

Electoral Review Committee

MINUTES OF THE ELECTORAL REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 26 JUNE 2023 AT KENNET ROOM - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Ashley O'Neill (Chairman), Cllr Gavin Grant (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling, Cllr Jacqui Lay, Cllr Ian McLennan, Cllr Paul Oatway QPM and Cllr Stuart Wheeler

Also Present:

Cllr Gordon King and Cllr Suzanne Wickham

18 **Election of Chairman 2023/24**

The Democratic Services Officer opened the meeting and called for nominations for Chairman for 2023/24.

It was,

Resolved:

To elect Cllr Ashley O'Neill as Chairman for 2023/24.

19 **Election of Vice-Chairman 2023/24**

The Chairman called for nominations for Vice-Chairman for 2023/24.

It was,

Resolved:

To elect Cllr Gavin Grant as Vice-Chairman for 2023/24.

20 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors Ernie Clark and Allison Bucknell.

Councillor Bucknell attended part of the meeting remotely.

21 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 April 2023 were presented, and it was,

Resolved:

To approve and sign the minutes as a true and correct record.

22 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations.

23 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no announcements.

24 **Public Participation**

The Chairman invited the registered speakers to address the Committee under each relevant agenda item.

25 **Community Governance Review 2022/23 - Consultation on Additional Draft Recommendations**

The Chairman provided details of the background of the ongoing Community Governance Review and presented a report on the consultation on the Additional Draft Recommendations, agreed by Committee on 20 April 2023.

For each recommendation the Chairman along with officers presented summaries of the responses to the consultation and issues that had been raised, before the Committee discussed the available options and determined what action to take.

It was noted that 19 responses were received on the online consultation portal during the consultation period of 10 May 2023 – 7 June 2023. There were also 8 further representations provided by email. All responses were included within Appendix A of the report.

Additional Draft Recommendation 1

Proposed changes to the boundaries and internal arrangements of Heywood Parish Council and Westbury Town Council, around the area of the Ham, currently divided between two parishes.

A statement was received from Mr Morland noting his comments on the Westbury Town Council submission and regarding neighbourhood plan details.

A statement was received from Cllr John Masson, Chairman of Heywood Parish Council regarding the reason for Heywood's original scheme proposal, and disputing the submissions made by Westbury Town Council.

A statement was received from Cllr Philip Harcourt of Westbury Town Council clarifying how the Town Council's proposals had come about, and that it was felt that the process had not gone smoothly and therefore the Town Council was now of the opinion that its preferred outcome would be for the boundaries to remain as they were.

A statement was received from Cllr Mike Sutton of Westbury Town Council, further confirming that the Town Council had submitted its proposal to initiate a

debate on possible options for boundary changes. Attention was drawn to the previous inclusion of Vivash Urban Park in a recommendation by the Committee due to insufficient information.

The Unitary Division Member for Westbury East, Cllr Gordon King, noted that in addition to being the division member, he was also a Westbury Town Council Member, clarifying that he had made his own submission, separately to that of the Town Council. He contended that the Ham had always been part of Westbury and the old industrial estate of Westbury was locally known as Westbury Area Trading Estate, not West Wilts Trading Estate. Cllr King confirmed that he supported the position of the Town Council.

The Unitary Division Member for Ethandune which included Heywood, Cllr Suzanne Wickham, commented on the local referencing of the West Wilts Trading Estate, and that there were no voters in that area. Cllr Wickham raised concern regarding the tone and content of the Town Council's latest submission in its comments relating to Heywood.

In response to the public statements, the Chairman noted that the Committee welcomed comments and ideas from all involved, receiving information as part as an evolving process enabled the Committee to make a judgement in line with the set criteria. The matter of Vivash Park came to light through the first consultation process as it had not been provided as part of the initial submissions. The Committee sought further information and legal advice before making additional draft recommendations as the review moved on through the process.

In discussion, the Committee considered that it continued to believe that on balance the area of the Ham represented a distinct community and that leaving it divided would not be in accordance with the statutory criteria for governance reviews.

The Committee confirmed its view that the Ham was an established community with some separation from and more limited connectivity with the rest of the town, and with a very clear boundary in one of the railway lines to exclude Vivash Urban Park, they considered that the character was sufficiently different from the main urban area of the town as to be a community in its own right.

Considering all the responses, the character of the area, the larger part of the existing properties being within Heywood, the Committee upheld its additional draft recommendation.

Additional Draft Recommendation 2

Recommendation 2 had been to reduce the number of councillors for Tidworth and reallocate the existing ward councillor numbers across two wards, with the wards to be named North & West Ward and East & South Ward.

The Committee noted there had been no representations to the consultation. The Committee however agreed to support additional draft recommendation 2 with no amendments, noting it had been the request of the Town Council itself.

Additional Draft Recommendation 4

Recommendation 4 had been to amend the boundaries of Grittleton, Nettleton, and Castle Combe, in response to a request to unify the area known as The Gibb. The amendment was to the proposed boundary line to incorporate one additional property named the Lodge, currently in Castle Combe.

