

Subject to approval at the next meeting

ELECTORAL REVIEW SUB-COMMITTEE

28 November 2017 at 6.00 pm

Present:- Councillors Gammon (Chairman), Wotherspoon (Vice-Chairman), Bower, Chapman, Elkins, Haymes and Purchase.

[Note:- Councillor Purchase was absent from the meeting during consideration of the items considered in Minute 1 to Minute 4 (Part)].

1. APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence had been received from Councillor Charles.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

A Declaration of Interest was made by:

- Councillor Haymes
- This was a Personal Interest
- Relating to Agenda Item 5 (Community Governance Review – Felpham and Yapton) as he was Chairman of Yapton Parish Council

3. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2016 were approved by the Sub-Committee as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. START TIMES

The Chairman proposed and the Sub-Committee agreed that the matter of Start Times be considered as an urgent item. This was because as this was the first meeting of the Sub-Committee in this Municipal Year, the start times for the remainder of 2017-18 needed to be approved.

The Sub-Committee, therefore

RESOLVED

That its start times for meetings during the remainder of 2017/2018 be 6.00 pm.

5. COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

In the absence of the Group Head of Policy, the Chief Executive presented the report setting out the detail of a request to undertake a Community Governance Review of the parish boundaries affecting Felpham and Yapton Parish Councils.

The Chief Executive explained that at this stage, the Council needed to first decide whether to carry out this review. Both Parishes concerned had confirmed their support to the changes and it was the view of Officers that the review should commence. The Chief Executive outlined that if approval to commence was given, then by statute, the review would need to be concluded within a twelve month period from the day on which the terms of reference were agreed by Full Council. It was explained that for each Community Governance Review, the Council had to meet the costs occurred in undertaking these reviews which included a compulsory consultation exercise.

In discussing whether to decide to proceed with the review, the Sub-Committee confirmed that it supported the proposals put forward by both Felpham and Yapton Parish Councils. This was because approximately 97% of the new development at Blake's Mead fell within Felpham Parish Council.

In terms of the associated cost that the District Council would need to bear, and in challenging financial times, the Chief Executive was asked if there was a broad provision within the Council's budget that could accommodate this. The Chief Executive outlined that for this review the cost would be minimal and that a typical cost of a review was in the region of £5-10k. The Chief Executive provided reassurance that the Council had provision within its 2018-19 Budget to accommodate such costs, as the Council did not have a choice on the funding arrangements.

The Sub-Committee

RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL – That

- (1) a community Governance Review to look at the request from Felpham Parish Council to consider altering the Felpham/Yapton Parish Boundary is undertaken; and
- (2) a report be made to Full Council with the terms of reference for the review; the method of how the review will be carried out; and the timetable.

6. COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW – BARNHAM AND EASTERGATE

In the absence of the Group Head of Policy, the Chief Executive presented the report setting out the detail of a request to carry out a Community Governance Review of the Barnham and Eastergate Parish Councils.

The Sub-Committee was informed that this request presented a much bigger issue for the Council to consider in comparison to the last agenda item discussed. This review related to the merge of Barnham and Eastergate Parish Councils without any other boundary changes.

Both Parish Councils had undertaken a lot of background work and had submitted a joint request to merge in order to provide improvements to community engagement and local democracy; more effective and convenient delivery of local council services; and to resolve anomalies around post codes and parishes following the creation of new housing developments.

Before inviting the Sub-Committee to make comments, Members were introduced to the Chairman of Eastergate Parish Council, Councillor Chris Allington. With the permission of the Sub-Committee, he explained the benefits that a merge of the two Parish Councils would bring. These points had been set out in the joint submission letter from Barnham and Eastergate Parish Councils as attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

In discussing the proposals, the reasons for the merge were agreed by the Sub-Committee, though it was outlined that this review would generate a lot of public interest and would most likely require the need to conduct two consultation exercises, the substantial cost needing to be met by the District Council. Once again, these costs would be budgeted for in the Council's 2018-19 Budget.

Following discussion, the Sub-Committee

RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL – That

- (1) a Community Governance Review to look at the request from Barnham & Eastergate Parish Councils to combine the two Parish Councils undertaken; and
- (2) a report is made to Full Council with the terms of reference for the review; the method of how the review will be carried out; and the timetable.

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7. REVIEW OF THE TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE ELECTORAL REVIEW SUB-COMMITTEE

The Committee received a report from the Group Head of Policy stating that the Council's Constitution was undergoing a major review. The report before Members was seeking views on re-drafted terms of reference for the Electoral Review Sub-Committee.

The Sub-Committee was advised that the terms of reference for all Committees, Sub-Committees and Panels were being reviewed so that the full review of Part 3, Responsibility for Functions, could be concluded after Full Council on 10 January 2018.

The Sub-Committee

RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL – That

(1) the revised terms of reference for the Electoral Review Sub-Committee, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved and updated in Part 3, Responsibility for Functions in the Constitution; and

(2) the Group Head of Council Advice & Monitoring Officer be authorised to make any further consequential changes to the Constitution.

