

BOUNDARY AND ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS WORKING PARTY

Minutes of the meeting held on 23 April 2024 at 2.00 pm at Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

Present: Councillor Rick Everitt (Chair); Councillors Albon, Boyd, Kup and Wright

In Attendance: Councillor Garner

7. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Councilor Albon proposed, Councillor Kup seconded and Members agreed that Councillor Everitt be the Chair for the meeting.

8. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the following Members:

Councillor Packman, substituted by Councillor Albon;
Councillor Green, substituted by Councillor Boyd.

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

10. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Kup proposed, Councillor Wright seconded and Members agreed the minutes to be a correct record of the working party meeting held on 12 December 2023.

11. PRESENTATION ON POTENTIAL TDC WARDING SUBMISSION

Nick Hughes, Committee Services Manager introduced the item and gave a presentation where the following key points were made:

- Thanet District Council had had its proposal for a councillor number of 42 agreed by the Local Government Boundaries Commission for England (LGBCE);
- Ward consultations on those proposals opened on 19 March 2024 and would end on 27 May 2024;
- The purpose for this working party meeting was to make for the working party to submit proposals on the warding patterns for the district;
- The current consultation by the LGBCE was on warding patterns and number of councillors per ward;
- Individual organisations, political parties and the Council could submit proposals;
- The Commission was looking for views on which communities should be part of the same ward, what facilities like schools, parks, leisure centres and shopping centres did these communities share;
- The Commission would also consider issues that included how communities were divided by features such as major roads or railway lines;
- This whole process was generally handled in a non-political way by officers and the Commission;

- This was a very difficult process for officers as they needed to remain politically neutral, but the proposed warding patterns would naturally be highly politically contentious.

Mr Hughes asked if the Boundaries and Electoral Arrangements Working Party had any proposals to make for consideration by Council.

Members of the working party asked questions and made comments as follows:

- It was important for Council to lay out the ward boundaries in order to ascertain the number of residents in each ward. This would in turn help determine the number of councillors needed for each ward;
- The electoral register numbers were used to determine how many residents were in each ward;
- Had other Councils put forward any proposals for the numbers for councillors for each?
- It was difficult for Councillors to come up with such figures without adequate information on the number of voters in each ward;
- Officers should put together proposals for the working party to consider;
- Would parishing be done first before submitting these proposals?
- The Chair advised the meeting that these proposals would need to be submitted first and once the Council got some feedback from the LGBCE, parishing would then followed;
- This might mean carrying out re-warding within existing boundaries if required;
- After this review would there be wards that were parished between two parish areas?
- How would Councillors forward information to the Commission?
- Three Member wards would have about 8,300 residents, which would be unwieldy;
- The working party would best propose two Member wards;
- Would it be acceptable for the working party to propose two Member wards?
- Two Member wards were ideal at district level and one Member wards at parish level would give more flexibility;
- Re-warding at district level might cause problems for future parish level elections as some parish wards may end up being outside the parish boundaries;
- It was important to start thinking about parishing Westwood Cross.

Nick Hughes responded as follows:

- The issue of an area being deprived or not deprived was not a material consideration for this review process;
- The Commission was looking at electoral equality, that each vote should count equally;
- Councillors could propose a new ward boundaries map. However, this was a very difficult task;
- Members could simply forward proposals such as this community should be under one ward or that there should be such and such a ward without offering a map. Any proposals should be accompanied by valid reasons;
- The Commission would further consult on their proposed boundaries map and a set of criteria;
- If the current situation was that one ward was over represented with the other underrepresented, the review would try to correct that situation to create electoral equity for all areas.

Councillor Everitt proposed, Councillor Kup seconded and Members agreed the following recommendations:

1. That the working party do not make any recommendations on where the electoral boundaries should be;
2. That TDC should submit a consultation response to the LGBCE asking for two Member Wards with a flexibility for one Member Wards where applicable, but wards should not be bigger than this (no three or four member wards).

The working party gave the following as the reasons for the above proposals:

1. Three Member Wards would be too big under the new calculation model to be used;
2. Historically three Member Wards have not worked well;
3. Giving Broadstairs as an example: With the new population estimates Broadstairs based on the current town border would have to be represented by 7.4 councillors to maintain electoral equality. This would mean that using exclusively two member wards would not work, but with seven councillors, three wards with two councillors each and one ward with one councillor would work. Thanet Villages could work in a similar way.

Meeting concluded : 2.40 pm