

ELECTORAL WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.00 pm on 23 AUGUST 2011

Present: Councillors R Chambers, J Davey, A Dean, J Freeman, E Hicks, J Ketteridge, M Lemon and J Rose.

Officers in attendance: L Bunting (Electoral Services Officer) and Peter Snow (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager).

EWG1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

Councillor Ketteridge proposed Councillor Chambers as Chairman and this was seconded by Councillor Lemon.

RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Chambers as Chairman of the Electoral Working Group for the ensuing year.

EWG2 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no apologies.

Councillor Chambers declared an interest as a member of Essex County Council and Essex Fire Authority.

EWG3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS WORKING GROUP

The Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Arrangements Working Group held on 7 March 2011 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

EWG4 MATTERS ARISING

With reference to Minute number EAWG16, the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager reported that the Reorganisation of Community Governance Order 2011 was duly made on 21 July 2011. The Order will be in force from 1 April 2012. Therefore the delayed parish elections would take place in Birchanger, Little Canfield, Stansted and Takeley in May 2012.

EWG5 TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE ELECTORAL WORKING GROUP

The terms of reference for the Electoral Working Group were noted as follows:

To consider all electoral, polling and community governance reviews, and necessary arrangements for the administration of elections, and to make recommendations to the Council.

Essentially the terms of reference remained the same as before except that the Working Group would report to Council and not the Executive.

EWG6 **PROPOSED WORK PROGRAMME**

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager had prepared a summary of items for the Electoral Working Group (EWG) to discuss over the coming months as follows.

(a) Polling district review

The review would proceed under the proposed timetable, when agreed, between 1 September and 1 December 2011. Further meetings of the EWG would therefore be necessary in early October and early November respectively.

It was likely that a further review of polling districts (see below at item (c) Further Electoral Review (FER)) would be required before the next statutory review was due in 2015. This review should follow the publication of final proposals for new ward boundaries prior to the election, which was expected to be in May 2015.

(b) Parliamentary boundary review

The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) was required to report to the Government with final proposals for re-drawn constituencies by 1 October 2013. The BCE intended to publish its preliminary submissions during the week beginning 12 September 2011. The Council had to decide whether to support or object to the proposals. The BCE would conduct public hearings in each region during a 12 week consultation period. The hearings for the Eastern Region would take place in Cambridge, Colchester, Luton and Norwich between 31 October and 11 November although it was only necessary to be represented at one of the hearings. Should the Council raise objections, these would carry more weight if a counter-proposal was made. However, because of knock-on effects of every change to a constituency boundary, a counter-proposal would need to address the pattern of constituencies across the entire region of 56 proposed seats, which would be an extremely difficult task at district level.

A secondary consultation period would follow during which written comments could be submitted on those representations already made and published. Revised proposals would then be made with a further eight-week period of consultation. The final recommendations and report would then be submitted to the Government. If the Council wished to engage in this process a meeting of EWG would be required during the week beginning 19 September so that a recommendation could be made to Council on 27 September, otherwise the Council could not be represented at any of the proposed public hearings. Alternatively a report could be submitted directly to the September Council meeting but it would be difficult at a full Council meeting to give the necessary time to examining the BCE's initial proposals and framing a counter-proposal if that is what was required by the Council. In any event the time available to consider and respond to the proposals was very tight.

Because the initial proposals were being framed on a regional basis rather than the county basis used in all previous reviews, there was a possibility that the district could be split between two or even three constituencies overlapping more than one county.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said that an embargoed package of proposals was to be delivered to him by 12 September but were not due to be made public until 13 September. Arrangements would be put in place on 13 September to make the documents available to the public.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager suggested that he would endeavour to clarify the proposals by email to Members and this was agreed. The date of Monday, 26 September 2011 was settled on should it be necessary to hold a meeting to discuss the issues further. The proposal regarding legal representation was agreed as not necessary.

(c) Further Electoral Review (FER) of Uttlesford District

A FER of the Uttlesford district was proposed to begin in July 2012 and be concluded in time for the revised ward boundaries to come into effect at the ordinary 2015 election. Further meetings of the EWG would be required during this time.

(d) Community Governance Reviews (CGR)

The Council had a continuing duty to keep its parish pattern under review and ensure that it was relevant to patterns of population and community identity in the district. Having concluded one review in July, there was no present intention to conduct a further review although the Council has agreed to re-examine the boundary at Priors Green in three years' time or as otherwise requested.

A review of parish electoral arrangements may be necessary at some stage, either as a result of a CGR, or because existing arrangements were no longer appropriate, for example in the event of population growth or re-distribution.

(e) Returning Officer's Fees

The fees and expenses payable to the RO were normally examined and updated prior to the ordinary election of district councillors.

EWG7

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager presented a detailed report on the requirement by legislation on all local authorities to review their polling districts and polling places by no later than the end of this year. The intention was to refer a revised scheme to the Council for approval on 29 November.

The report went on the outline the process and a timetable for how to undertake the review. In designating polling districts and polling places it was

explained that the Council must seek to ensure that all electors had reasonable facilities for voting as were practicable in the circumstances; seek to ensure that so far as was reasonable and practicable the polling places were accessible to those who are disabled; and when considering or reviewing the designation of a polling place, have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons. The polling place did not have to be a designated building but the Electoral Commission recommended that a particular building or location should always be defined in selecting a polling place. Polling stations were selected by the returning officer but must be located in the designated polling place. Once the polling place had been determined, it was for the returning officer to decide how many polling stations would be located in each polling place and what arrangements for voting should be made within those buildings.

The Council must follow the rules set out in legislation for conducting the statutory review. The method for carrying out the review and a suggested timetable was outlined in the report.

Members were concerned that there might not be enough time to receive comments from all those interested parties, such as parish councils. It was suggested that contact be made by email to get the issue included on parish council agenda for their next meetings to indicate that the review was about to take place. Members also suggested that district councillors be contacted for their comments and this was agreed.

Subject to these comments, the proposed timetable and terms of reference were both agreed.

EWG8

ARRANGEMENTS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Subject to a possible meeting on 26 September to consider the Parliamentary review, it was agreed that the next meeting would be held on Monday, 10 October at 7.00 pm.

The meeting ended at 7.50 pm.