BOUNDARY AND ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS WORKING PARTY

Minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2023 at 1.00 pm at Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

Present: Councillor Jack Packman (Chair); Councillors Everitt, D Green and Wright

19. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Kup.

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

21. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Everitt proposed, Councillor Green seconded and Members agreed the minutes to be a correct record of the working party meeting held on 5 October 2023.

22. GENERAL PROGRESS UPDATE PRESENTATION

Nick Hughes, Committee Services Manager & Deputy Monitoring Officer introduced the report and made the following comments:

- Democratic Services were working on putting together all the evidence required by the LGBCE as part of the information pack and evidence pack;
- The pulling together of the Housing Development data had been completed with help from Adrian Verrall, Strategic Planning Manager;
- The polling district map had been developed;
- Thanet Villages had been separated out into the individual polling districts;
- The map would be shared with Members;
- The latest Review of Polling stations and places had been sourced;
- Parish electoral arrangements information had also been sourced;
- The Legal Department had confirmed that there were of no Orders for the period under review;
- Westgate-On-Sea Town Council had been created during the period under review;

- It was now possible to give a forecast of the housing development numbers and placing such information on the district map;
- 150 contacts had been added to the stakeholder database. Comms and regeneration teams were assisting with putting this information together;
- Evidence about the committee structure had been sourced;
- Historical information regarding the Outside Bodies that TDC was committed to had been sourced;
- The percentage planning applications processed over the years had been compiled;
- Individual Cabinet Member decisions made over the years under review had been pulled together for comparison purposes;
- The Scrutiny Panel structure had also been looked at.

Next Steps

- Democratic services would be drafting the submission report for consideration by the working party to settle on a specific number of proposed councillors and this would be considered at the 9 November meeting;
- Once the working party agreed on a number this would then be put before Full Council in December for final approval before submission was made to the LGBCE;
- The working party would meet again if Full Council were to come up with a total councillor number different to the one proposed by the working party.

Members made comments as follows:

- Although the issue regarding polling stations was not part of this discussion and review process, it should be noted that it would be challenging to find polling stations;
- The bulk of housing development would be concentrated in certain specific areas of the district like Brooksend in Birchington. This might lead to future exclusion of some voters due to lack of polling stations.

Members noted the update report.

23. EVIDENCE FOR DRAFT SUBMISSION

Nick Hughes led the discussion and made the following comments:

- A report with all the evidence was being drafted by Democratic Services and this would contain information regarding when the Council first moved from a committee system to a cabinet system;
- The report would also be commenting on local government funding, levelling up funds and any relevant governance issues related to Thanet District Council;
- The content would also include comment on strategic leadership, accountability (including scrutiny, regulatory functions and partnerships) and community leadership;
- The assumption was that TDC would remain a cabinet system governed Council and the current portfolio structure would remain the same;
- The Council would be retaining a single Overview and Scrutiny Panel and single Planning Committee;
- The Council would still retain arrangements for Cabinet Members to seat on the Planning Committee;
- There was no intention for TDC to create Area Committees as there were Parish and Town Councils that dealt with issues that would normally be dealt with by Area Committees;
- TDC would be recruiting to a new post of the Casework Member Support Officer;
- The Council would continue to provide ICT equipment to Members.

Members made comments and asked questions as follows:

- Levelling Up Funds and Town Deal Funds were area related and therefore Area Committees would still be able to get involved in these projects;
- KCC were currently looking at changing the Joint Transportation Board approach and have a new format;
- There were previous concerns about combining Governance & Audit Committee functions and Standards Committee. Were there any Councils that had gone ahead and combined these functions?
- Reducing the membership size of some of the committees like the two disciplinary committees would inhibit their work;
- It seemed sensible combining the Boundaries and Electoral Arrangements Working Party and the Constitutional Review Working Party;

- It would be good to start from a proposed position of 36 councillors as the number of councillors for TDC to put forward for the review by the LGBCE;
- However, there was a need to get the view of other political groups;
- It was important to reach cross party consensus;
- The number being put forward was based on the assumption of what Members do at the Council offices. Consideration had not been given on what Members do in their respective wards. Ward work was not documented. How could this issue be addressed?
- The more the councillor number was reduced, the more it would negatively impact the smaller political groups when it came to proportional representation on committees.

