

CHILTERN DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the GOVERNANCE AND ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS COMMITTEE held on 10 DECEMBER 2014

PRESENT: Councillor N M Rose - Chairman

Councillors: M Z Bhatti
Mrs I A Darby
P M Jones
M Stannard
J F Warder

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were received from Councillors A J Garth and D J Lacey

1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED:

That Councillor N M Rose be appointed Chairman of the Governance and Electoral Arrangements Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

2 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED:

The Committee decided not to appoint a Vice Chairman.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of Constitution Review Committee held on 25 June and 2 July 2014 and of the joint meeting of the Boundaries and Electoral Arrangements Committee and Constitution Review Committee held on 11 July 2013 were agreed by the Committee and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

5 GOVERNANCE & ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

RESOLVED:

That the Governance and Electoral Arrangements Committee Terms of Reference as agreed at Full Council on 22 July 2014 were noted.

6 UPDATE ON INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

The Committee received a report which provided an update on the progress of the annual canvass for the Register of Electors 2014-15, and the impact of the recent implementation of Individual Electoral Registration (IER).

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 required all local authorities to implement Individual Electoral Registration during the 2014 canvass; which changed the household based system to one that required each individual to be contacted and registered individually.

The report outlined the key changes and the impact of the changes on electors, staff delivering the service and suppliers eg. Electoral registration software company and Royal Mail.

The key impact of the change had been in relation to the increased volume of calls and emails to the Electoral Registration team in respect of opt in / opt out queries and the requirement of the new processes to send out additional paperwork to electors to provide confirmation at each stage. The changes had generated additional workload and increased temporary resources had been necessary to ensure an efficient and effective service.

The introduction of online registration had worked well and proved to be a positive change to the process and it was considered that over time and familiarity for electors there would be a further increase in the use of online registration. The return on registered electors was comparable with previous years having achieved a 95.3% return which was pleasing during an implementation year.

Overall the transition to IER had worked well but there had been concerns over the increased workload and cost of implementation. Although during 2014/15 the implementation of IER was within budget due to additional resources received from the Cabinet Office for the implementation of IER, it was noted that the cost of the registration process in future years may require additional funding, as the Government support is unlikely to be recurring.

It was noted that Electoral Registration Administrators had been advised that there was still an expectation for an Annual Canvass but following evaluation of the implementation of IER, the Cabinet Office may amend processes but this was not known at this stage.

RESOLVED:

- I) That the content of the report was noted; and**
- II) That a further report be presented to the Committee during 2015 following agreement of the processes involved for the 2015 Canvass.**

7 POLLING STATION REVIEW

The Committee considered the report which informed members of the requirement to review UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places and agree the process for undertaking consultation and considering representations received.

The Electoral and Administration Act 2013 required that the compulsory review take place between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015 (inclusive).

Members were advised that the notice of the review had been placed on the Council's website and the consultation process had commenced with the consultees as listed below:-

- The (Acting) Returning Officer for Chesham and Amersham Parliamentary Constituency
- The Member of Parliament for Chesham & Amersham Parliamentary Constituency
- Buckinghamshire County Council
- Buckinghamshire County Councillors representing divisions within Chiltern District
- Chiltern District Councillors
- Town and Parish Councils within Chiltern District
- Registered Political Parties and Election Agents
- Chiltern Disability Focus Group

Members were informed that work had commenced on the review during the European Parliamentary Elections in May 2014 when Polling Station Inspectors were asked to complete questions regarding polling places as outlined in guidance from the Electoral Commission. This information was further evidenced by the Democratic and Electoral Services Team who had each visited specific polling places in the district to identify any issues that required a change of polling station venue.

The consultation period for the polling place review was due to close on Friday 9 January 2015. Members queried if the consultation period was sufficient for Parish Councils to respond; and it was noted that if Parish Councils wish to respond after the closing date these would be accepted up to a week after 9 January 2015. However Parish Councils would be contacted to ensure they are aware of the consultation and timetable for responses.

RESOLVED:

- I) That the requirement for the review of polling district and polling places be noted; and**
- II) That the proposed timetable for carrying out the necessary consultation and consideration of comments and representations was agreed.**

8 REVIEW OF FORMAT OF FULL COUNCIL

At the meeting of the Constitution Review Committee held on 2 July 2014 options for change in respect of full Council meetings had been considered with the aim to improve the interest and public engagement with Council meetings. Particular options considered were:-

- Questions with notice (Public Questions) with an allotted time period for questions to be answered
- Criteria for submitting questions eg. Relevant to the area; submission date prior to the meeting; complies with protocol; oral presentation of questions at the meeting and the permission of a supplementary question
- A programme of speakers to Council eg. Paradigm, with an allotted time period for presentations
- Incorporate the Chief Constable Q & A session into a future Council meeting
- Report on recommendations rather than minutes to Council

Members were asked to consider a mock Council Agenda and the following points were raised:-

- That presentations be heard at Council as required but it was not necessary to agree a schedule of speakers at the beginning of each municipal year as it may be appropriate to invite specific speakers on topical issues arising during the year.
- That the annual meeting with the Chief Constable be incorporated into an appropriate Council meeting rather than a separate meeting
- That arrangements for receiving petitions and deputations be included on the Council agenda and the proposed amendments to Council Procedure Rules to enable this be brought back to the next meeting of the Committee, including provisions allowing members to ask questions of clarification at the discretion of the Chairman and restrictions on deputations covering the same subject or by the same speakers
- That an opportunity for members to ask a question of the cabinet leader, individual cabinet members or Committee Chairman be included on the Council agenda as well as questions with notice and appropriately updated Council Procedure Rules be brought back to the next meeting for consideration
- That Council meetings would not include the presentation of Committee minutes but rather would receive any recommendations from Committee's to Council supported with a full report to enable members to make an informed decision
- That Council meetings would not include the presentation of Cabinet minutes but Council would receive any recommendations from Cabinet supported by a full report
- Members requested a separate Minute Pack be electronically available for each Council meeting in the event that members wished to refer to the minutes of committees or cabinet.

RESOLVED:

- i) That the necessary amendments to the Council's Procedure Rules to implement the above proposals be brought back to the next meeting for further consideration ; and**
- ii) That the introduction of the revised Council agenda to be implemented from Annual Council on Wednesday 27 May 2015.**

The meeting ended at 7.32pm