EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO

THE SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE (ELECTORAL CHANGES) ORDER

2014 No. 23

1. This explanatory memorandum has been prepared by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission) and is laid before Parliament by Command of Her Majesty.

2. Purpose of the instrument

2.1. The Order provides for new district wards and numbers of district councillors for the district of South Oxfordshire at the district elections in 2015 and thereafter. The Order also provides for new parish wards and numbers of parish councillors at the parish elections in 2015 and thereafter wherever this is necessary because a parish is to be split between new district wards.

3. Matters of special interest to the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments

3.1. None.

4. Legislative context

4.1. The Commission has power under section 59 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act) to make an order giving effect to recommendations contained in a report, prepared under section 58(4) of the 2009 Act, after conducting an electoral review under section 56(1) of that Act. This instrument is being made to give effect to the Commission's recommendations for new electoral arrangements set out in its report prepared following an electoral review of the district of South Oxfordshire.

4.2. This instrument is one of a set of three similar ones laid before Parliament together. The others are the Vale of White Horse (Electoral Changes) Order 2014 and the Gedling (Electoral Changes) Order 2014.

5. Territorial extent and application

5.1. This instrument applies to England.

6. European Convention on Human Rights

6.1. As the instrument is subject to the negative resolution procedure and does not amend primary legislation, no statement is required.

7. Policy background

- What is being done and why

7.1. The purpose of an electoral review is to decide on the appropriate electoral arrangements including the number of councillors and the names, number and boundaries of wards or divisions for a specific local authority. The Commission began the electoral review of South Oxfordshire on 27 March 2012. The Commission decided to conduct the review following a request from South Oxfordshire District Council.

7.2. An electoral review aims to ensure that the number of electors represented by each county or district councillor is as close to equal as possible, but the recommendations must also have regard to community identities and interests and the need for effective and convenient local government. To achieve these aims, the Commission tries to ensure that the number of electors per councillor in every division or ward is as close as possible to the average for the authority, but is happy to show flexibility in moving away from the average based on the evidence provided during the consultation stages of the review. Following a four-stage review process the Commission published its 'Final recommendations - New electoral arrangements for South Oxfordshire'[1] on 25 March 2013.

7.3. The Order provides for changes to the electoral arrangements for the district of South Oxfordshire at the district elections in 2015 as recommended by the Commission. The existing wards of the district will be replaced by 21 new ones. Four wards will each return three councillors, seven wards will each return two councillors and 10 wards will each return one councillor. The Commission considered that the evidence received justified one ward having a variance predicted to vary by more than 10% from the authority average by 2018.

7.4. Under section 56 of the 2009 Act, whenever the Commission recommends changes to the electoral arrangements for a district council it must also recommend whether, in consequence of those changes, any changes should be made to the electoral arrangements for any parish council that is within that district. Among other things, under Schedule 2 to that Act recommendations must ensure that no parish ward is split between new district wards and under section 56 of that Act recommendations must be made regarding the number of parish councillors for each parish ward.

7.5. Consequently, in addition to making changes to the electoral arrangements for the district the Order also, where necessary, makes provision with respect to the establishment of new parish wards and sets the number of parish councillors for each of those parish wards. This is not necessary for the parish of East Hagbourne and the parish of Cholsey because the new district ward boundaries will follow the existing parish ward boundaries.

- Consolidation

[1] http://www.lgbce.org.uk/__documents/lgbce/submissions/south-oxfordshire/final-recommendations/south-oxfordshire-final-recs-edited.pdf

7.6. The Order amends the Oxfordshire (Electoral Changes) Order 2012 to revoke article 12 of that Order.

8. Consultation outcome

8.1. The Order gives effect to recommendations that were consulted on during the review of electoral arrangements from March 2012 until March 2013. There was an initial six-week consultation, during which the Commission asked for proposals on the most appropriate number of councillors. There was then a 10-week consultation on ward boundaries for the district. Having considered the submissions received, the Commission published its 'Draft recommendations - New electoral arrangements for South Oxfordshire'[2] on 13 November 2012. Following a further eight-week consultation on the draft recommendations, the Commission considered the further evidence received and published its final recommendations.

8.2. During the course of the review, the Commission received approximately 104 representations. The consultations involved South Oxfordshire, parish and town councils and other interested parties. The Commission considered that a council size of 36 would ensure effective and convenient local government for the district. The Commission based its draft recommendations on submissions from South Oxfordshire District Council and parish and town councils. The Commission made some modifications in specific areas to better reflect the statutory criteria.

8.3. In response to the consultation on the draft recommendations, the Commission modified its recommendations in Didcot, in Wallingford and Cholsey, in Benson and Chalgrove, and in Wheatley and Forest Hill.

8.4. The Commission also received submissions opposing its proposed boundaries in Sonning Common and Shiplake, and in Haseley Brook. In each of these cases, the Commission did not consider that satisfactory evidence had been received for it to alter its draft recommendations. The Commission therefore confirmed the remainder of its draft recommendations for the district as final.

8.5. A detailed analysis of the outcome of the consultation is set out in the report 'Final recommendations - New electoral arrangements for South Oxfordshire' which is available at www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/south-east/oxfordshire/south-oxfordshire-fer

9. Guidance

9.1. The Commission does not intend to issue any guidance alongside this instrument. This is not considered necessary as the Order is self-explanatory and gives effect to recommendations following consultation with interested parties as to the changes to electoral arrangements.

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[2] http://www.lgbce.org.uk/__documents/lgbce/draft-final-reports/2012-draftfinal-reports/south-ox-draft-recs-long-report-editor-comments.pdf

9.2. Once the Order has been made, the Commission will publish a press release and distribute to local media advising that new electoral arrangements will be implemented at the next local elections. The press release will also direct interested parties to the Commission's website where the final recommendations will be available in detail.

10. Impact

10.1. No impact assessment has been prepared because no impact on the private sector or the voluntary sector is foreseen.

10.2. The impact on the public sector will be limited to the area for which the Order makes provision. The one-off cost of producing the map referred to by the instrument is to be funded by the Commission. The one-off cost of amending the electoral register to reflect the new district wards and parish wards is to be funded by South Oxfordshire.

11. Regulating small business

11.1. The Order does not apply to small business.

12. Monitoring and review

12.1. The Commission will have no role in monitoring South Oxfordshire's implementation of the South Oxfordshire (Electoral Changes) Order 2014. The Commission is not required to undertake such monitoring; that is a matter for the relevant officers of South Oxfordshire.

12.2. The Order will be reviewed insofar as the Commission continually monitors local authorities in England to identify any that meet its criteria for electoral reviews.

13. Contact

13.1. Marcus Bowell at the Commission (Tel: 0207 664 8530 or email: marcus.bowell@lgbce.org.uk) can answer any queries regarding the instrument.