



BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 16TH MARCH 2006
AT 6.00 P.M.

COUNCIL CHAMBER, THE COUNCIL HOUSE, BURCOT LANE, BROMSGROVE

MEMBERS: Councillors D. Hancox (Chairman), Mrs. C. J. Spencer (Vice-Chairman), G. N. Denaro, Mrs. J. Dyer M.B.E., Mrs. J. M. L. A. Griffiths, C. B. Lanham, P. M. McDonald, N. Psirides J.P., G. G. Selway, and E. C. Tibby

AGENDA

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www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/meetings

1. To receive apologies for absence and notifications of substitutes
2. Declaration of interest and whipping arrangements
3. To receive the Minutes of the Meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee held on 12th July 2006 (attached)
4. To consider the Report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services relating to non-confidential and non-exempt items (attached)
5. To consider any other business, details of which have been notified to the Chief Executive prior to the commencement of the Meeting and which the Chairman by reason of special circumstances considers to be of so urgent a nature that it cannot wait until the next Meeting.

S. NIXON
Chief Executive

The Council House,
Burcot Lane,
BROMSGROVE,
Worcestershire,
B60 1AA.

7th March 2006

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 12th July 2005, at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT Councillors G. N. Denaro, Mrs. J. Dyer M.B.E., Mrs J. M. L. A. Griffiths, D. Hancox, C.B. Lanham, P. M. McDonald, N. Psirides J. P., G. G. Selway, Mrs. C. J. Spencer and E. C. Tibby

1/05 **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED: that Councillor D. Hancox be elected Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

2/05 **APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED: that Councillor Mrs. C. J. Spencer be elected Vice Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

3/05 **APOLOGIES**

No apologies for absence were received.

4/05 **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

Councillor C. .B. Lanham declared a personal interest in agenda items 6 (1) and 6(2) as a Member of Stoke Parish Council and as a resident of the areas concerned.

5/05 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on the 17th February 2004 were submitted.

RESOLVED: that the Minutes be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

6/05 **REPORT OF THE HEAD OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES RELATING TO NON-CONFIDENTIAL AND NON-EXEMPT ITEMS**

The Report of the Head of Administrative Services relating to non-confidential and non-exempt items was submitted.

Arising therefrom:

(1) **PARISH REVIEWS**

The Head of Administrative Services reported that four Parish Councils within the District had requested a review of the number of elected members for their authorities. The requests arose partly from the criterion of the Quality Parish Councils scheme that Councils qualifying for the scheme would need to have all their members elected. Some of the Parishes had experienced difficulties in attracting people to stand as Parish Councillors.

The Parishes which had requested reviews were :-

- Beoley
- Hagley
- Lickey and Blackwell
- Stoke

The review process would include a period of public consultation on any changes which are proposed, further consideration of the proposal by this Committee in the light of responses received followed by a decision on the proposal. If any of the Parishes had been the subject of any review in the last five years the proposal would also require the approval by the Electoral Commission. The Parish Councils concerned would be asked to assist in the consultation exercises.

Members were of the opinion that the requests submitted by each of the Parish Councils should be the subject of a consultation exercise.

RESOLVED that consultation exercises be undertaken in respect of the requests submitted by the four Parish Councils detailed in the report submitted and the outcome of those exercises be reported to a future meeting of this Committee

(2) **POLLING DISTRICTS , STOKE HEATH WARD**

The Head of Administrative Services reported that the Council's ward boundaries were altered in 2003 resulting in two polling districts being created in the Stoke Heath Ward one of which was with the Parish of Stoke Prior and one was not. The Parish boundary had now been revised and the whole of the Stoke Heath Ward was within the Parish and there was therefore no need for two separate polling districts

RESOLVED that polling districts SA and SB be amalgamated into a single polling district SA and that the Order relating to the District's polling arrangements be amended to reflect this.

The Meeting closed at 6.25 p.m.

Chairman

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

16TH MARCH 2006

PARISH REVIEWS

Responsible Portfolio Holder	Cllr Mrs. C. J. Spencer
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Legal and Democratic Services

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 To consider the results of the consultations on a review of the number of elected Councillors for some Parishes within the District.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 Members views are requested.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At it's meeting on 12th July 2005 this Committee considered a report on requests received from four Parishes within the District to review the number of elected members for their authorities. The requests arose partly from the criterion of the Quality Parish Councils scheme that Councils qualifying for the scheme would need to have all their members elected. Some of the Parishes had experienced difficulties in attracting people to stand as Parish Councillors.

- 3.2 The Parishes which had requested reviews were :-

- Beoley
- Hagley
- Lickey and Blackwell
- Stoke

- 3.3 The Committee resolved that consultation exercises be undertaken in respect of the requests submitted by the four Parish Councils detailed in the report submitted and the outcome of those exercises be reported to a future meeting of this Committee

- 3.4 The process of the review in each case includes
- (i) initial consideration by this Committee and the formulation of a proposal in each case,
 - (ii) a period of public consultation on any changes which are proposed,
 - (iii) further consideration of the proposal, in the light of responses received, and
 - (iv) decision on the proposal which, in the case of any Parish which has been subject to any review in the last five years (this applies to two out of the four Reviews below), is also subject to approval by the Electoral Commission.
- 3.5 Parts (i) and (ii) of the consultation have now been completed and this meeting constitutes the third part.

