

Item 7b

ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 10.30am on 5 NOVEMBER 2009

Present: Councillors R H Chamberlain, J F Cheetham (substituting for Councillor A J Ketteridge), E J Godwin, D J Morson (substituting for Councillor P A Wilcock), and J Salmon

Officer in attendance: P Snow (Committee and Electoral Services Manager).

EAWG1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

In the Leader's absence it was agreed that Councillor Cheetham would chair this meeting.

EAWG2 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ketteridge and Wilcock.

Councillors Cheetham and Godwin declared a personal interest as ward representatives of areas under discussion.

EAWG3 TIMETABLE OF ELECTORAL REVIEWS

The Committee and Electoral Services Manager explained that the Working Group was created in 2007 but had not met as he had not been in a position until now to report on a suggested programme of reviews.

The most urgent matter facing the Working Group was the unresolved matter of the parish boundary between Birchanger and Stansted dividing the Foresthall Park development site (Rochford Nurseries) in a random fashion following the historic boundary. The Council had a long-standing commitment to review the boundary once at least 200 houses were occupied. This was to enable a meaningful consultation to be carried out to establish the community loyalties and identities of local residents.

He reported that, according to latest figures, 151 dwellings were now occupied at Foresthall Park. A number of options were identified in the report for dealing with the existing boundary and Members accepted that it would be wrong at this stage to express a preference for one solution over any others.

A formal approach for a parish review (now called a community governance review) had now been received from Stansted Parish Council. The Parish Council was requesting that the whole of the Rochford Nursery site should be included within Stansted; that Thremhall Priory should be removed from Stansted; and that the centre line of the new A120 should form the boundary.

It was agreed that it was appropriate to begin a review in mid-2010 as suggested in the report, as this would provide an opportunity for the site to be more fully occupied and for community identities to become established. It would also meet the request of the Parish Council.

Members discussed the electoral implications of the proposed review. Mr Snow advised that it was likely the outcome of a community governance review could be brought into effect at the parish elections in May 2011, but it was less clear that any consequential changes to district ward boundaries could be implemented in time for that election. This was because principal area electoral changes could only be effected by the Local Government Boundary Committee and there would be an inevitable time lag between parish changes and the making of related principal area boundary change orders.

Without prejudging the outcome of any review, it was recognised that any changes in parish boundaries might have a subsequent knock-on effect on ward boundaries. The Boundary Committee had written earlier this year to draw attention to variances in the electoral quota (principally affecting Birchanger ward) that would qualify Uttlesford for a further review, but that this would be unlikely before 2011/12.

The Working Group then discussed the position at Priors Green where new development was split between the parishes of Takeley and Little Canfield. The position at Priors Green was less confused than at Foresthall Park as the various phases of the development took the existing boundary into account. However, the division between parishes did mean that there was at least the potential for a lack of community cohesion. To counteract this possibility, it was suggested that the two parish councils be approached to ascertain their respective views about what should happen in terms of the parish boundaries.

Depending on the responses received from the two parish councils, it might be necessary to consider expanding the terms of reference of the proposed review to incorporate Priors Green. Contact would also be made with the newly formed residents association to gain an insight into the views of the residents.

The need for other reviews was considered, including a full review of parish electoral arrangements, a review of Returning Officer's fees, and a review of polling districts and places throughout the district. It was proposed in the report that each of these reviews should ideally be completed before the May 2011 local elections. Members agreed to this suggested timetable whilst recognising that this was a demanding work programme for the Democratic Services team to undertake, especially bearing in mind the certainty of a parliamentary General Election taking place by next June.

RECOMMENDED that the following programme of electoral reviews be approved by the Finance and Administration Committee:

- a. A community governance review (terms of reference yet to be decided, but definitely to include Foresthall Park, and

the boundary between Birchanger and Stansted) to begin in June/July 2010.

- b. A formal approach be made to both Little Canfield and Takeley parish councils, and to the newly formed residents association, to ascertain their views about future parish arrangements in respect of the Priors Green development site, and whether the residents of Priors Green would benefit from a formal review of boundaries to co-incide with the review proposed in (a) above.
- c. A review of parish electoral arrangements throughout Uttlesford to be completed before the parish elections due in May 2011.
- d. A review of Returning Officer's fees and charges to be completed by December 2010.
- e. A review of polling districts and polling places within the district, or a more limited review of arrangements needing particular attention, to be completed by November 2010.

The meeting ended at 11.20am