



BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 12TH JULY 2005
AT 6.00 P.M.

COUNCIL CHAMBER, THE COUNCIL HOUSE, BURCOT LANE, BROMSGROVE

MEMBERS: 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, G. G. Selway, Mrs. C. J. Spencer and E. C. Tibby

AGENDA

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1. Election of Chairman of the Committee for the ensuing Municipal Year
2. Election of Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the ensuing Municipal Year
3. To receive apologies for absence and notification of substitutes
4. Declarations of interest and whipping arrangements
5. To receive the Minutes of the Meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee held on 30th March 2004
6. To consider the Report of the Head of Administrative Services relating to non-confidential and non-exempt items
7. 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

30th June 2005

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 30th March 2004, at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT Councillors C. R. Scurrall (Chairman), Mrs. C. J. Spencer (Vice Chairman), G. N. Denaro, Mrs. J. Dyer M.B.E., D. Hancox, C.J. Lanham, P. M. McDonald, Mrs. M. A. Sherrey (substituting for Councillor Mrs. J. M. L. A. Griffiths), and E. C. Tibby

Councillor Mrs. M. M. T. Taylor attended the meeting as an observer.

12/03 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs. J. M. L. A. Griffiths.

13/03 **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

No declarations of interest or whipping arrangements were made.

14/03 **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.

15/03 **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) **FUTURE ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS OF WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

The Head of Administrative Services reported that the Boundary Committee of the Electoral Commission had produced its report and recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Worcestershire County Council. The report detailed the proposal from the Boundary Committee which was based on conterminosity between the boundaries of the County Divisions and District wards. The Committee also considered the County Council's proposals.

RECOMMENDED that the Boundary Committee of the Electoral Commission be informed of this Council's support for its proposals on the electoral arrangements of Worcestershire County Council, based on conterminosity between the boundaries of the County divisions and District wards.

Councillor P. M. McDonald requested that his opposition to the above recommendation be recorded.

The Meeting closed at 6.10 p.m.

Chairman

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

12TH JULY 2005

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES RELATING TO NON-CONFIDENTIAL AND NON-EXEMPT ITEMS

1. **PARISH REVIEWS**

Introduction

The Council has received a number of requests from Parish Councils in this area to review the number of elected Councillors for those Parishes.

The requests are all for a reduction in the number of Councillors and in some, if not all cases, arise from the requirements of the Quality Parish Councils scheme. As things presently stand, one of the requirements for a Parish Council to achieve quality status is that at least 80% of its Councillors must have been elected at the last whole-Council elections (2003) rather than having been co-opted on to the Parish Council. However, in future, this requirement will rise from 80% to 100%, meaning that any Parish Council which receives fewer nominations than there are positions on the Council will not be able to achieve quality status. Consequently, some Councils are proposing a reduction in the number of Councillors they will have in future, in order to give themselves a better chance of achieving Quality Status.

However, this will not be the only reason for some Parish Councils seeking to reduce the number of Councillors. Some of them have long-standing vacancies, which they are unable to fill, simply because no-one will come forward. In other cases the ratio of Electors to Councillors is a very low one, perhaps too low to be either realistic or necessary. A table is set out below showing the number of Electors per Councillor in each Parish in the District.

PARISH	NO. OF ELECTORS	NO. OF COUNCILLORS	ELEC/CLLRS
Alvechurch	4298	12	358
Barn Green	1425	8	178
Belbroughton	2011	14	144
Bentley Pauncefoot	285	7	41
Beoley	809	9	90
Bournheath	392	7	56
Catshill & North Marlbrook	4421	13	340
Clent	2035	9	226
Cofton Hackett	1461	9	162
Dodford with Grafton	622	7	89
Finstall	496	7	71
Frankley	98	5	20
Hagley	3461	15	231
Hunnington	478	7	68
Lickey and Blackwell	3283	11	298
Lickey End	2114	10	211
Romsley	1331	7	190
Stoke	3627	15	242
Tutnall and Cobley	624	7	89
Wythall	9413	15	628

It will be noted that the figures vary widely, from 628 electors/councillor in Wythall to only 20 electors/councillor in Frankley. It would seem that those Parishes with a low figure in the right hand column of the table have, in one respect at least, the greatest justification for reducing the number of Parish Councillors which they have.

The process of the Review in each case should include (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.

It would be appropriate to ask the Parish Councils concerned to assist in the consultation exercises.

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, shown in the table above, is a very low one and reducing the number of Parish Councillors to 7 would increase this to 114, which is still low.

If the Committee believes that the Parish Council's proposal is justified, it would be appropriate to undertake a consultation exercise.

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 - they run the Council on the basis of electing Lead councillors for the main issues i.e. Finance and General Purposes; Planning; Environment; Highways and Lighting; Village Enhancement. This works effectively along with the roles of Chairman and Vice Chairman and still leaves enough Councillors to take on special projects as necessary, recent examples being a parking survey of the village and a formal bid for funding to replace our outdated play equipment. All enquiries are directed through the Clerk at the Parish Office which is open to the public at least two hours each weekday. The Council meets on the first and third Monday of each month, which gives plenty of time for all issues to be covered.

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.

If the Committee believes that the Parish Council's proposal is justified, it would be appropriate to undertake a consultation exercise.

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).

If the Committee believes that the Parish Council's proposal is justified, it would be appropriate to undertake a consultation exercise. Because this Parish has been subject to a review within the last five years, any decision made by this Council will be subject to approval by the Electoral Commission.

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 boundary change and the change in the name of the Parish were implemented with effect from 1st April 2004. However, because of delays in the process being followed at the Electoral Commission, the change in the number of Councillors has not yet been implemented and the proposal has now been placed in abeyance, following receipt of a further proposal from the Parish Council.

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.

If the Committee believes that the Parish Council's proposal is justified, it would be appropriate to undertake a consultation exercise. Because this Parish has been subject to a review within the last five years, any decision made by this Council will be subject to approval by the Electoral Commission.

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.

2. **POLLING DISTRICTS, STOKE HEATH WARD**

At the time that this Council's ward boundaries were altered in early 2003, two polling districts, designated as SA and SB, were created in the Stoke Heath Ward. There was a need to create two polling districts, because part of the Ward was in the Parish of Stoke Prior (as it was then called) and the remainder of the Ward was outside the Parish. The electors who lived outside the Parish were placed in polling district SA and those within the Parish were placed in polling district SB. However, the electors in both polling districts voted at the same location, in the same polling station at Morrisons Supermarket.

The boundary of the Parish, now called Stoke, has been revised and the whole of the Stoke Heath Ward is now included within it. The need to have two separate polling districts has disappeared and it will simplify the appearance of the Register of Electors to amalgamate them into one. Doing so will not cause any alteration to the way in which people vote, or to the location of the polling station.

The Committee is therefore asked to recommend 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.

Background Papers:

None

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30th June 2005