

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

28TH FEBRUARY 2018, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors R. L. Dent (Chairman), R. J. Deeming, M. Glass,
C.A. Hotham, L. C. R. Mallett (Vice-Chairman) and M. J. A. Webb

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

1/17 **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED that Councillor R. L. Dent be elected Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

2/17 **ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED that Councillor L. C. R. Mallett be elected Vice Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

3/17 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S. J. Baxter and L. J. Turner, with Councillor C. Hotham attending as substitute for Councillor Baxter.

4/17 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest, although it was noted that both Councillors R. Deeming and C. Hotham were parish councillors.

5/17 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the electoral Matters Committee held on 16th February 2017 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee held on 16th February 2017 be approved as a correct record.

6/17 **COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW**

The Electoral Services Manager introduced the report and explained that a Governance Review of the Bromsgrove District Area had been something which he had been looking at carrying out since he took up

the post of Electoral Services Manager in 2016. The following areas were highlighted during presentation of the report:

- It was some time since a full review had been carried out (Officers had been unable to find a record of when the last one had taken place).
- It was good practice to carry out a full review every 10-15 years.
- There were a number of parishes who had been in contact asking whether one would be carried out.
- The timing was good as there were no elections this year at Bromsgrove and any changes could feed into the District and Parish elections in 2019.
- A full review would take less resources than a number of small ad hoc reviews which could potentially come forward should the review not take place.
- The Council was obliged to carry out a review if it were petitioned by a parish or representatives from an area. The Hagley/Clent review was given as an example of where this had previously happened.

Following presentation of the report, Members asked for clarification in respect of a number of areas including:

- The Government's definition of a "strong presumption" in respect of being against the abolition or parishes there creation. The Electoral Services Manager provided the background to this and that the Secretary of State's powers. The final decision in respect of an area no longer being parished sat with the Secretary of State. Further clarification would be provided to Members outside of the meeting. It was noted that in recent years this had happened on one occasion within Bromsgrove District.
- Whether Worcestershire County Council would be consulted as part of the process – it was confirmed that they would be.
- The cost effectiveness of holding the review at this stage as opposed to the potential for ad hoc petitions being received. Concerns were raised that by not carry out a review such petitions may come forward.
- It was confirmed that the Council had a duty act upon any petition received.
- The impact should the review be delayed until 2019 – Members were concerned that there was the potential for issues to be raised which would take longer than the timescale proposed and would not want these to be "rushed through" in order to meet the required deadline. It was confirmed that a 12 month deadline was a requirement.
- Should the review be delayed until 2019 it was highlighted that any changes which arose would not be implemented until the elections in 2023.
- Exact costings could not be provided in respect of such petitions, but it was highlighted by officers that should these be received it

was likely that additional external resources would be required, which would add to the overall costs. This would also apply should the review be held outside of the timescale suggested.

- It was confirmed that there was no statutory requirement to carry out a review, simply guidance which suggested a review should be carried out every 10-15 years.
- Any review would begin with a “light touch” approach and then should there be specific issues in a particular area which needed more in depth work carried out this would be done as necessary.
- Concerns were raised around any matters which would be raised that the Council was not already aware of and the potential impact of a number of ad hoc petitions received, which had to be responded to. By carry out a review the Council had an opportunity to deal with these in a more “controlled” manner.
- Members discussed the impact of future housing developments and whether this would change the landscape for any decisions which were made should a review be carried out in 2018. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that she had discussed this with the Head of Planning and she had confirmed that these were long term projects which would not impact on this review at this stage. It was also noted that going forward the housing report referred to was not a material planning document but would be used as evidence in support of the local plan review which was currently underway.
- Whether there was the option for the Parishes to pay or contribute towards the cost of the review. Officers confirmed that the Council was responsible for any costs which were incurred in respect of such a review.
- The option to recommend a timeline to Council for 2019 rather than 2018. It was confirmed by officers if this was the case then a further report would need to be prepared to cover the potential increase in cost for additional resources.
- The position in respect of parish councils and whether they would have enough time to formulate any ideas in time to meet the deadline in 2018. It was advised that although some parish councils did not meet every month there was always the option of calling an emergency meeting. It was likely that those that wished to put forward representations would already have ideas around any changes that they wished to propose.

Following further discussions the Committee

RECOMMENDED that a Community Governance Review of the Bromsgrove District Area does not take place in 2018.

The meeting closed at 6.49 p.m.

Chairman