

Review of Wards and Representation Discussion Paper 2022

The Shire of Northam has resolved to undertake a review of its ward system to comply with the requirements of the *Local Government Act 1995* (the Act).

Schedule 2.2 of the Act requires local governments with wards to carry out reviews of the ward boundaries and the number of Councillors for each ward from time to time so that no more than eight years elapse between successive reviews.

The last review of wards in the Shire of Northam was undertaken in 2014/15 and it is now appropriate to carry out another review.

Current Situation

Currently the Shire of Northam has ten (10) Councillors elected from four (4) wards as follows:

Shire of Northam Elector to Councillor ratios - current

Ward	Number of Electors	Number of Councillors	Councillor to Elector Ratio	% Ratio Deviation
West	1176	2	1:588	22.70%
Central	1163	2	1:582	23.56%
East	552	1	1:552	27.44%
Town	4716	5	1:943	-23.99%
TOTAL	7607	10	1:761	Not applicable

The % ratio deviation gives a clear indication of the % difference between the average Councillor to Elector ratio for the whole local government and the Councillor/Elector ratio for each ward.

It can be seen that there is a significant imbalance in representation across the Shire with the West, Central and East Wards being over-represented and the Town Ward is under-represented. A balanced representation would reflect only a plus or minus deviation of 10%.

A map showing the ward boundaries is attached.

Review Process

The review process involves a number of steps:

1. The Council resolves to undertake the review
2. Public submission period opens
3. Information provided to the community for discussion
4. Public submission period closes
5. The Council considers all submissions and relevant factors and makes a decision
6. The Council submits a report to the Local Government Advisory Board (the Board) for its consideration
7. If a change is proposed, the Board submits a recommendation to the Minister for Local Government (the Minister).

Any changes approved by the Minister will be in place for the next ordinary election in 2023 where possible.

Factors to be considered

When considering changes to wards and representation, Schedule 2.2 of the Act specifies five factors that must be taken into consideration by the local government as part of the review process:

1. Community Interest
2. Physical and topographic features
3. Demographic trends
4. Economic factors
5. Ratio of Councillors to Electors in the wards

The Board offers the following interpretation of these factors.

1. Community Interest

The term community interest has a number of elements. These include a sense of community identity and belonging, similarities in the characteristics of the residents of a community and similarities in the economic activities. It can also include dependence on the shared facilities in a district as reflected in the catchment areas of local schools, volunteer groups and sporting teams, or the circulation areas of local newspapers. Neighbourhoods, suburbs and towns are important units in the physical, historical and social infrastructure and often generate a feeling of community and belonging.

2. Physical and topographic features

These may be natural or man-made features that will vary from area to area. Water features such as rivers and catchment boundaries may be relevant considerations. Foothills regions, parks and reserves may also be relevant as may other man-made features such as railway lines and highways.

3. Demographic trends

Several measurements of the characteristics of human populations, such as population size, and its distribution by age, gender, occupation and location provide important demographic information. Current and projected population characteristics will be relevant as well as similarities and differences between areas within the local government.

4. Economic factors

Economic factors can be broadly interpreted to include any factor that reflects the character of economic activities and resources in the area. This may include the industries that occur in a local government area (or the release of land for these) and the distribution of community assets and infrastructure such as road networks.

5. Ratio of Councillors to Electors in the wards

It is expected that each local government will have similar ratios of Electors to Councillors across the wards of its district. A balanced representation would be reflected in the ratio deviation being plus or minus 10% for all wards.

Options to consider

The Council will consider the following options and members of the community may suggest others:

- Option 1:** Maintain the current ward system
- Option 2:** Create three wards (East, West and Central) using the areas of economic activity boundaries with Central Ward being the Town Ward.
- Option 3:** Dispense with wards

The attached map indicates the options as noted above.

Also under consideration will be the number of Councillors for each ward and the district.

As an example, you may consider that fewer Councillors will provide a good representation and may result in financial savings and more effective and efficient decision making.

The names of the wards will also be considered, rather than using West, East, Town and Central you may wish to use the traditional Aboriginal names for localities, or the names of the pioneering families in the district.

Public submissions

Members of the community are invited to make a written submission about any aspect of ward boundaries and representation and lodge it at:

Shire of Northam
395 Fitzgerald St, OR
PO BOX 613
NORTHAM WA 6401
Email: records@northam.wa.gov.au

All submissions must be received by 5pm on

Thank you for your interest and involvement in this review. Council welcomes your comments on any matters that may assist it to make informed and responsible decisions for the benefit of the people of the Shire of Northam.

