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## BOUNDARY AND ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS WORKING PARTY

Minutes of the meeting held on 5 October 2023 at 2.00 pm at Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

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

### 12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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

### 13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

### 14. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Everitt proposed, Councillor Kup seconded and Members agreed the minutes to be a correct record of the working party meeting held on 22 August 2023.

### 15. GENERAL PROGRESS UPDATE PRESENTATION

Nick Hughes, Committee Services Manager introduced the report and made the following comments:

- The Council was required to produce evidence for the review that included the following information:
  - Geocoded Electoral Register
  - Current & Forecast Electorate,
  - Forecasting Methodology
  - Housing Development Data,
  - Polling District Maps
  - Polling District Review Report
  - Parish Electoral Arrangements
  - Parish Ward Maps
  - Local Orders & Governance Changes
  - Communications Planning
  - Stakeholder Database
- Local Orders and Governance Changes: This would be information on whether the Council had made any changes since the last review;
- The forecast document had been updated with electoral information and there was a tool for forecasting elector numbers;
- The Council had to identify predictions that were outside this LGBCE model using the challenge data column in the forecast document;
- There were large housing developments in Thanet. If these house numbers were going to be built the corresponding number of electors would be significantly different to the LGBCE ones;
- The Comms and Digital teams were working on collecting data;
- The Legal department had confirmed that the Council did not have any Orders in the period under review;
- Democratic Services were currently collecting stakeholder data;

- BEAWP had agreed at the previous meeting on working towards a councillor number of between 36 and 44;
- It was worth noting that Outside Bodies numbers to which the Council appointed its representatives had significantly decreased in the period under review. The number was half of what it was;
- The Council had changed governance arrangements from a committee system to executive arrangements in the period under review;
- Councillors were now using more of ICT equipment like Chromebook to carry out their councillor role including communicating with residents in their respective constituencies;
- Members were now working more efficiently than before;
- There was a cabinet system in place and there was no intention to change;
  
- There was now more officer decision making than before and less policy framework and key decisions to be made by Members;
- There was currently a high threshold for key decision definition;
- There was also now a single Overview and Scrutiny Panel, unlike before when there were two;
- There were less committees than before;
- There was currently extensive Member support and training, all to deal with Member queries and casework;
- There were significant areas of deprivation in Thanet, therefore busier wards in terms of councillor ward casework;
- The Council could consider combining some committee functions like Standards and Governance and Audit into a single committee thereby reducing further the number of committee there were. This would also reduce the need to keep the councillor number at the current level;
- Officers would bring all the evidence at the next meeting;
- LGBCE wanted the Council to provide them with a number of proposed councillor for Thanet and not a range.

One Member said that councillors had different approaches to work. Some were proactive whilst others were reactive. It was about how manage their casework. They further said that a committee membership of 15 councillors was not unwieldy.

Members noted the update report.

## **16. PRESENTATION REGARDING FUTURE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN THANET**

Adrian Verrall, Strategic Planning Manager introduced the report and made the following points:

- There is a relationship between the Local Plan, population trends and housing development;
- There would new 18,000 dwellings in the district by 2031;
- Housing requirements used 2014 population projections and the population figure was projected to be 161,252 by 2031, a growth of 26,850 from 2011;
- Projected household growth was from 59,619 to 75,069 (+15,450)
- This was 7,000 less as the 2021 census showed that the district's population was 140,600;
- Of the housing supply that was identified in the Local Plan, currently as at March 2023, the following are the completion stats:
  - Completions – 4,965
  - Under construction – 3,016
  - Not started – 10,470

- There were some factors to consider when discussing population distribution to wards as it was difficult to know where all the housing development would be until applications were submitted to the Council;
- The Strategic Planning team conducted site assessments and their progression each year. The team carried out about 400 site visits each year;
- The team would usually write to developers to check on development of sites any planned future housing development projects;
- The Council was largely dependent on private developers for information;
- It was worth noting that currently there was a slowdown in the housing construction industry and some developers had gone out of business.

