhurst, it would have a total electorate of comprise of circa 13,203 served by 4.5 councillors

We as a Parish Council are invited to make representations to LGBCE as to what we would like to see in terms of our local District Ward (s). In explaining our opinion we should use evidence and give examples, whilst thinking about the three legal factors the Commission uses to draw new boundaries which are:

1. New wards should leave each councillor representing roughly the same number of voters as other councillors elsewhere in the authority.
2. 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.
3. 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.

So by way of examples if we felt that we would be better placed in a new ward made up of:-

1. Bramshaw (568 voters, Copythorne (2363) and Minstead (618) the first hurdle we would need to overcome is that the total electorate of 3549 is slightly more than 15% of the expected average.
2. Copythorne and Minstead (total 2880) we would need to consider that Bramshaw would then be out on a limb and that the electorate is only 93% of the expected average.
3. Copythorne and Bramshaw (total 2825) we would need to consider that we have longer physical boundary connections with Netley Marsh than we do with Bramshaw and that the electorate is only 92% of the expected average.
4. Copythorne, Netley Marsh, Ashurst and Bramshaw. That would mean a total electorate of 6494, served by two councillors (3,248 per councillor), which is slightly under 6% higher than the expected average. We would need to explain why it makes sense to include Bramshaw

It is important also to recognise that the review is about the structure of the wards within the District Council and not who the District Councillor is. Any changes to warding patterns would not take effect until the next set of District Council elections after the review had been approved (likely to be 2023).

In summary, we need to consider whether we are in favour of the expected NFDC suggestion and if not we need to explain why and suggest an alternative that complies with the three legal criteria that LGBCE have to use.

Given the above information plus the fact that we in Copythorne Parish are directly affected by any changes in respect of our own 'split ward' situation, Councillors may wish to consult with local community members before creating any initial feedback to the Parish Council.

Recommendations

1. We compile our responses before and during the meeting in February for assembly by the Clerk following the meeting.
2. The resulting draft response is then circulated to Councillors by the Clerk, for final comment and approval via email.
3. The Clerk is enabled to submit the response on behalf of the Parish Council on or before the due date of March 2nd 2020.

David Rigby
Parish Clerk