SHIRE PRESIDENT
CHRISTOPHER ANTONIO

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
JASON WHITEAKER

ASSESSMENT OF OPTIONS

FEATURES OF THE DISTRICT

Community of Interest

Northam townsite is the commercial and service centre of the district and is used by residents from not only the Shire of Northam but surrounding districts.

Northam Education Centres:

- two high schools (year 7 to year 12)
- four primary schools (kindergarten to year 6)
- two pre-kindergarten
- one early learning centre
- one education support centre
- Central Regional TAFE
- Muresk Institute (WA Government, Department of Training and Workforce Development).

Northam also supports an aquatic centre, recreation centre, library, town hall, sporting groups, emergency services and other volunteer groups.

Northam offers a wide variety of services including a caravan park, shopping, dining, hotels, plumbing, electrical, building, maintenance, vehicle purchase and maintenance, hospital, medical and dental, optometry, podiatry, hearing, veterinary, Bilya Koort Boodja, service stations and funeral services.

Bakers Hill town site offers shops, dining, veterinary, one primary school (kindergarten to year 6), out of school hours care, recreation centre, sporting groups, volunteer groups, volunteer bush fire brigade, hotel and a brewery. An RV overnight stay is also proposed to be developed.

Wundowie town site provides RV overnight stay, library, shopping, emergency services (Volunteer Fire and Rescue and Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade), volunteer groups, primary school (kindergarten to year 6), early learning, medical centre and a town hall.

Outside the main town sites there are communities of interest which include local halls, broad acre farming and pastoralists, community groups and Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades.

Physical and topographic features

The Shire of Northam has four main arterial roads:

- Great Eastern Highway which bisects the district
- Northam-Toodyay Road running north from the Highway
- Northam-York Road running south east from the Highway
- Northam-Pithara Rd running north east from the highway

The river bisects the district from west to east.

Demographic trends

In 2016 the population of the Shire of Northam was 11,112. Despite new infrastructure and the rise in profile of the Shire over the last five years, the population has increased

slightly in 2021 with the resident population numbered at 11,358 and a population density of 7.51 persons per square kilometre over an area of 1,432 square kilometres.

From June 2020 to June 2021, population growth has occurred as follows:

- Bakers Hill 0.36%
- Wundowie 0.08%
- Northam 0.51%
- Rural Districts 0.28%

Economic factors

The Shire of Northam has provided economic growth with a new location for Coles, new businesses such as Aldi, Spud Shed, Dome, Lume and KFC as well as new shops in the Boulevard and the Coles complex. Farming and agriculture also play a high part in the economic structure of Northam as does the light industrial areas.

Ratio of Councillors to Electors

This is the current situation:

Ward	Number of Electors	Number of Councillors	Councillor to Elector Ratio	% Ratio Deviation
West	1176	2	1:588	22.70%
Central	1163	2	1:582	23.56%
East	552	1	1:552	27.44%
Town	4716	5	1:943	-23.99%
TOTAL	7607	10	1:761	Not applicable

The % ratio deviation gives a clear indication of the % difference between the average Councillor to Elector ratio for the whole local government and the Councillor/Elector ratio for each ward.

It can be seen there is a significant imbalance in representation across the Shire with the West, Central and East Wards being over-represented and the Town Ward, under-represented. A balanced representation would reflect only a plus or minus deviation of 10%.

A comparison with surrounding and similar local government areas is provided below:

LGA	Number of Electors	Number of Councillors	Councillor to Elector Ratio
York	2823	7	1:403
Toodyay	3453	8	1:432
Collie	6443	11	1:586
Mundaring	7231	12	1:603
Narrogin	3243	9	1:360
Northam	7607	10	1:761

Ward	Electors	8 Member Council			9 Member Council		
		Number of Councillors	Elector Ratio	% Ratio Deviation	Number of Councillors	Elector Ratio	% Ratio Deviation
TOTAL	7607	8	1:951	0.00%	9	1:845	0.00%

Ward	Electors	10 Member Council			11 Member Council		
		Number of Councillors	Elector Ratio	% Ratio Deviation	Number of Councillors	Elector Ratio	% Ratio Deviation
TOTAL	7607	10	1:761	0.00%	11	1:692	0.00%

Option 1 – Maintain current ward boundaries

The following is an assessment of the current situation against the factors.

Community Interest

Ward boundaries do not reflect town or rural interests or current economic activities.

Physical and topographic features

Ward boundaries do not reflect physical or topographic features. Refer to Attachment 3.

