

GOVERNANCE AND ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS COMMITTEE

Meeting - 29 October 2018

Present: P Hogan (Chairman)
Dr W Matthews, D Anthony, D Pepler and D Smith

Apologies for absence: J Lowen-Cooper

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

30. MINUTES

The minutes of the Governance and Electoral Arrangements Committee held on 26 June 2018 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

31. TO CONSIDER THE FIRST CONSULTATION RESPONSES ON THE COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

At the previous meeting the Committee agreed to conduct a Community Governance Review for Denham, Stoke Poges and Farnham Royal parish councils. This followed requests received from those parish councils for South Bucks District Council to the review and change the governance arrangements in place, specifically relating to council size and the warding arrangements for those parish councils. At that meeting authority was delegated to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Chairman, to agree the Terms of Reference of the review.

A public consultation took place from 3 September to 12 October 2018 inviting local electors and other interested parties to submit their views and comments on the current governance arrangements for the three parish councils, or to propose changes. Members considered the responses to the consultation, relevant guidance, electorate ratios and the proposed draft recommendations for the three parishes, as set out in the report.

Denham Parish Council's initial request proposed that all wards be removed from the parish so that it becomes an unwarded parish. During the consultation 3 representations were received proposing that all parish wards be removed in Denham. None of the representations received suggested that there be any change to the council size.

Stoke Poges Parish Council's initial request proposed that the council size be reduced from 13 to 9 Parish Councillors. During the consultation, responses proposed that the number of councillors be reduced from 13 to 9, 10, or 11.

Guidance suggests that 11 Councillors is recommended for an electorate of 3,500, and 12 for an electorate of 4,400. A reduction in Council size to 11 Councillors would bring the elector ratio up from 300 to 355 which is closer to the South Bucks Parish Council average of 384. One representation also proposed that parish wards be removed; however there are no parish wards at present.

Farnham Royal Parish Council's initial request proposed removing the current three parish wards so that it became an unwarded parish. One representation received during the consultation recommended this approach. Another representation received recommended that a minimum of two wards be retained in order to align with the two county electoral divisions. The guidance recommends that principal council boundaries align with parish wards. No representations were received regarding the council size.

The next stage of the review was to submit the Committee's draft recommendations to public consultation. The representations received during this second stage of consultation would then be considered by the Committee at the next meeting on 16 January 2019. The Committee would then be asked to agree final recommendations for consideration by Full Council.

Following a discussion it was **RESOLVED** that:

1. The representations received during the first consultation, as set out in Appendix 3, be noted.
2. The following draft recommendations be agreed:
 - a) Denham Parish Council – remove all parish wards
 - b) Stoke Poges Parish Council – reduce the size of the council from 13 to 11 parish councillors
 - c) Farnham Royal Parish Council – remove 1 parish ward (by combining Farnham Royal South with Farnham Royal Central) to create a total of 2 parish wards

32. **CONSULTATION ON THE DETAILED PROPOSALS FOR THE MODERNISATION OF THE ANNUAL CANVASS IN ENGLAND, SCOTLAND AND WALES.**

The Government was consulting on proposed changes to the annual canvass – the annual check carried out by Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) to ensure that the electoral register remained accurate and up-to-date.

Currently all ERO's must conduct an annual canvass prior to the publication of the revised electoral register on 1 December by writing to every household asking for the details on the electoral register to be confirmed or to advise of any changes. Pilots had been carried out by some EROs trialling new ways of conducting the annual canvass for example by using telephone and email contact methods. The majority of households' details remain unchanged each year, but Councils are currently still required to chase households where no response has been provided, even where details may remain the same.

The Government's proposals were aimed at streamlining the annual canvass, informed by the pilots carried out, to enable EROs to focus resources on encouraging responses from properties and electors that may not be registered. The proposals included using a data matching exercise at the start of the annual canvass to determine the level of contact required. In summary, three routes were proposed. Route one would be used where all electors' details could be confirmed as correct using national and local data matching. Those households would then receive one piece of correspondence and the ERO would not necessarily need to chase up non responding properties. Route two would be used where data matching had identified that information may not be correct or up-to-date. EROs would still be required to chase up responses using two reminders plus a personal canvass, similarly to the current annual canvass. Route three would be used where multiple occupants live at the same address. A single officer would then be asked to provide a list of people eligible to register to vote at the property. The ERO could then issue Invitations to Register (application form to register to vote) to those residents.

A draft response to the Government's consultation on reforming the annual canvass was considered by the Committee, and after noting a number of minor formatting changes that would be made to the consultation response, it was **RESOLVED** that:

1. The Government's consultation on reforming the annual canvass be noted.
2. Authority be delegated to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Chairman of the Governance and Electoral Arrangements Committee, to submit a response to the consultation.

The meeting terminated at 6.43 pm

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