

CHILTERN DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Joint Meeting of the BOUNDARIES & ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS AND CONSTITUTION REVIEW COMMITTEES held on 11 JULY 2013

PRESENT: Councillor N M Rose - Chairman

Councillors: Mrs I A Darby
A D Garnett
A J Garth
P M Jones
D W Phillips
D Spate
M Vivis
J F Warder

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were received from Councillors Miss P A Appleby, D G Meacock, M Stannard and N Stewart.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors A K Bacon, R Burns-Green, Mrs J A Burton and C J Wertheim.

1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

It was moved by Councillor D W Phillips, seconded by Councillor A D Garnett and

RESOLVED –

That Councillor N M Rose be appointed Chairman for the joint meeting.

2 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the joint meeting held on 14 May 2013, copies of which had been previously circulated, were agreed by the Committee and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4 ELECTORAL REVIEW: CONSIDERATION OF COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION

At the previous joint meeting on 14 May 2013, it had been recommended (and subsequently endorsed by Full Council) that the Council be minded to request that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE)

conduct a review of the size of Chiltern District Council with a view to reducing the number of Councillors from May 2015 onwards. Since that time a Draft Council Size Submission had been prepared. Members were now invited to consider whether the Council should make a formal request to the LGBCE for an Electoral Review, and if so, to recommend to Full Council the appropriate number of Councillors.

A briefing had been held for all Members with Dr Peter Knight and Richard Buck from the LGBCE immediately prior to the meeting. It was agreed that it had been a useful session. However, Members expressed concerns regarding the need to reduce the number of Councillors. In the ensuing discussion, the following key points were made:

- The average electorate per councillor was 1,836 and only four wards had a deviation of 10% or more from this average. As such, the electoral equality was good and would not of itself trigger a Review. Given this, Members questioned why the Council would volunteer for an Electoral Review to be undertaken.
- It was considered that savings were minimal. A councillor's basic allowance was currently £4,500 per annum resulting in a saving of £27,000 per annum if there was a reduction of six councillors.
- It was possible that there could be a wider review of local government structures following the next parliamentary election, meaning that any electoral review undertaken now could have to be repeated in just a few years.
- Whilst the Council might be able to operate with fewer councillors, it was not considered that the vital representative role of councillors would be better exercised with fewer councillors.

On balance, Members agreed that a request to the LGBCE to reduce the number of Councillors representing Chiltern District Council should not be proceeded with.

Instead, it was considered important to continue to look at the governance arrangements of the Council, and the Constitution Review Committee had already developed a work programme to take this work forward.

In particular, it was suggested that it was important to look at ways to better engage non-Cabinet Members in the decision-making process. At present some Members considered that the workloads of the Cabinet Leader and Portfolio Holders were excessive. The high percentage of Cabinet representation on Outside Bodies was highlighted as an example of this. A better balance was required.

The introduction of Policy Advisory Groups (PAGs) were highlighted by some Members as a positive way of engaging non-Cabinet Members in decision-making. The work of the Council Tax Support PAG was particularly highlighted. This had involved non-Cabinet Members working with the relevant Portfolio Holder to develop a Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

However, one Member opined that Overview Committees could perform this role better since there was no Cabinet involvement.

The Cabinet Leader confirmed that the Cabinet were committed to increasing the role of non-Cabinet Members and this work would be taken forward by the Constitution Review Committee.

RECOMMENDED –

That the request to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England for an Electoral Review to reduce the number of Councillors be not proceeded with.

The meeting ended at 8.04 pm