

ELECTORAL WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 6 AUGUST 2014 at 7pm

Present: Councillor R Chambers – Chairman.
Councillors J Davey, A Dean, E Hicks, J Ketteridge, R Lemon and J Rose.

Officers in attendance: P Snow (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager) and R Dobson (Principal Democratic Services Officer).

EWG1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Councillor Chambers was proposed and duly elected as Chairman.

EWG2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Freeman.

EWG3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 May 2013 were received and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

EWG4 WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager summarised key elements from the proposed work programme for 2014/15. The programme would include the polling district review; consideration of the scale of Returning Officer's fees at district and parish elections and consideration of a programme of Community Governance Reviews (parish reviews) in the next two years.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said this was a rolling programme, due to the challenge of scheduling an onerous level of work whilst the department was also dealing with the new individual electoral registration system, and preparing for the May 2015 elections. It was likely there would be a number of contentious development sites coming forward which would require review. It was therefore probable that the community governance review would have to be undertaken after the new council was returned, and in due course a timetable for the work would be prepared for members' agreement.

EWG5 REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND STATIONS

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager presented a report seeking members' approval of the timetable, process and terms of reference for the review of the polling districts and places to be carried out.

This was a statutory review, which had to be completed by the end of January 2015. However, following the new boundaries implemented by Parliamentary Order following the Further Electoral Review in 2013/14, this review would in any event have been necessary.

The boundary changes primarily affected Saffron Walden and Stansted wards, and to some extent Dunmow.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said that due to the tight timetable for the polling district review, the consultation had started the previous day. He asked Members to agree terms of reference as set out in Appendix C, updated to reflect the timetable to be considered at this meeting.

AGREED to adopt the terms of reference as set out in the appendix.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said whilst limits on staffing capacity would mean not all polling districts and places could be visited, visits would be made to all where representations had been made. He referred members to the draft scheme set out in the report, an updated version of which was circulated to show the figures calculated for the revised ward boundaries.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager drew attention to a list of 'problem areas' which would need consideration. Proposals would be drafted after responses to the initial consultation had been received, and would be brought to the next meeting. There would then be a further consultation period. Members would then meet again, to make recommendations to Full Council. The changes would be published and implemented in the new electoral register on 1 December 2014.

The Chairman thanked the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager and invited members to comment.

Councillor Dean expressed concern at the short consultation period allowed for in the timetable, as parish councils tended not to have meetings during August.

The Chairman agreed, and asked whether the timetable could be extended.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said all representations would be considered, even if received after the deadline for the consultation. The review could not be started earlier due to staff workload. Nevertheless there would be a thorough review as the process included a second consultation period. The recommendations following the consultation had to be approved by Full Council, so the scheduled meeting of Full Council on 21 October 2014 had seemed the most likely opportunity for this to be done. However, if members wished, an extraordinary Full Council meeting could be called in order to allow for an extended timetable.

The Chairman suggested the possibility of recruiting additional staff and said funding could be made available for this purpose.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager thanked the Chairman and said additional resources had been obtained, and he was satisfied there was currently sufficient capacity.

Further discussion of the timescale took place. It was noted the Polling District Review timetable was imposed nationally, and the new scheme had to be in place by the end of January 2015. In the case of Uttlesford, the changes agreed under last year's Further Electoral Review would at the same time be implemented in accordance with the Order finalising that process, which had been made on 20 May 2014.

Councillor Davey asked about parish boundary changes arising from development in "sector 4" in Dunmow. He was concerned that as occupancy of new developments increased, boundaries ought to be resolved at the appropriate time.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager explained that under a community governance review it was necessary to consult those people who were most likely to be affected by the changes, in order to reflect community identities. It was therefore preferable to wait until occupants were living at the sites.

Councillor Dean asked about issues affecting wards in Stansted.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said inevitably there would be changes to polling district boundaries in Stansted, and also in Saffron Walden, due to imbalances in the numbers of voters following the ward boundary changes. As a general rule, it was advisable to limit numbers of voters for each polling district to no more than 3000.

AGREED to revise the timetable to allow a longer consultation period.

The next meeting would be at 5pm on 18 September 2014.

The meeting ended at 7.40pm.