8. PROPOSALS FOR PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY BOUNDARIES

In the absence of the Group Head of Policy, the Chief Executive reminded the Sub-Committee of the report it had received from the then Head of Democratic Services at its last meeting (11 October 2016) outlining the initial proposals for new Parliamentary constituencies in England.

As these proposals affected three constituencies within the Arun District, the Sub-Committee had been asked if it wished to consider making any form of representation to the Boundary Commission for England on their proposals by its deadline date. The Sub-Committee's view was that a response should be sent to the Boundary Commission confirming that the Council supported the initial recommendations and this had been done.

The Sub-Committee was advised of the confirmed changes for the area which were:

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- The Barnham District Ward would move from the Arundel & South Downs constituency into the Bognor Regis & Littlehampton constituency affecting the polling districts of Aldingbourne, Barnham and Eastergate; and
- The Angmering polling district would move from the Arundel & South Downs constituency into the Worthing West constituency.

The Sub-Committee then noted the update provided.

9. REVIEW OF THE WEST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTION ON 4 MAY 2017 AND PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION HELD ON 8 JUNE 2017

In presenting this report, the Chief Executive (and Returning Officer) outlined that it reviewed the arrangements that had been put in place for the West Sussex County Council and Parliamentary Elections that had taken place on 4 May and 8 June 2017

Members were provided with information on election planning, polling day and verification/count arrangements. The Chief Executive emphasised the significant challenge of planning for the three Parliamentary constituencies whilst also covering the West Sussex County Council election. He referred to the complexity involved and stated that, in view of this, he was pleased with the positive outcome.

It was pointed out that due to the management restructuring exercise that was ongoing at that time, the complex planning for the two elections had had to be carefully managed and had presented a real challenge. This was because the 8 June Election had been unexpected and announced during the election timetable for the West Sussex County Council Election on 4 May 2017. The decision had therefore been taken, with the Corporate Management Team, to identify the management of both elections as a major project for the Council. It had been recognised that a much larger staff resource would be required to support the run up to the polls as well as managing the verifications and counts. The Chief Executive praised the corporate support received from staff that helped achieve the key tasks in the election timetable.

He highlighted the following activities:

Election Timetable

It was noted that meetings had been held with the key staff involved that considered the Council's processes and systems; and the reports made by Presiding Officers from polling day were reviewed and actioned where required. The analysis had been considered by the Corporate Management Team and no issues of significance had been raised. Identified areas of improvement were included in future project plans.

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The Chief Executive also highlighted:

- There had been severe problems with the previous election software and so a new software provider had been contracted which had been installed and was up and running for the two elections.
- Call volumes to the Call Centre increased significantly ahead of a Parliamentary election. The Council allowed for this in project plans by increasing resources to Arun Direct for the period of the election timetable.
- Turnout, as anticipated, had been high across all elections. There were some queues, at Polling Stations, but the Council had additional staff in reserve which helped reduce queues quickly. It was recognised that the nature of these elections meant a very challenging day for staff.
- It was noted that there had been an ongoing trial allowing Tellers to sit inside at 5 polling stations. It was emphasised that the majority of complaints received on the day requiring the action of the Returning Officer had involved complaints against tellers.

Individual Electoral Registration

The Chief Executive reported on the impact of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) and emphasised that there was still a lack of understanding of the requirements of IER. Electors were struggling to comprehend that registration had two stages:

1. Completing a household enquiry form – so that the local authority would identify who was eligible to vote
2. Then completing an invitation to register form – either online or by hard copy

Verification and Count

The Chief Executive also reported on the verification and count for both elections. The feedback from candidates and agents had been positive with all supporting the different approach adopted to counting for the Parliamentary Election, with verification starting as soon as there were supervisors and staff available on any one table. This had been very strictly controlled by senior managers to avoid any confusion. As a result the count had finished at 4.30 am, much earlier than previous elections.

The Chief Executive recognised the elections' impact on the Elections and Democratic Services Staff. The Elections team had faced the challenge of introducing the major change in legislation in electoral registration and had continued to manage Neighbourhood Plan Referendums – this was in addition to planning for the combined elections on 4 May and 8 June 2017.

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The Chief Executive concluded his report stating that he would not have been able to deliver these elections without the Election Team's commitment and hard work, together with the help of the whole Arun organisation. He thanked staff for the commitment and support he had received.

In discussing nominations, Members were grateful for the staff checking procedures that aided satisfactory completion of the nomination forms.

The Sub-Committee thanked the Corporate Management Team, Democratic Services and all Staff that had contributed to two successful elections.

The Sub-Committee then considered the report's recommendations which were agreed.

The Sub-Committee

RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL – That

- (1) the report be noted; and
- (2) support be given to the Returning Officer to implement suggested improvement to the Elections process.

(During the course of the discussion on this item, Councillor Purchase declared a Personal Interest as a Candidate and Agent for the West Sussex County Council Election held on 4 May 2017.)

(The meeting concluded at 6.59 pm)