Demographic trends

Ward boundaries do not reflect demographic trends and are not determined by population characteristics

Economic factors

Ward boundaries do not reflect economic activities. The wards are economically diverse with light industrial and commercial areas.

Ratio of Councillors to Electors

There is a significant imbalance in representation across the Shire with the West, Central and East wards being over-represented and the Town ward being under-represented.

For comparison below is 10 Councillors for the four wards, and nine Councillors for four wards

Ward	Number of Electors	10 Member Council			9 Member Council		
		Number of Councillors	Councillor to Elector Ratio	% Ratio Deviation	Number of Councillors	Elector Ratio	% Ratio Deviation
West	1176	2	1:588	22.70%	2	1:588	30.43%
Central	1163	2	1:582	23.56%	2	1:582	31.20%
East	552	1	1:552	27.44%	1	1:552	34.69%
Town	4716	5	1:943	-23.99%	4	1:1179	-39.49%
TOTAL	7607	10	1:761		9	1:845	

The following comparison is with 11 and 12 Councillors for the four wards

Ward	Electors	12 Member Council			11 Member Council		
		Number of Councillors	Elector Ratio	% Ratio Deviation	Number of Councillors	Elector Ratio	% Ratio Deviation
West	1176	2	1:588	7.24%	2	1:588	14.97%
Central	1163	2	1:582	8.27%	2	1:582	15.91%
East	552	2	1:276	56.46%	1	1:552	20.18%
Town	4716	6	1:786	-23.99%	6	1:786	-13.66%
TOTAL	7607	12	1:634		11	1:692	

In the 12 Member Council comparison an extra Councillor was added to East ward and to Town ward which created an even greater ratio deviation. It is noted in the 11 Member Council comparison that whilst increasing the number of Councillors in the Town ward to six and leaving East ward at one improves the ratio deviation closer it is still not within recommended levels.

Option 2: Create three wards

To assess the situation if the Shire created three wards (East, West and Central) using the areas of economic activity boundaries with Central Ward being the former Town Ward. The following is an assessment against the factors.

Community Interest

All wards share a common community of interest overall as containing residential townsites and services including schools and recreational facilities. The Central ward is predominately residential and is made up of the regional service centre of the Avon Valley and Central Wheatbelt. The East and West Wards contain smaller residential areas. All wards are economically diverse with agriculture, industrial and commercial activities.

Physical and topographic features

Wards would be more distinguishable with the West ward bounded by its usual western end with the new part of the boundary being near Chitty Road, Toodyay-Northam Road, the west side of Spencers Brook Road, and Spencers Brook -York Road to Leaver Road. East ward would be bounded by new location of east of Spencers Brook-York Road, Spencers Brook Road. Central (formerly Town) would remain the same taking the greater number of Electors. Refer to Attachment 3.

Demographic trends

Ward boundaries do not reflect demographic trends.

Economic factors

Ward boundaries do not reflect economic activities. The wards are economically diverse with light industrial and commercial areas.

Ratio of Councillors to Electors

There is a significant imbalance in representation across the Shire with the West, Central and East wards being over-represented and the Town ward being under-represented.

Ward	Electors	9 Member Council			10 Member Council		
		Number of Councillors	Elector Ratio	% Ratio Deviation	Number of Councillors	Elector Ratio	% Ratio Deviation
West	1726	2	1:863	-2.10%	2	1:863	-13.45%
Central	4716	5	1:943	-11.59%	6	1:786	-3.33%
East	1165	2	1:583	31.08%	2	1:583	23.43%
TOTAL	7607	9	1:634		10	1:761	

The deviation ratio with nine Councillor in three wards is still too great while the deviation for 10 Councillors doesn't provide the correct percentages.

Ward	Electors	11 Member Council	12 Member Council
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		Number of Councillors	Elector Ratio	% Ratio Deviation	Number of Councillors	Elector Ratio	% Ratio Deviation
West	1726	3	1:575	16.80%	3	1:575	9.24%
Central	4716	6	1:786	-13.66%	7	1:674	-6.28%
East	1165	2	1:583	15.77%	2	1:583	8.11%
TOTAL	7607	11	1:692		12	1:634	

With eleven Councillors the deviation ratio is still too great and would not provide the equal distribution required. Whilst the deviation ratio with twelve Councillors is certainly closer, however the cost of having two extra Councillors would have to be considered.

Option 3: Dispense with wards

The following is to explore an assessment of dispensing with wards and the effect that may have on the service provided to Electors.

Community Interest

Community interests are not reflected by the local government boundaries. There are commonalities in the communities of interest across the Shire. This includes the dependence of shared facilities including schools, recreational facilities, and sporting teams.

