

CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW WORKING PARTY

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2011 at 9.30 am in Pugin & Rossetti Rooms,
First Floor, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate.

Present: Mr Robin Hills (Chairman); Councillors Mr B Hinchley (Independent Member), K Gregory, Nicholson, Watkins and Wright

In Attendance: Councillor King

12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Hayton.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

14. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Watkins moved, Councillor Gregory seconded and Members agreed the minutes.

The Chairman then signed the minutes.

15. TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE ELECTORAL MATTERS WORKING PARTY

Harvey Patterson, Corporate and Regulatory Services Manager outlined the report, explaining that the Electoral Matters Working Party had been established to conduct the review of polling districts and places. He asked that the Constitutional Review Working Party recommend the changes to the terms of reference outlined in Annex 2 of the report. This would then allow the Electoral Matters Working Party to become a committee that could consider community governance reviews in addition to reviews of polling districts or places or reviews of electoral arrangements before those issues were considered by Council.

He added that the issues relating to electoral registration highlighted in Annex 3 of the report were inappropriate to be included in the terms of reference of the Electoral Matters Working Party. This was because elections and electoral registration were not a Council function. The Council had a duty to appoint a Returning Officer and an Electoral Registration Officer whose personal responsibility was for elections and electoral registration. The Overview and Scrutiny Panel had the power to scrutinise the issues outlined in Annex 3 of the report as they could look at both Council and non Council issues.

Members commented that the Electoral Matters Working Party should be renamed as it was misleading as it did not have the power to look at all electoral matters just those within its narrow terms of reference. They also added that the electoral registration rate was lower than the surrounding districts.

Mr Patterson explained that if the Working Party concurred with the amendments outlined in Annex 2 of the report then a change of name of the Electoral Matters Working Party would be justified. He confirmed that the electoral registration rate was lower than the neighbouring districts and added that that was a legitimate issue that could be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Members added that when the Council considered the Parish Council for Ramsgate all of the reports went straight to Council and did not go via any consideration committee first. Glenn Back, Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager explained that the arrangements for undertaking governance reviews at the time of governance review of Ramsgate were not the same as they are now.

In response to queries from Members Mr Patterson confirmed that how the electoral response rate was calculated could be looked at in comparison with other Councils and cited Shepway District Council as a Council that could be consulted as their electoral response rate had increased very dramatically over a very short space of time.

Mr Back then explained that other Councils such as Dover District Council delivered their initial canvass forms by Royal Mail, however TDC used canvassers to deliver forms as using Royal Mail was more expensive. It would be worth exploring whether such differences could affect the registration rate.

Mr Patterson also added in response to questions from Members that the electoral register could not be cross matched against council tax records as that would be contrary to the Data Protection Act.

Councillor Gregory moved, Councillor Wright seconded and Members agreed that:

“The Constitutional Review Working Party recommend to Standards Committee:

- a) The amendments to the Terms of Reference of the Electoral Matters Working Party as set out in Annex 2 of the report.
- b) That the name of the Electoral Matters Working Party be altered to the Boundary and Electoral Arrangements Working Party”

Meeting concluded: 9.55 am