

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MEETING OF THE ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE**

**3RD SEPTEMBER 2020, AT 6.00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Councillors R. J. Hunter (Vice-Chairman), S. R. Colella, R. J. Deeming,  
L. C. R. Mallett and M. Middleton

Officers: Mrs. C. Felton, Mr D. Whitney, Ms M. Bassett and Ms. A. Scarce

1/2020

**APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M. Glass and S. Hession.

2/2020

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

3/2020

**MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the electoral Matters Committee held on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2020 were submitted.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee held on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2020 be approved as a correct record.

4/2020

**POLLING PLACE ALTERATION 2020**

The Electoral Services Manager introduced the Polling Place Alteration Report for 2020 and explained that this was a follow on from the report received at the February 2020 meeting, when it was agreed to use the Westmead Hotel for the PCC elections, which due to Covid-19 had not in fact taken place. It had been agreed at that meeting that the polling place would be reviewed once that election had taken place and the Village Hall had put the new disabled access in place. This had now been completed and officers had inspected the site and were quite happy with the access. The District councillor, Councillor C. Hotham was in support of the polling place returning to the Village Hall. Alvechurch Parish Council had also sent a letter in support of the return to the Village Hall. When polling places are reviewed the Acting Returning Officer has to be asked for their comments and he raised no objections to the change of the polling place back to the Village Hall. One of the areas mentioned when visiting the polling place was that the Council would like a guarantee that the Village Hall could be used as a polling place at short notice as previously there had been booking problems in respect of not enough notice being given. Officers would

also like to be able to request that the Village Hall be opened up and closed on polling day and during delivery as currently the presiding officer has to collect the keys from nearby.

Members asked whether the Village Hall had indicated whether they were happy with the recommendations and officers advised that this had not been received as yet. Officers confirmed that the addition of the opening and closing of the Village Hall and use at short notice, would be a useful addition to the agreement made with them.

**RESOLVED** that Hopwood Village Hall be the agreed polling place for BHA subject to agreement that the Village Hall be made available at short notice and is opened and closed by a Village Hall key holder on Polling Day.

5/2020

### **COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW FOR A PROPOSED NEW PARISH WITHIN THE CURRENT STOKE PARISH AREA**

The Electoral Services Manager introduced the report in respect of a Community Governance Review for a proposed new parish within the current Stoke Parish area. It was noted that members of the community had raised a petition, part of the report was for Members to note and receive the petition and the Electoral Services Manager had the petition with him and showed this to the Members (via his online screen). It was confirmed that it had been checked by officers to ensure those signing were valid electors, there were 228 signatures, 13 not on the register, 20 had not signed but 195 were valid, as the requirement was 187 the petition was therefore valid. Once it is confirmed as a valid petition then a community governance review had to take place. Appendix 1 to the report had the draft terms of reference which Members needed to agree in order to proceed. The review needed to be completed within one year of receiving the petition. The report also asked for delegation to the Chief Executive, in consultation with Members of the Committee to make minor amendments to the terms of reference is necessary, this was mainly in regard to the time table, should these need to be revised at any stage.

It was noted that following publication of the agenda the lead petitioner had emailed Electoral Services querying one of the parts of the terms of reference (page 16 of the agenda pack and page 3 of the terms of reference). He was unhappy with the reference to “..... the potential splitting of the existing parish, it is important that all residents have the opportunity to respond. The document will initially outline the implications of splitting the parish, and ask residents for their views. It will be delivered to every address in the parish, and include a form to return .....” The lead petitioner had three points to make:

- The proposed remaining residents of Stoke Parish may realise that they will be expected to pay more per household for the same level of amenities, this could influence their opinion and be detrimental to the residents of Stoke Heath. This had been

discussed at officer level and with the Legal team and it was felt that the whole parish should be consulted as they did have an interest as assets would be changing hands. There was some sympathy in respect of this and it would be dependant on how the consultation document would be worded. It was suggested that an additional recommendation be added that suggested a short additional meeting of the Committee was held once the consultation documents was ready in order for Members to agree that document, before commencement. It was confirmed that the guidance was clear that it should not be based on financial issues, but the betterment of parish residents.

- The second point was in respect of Stoke Parish being formed by adding the then Stoke Heath Ward, at that time only the residents of Stoke Heath were included in the consultation. No residents of the Stoke Prior Parish were consulted at that time and the lead petitioner did not believe that they should be consulted now. Officers had been unable to find any documents on this to see what exactly had happened, but following discussions with Legal it was likely to have been done as the parish was being added to and not taking away an area.
- The third point was the petition had been accepted by just involving Stoke Heath residents and should remain so. Officers advised that the legislation stated that “you should consult with the Local Government electors for the area under review and consult with any other person or body who appears to have any interest in the review”. It was believed that the electors of Stoke Prior fell into that category.

It was noted that the terms of reference were standard for a Community Governance Review as was the timetable.

Members raised the following points during their discussions:

- It had been stated that Stoke Heath residents were unhappy with the current arrangement and officers were asked to clarify why this was. Officers confirmed that it was felt that there was a geographic issue.
- It was asked as to whether officers were aware of any appetite to form a parish in Stoke Heath – officers were not able to respond to this, but suggested that through the consultation this may become more apparent.
- It was noted that the majority of assets were in fact within Stoke Prior side, in respect of the second element of the points raised by the lead petitioner which did not seem to be logical and that the method of entry in to the parish was somewhat irrelevant in terms of exit.
- The impact of a split would have an effect on both residents of Stoke Heath and Stoke Prior and was therefore a decision for all concerned, as it may be felt that the Parish was too big and covered too wide an area.

- The type of questions that would be asked within the consultation and the difficulty in posing questions which would give a fair view from both sides of the current parish area. It was confirmed that Members would get an opportunity to see the questions prior to the consultation commencing.
- It was confirmed that there had been no additional information from the relevant ward councillors.

The Committee briefly discussed the terms of reference and timeline and were happy to proceed on the basis set out in appendix 1 of the report.

**RESOLVED:**

- a) that the valid petition from residents of Stoke Heath Parish Ward be received and noted;
- b) that the Terms of Reference for the Community Governance Review at appendix 1 of the report be agreed;
- c) that authority be delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with Members of the Committee, to make minor amendments to the Terms of Reference, including the timetable for the review, if required; and
- d) that a short meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee be arranged prior to commencement of the consultation period in order for it to consider the questions within it.

The meeting closed at 6.28 p.m.

Chairman