Nick Hughes added the following comments:

- There was a steady increase in housing development trajectory;
- There was a need to make an educated guess as to the number of houses there would be by 2030 and extrapolate that against elector numbers;
- The houses should have been completed and have electors living in them by 2030;
- This was quite challenging data to come up with;
- The challenge column on the evidence document to be sent back to LGBCE had a column that would be populated with the Local Plan housing sites;
- In instances where it was obvious that the ward had no large housing development like in Birchington North, the Council would use the LGBCE model;
- For all the areas where major housing development projects were planned, there is a need to challenge the LGBCE model, as the Council believed that there would new electors living in the new dwellings in Birchington South, Garlinge, Westgate-On-Sea, Salmerstone and Northwood.

Members made comments as follows:

- There new sites coming forward in such areas as Cliffsend and Pegwell;
- Were the 1.6 electors living in each household up to date or whether there would be more people and therefore more electors than in old houses?
- The housing statistics trajectory looked too high?
- How would the review of the Local Plan affect these elector number?
- Herne Road housing development will distort Thanet Villages elector numbers.

A Member speaking under Council Procedure Rule 20.1 asked the following questions:

- Had the census reduced the elector numbers in the electoral register?
- Should the Council not assume that of the new 18,000 dwellings to be developed in the district that some of the electors going into those new dwellings would be coming from other wards within Thanet District and not just assume that all of the electors would be coming from outside the district?
- How would empty hokes affect the elector numbers and would this be factored in the statistics.

Adrian Verrall and Nick Hughes responded as follows:

- The review would continue to use the 1.6 persons per household as the elector numbers for each home, but officers would see if a more up-to-date figure was available;
- Officers did some work for the Local Plan Examination in 2019 on improving the house number projections. This involved holding a roundtable session which included private developers. The developers provided their projections for the Examination;

- Officers would now be looking at what had changed, following the Census, that could impact on the population projections and dwelling numbers in the district;
- The Government was considering reviewing its methodology for working out housing numbers (in 2024);
- The Council was therefore waiting for government guidance under the NPPF;
- The number one priority was to get an accurate figure of proposed councillor numbers to forward to LGBCE;
- The centre of Thanet is where the most changes would be;
- The community criterion would not allow the splitting of a rural ward into urban and rural wards. It would be designated as either rural or urban;
- There was no direct correlation between elector numbers and population. It is more specifically about the number of people on the electoral register;
- It was possible that some of the young people coming out of their parents' homes to establish their own families would account for the movement from other wards into the new dwellings. It might be necessary to think more about this point to check if such numbers were large enough to impact the projected elector numbers;
- There were a small number of empty homes. Officers did not view such numbers to be such that it would skew the elector numbers. However they would investigate.

Members noted the update report.

## 17. **STAKEHOLDER LIST**

Nick Hughes led the discussion and made the following comments:

- All councillor details would be provided for the review consultation;
- All parish and town councillor details would also be provided so they can take part in this review;
- Statutory bodies, housing associations and clinical commissioning group would also be consulted;
- Formal and informal residents' associations and under-represented groups would be consulted;
- This would represent a wide section of stakeholders to be consulted;
- Councillors could forward to officers the contact details of any community groups they were aware of so that they could all take part in this review;
- Partaking in the warding stage was where everyone in the district had a significant stake;
- The Council would be asking all those who personal details would have been forward to the Council to give their permission for the use of such details for the purposes of the review;
- The deadline for Council to consider the report was at the 12 December 2023 Full Council meeting;
- The deadline for submitting the evidence was 30 January 2024.

Members noted the update report.

## 18. **NEXT STEPS**

Nick Hughes said that Members had agreed that there was no need to conduct a Member survey to get their view on current average workload/caseload.

Members made comments as follows:

- It would be difficult for Members to give an accurate data about how busy they were as they have different circumstances they have to work around in their role as councillor as some are in fulltime employment whilst others are not;
- During the previous review Members started with a low councillor figure being proposed for Thanet District Council. However after some debate that number was increased;
- It was important for Members to work more efficiently rather than rely on the number of councillors needed for each ward;
- It was also important for councillors not to duplicate work in their respective wards.
- In conclusion this discussion therefore meant that Members agreed not to conduct a Member survey on this subject.

Nick Hughes made further comments as follows:

- Officers did not have the TDC submissions the previous LGBCE review;
- The template for the draft response with basic evidence would be presented at the next meeting.
- Further updates would be brought to next week's meeting and this would include the CIPFA15 in order to demonstrate that what TDC was proposing was not out of line with comparator districts.

Meeting concluded: 3:03pm

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