

ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 10.30am on 25 OCTOBER 2010

Present: Councillor A J Ketteridge – Chairman.
Councillors R H Chamberlain, J Salmon and P A Wilcock.

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

EAWG8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor E Godwin.

EAWG9 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

EAWG 10 MATTERS ARISING

The Democratic and Electoral Services Officer gave an update on the consultation on draft proposals for parish boundary changes regarding Foresthall Park and Priors Green. Consultation materials would be sent out next week, and the consultation period would run for approximately three months. A further report would be brought to the Working Group in late February or early March.

EAWG11 PARISH ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

Members considered a report on submissions made at the first stage of the Community Governance Review in respect of parish electoral arrangements (other than the parishes of Birchanger, Little Canfield, Stansted Mountfitchet and Takeley, where the separate review of boundaries was being undertaken).

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said all final recommendations for changes were to be submitted to the Finance and Administration Committee on 25 November, as provided for in the timetable. He drew Members' attention to the statutory provisions and to the Council's own guidelines. Members would need to consider whether to adhere to these guidelines in cases where parish councils had suggested different arrangements.

Members agreed to confirm as unchanged the respective electoral schemes for the parishes (set out at paragraph 1 of the recommendation below). Members noted that in each case the scheme was suitable for the parish council concerned and met the statutory criteria.

Members then considered the submissions of a number of parishes where changes had been suggested and where these changes were agreed (set out at paragraph 2 of the recommendation).

Members proceeded to discuss submissions of those parish councils which had not agreed the changes suggested to their electoral schemes. Members took into account the statutory guidance, and considered in each case whether the submissions made could be accepted, having regard also to the Council's own guidelines. It was agreed to make the recommendations as set out in paragraph 3 below.

Members then considered the four parishes which operated by parish meeting only, without an elected parish council, and agreed to recommend no changes for these parishes (paragraph 4 below).

The Chairman declared a personal interest in the electoral scheme for Saffron Walden Town Council.

RECOMMENDED to Finance and Administration Committee

(1) the electoral scheme in the following parishes be confirmed as unchanged:

Ashdon; Barnston; Berden; Broxton; Clavering; Debden; Elmdon and Wenden Lofts; Elsenham; Farnham; Felsted; Flitch Green; Great Canfield; Great Chesterford; Hatfield Broad Oak; Hatfield Heath; Hempstead; Henham; High Easter; High Roothing; Langley; Little Dunmow; Little Easton; Little Hallingbury; Manuden; Newport; Quendon and Rickling; Radwinter; Stebbing; Ugley; Wendens Ambo.

(2) the following changes to the electoral scheme be made in the parishes of:

Parish	Recommendation
Arkesden	INCREASE FROM FIVE COUNCILLORS TO SIX
Great Hallingbury	DECREASE FROM NINE COUNCILLORS TO EIGHT
Hadstock	INCREASE FROM FIVE COUNCILLORS TO SIX
Margaret Roding	INCREASE FROM FIVE COUNCILLORS TO SIX
Sewards End	INCREASE FROM FIVE COUNCILLORS TO SEVEN
Thaxted	INCREASE FROM NINE COUNCILLORS TO ELEVEN
The Sampfords:	NO CHANGE IN NUMBER OF COUNCILLORS BUT A CHANGE IN BALANCE OF EXISTING NUMBER OVER THE TWO

Parish	Recommendation
	WARDS: GREAT SAMPFORD: INCREASE FROM FIVE COUNCILLORS TO SIX; LITTLE SAMPFORD: DECREASE FROM FOUR COUNCILLORS TO THREE

(3) in the following parishes the electoral schemes be retained or changed as detailed in the centre column:

Parish	Recommendation	Comments
Aythorpe Roding	NO CHANGE	Whilst the guidelines indicate an increase from five to six, the minimum of five can be allowed where justified by local circumstances; the parish council does not see the need for an increase.
Chrishall	NO CHANGE	A decrease to seven was suggested, but the parish council wishes to retain nine councillors.
Great Dunmow	CHANGE IN OVERALL IN NUMBER OF COUNCILLORS AND IN BALANCE OF EXISTING NUMBER OVER THE TWO WARDS: NORTH WARD: INCREASE FROM SIX COUNCILLORS TO SEVEN SOUTH WARD: NO CHANGE, I.E. RETAIN NINE COUNCILLORS	The present warding scheme does not reflect the number of electors in proportional terms, either now or in five years' time. Dunmow North is due to grow substantially, and an increase is suggested for the North Ward accordingly.
Great Easton and Tilty	NO CHANGE	An increase to the Village ward was initially suggested, in the interests of broad proportionality, and also because the number of councillors for the size of the electorate overall should be in the 9-12 range. However, the parish council has requested no change, as residents seem content that the parish council is working effectively with the current number of councillors, and proportionality between the wards is apparently satisfactory at present. As the new grouped parish council was only established for the first time in 2007 it seems reasonable to

