

BOUNDARY AND ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS WORKING PARTY

Minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2024 at 3.00 pm at Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

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

In Attendance: Councillor Garner

12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies made at the meeting.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations made at the meeting.

14. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Kup proposed, Councillor Green seconded and Members agreed the minutes to be a correct record of the working party meeting held on 23 April 2024.

15. PRESENTATION ON LGBCE REVIEW

Nick Hughes, Committee Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer made a presentation on the LGBCE Review and made the following comments:

- The LGBCE consultation had now commenced. The LGBCE proposals were that Thanet District Council would have 42 councillors serving 20 wards that comprised of 1 single councilor ward, 16 two councillor wards and 3 three councilor wards;
- All proposals had a variance of less than ten percent;
- The LGBCE had taken on board points raised by the political groups as well as individual members of the public in drafting these proposals;
- The Commission was not looking for comments on specific elements of their proposals;
- Any recommendations on the warding patterns from the Boundaries and Electoral Arrangements Working Party would need to be taken to Full Council on 12 December 2024;
- The public consultation would end on 16 December 2024;
- The LGBCE would publish their report on 29 April 2025 and the 2027 Local Government Elections would be contested on the new boundaries that emerge from this review.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- There was agreement with the names of the wards in Ramsgate;
- Would the ten percent variance stand up to future ward elector numbers?
- At the moment there were 450 electors for the proposed Westwood Cross ward. It was difficult to believe that there would be 3,000 electors by 2030;
- It was therefore difficult to understand that there were proposals for creating a ward which would initially have 450 electors;

- It was important to ensure that in coming up with new ward patterns, residents felt they had an identity in their various communities. That could be considered to be the reason behind the proposal for the creation of Westwood Cross ward;
- Thanet Villages was a massive ward and having three councillors to cover the area felt like an appropriate number. It should also be noted that there were five parish wards that would mean attending parish meetings;
- Was it possible as part of the consultation for officers to ask questions and get responses from the Commission on why they wanted three member wards and whether Thanet could get more two member wards instead?

Speaking under Council Procedure Rule 20.1, Councillor Garner made comments and asked questions as follows:

- Thanet District Council had been pushing for town council status elevation for Westwood Cross;
- Most of the proposals in the consultation were appropriate;
- What were the next steps going to be for parish and town councils?

Nick Hughes and Colin Carmichael, CEx responded to questions and comments as follows:

- The ten percent variance did stand up to future elector numbers per ward. This was because as part of its response the Council provided the Commission with the future housing development numbers;
- It was up to members of the working party to make recommendations regarding Westwood Cross for consideration and adoption by Full Council for onward submission to the LGBCE if they wished to;
- However it was important to note that in making those recommendations the Council would need to suggest an alternative proposal regarding Westwood Cross;
- Review of wards was last done twenty years ago and the next review would be in ten years' time;
- Review of polling stations was conducted every five years;
- This current review tried to future proof as there was a lot of housing development expected at Westwood Cross;
- If the anticipated housing development did not come to fruition, then yes there could be a big variance;
- The working party could make a recommendation regarding the proposed Westwood Cross ward, either to make it bigger or get rid of it altogether;
- The Commission was using a five year time criteria and agreeing that in five years' time Westwood Cross would be community;
- The Commission was aiming for 2030 and if the housing development did not come out as predicted then there would be an opportunity for another review towards the ten year mark for review;
- The Commission had come up with a majority of two member wards but in order to meet their criteria, they also came up with three member wards;
- Officers were going to ask the Commission's case officer if the Council could ask questions and get responses from the Commission during the consultation.

Members noted the report.

16. PRESENTATION ON REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND STATIONS

Nick Hughes made the following points during his presentation to the working party:

- Polling Station Reviews were done every five years to make sure the polling stations were still appropriate;
- Colin Carmichael as the Returning Officer was obliged to respond to this review;
- The Commission was interested in ensuring that the views on accessibility of polling stations from people with disabilities were heard;
- Full Council would need to meet in January 2025 to adopt recommendations before the deadline of the review;
- The consultation would over a two week period and the deadline for the review is the end of January 2025;
- The working party would need to meet in early January 2025 to agree recommendations to forward to an extraordinary Full Council meeting to be arranged to take place before the end of January.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- Some of the existing arrangements for example for Salmerstone and Beacon Road had been problematic;
- What would the Council do if there was a ward without a venue that could be used as a polling station at all?

Nick Hughes and Colin Carmichael, CEx responded to questions and comments as follows:

- The closure of Church Hall led to the problems experienced at Salmerstone and Beacon Road. There was no other alternative for the area;
- St Andrews Church Hall was not ideal as it was outside the ward, although the venue was a good one;
- The Lesters venue was now being used for Salmerstone ward. This ward was short of venues and there were very few suitable alternatives;
- The compliance requirements was a long list that took out some of the possible venues, particularly due to accessibility requirements;
- If there was no venue at all in a ward, or just outside the ward in question, the Council would have no other option than to set up a temporary pop-up facility;
- Pop up facilities were an expensive option;
- The Council would have to come up with a budget to fund the pop up facility;
- The duty to the Council was to maximize voter turnout.

Nick Hughes also made a presentation on the community governance review. He made the following points:

- The Council would need to complete this review for parish boundaries coterminous with new district council wards;
- This would also be the opportunity to create a parish council for Margate;
- This could only be done after April 2025 when the LGBCE review report would have come out, as this governance review was dependent on the new ward patterns from their review;
- It would take a year to be ready for the 2027 Local Government elections;
- That would mean in summer 2026, there could be a shadow parish council for Margate replacing the Margate Charter Trustees;

- Responses from this community governance review would also inform the decision for polling stations for the 2027 elections.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- Who made decisions for parishing areas?
- Could the working party membership have a larger and wider political group representation;
- Was it the case that the District Council was setting standards for how the parish council should work?

Nick Hughes and Colin Carmichael, CEx responded to questions and comments as follows:

- Full Council made decisions on parishing areas in the district whilst the working party would conduct most of the in-depth review leading to that decision;
- The working party would be meeting monthly to work through the parishing programme and make recommendations to Full Council;
- If the working party recommended that its membership be increased a report can be drafted by officers to Full Council with such a recommendations;
- Ideally parish councils would be advised to copy what the district council were in terms of setting out the parish wards pattern. This was with particular reference to those parishes that were affected by changes in the district wards.

The Chair was going to ask Councillor Everitt, Leader of the Council to add a presentation on the LGBCE Review, Polling Station Review and Community Governance Review at the next Parish and Town Forum meeting on 4 December 2024.

Members noted the report.

Meeting concluded: 4.10 pm