

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 13 April 2016 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Pett (Chairman)

Cllr. Ms. Tennessee (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Dr. Canet, Layland, and London

An apologies for absence was received from Cllr. Clack

Cllrs. Firth, Grint, Horwood and Miss. Stack were also present.

17. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Governance Committee held on 20 October 2015 be approved and signed as a correct record.

18. Declarations of Interest

No additional declarations were made.

19. Actions from the previous meeting

There were none.

20. Electoral Review for Sevenoaks District Council - Members Survey

The Chief Officer Legal & Governance presented a report which set out the results of a Member Survey on whether to invite the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) to carry out a review that could result in a reduction in Member numbers. The report explained that 33 Members responded to the survey of whom 18 Members were in favour of a review and 15 thought that the Council should not consider a review.

The Chief Officer Legal & Governance advised that Officers could go forward with further work. The technical guidance produced by the LGBCE stated that before the LGBCE undertook a review they would meet with the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council to establish the reason for the request, the likely scope of the review and the commitment and capacity of the Council to provide the information requirements. If Members requested Officers to undertake further work then it was anticipated that this work could be completed by early Autumn 2016. This would give sufficient time for Full Council to consider the matter and make a decision on whether to invite the LGBC to undertake a review to take effect at the District Council elections of May 2019.

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The Chairman noted that any review of the boundaries would finally be decided by the LGBCE which may take little account of local geography. A reduction in Councillors could also mean an increase in work for those that remained.

The Committee discussed the electorate data from Kent County Council for each District Council ward, provided at the meeting on 20 October 2015. Members raised concerns at its accuracy, particularly in the projected overall reduction in electorate in the District.

Members considered the cost of the number of Councillors and the savings that could be made either by reducing Councillors or cutting allowances. It was noted that cost reduction would not be a factor which could be taken into account by any LGBCE review but recent reviews in Kent had reduced the numbers of Councillors.

Cllr. Horwood addressed the Committee to express support for a review and reduction in Councillors, noting that a majority of Councillors who responded were in support. He considered that a review could address past anomalies and suggested a Working Group be established to talk to other local authorities who had recently been reviewed. Cllr. Firth addressed the Committee in her capacity as Portfolio Holder for Legal & Democratic Services. She agreed that the survey expressed support for a review and felt that a review would be required because of upcoming housing developments, such as Fort Halsted.

In response to a question, the Chief Officer Legal & Governance explained that significant work needed to be carried out, particularly by Officers from Planning Policy or a consultant preparing appropriate projections for the electorate before a review, which had cost implications.

Action: That the cost of the last boundary review be circulated to the Members of the Committee.

Public Sector Equality Duty

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

Resolved: That

- a) further work be undertaken, particularly with an aim of improving the Council's data on the projections for the future electorate and re-consult with Members before the Governance Committee meeting of 3 November 2016; and
- b) the Governance Committee hold a workshop open to all Members, inviting guests to speak about the experience of a reduction in Members at other Councils, with a report back to the Committee at its meeting on 3 November 2016.

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21. Appointment of Monitoring Officer

The Chief Officer Legal & Governance presented a report which explained that on 3 November 2015 Full Council had agreed that the post of Chief Officer Legal & Governance (the current Monitoring Officer) be deleted from the end of May 2016 and the post holder of the Head of Legal & Democratic Services role be appointed as Monitoring Officer, effective from 1 April 2016. However, the new Head of Legal & Democratic Services was yet to be in post. The role of Monitoring Officer continued to reside with the Chief Officer Legal & Governance but this post would no longer exist after May 2016. Under Section 5 of the Local Government & Housing Act 1989 the Council had a duty to appoint a Monitoring Officer.

The report proposed that, in the absence of a Head of Legal & Democratic Services post holder, the Chief Officer Legal & Governance continue as Monitoring Officer until the end of May 2016. The Chief Officer Corporate Support was to be appointed interim Monitoring Officer after May 2016 and until the Head of Legal & Democratic Services was in post.

Public Sector Equality Duty

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

Resolved: That it be recommended to Council that

- a) in the absence of a Head of Legal & Democratic Services post holder, the Chief Officer Legal & Governance continue as Monitoring Officer until the end of May 2016 (or until such time as the Head of Legal & Democratic Services is in post, whichever is the sooner); and
- b) in the absence of a Head of Legal & Democratic Services post holder after the end of May 2016, the Chief Officer Corporate Support be appointed interim Monitoring Officer, until such time the Head of Legal & Democratic Services is in post.

22. Work Plan

It was noted that a report to the Committee on Option 2 arising from the report on the Electoral Review for Sevenoaks District Council that was considered at minute item 20, would be considered by the Committee at its meeting on 3 November 2016.

Resolved: That the meeting of the Committee on 19 July 2016 be cancelled and the electoral review workshop be held on 12 July 2016.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 7.52 PM

CHAIRMAN

