

## **New electoral arrangements for Warwickshire County Council**

### **Consultation response by the Liberal Democrat Group**

This submission is made on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group of members of Warwickshire County Council.

We support in full the submission made by the Council as agreed at its meeting on the 28<sup>th</sup> October 2014. This submission commands the support of the Labour, Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent Groups of members of the Council, with only members of the Conservative Group opposing it.

The following additional comments are offered in support of the Council's submission:-

#### ***Rugby Borough***

We accept that all divisions within the town of Rugby will be single-member, although we would have preferred two-member Brownsover and Eastlands & Hillmorton divisions for the reasons previously stated.

#### ***Stratford District***

We accept that all divisions within the town of Stratford will be single-member, although we would have preferred a two-member Stratford South division for the reasons previously stated.

We strongly support the Council's view that the River Avon should form the boundary between divisions as much as possible. It is a substantial natural boundary with few crossing points.

#### ***Warwick District***

The county electoral divisions within Warwick District can be broadly split into two groups:

- those within the conurbation of Warwick & Leamington:
- those within the surrounding "ring", made up of the towns of Kenilworth, Whitnash and rural/semi-rural villages of various sizes.

For the proposed divisions within the conurbation of Warwick & Leamington, the Council generally supports the LGBCE draft recommendations. We accept that all divisions will be single-member, although we would have preferred a two-member North Leamington division for the reasons previously stated.

For the three proposed North Leamington divisions, we believe that the minor changes proposed by the Council will improve community identity and yield a higher level of co-terminosity with the new district council wards.

However, for the divisions within the surrounding ring, there are major concerns about the LGBCE draft recommendations, in particular as they impact on Kenilworth:

- The population of Kenilworth (i.e. within the boundaries of the town council) is too large for two county electoral divisions, but not large enough for three. Kenilworth is a thriving market town, with a proud history, a strong community identity and well-established links with its surrounding villages.

- The combined effect of the LGBCE final recommendations for Warwick District ward boundaries (effective 2015) and the Community Governance Review by Warwick District Council is to achieve total co-terminosity between district and town ward boundaries within the town council area. It therefore seems eminently logical to base three new county divisions for Kenilworth on these same boundaries, but to extend them into the rural areas surrounding the town in order to reach the target size. This is what the Council's submission proposes, and is what Kenilworth Town Council proposed in its previous submission to the LGBCE.
- The LGBCE draft recommendations would not achieve full co-terminosity with district and town ward boundaries, and in particular would move the University parish ward (KWD) out of Abbey, when it has just been agreed to move it into Abbey district ward. With 1,741 electors in KWD, this would be a significant worsening of co-terminosity.
- The effect of the LGBCE draft recommendations on the current Kenilworth Abbey county division would represent a drastic change, for the residents of the historic old town area in particular. At town and district council level they would be represented by councillors with a very strong focus on the town itself, whereas at county level their identity would be submerged within a large, diverse and predominantly rural division stretching all the way to the Solihull boundary to the west.

In seeking to understand the rationale behind the LGBCE draft recommendations, it seems that draft conclusions in respect of Whitnash electoral division have had a "ripple effect" throughout the rest of the ring of divisions surrounding the Warwick/Leamington conurbation. If the current boundaries of Whitnash parish council are taken as a "fixed point" on the ring, then based on the numbers of electors in the ring one arrives at something like what is currently recommended for Kenilworth at the opposite side of the ring.

However, it doesn't have to be like that. We respect the view of Whitnash Parish Council for the present Whitnash division to remain largely unchanged, and the Council's submission achieves this. It should be noted that this is supported by the Independent Group on the Council, including the current member for Whitnash division.

By excluding the rural area (47 electors) of Whitnash parish as proposed by the Council, the fixed point on the ring is removed. This enables the ring of divisions around the Warwick/Leamington conurbation to be arranged in the way that is best for Kenilworth, while not disadvantaging the rural areas.

We strongly commend the Council's proposals to the LGCBE.

**Jerry Roodhouse**

**Leader – Liberal Democrat Group**

**Warwickshire County Council**