The Committee noted the parish council representations were in support of the additional draft recommendation, however the submission from the owners of the property had highlighted that the proposed new boundary line, although was drawn around their dwelling, did not also include the entirety of their estate, which included out buildings and gardens. The owners also stated a preference to remain wholly in Castle Combe.

The Committee considered the options available which included reverting to the original draft recommendation for the boundary to follow the road line, thus excluding the Lodge from Grittleton, or to extend the boundary line to encompass the entirety of the Lodge estate and grounds, bringing it into Grittleton.

Discussion points included the impact of both options, noting the criteria and that dividing an estate across two parishes would not be in line with the Committees approach to community cohesion and may also raise future issues in terms of planning. It was agreed that depending on the scope of the area of the Lodge estate, it should be included within the area known as the Gibb. The Committee requested that the matter be further investigated and following consultation with the relevant parish councils and resident, the final draft recommendation be delegated to the Director of Legal and Governance, in consultation with the Chairman, for further consultation if appropriate.

Additional Draft Recommendation 5

Recommendation 5 had proposed transfers of land between Yatton Keynell and Biddestone & Slaughterford, mostly involving the area known as Giddea Hall and additionally amended to include one property called Lower Long Dean Mill.

The Committee noted the support by Yatton Keynell parish council. The Committee agreed to support additional draft recommendation 5 with no amendments.

In relation to further recommendations. where the Committee had requested further investigation on a matter, it was agreed to undertake a short consultation with the relevant parties only.

It was therefore,

Resolved:

To delegate to the Director, Legal and Governance, in consultation with the Chairman, the preparation of a detailed Final Recommendations document for consideration of Full Council (Recommendations 1/2/5), and

preparation of an Additional Draft Recommendations for consultation (Recommendations 4).

26 Update on Electoral Division Variance

The Committee received an update on the electoral variance of Wiltshire Council Divisions.

The last Electoral Review was carried out in 2018-2020, with new Divisions for Wiltshire Council effective from May 2021 for the local elections.

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) conducts reviews for two reasons:

1. At the request of the local authority; or
2. If the local authority meets the Commission's intervention criteria:
 - a. If one ward had an electorate of +/-30% from the average electorate for the authority.
 - b. If 30% of all wards had an electorate of +/-10% from the average electorate for the authority.

It was noted that there were currently 20 divisions which had a variant greater than 10%, of those, there were three divisions with a variance greater than 30% two of which were linked to known large scale planned development, not coming forward as planned.

One division of particular note was Purton, which was at 28% over the average, and if it reached 30% this could trigger a review. The LGBCE had confirmed there was no intention to carry out a review before 2025, however one could take place between 2025-29 if the variances remained at such a level.

It was then,

Resolved:

To note the update on Electoral Division variance and to receive a report annually on the variance.

27 Forthcoming Community Governance Review 2023/24

The Committee received a report detailing the remaining CGR requests received by the Council since 2019, as summarised in appendix A with further anomalous boundary situations presented at the meeting.

Parish councils which had submitted requests had been contacted to confirm their proposals remained active, with the view of including them for consideration as part of the 2023/24 CGR. Once confirmation had been received, a final list would be included within the Terms of Reference.

A statement was received from Cllr Roger Evans, Chairman of North Bradley Parish Council in relation to its request for a boundary change to partially revert

back to its previous position, prior to the Electoral Review carried out in 2020/21 by the LGBCE and the subsequent Community Governance Review.

It was advised that the Electoral Review process had been instigated by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), and a Community Governance Review had been undertaken by Wiltshire Council following this, which had been impacted by the outcomes of the Electoral Review. It was clarified that consent of the LGBCE was still currently required to make any further changes to the North Bradley or Trowbridge areas, and that as the areas requested had too few electors to form a viable parish ward for May 2025, it was unlikely consent would be granted on that basis. Instead, a change could occur if the LGBCE consented to change the unitary Divisions boundaries at the same time. However, this would leave a Trowbridge Division permanently undersized, which might therefore be unlikely to be consented.

The Committee considered whether a full review of the areas could result in recommendations which could not therefore be likely enacted, due to the consents required. It noted it had agreed in the 2019/20 review to look at the precise boundary between the two parishes, to address some noted anomalies, and that a limited scope review was permissible. It agreed in the circumstances that such a limited review was appropriate, but would seek clarity from the LGBCE around their potential response to a wider review.

It was then,

Resolved:

That the Committee agreed to:

- 1. Include areas as set out in Appendix A and the additional list of anomalies circulated at the meeting, would be include for review for 2023/24 within the terms of reference, subject to confirmation by the requesting parties.**
- 2. Delegate to the Director Legal and Governance, finalisation and approval of the Terms of Reference for a Community Governance Review 2023/24 after consultation with the Chairman of the Committee. The Director, after consultation with the Chairman, will have the authority to amend the terms of reference at any time if appropriate.**

Cllr Wheeler left the meeting prior to the vote.

Urgent Items

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 3.00 - 5.20 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Lisa Alexander of Democratic Services, direct line 01722 434560, e-mail lisa.alexander@wiltshire.gov.uk

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