

*Subject to approval at the next meeting*

ELECTORAL REVIEW SUB-COMMITTEE

25 March 2013 at 6.00 pm

Present:- Councillors Chapman [Chairman – on Election], Bower, Mrs Brown, (substituting for one of the Conservative Vacancies) and Nash.

7. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

The Sub-Committee

RESOLVED

That Councillor Chapman be elected Chairman for the meeting.

8. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Dendle and Gammon. The Sub-Committee noted that Councillors Chapman and Charles were acting as their substitutes.

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Monitoring Officer has advised Members of interim arrangements to follow when making declarations of interest. They have been advised that for the reasons explained below, they should make their declarations on the same basis as the former Code of Conduct using the descriptions of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

Reasons

- The Council has adopted the Government's example for a new local code of conduct, but new policies and procedures relating to the new local code are yet to be considered and adopted.
- Members have not yet been trained on the provisions on the new local code of conduct.
- The definition of Pecuniary Interests is narrower than the definition of Prejudicial Interests, so by declaring a matter as a Prejudicial Interest, that will cover the requirement to declare a Pecuniary Interest in the same matter.

Where a member declares a "Prejudicial Interest", this will, in the interests of clarity for the public, be recorded in the minutes as a Prejudicial and Pecuniary Interest.

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

10 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2012 were approved by the Sub-Committee as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

11. FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND ON THE ELECTORAL REVIEW OF ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England published its final recommendations on the review of Arun District Council on 26 February 2013. All Members of the Council had been provided with a copy, including the relevant maps. The recommendations from the Commission had been attached to the agenda.

The Chairman asked the Sub-Committee if it had any views that it wished to express with regard to these final recommendations.

The Sub-Committee agreed that although a reduction in Council size from 56 to 54 Councillors was not massively different the review had been a useful exercise to undertake. Despite this, criticism was made about the consequential parish changes as these created Parish wards that were no longer coterminous with the District wards. The Sub-Committee accepted that although nothing further could be done to change the final recommendations, the concerns expressed over the Town and Parish warding arrangements should be formally placed on record via these minutes. There was also concern that these changes could confuse the electorate.

Further concern was expressed with regard to the recommendations for Littlehampton which saw changes to include 3 new wards. Similarly, the changes for Bognor Regis saw an increase in wards from 4 to 6. Other comments made focused on the belief that the Commission through these recommendations had demonstrated its objective to try and remove single Member wards. The final arrangements for Angmering & Findon and Arundel & Walberton were cited as such examples as they both saw a merger into combined wards.

The Head of Democratic Services confirmed that the next stage for the Commission would be to lay a draft Order with these changes before Parliament which would confirm that the changes would come into force at the next District and Town and Parish Elections in May 2015. She agreed with the views expressed by the Sub-Committee in that there would now be a lack of coterminosity between Parish and District wards which would make the election process a real challenge.

It was outlined to Members that with the current priorities facing the Election team in preparing for the County Election, there had been insufficient

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time to look fully at the implications but that little could be progressed about what needed to be done until the final Order was confirmed by Parliament.

Following some further discussion, the Sub-Committee noted the Electoral Commission's final recommendations on Electoral Review for Arun District Council.

12. FEEDBACK ON THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER ELECTIONS AND POLLING STATION TRIALS

The Head of Democratic Services firstly provided the Sub-Committee with a verbal report back following the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections held in November 2012.

The main issues for the Sub-Committee to note related to the very low turnout which was 14.8% within Arun, slightly below the 15.1% national figure. The most common reason for not voting, from those surveyed by the Electoral Commission, had been down to a general lack of awareness with 55% of respondents stating that they knew nothing at all or not very much about what the elections were about. Late legislation had also caused issues for the Electoral Services team who only knew how much funding was being provided 3 weeks before the election timetable commenced. Feedback received from candidates nationally outlined that there were difficulties experienced in getting the 100 signatures needed and in raising the £5k deposit required.

No issues had been raised in the Council's arrangements at Arun with the Council meeting the Returning Officer's performance standards in most part. The Head of Democratic Services informed members that there was an outstanding issue about the postal vote statement used which might result in the Council being marked as below performance. This issue was ongoing.

The Head of Democratic Services then verbally reported on the Polling Station trials that had been undertaken and explained that reviews had taken place in instances where premises were no longer available and for others where the Sub-Committee had been keen to amalgamate stations rather than maintain lots of smaller ones. These trials had been undertaken for the November Police and Crime Commissioner Elections and a table illustrating the current position and feedback received was circulated at the meeting.

The Sub-Committee was advised that other than Poling, it was proposed that the trials continue for the County Council Elections on 2 May 2013 and in view of the low turnout experienced in November. The trials in place had been supported from consultation undertaken with Ward and County Councillors but that limited feedback had been received from electors as to whether they felt that the arrangements had worked or not.

The Head of Democratic Services outlined that for Poling it was proposed that a polling station be located in the village in view of the deep concern expressed about only being able to vote in Arundel. With the help of the owners of Fairplace Barn it had been possible to identify a way of making the building accessible through using a previously unavailable entrance. This

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arrangement would be trialled at the forthcoming Angmering By-Election to be held on 18 April 2013 and then again for the County Elections in May 2013. The outcome of the assessment of the voting figures would then determine what decision would be made as to whether this arrangement would continue or not.

The Sub-Committee was advised that there were 2 new areas where remedial action had had to be taken for the May elections. These both related to polling stations located in Bognor Regis. The table circulated provided the detail relating to these changes which had both been supported by Ward Councillors.

Finally, Members were advised that there was a new requirement to undertake a full review of Polling Stations starting from 1 October 2013 and so the feedback from the County Elections and from the Sub-Committee would be used to inform this.

The Sub-Committee then noted the contents of the verbal update provided and the feedback table circulated at the meeting.

13. ELECTORAL REGISTRATION – UPDATE

The Head of Democratic Services provided the Sub-Committee with a verbal update on electoral registration.

Firstly, Members received an update on the annual canvass arrangements for 2013, as a different timetable needed to be in place due to the preparations for individual elector registration.

Turning to the introduction of individual elector registration, the Head of Democratic Services circulated an information sheet which had been developed by the Cabinet Office. This set out a timetable that needed to be worked to in preparing for and implementing individual Electoral Registration.

The Head of Democratic Services explained the transition to the new system which would be an extremely labour intensive piece of work. She outlined that the implementation plan circulated aimed to help Members understand how much work had to be completed in planning for the new system. Although grant money would be received from the Cabinet Office for this purpose, the amount to be received was not yet known but it was likely that the Election team would have to grow in terms of staffing numbers to ensure that the large amounts of work that would to be undertaken would be completed in time.

Discussion took place on the intention of the process and that it would be interesting to see how individual Electoral Registration might affect the already poor response rate to the annual canvass. The Sub-Committee was doubtful that this change would increase numbers and suspected that it would have the opposite effect.

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Following some discussion, the Sub-Committee received and noted the updates provided.

(The meeting concluded at 6.30 pm)