

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2016 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Pett (Chairman)

Cllrs. Dr. Canet, Clack, Layland, London and McGarvey

An apologies for absence was received from Cllrs. Ms. Tennessee

Cllrs. Dickins, Dyball, Esler, Firth, Fleming, Halford, Horwood, Mrs. Hunter, Lake, Mrs. Morris, Parkin, Piper and Miss. Stack were also present.

1. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Governance Committee held on 13 April 2016 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

2. Declarations of Interest

Cllr. McGarvey declared that he was a member of the Electoral Reform Society for reasons of transparency.

3. Actions from the previous meeting

The action from the previous meeting was noted.

4. Outcome of Electoral Review Workshop

The Chairman presented the report which asked Members to consider whether to request the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) to undertake a review of the current electoral arrangements for the District. Members were advised that a review of the Council's electoral arrangements were not required at the moment, and the cost was not a material consideration for the LGBCE but rather electoral equality. If there was a call for review the council would have no control over the process but rather be a consultee. He informed Members that a Community Governance review could take place to regulate any projected anomalies by making adjustments to Parish Boundaries, of which the LGBCE would then be asked to ratify the changes.

Members discussed whether a review at this current time was needed. Some Members thought that a review should take place due to an increase in the voting population. As officers had been required to make cuts, Members should look at

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doing the same. It was thought that only a minority of residents contacted Councillors and most of this was carried out through the use of new technology. However some Members disagreed, and believed there were other ways of making savings rather than trying to reduce the number of Councillors and thought a review was not required as the LG BCE may not decide that fewer Councillors for the District were required. With fewer Councillors, caseloads could increase. Meeting patterns may have to change, with meetings possibly during the day, which could lead to would be councillor candidates in employment being excluded. There would be a reduction in the breadth of skills, knowledge and experience that Councillors could offer with impact on the quality of decision making. Fewer wards would mean that village identities could be less clear.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Councillor London moved and it was seconded that it be recommended to Council that no action be taken at this stage, but the matter be reconsidered shortly after the 2019 local elections.

The motion was put to the vote and it was:

Resolved: That it be recommended to Council that no action be taken at this stage, but the matter be reconsidered shortly after the 2019 local elections.

5. 2018 Parliamentary Boundary Review

Members considered a report which detailed the initial proposals from the Boundary Commission for England (BCE) who were required to conduct a review of the Parliamentary constituencies in the UK and make recommendations, to be published in September 2018, that reduces the number of constituencies in England to 501 from 533. A survey had been sent to all Members requesting their views on the initial proposals and the results were set out at Appendix B.

The Chairman allowed a Member to address the Committee with a counterproposal to the Boundary Commission's for the placement of Ash and New Ash Green to remain within the Sevenoaks Constituency and Borough Green and Long Mill, and Downs and Mereworth remain within Tonbridge & Malling Parliamentary constituency as the character of Ash and New Ash Green were rural rather than the urban character of Gravesham. By suggesting keeping the Tonbridge and Malling Parliamentary constituency, it would not break any local ties that were already established.

Members discussed the proposal and whether Ash cum Ridley and Hartley and Hodsoll Street should be brought back into the Sevenoaks District. Some Members thought there were merits in moving Swanley and Hextable to the Dartford Parliamentary constituency. Members also discussed the moving of some of the District into the Tunbridge Wells Parliamentary constituency.

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Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

The Chairman moved that recommendation b, be amended to include, 'and the additional comments submitted at the meeting'

The motion was put to the vote and it was

Resolved: That it be recommended to Council that

- a) the Boundary Commission for England proposals for Parliamentary boundaries for the Sevenoaks District Council area are noted; and
- b) the council submits a consultation response to the Boundary Commission for England based on the views collated from Members as set out at Appendix B and the additional comments submitted at the meeting be agreed with the Chairman of the Governance Committee

6. Work Plan

It was noted that items may be added to the work plan following the Council meeting on 22 November 2016.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.44 PM

CHAIRMAN