3.6 **Beoley Parish Council**

Beoley Parish Council have requested that the number of Parish Councillors be reduced from 9 to 7. No specific reasons are given in support of the request, but the Parish Council has not been able to fill its complement of 9 Councillors since at least 2003 and only 6 were elected (unopposed) in 2003. Following co-options, there are presently 7 Parish Councillors in office.

The elector/councillor ratio, is a very low one and reducing the number of Parish Councillors to 7 would increase this to 114, which is still low.

The consultation exercise shows that of the 430 properties consulted, 110 consultation forms were returned of which 88 supported the proposal and 22 wished to remain as they are.

3.7 **Hagley Parish Council**

Hagley Parish Council have requested that the number of Parish Councillors be reduced from 15 to 13. They say that in recent years, they have had no more than 12 Councillors and at present have only 11. Despite attempts at recruitment, only one Councillor has been co-opted in the last 12 months. They believe that it is unlikely that they would have 15 candidates at an election and this would have implications for their plans to obtain Quality Parish status. The Parish Council also points out that it is confident that it can operate with fewer Councillors.

The Parish Council has tried to recruit more Councillors at local events, in the monthly magazine produced by the Community Association, and from the Parish Plan consultation. They believe they should continue trying to attract 'new blood' and are therefore still trying to recruit. However, of the four new Councillors who have joined the Council since December 2002, two have already left, along with two of the longer standing members, so the Council has remained at 11 members. The Parish Council is concerned that it will never attract enough people to fill 15 seats and believes that it would be far more practical to reduce the number of Councillors to 13, a far more realistic number to achieve.

The elector/councillor ratio in Hagley is currently 231. Reducing the number of Parish Councillors to 13 would increase this to 266, which would still be below that of some of the other larger Parish Councils in the District.

The consultation exercise shows that of the 2016 properties consulted, only 7 consultation forms were returned of which 6 supported the proposal and 1 wished to make other comments.

3.8 Lickey and Blackwell Parish Council

Lickey and Blackwell Parish Council have requested that the number of Parish Councillors be reduced from 11 to 9. The Parish is (and will have to remain) divided into 4 Wards and the Parish Council suggest the following arrangement:

Lickey Grange Ward 659 electors, 2 Councillors (presently 2)
Lickey Monument Ward 919 electors, 2 Councillors (presently 3)
Linthurst Ward 1080 electors, 3 Councillors (presently 4)
Shepley Ward 592 electors, 2 Councillors (presently 2)

The Parish Council states that it has been working satisfactorily with its present number of 8 Councillors and has been unable to co-opt further members.

They point out that:

- The Parish Council would more easily be able to apply for Quality Parish Status with a reduced number of Councillors - at present it is ineligible because of the low number of Councillors
- The present eight Councillors have been able to carry out and prepare plans for a website, design improved newsletters, co-operate with the Highways Partnership over all highways matters and with the District Council over planning matters; maintain the Parish Council's own grass cutting and litter picking programmes, and work together with other organisations within the Parish to improve community life
- The present eight Councillors and fully qualified clerk are able to carry out all the above duties satisfactorily and have the confidence to carry on doing so with a reduced number of members.

The arrangement suggested by the Parish Council will result in an overall elector/councillor ratio of 361, as opposed to the present 298. The ratios for the individual Wards will range between 296 (Shepley) to 460 (Lickey Monument). These figures will be higher than most in the District, although it is not thought that the discrepancy in the ratios between the individual Wards is so great as to justify any accusation of electoral inequality within the Parish (in any event, given a total number of 9 Parish Councillors, it would not be possible to achieve a more even distribution between the Wards).

The consultation exercise shows that of the 1641 properties consulted, 31 consultation forms were returned of which 25 supported the proposal and 6 wished to remain as they are

3.9 Stoke Parish Council

The Committee will be aware that Stoke Parish Council was subject to a recent review, which resulted in its boundary being extended to include the whole of the District Council's Stoke Heath Ward. Alongside this, it was agreed that the size of

the Parish Council be increased from its present level of 10 (7 for the Stoke Prior Ward and 3 for the Stoke Heath Ward) to 15 (7 for the Stoke Prior Ward and 8 for the Stoke Heath Ward) and that its name should be changed from Stoke Prior to Stoke.

The Parish Council has now indicated that it believes that the appropriate number of Parish Councillors is 12, rather than 15, and that there should be 6 Councillors for each Ward. The Parish Council states that it believes that 12 Councillors is a more appropriate and manageable number for the Parish and that it doubts whether enough Candidates could be found to fill all the vacancies if the number was increased to 15.

This could have an effect on the Parish Council's ability to achieve Quality Status. A reduction in the number of Parish Councillors to 12 would increase the overall elector/councillor ratio from 242 to 302, which is not out of line with the proposals in similarly sized Parishes. The two Wards of the Parish have similar electorate sizes (Stoke Prior 1722 and Stoke Heath 1905), so the proposal to divide the total number of Parish Councillors equally between them appears to meet the requirements of electoral equality.

The consultation exercise shows that of the 1838 properties consulted, 136 consultation forms were returned of which 125 supported the proposal, 9 wished to remain as they are and 2 wished to make other comments.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

5. Legal Implications

5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Background Papers

Letter from Beoley Parish Council dated 12/2/05, received 5/4/05

Letter from Hagley Parish Council dated 24/5/05

Email from Hagley Parish Council dated 30/6/05

Letter from Lickey and Blackwell Parish Council dated 7/4/05

Letter from Stoke Parish Council to ODPM dated 13/1/05 and ODPM's reply dated 12/4/05.

Contact officer

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