Parish	Recommendation	Comments
		allow for a further settling in period.
Leaden Roding	INCREASE NUMBER OF COUNCILLORS FROM FIVE TO SIX	Although the Parish Council cites the difficulty of recruitment, the number of electors is projected to rise from 474 to 497 by 2015. For a parish of this size, the expectation would tend to be for the election of at least seven councillors. A reasonable compromise would be to allow for the election of six councillors.
Little Bardfield	NO CHANGE	Whilst the guidelines indicate an increase from five to six, the minimum of five can be allowed where justified by local circumstances; the parish council does not see the need for an increase.
Littlebury	NO CHANGE	The number of electors is below the threshold for 9-12 councillors, and it was proposed to reduce the number from nine to eight; there is also merit in considering warding to grant separate representation to Littlebury Green/Catmere End. However, the parish council wishes to retain the existing scheme, and considers Littlebury Green and Catmere End are already represented on the Council.
Little Chesterford	INCREASE FROM FIVE COUNCILLORS TO SIX	No response was received from this parish council. Their views on this recommendation are again being sought, and if available, will be brought to Committee. However, in the absence of any reasoned case, the guidelines suggest an increase.
Saffron Walden	INCREASE FROM 15 COUNCILLORS TO 16, BY THE ADDITION OF A COUNCILLOR TO SHIRE WARD	Whilst the Town Council has suggested there is no pressing need for a change, the electorate forecast would justify a 16 th councillor as the Shire Ward is forecast to grow to 4590 electors by 2015, and the revised scheme would thus be more broadly proportional.
White Roothing	NO CHANGE	The parish council considers it will be difficult to recruit even the minimum of five councillors, and some latitude from the guidelines, which would otherwise suggest

Parish	Recommendation	Comments
		increasing the number to six, should be allowed in this case.
Widdington	NO CHANGE	Whilst there have been difficulties in recruitment at various times, no specific suggestion has been made to reduce the number of councillors. The size of this parish justifies retaining eight councillors.
Wimbish	NO CHANGE	The number of parish councillors could increase to reflect the size of the electorate, but the electorate includes transitory service personnel from Carver Barracks. An observer from the Barracks attends most parish council meetings, and as no request has been made for an increase in representation, the existing number of parish councillors seems sufficient.

- (4) there be no change to the following parishes which operate by parish meeting: Chickney; Lindsell; Strethall; Wicken Bonhunt.

EAWG12 **PARTIAL REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES**

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager presented a report for Members to agree a revised scheme of polling district arrangements in the district. He reminded Members that the Council had a statutory duty to undertake a review of its Parliamentary polling districts and polling places every four years. Whilst the next such review was to be completed by 1 December 2011, in view of the parish reviews being undertaken this year and next, Members had agreed to complete a partial review of those polling districts in which problems were reported at the general election in May this year. The polling places which were the subject of this review were The Function Room, Three Horseshoes Public House, Duton Hill and The Reid Rooms, Marks Hall Lane, Margaret Roding. At neither location was a suitable alternative building available for use as a polling place. Other options were identified in the report but none of these was considered satisfactory.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager described the access difficulties for disabled and some elderly voters regarding the polling station at The Three Horseshoes Public House, Duton Hill. He said the Function Room was situated on the first floor of the building, and was accessed by internal stairs. The landlord had made his garage available for the location of a screen to be used by any elector unable to access the polling station, an arrangement which was not ideal, but which had operated for some years without any complaints being submitted. However, following the general election earlier this year, a report had been submitted by the deputy returning officer, highlighting concerns regarding safe access of both the polling station and garage area.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said he had visited the site to consider with the landlord potential options to address these difficulties for future polling arrangements. The landlord had been very co-operative, and alternative solutions had been considered. From these discussions a solution had been identified as likely to result in the best outcome. This solution was to cordon off for use by disabled or elderly/infirm voters a part of the bar area next to a connecting door to the stairs leading to the Function Room, permitting electors to enter the polling area via the main level entrance to the public bar, which was fully accessible.

Members agreed that the most sensible solution was to retain the Three Horseshoes as the designated polling place in Duton Hill, but simply to delete the words 'The Function Room' from the description.

Regarding Margaret Roding, the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said that due to the increasing commercial success of the Reid Rooms as a venue for weddings, the main buildings were not always available for use as a polling station. Use of the parish church in 2009 had proved unsatisfactory. For the general election in 2010 another part of the Reid Rooms site had been used, but subsequently the presiding officer had reported that this venue was unsatisfactory in several respects, particularly in its unsuitability for wheelchair access.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said the main buildings at the Reid Rooms would again be unavailable for the local elections in May 2011. Further options had been explored, but so far with no likely prospect of a satisfactory alternative venue. Discussions were continuing with the owner of the Reid Rooms to try to find a better arrangement. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said whilst it was likely the polling station could therefore continue to be somewhere on the Reid Rooms site, Members' agreement was sought to change the designation of the polling station to 'the polling district of Margaret Roding' as this would allow added flexibility to make such suitable arrangements as were possible on the occasion of each election.

Members agreed with the course of action proposed.

RECOMMENDED to Finance and Administration Committee

- 1 To delete from the description of the polling place at the Three Horseshoes Public House, Duton Hill, the words 'Function Room'.
- 2 To change the designation of the polling place 'The Reid Rooms, Marks Hall Lane, Margaret Roding' to 'the polling district of Margaret Roding'.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said a revised schedule of polling districts and polling stations would be prepared.

The meeting ended at 11.55am.