

BOUNDARY AND ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS WORKING PARTY

Minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2023 at 2.00 pm at Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

Present: Councillor Jack Packman (Chair); Councillors Everitt, Kup, W Scobie and Wright

In Attendance: Councillor Garner

25. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Green, substituted by Councillor Will Scobie.

26. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

27. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Councillor Everitt proposed, Councillor Wright seconded and Members agreed the minutes to be a correct record of the working party meeting held on 26 October 2023.

28. GENERAL PROGRESS UPDATE PRESENTATION

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

- The Strategic Planning Team assisted Democratic Services in reviewing the forecasting tool for more accuracy;
- This led to new figures of estimated population for 2030;
- CiPFA 15 comparators were used to come up with new recommended total number of councillors for the Thanet District Council;
- Elector ratios of the 15 other councils showed that TDC's current situation was on the extreme outlier side of the comparator scale;
- Having 36 councillors would take TDC to the other extreme end of the comparator scale (the extreme right side);
- The Council could therefore not justify a reduction of councillor numbers to 36;
- There was now need to come up with a revised number that was slightly higher than 36 and possibly between 42 and 44.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- Were other Councils currently reviewing their own councillor numbers?
- If they were also conducting their own reviews would these comparator numbers not change?
- Basing the number of electors in the district on the proposed housing development in the district might be based on a faulty formula;
- Where did the Council get the other Councils' numbers?
- Was the information available to the Council on whether those comparator councils had parish councils?

Nick Hughes responded to Member questions and comments as follows:

- Most Councils had done their reviews and were not currently conducting any;

- Folkestone and Dover District Councils had carried out their reviews about five years ago;
- The formula for working out elector numbers might not be perfect. However, that was the one that was forwarded to the Council by the LGBCE;
- Current elector ratio was 1.6 electors per household. This figure is then used to multiply by the anticipated number of properties to be built by 2030 and then added to the current elector numbers;
- Housing development might affect these numbers depending on whether such development was completed or not in the period under review;
- Data for other Council was collected from a national database;
- Officers did not research on the determining whether the 15 Councils that acted as Thanet comparators had parishes or not.

Members noted the report.

29. **SUBMISSION DOCUMENT**

Nick Hughes asked Members whether they had any comments to make regarding the contents of the submission document.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- How would combining the Governance and Audit Committee and Standards Committee into a single committee be done?
- The submission documents seemed that combining these two committees would be done;
- Would committee membership numbers change as a result of changing the total number of councillors from 36 to 44?
- It was important to go with a number that was likely to be acceptable to the LGBCE;
- This review should have been carried out ten years ago;
- Going with a total number of councillor 40 might be too low it was too close to the original number that the working party had proposed;
- Did the LGBCE guidance require the Council to focus on the trend as established by the 15 Councils comparators?
- Was there no risk that in six years' time after 2027 the councillor number would be out of kilt again in comparison to other Councils?
- Could an assumption be added to the report to reflect that other Councils' populations would grow and therefore there would be changes which were likely to require Thanet District Council having to conduct another review earlier than would be the case (i.e. every 10 years)?
- Was it possible for the Council to change this number after this meeting?
- Could a Members Briefing be held before Full Council in order to advise Members on how the recommended total number of councillors of 42 was arrived at?
- Could an updated graph be made available to Members or a narrative explaining the pros and cons be used instead?

Nick Hughes and Ingrid Brown, Head of Legal and Democracy & Monitoring Officer responded to Members questions and comments as follows:

- Discussions held between Nick Hughes and the Section 151 Officer had indicated that the two committees could be combined;
- This approach had been done by other Councils. This could be done at Annual Council when committees would be reconstituted;
- It was however important to consider the merits of combining committees;
- The Council could also decide to change the membership sizes of committees in line with the new total number of councillors adopted;

- If the Council submitted a number that was not suitable the LGBCE would come back to a negative response and that would be the end of the Council's contributions to this stage of the review process;
- The Council had to have regard to what the other Councils (CiPFA 15) were doing. That was what the guidance advised;
- Yes, the risk was there that the new figure could be out of kilter in the next few years. However, the Council could apply to the LGBCE to conduct another review outside of the LGBCE review cycle. That was what Canterbury City Council did and they were currently carrying out their own review;
- Once the recommended number went to Full Council it would not be possible to change it and that was what would be submitted to the Commission;
- Officers would consider adding some wording in the report explaining the pros and cons of the approach taken in deriving the total number of councillors.

As a result of the additional information that was presented to the Boundaries and Electoral Arrangements Working Party, Councillor Everitt proposed, Councillor Kup seconded and Members agreed to recommend to Full Council that a proposed figure of forty-two (42) councillors be total number of TDC councillors to be forwarded to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).

30. NEXT STEPS

Nick Hughes suggested that the working party held one more meeting after the recommendations had been to Full Council. This would then be followed by the submission to the LGBCE before Christmas. The Commission would review the submission in January 2024 and would get back to the Council with a response in March 2024 at which point the council would move to the next stage which is determining whether to adopt single or multi member wards in line with the new total number of Councillors. Political Groups would be free to forward their own proposals to the LGBCE.

Members made comments and asked questions as follows:

- Was it illegal to have a ward with more than three councillors?
- There were parish wards that had four councillors representing a single ward;
- In order to get the public involvement in this review it was important to share widely the information about the review;
- The ward boundaries for Broadstairs Town Council were causing confusion for electors. This issue needed addressing;
- Would the review of polling stations be done by this working party?
- Would the polling station review come up for discussion or just for decision?

Nick Hughes and Ingrid Brown responded to Member questions and comments as follows:

- The maximum number of councillors permitted in a ward could be three;
- The LGBCE would communicate information about the review to the public and the Council would only be signposting residents to this information;
- The Council would provide the stakeholder database to the LGBCE;
- Any current ward boundary issues would be picked up when the Council conducts a governance review as part of this review process;
- The polling stations review would usually be finalised by Full Council;
- If Members wanted a discussion on the polling stations, the review officer could arrange a meeting for that discussion.

Members noted the update.

Meeting concluded: 2.43 pm