Physical and topographic features

The district boundaries do not follow topographical or physical features.

Demographic trends

The major growth is within the town areas with some growth in smaller hobby farms in the regional areas.

Economic factors

District boundaries do not reflect areas of economic activities as the Shire is economically diverse geographically with light industrial/commercial areas and education facilities.

Ratio of Councillors to Electors

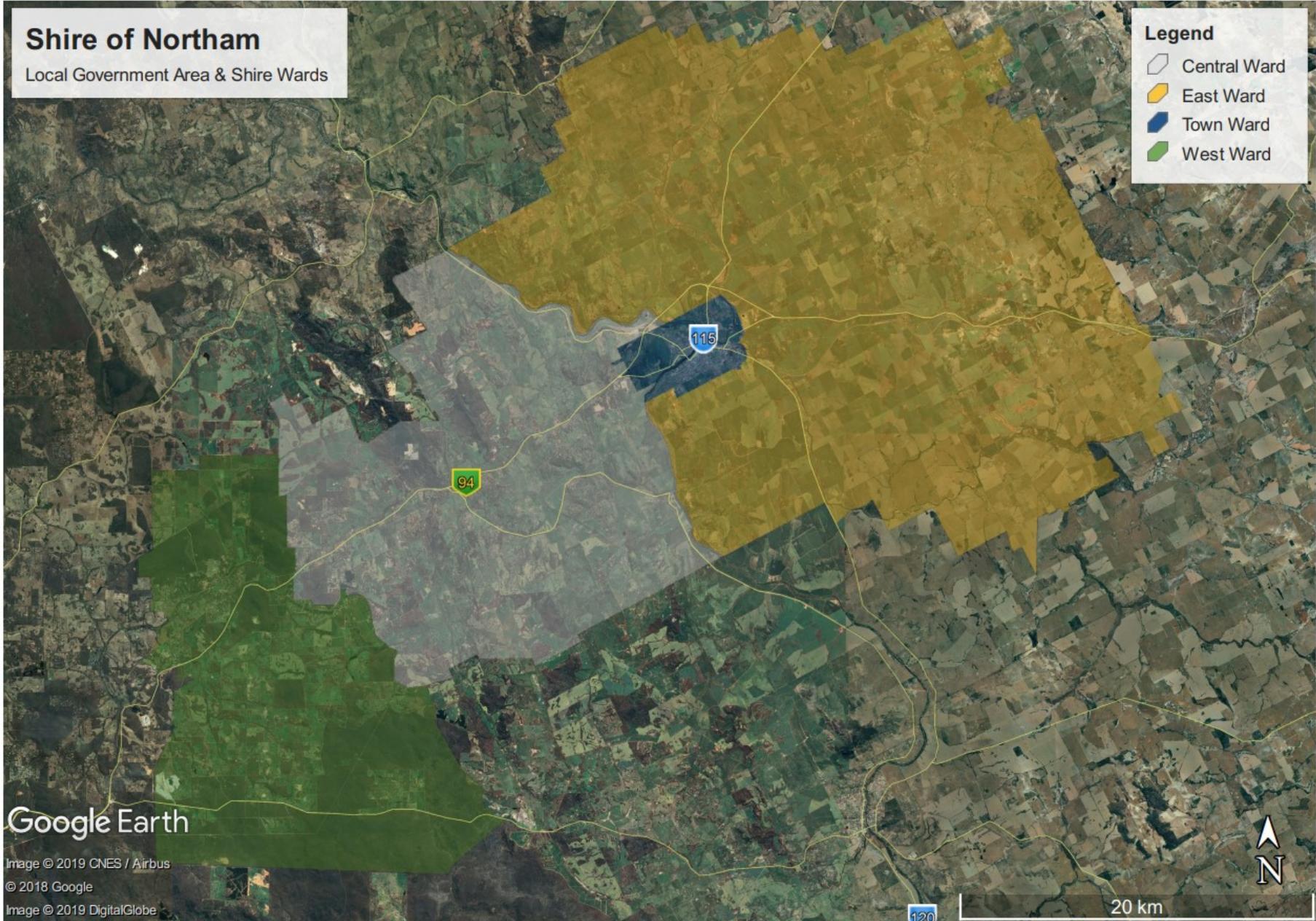
This option results in the following:

Ward	Electors	8 Member Council			9 Member Council		
		Number of Councillors	Elector Ratio	% Ratio Deviation	Number of Councillors	Elector Ratio	% Ratio Deviation
TOTAL	7607	8	1:951	0.00%	9	1:845	0.00%

