

ELECTORAL REVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE ELECTORAL REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 25 JANUARY 2018 AT THE SALISBURY ROOM - COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE.

Present:

Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling, Cllr Richard Clewer (Chairman), Cllr Gavin Grant, Cllr Ian McLennan, Cllr Christopher Newbury, Cllr Ashley O'Neill, Cllr Jonathon Seed (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Stuart Wheeler, Cllr Graham Wright and Cllr Ruth Hopkinson (Substitute)

Also Present:

Cllr Ian Thorn

8 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Clare Cape, who was substituted by Councillor Ruth Hopkinson.

Councillor Ian McLennan gave apologies that he would arrive late to the meeting.

9 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2018 were presented for consideration and it was,

Resolved:

To approve and sign as a true and correct record.

10 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations.

11 **Chairman's Announcements**

Through the Chair there was the following statement:

At the last meeting Cllr Seed raised the question of the three staff submissions received to the review consultation. He questioned whether staff advising the committee could remain impartial if they were involved in the submissions.

The Committee requested that staff be consulted. However, staff were advised erroneously by a member of staff, and without the prior knowledge or approval of the Director for Legal & Democratic Services and the Corporate Director, that any submissions would be anonymous. Whilst incorrect this position must now be supported as it was on that basis that staff have responded.

The Corporate Director and Director for Legal & Democratic Services advise the committee that the submission will be drafted by themselves and the Head of Service for Democratic Services. None of these staff were involved in the staff submissions in any way.

I hope this addresses the valid question raised by Cllr Seed at our last meeting

12 **Public Participation**

There were no questions or statements submitted.

13 **Electoral Review Update**

At its meeting on 11 January 2018 the Committee, having reviewed the available evidence against the valid criteria of governance arrangements, scrutiny arrangements and the representational role of councillors, determined that the most appropriate council-size for the Wiltshire Council area was between 93-99 councillors. In particular the Committee had determined that the community area structure was very significant due to its impact on council governance, engagement and service delivery. Other significant factors included the role played by executive portfolio holders and the relating impact upon committee membership and scrutiny engagement, and the representational role of councillors within a large, rural unitary council.

The Chairman introduced two supplementary documents which explored the impacts of council sizes of 93-99 upon the community areas, average division size, as well as reasoning for the presence of executive portfolio holders and the particular challenges arising from a large, rural authority, including the engagement with and assistance to large numbers of parish councils.

The Committee discussed the information, noting that electoral equality was the most significant factor, and considered which if any of the proposed range of council sizes met that requirement in addition to being supported by other factors. It was argued that the historic nature of the community areas along with their centrality to council governance and service delivery in localities, which would only increase in years to come, justified maintaining a council size which did not make more than minor adjustments to the external boundary of a community area.

It was accepted that even with council sizes at the upper end of the range, significant changes would be made to division boundaries to achieve electoral equality, and the acceptable level of variance from the average division was debated, along with whether it was felt there was a practical level at which no

more area boards could be reduced to 3 members and be as effective as possible.

Other issues discussed included the conclusions of Peer reviews regarding council governance arrangements, whether there had been or would be an overall reduction or increase in the workload of councillors in years to come, the particular challenges posed by rurality, electorate forecasts and updates from the Commission.

During debate a motion for a council-size of 99 to be recommended to Full Council as the figure to be submitted to the Commission was moved by Councillor Jonathon Seed, seconded by Councillor Ian McLennan, and at the conclusion of discussion it was,

Resolved:

That based on the evidence presented the Committee considered 99 to be the appropriate council size and they therefore instructed officers to draft a proposed submission to the LGBCE based on that figure, to be considered by the Committee at its next meeting

14 **Work Programme**

The work programme was noted, with the next meeting to be the 7 February 2018 meeting, ahead of Full Council on 20 February 2018.

15 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 11.30 am - 12.20 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Kieran Elliott of Democratic Services, direct line 01225 718504, e-mail kieran.elliott@wiltshire.gov.uk

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