Nick Hughes and Colin Carmichael responded as follows:

- Town Deal and Levelling Up Fund projects were focused on one-off specific issues rather than being area focused;
- In instances where Area Committees had been established these committees could make recommendations directly to Cabinet and this could be confusing in terms of the structure for decision making. This led to some Councils removing them from their structures;
- Annex 2 to the report was demonstrating that TDC could run Council business with a reduced number of councillors;
- The proposed model could mean reducing the number of committees by combining some of their functions;
- Some Councils had combined Governance & Audit Committee and Standards Committee. Standards Committee's main function was to provide a pool of members to seat on the standards assessment sub committees;
- If the Standards Committee was no longer going to review recommendations from the Constitutional Review Working Party, then the committee would no longer have much to do, as the working party would be taking their recommendations straight to Full Council;

- The examples given in the presentation on committee sizes were for illustrative purposes only. The report would provide evidence that the Council could still conduct its business with a smaller number of councillors;
- TDC used to be committed to 83 Outside Bodies in 2011 to which it assigned representatives. Currently there were 43;
- Twelve percent of the planning applications were processed through the Planning Committee in 2003, now it was about five percent;
- There were less Licensing Board and Licensing Sub Committee meetings now than they were previously;
- This meant that a lot of applications were now being processed by officers without the need to go to committee;
- Cabinet Member decisions had decreased from 246 in the period 2002-2006 to 54 in 2018-2023;
- There was no evidence that there was a need to increase the number of Overview and Scrutiny Panels from the current one to two or three;
- With all this information before Members what was the view of the working party regarding the proposed number of councillors to put forward to the LGBCE?

- Was 36 a good number to put forward?
- The evidence gathered thus far would support 36 councillors;
- Folkestone District Council had 30 councillors with a population that was less than that of Thanet District;
- The LGBCE would not be giving much weight to the view that councillors were busier in some wards than others in redrawing boundaries for the polling district map;

- The LGBCE felt that councillors were now able to work more efficiently as they had ICT equipment that that they could use for improved communication with residents when conducting ward work.

Councillor Everitt proposed and Councillor Packman seconded that the Boundaries and Electoral Arrangements Working Party put forward a recommendation that a figure of 36 councillors be agreed by Full Council as the proposed total number of councillors to be forwarded to the LGBCE.

Councillor Wright proposed a figure of 40. However, there was no seconder for this proposal.

Members agreed that 36 be the figure to put forward to Full Council.

24. NEXT STEPS

Nick Hughes led the discussion and made the following comments:

- The LGBCE would be given the total number of councillors that the Council was proposing;
- They would then look at all the evidence the Council would have submitted, including the district polling map;
- They would then draw the final map having considered all submissions including submissions made by individual political groups.

Colin Carmichael, Interim CEx said that there were criteria for drawing the district polling map and this was based on evidence.

Members made comments and asked questions as follows:

- There were well defined boundaries between some areas like Ramsgate and Broadstairs. Whilst the review would be looking at the district's ward boundaries, would well defined boundaries have to change?
- Currently there were challenges facing Westwood. This was with regards to whether Westwood would become a parish or would join an existing parish;
- Existing parishes would likely be affected by this review.

Nick Hughes responded to Member comments and questions as follows:

- As soon as the Order was made by Parliament, there would be a redrawing of parishes to reflect the new district ward boundaries via a governance review;
- Democratic Services were now going to write a submissions report that was based on 36 councillors as the proposed number of councillors for the district council;
- Member could now go back to their respective political groups to discuss the proposed number;
- This report would be brought back to the working party at the November meeting.

Members noted the report.

Meeting concluded: 2.02 pm