Ward	Electors	10 Member Council			11 Member Council		
		Number of Councillors	Elector Ratio	% Ratio Deviation	Number of Councillors	Elector Ratio	% Ratio Deviation
TOTAL	7607	10	1:761	0.00%	11	1:692	0.00%

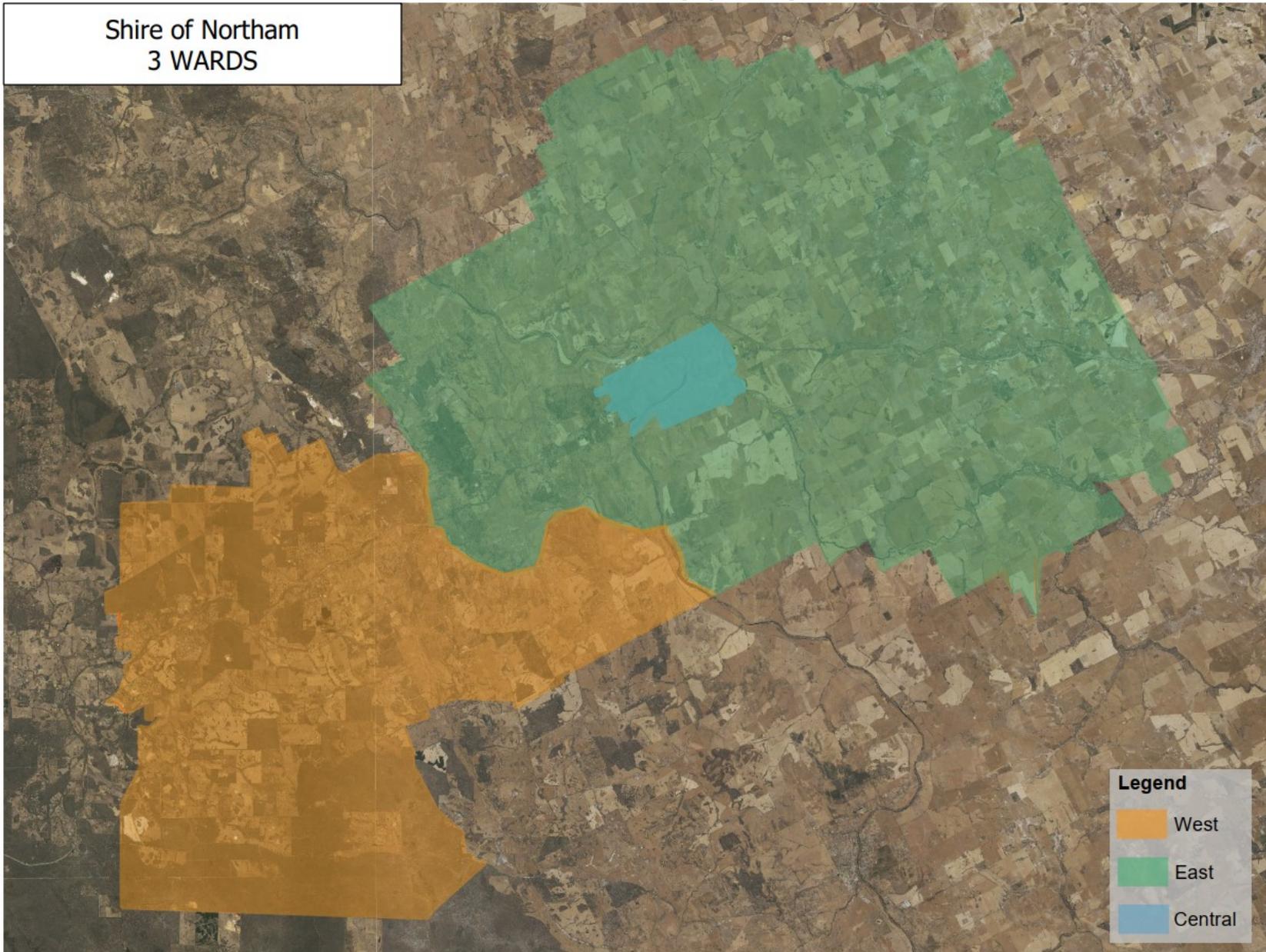
This option results in a balanced representation across the Shire. The eight Councillor option would provide the most financial savings and could lead to more efficient and effective savings.

Current 4 Ward Structure (Option 1)



3 Ward Structure (Option 2)

Shire of Northam
3 WARDS



Legend

- West
- East
- Central