

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

FRIDAY 23RD FEBRUARY 2024, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors E. M. S. Gray, A. Bailes, S. R. Colella, D. Hopkins, K.J. May, D. J. Nicholl and S. T. Nock

Officers: Mrs. C. Felton and Mr D. Whitney

18/23

TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H. Rone-Clarke (Chairman), J. Robinson (Vice-Chairman), C. Hotham, H. Jones and R. Lambert with Councillors D. Hopkins, D. Nicholl, A. Bailes, S. Nock and K. May in attendance as the substitute Members respectively.

As apologies for absence had been submitted by the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman, the Committee was requested to elect a chairperson for this meeting.

On being put to the vote it was

RESOLVED that Councillor E.M. S. Gray be elected as Chairman for the meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee on 23rd February 2024.

19/23

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor A. Bailes declared an Other Disclosable Interest for item 4 – Minute Item 21/23 - Polling Places Alterations 2024 in that he was a friend of the owner of The Old Rose and Crown Hotel.

Councillor K. May declared an Other Disclosable Interest for item 6 – Minute Item 23/23 - Local Government Boundary Commission for England – Worcestershire County Divisions Review in her capacity as Worcestershire County Council Ward Member for Clent Division.

Both Members remained in the meeting and took part in the vote thereon for these items.

20/23

TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE HELD ON 7TH DECEMBER 2023

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7th December 2023 were submitted for Members consideration.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 7th December 2023 be approved as a correct record.

21/23

POLLING PLACES ALTERATIONS 2024

The Returning Officer and Electoral Services Manager presented the Polling Places Alterations 2024 for the consideration of the Committee.

During the presentation of the report, Members were advised that changes needed to be made to some Polling Places in readiness for the elections due to be held in May 2024. These changes had come to light following the previous meeting of the Committee and Members were asked to make a decision on these changes.

Polling District ASA (Aston Fields North), ASB (Aston Fields South)

Members were reminded that at the meeting held on 7th December 2023 it was agreed that St Godwald's Church continued to be used as a polling place for Polling District ASA (Aston Fields North), ASB (Aston Fields South). Officers had also investigated the use of the Salvation Army Hall on Carlyle Road which had previously been used as a polling place. Officers were of the opinion that the Salvation Army Hall would be suitable as a polling place.

Polling District CAN (Woodrow)

Members were informed that the current polling place of Catshill Methodist Church Hall was booked for the dates of the election in May 2024 and that the bookings were unable to be changed. Officers had therefore visited Catshill Village Hall and investigated this site as an alternative polling place. Although it was noted that this venue had limited onsite parking, there was on road parking provision across the road. It was therefore deemed by Officers that Catshill Village Hall was suitable for use a polling place for May 2024.

Polling Districts COB/LHA (Lickey/Lickey Monument)

The Returning Officer presented Members with the information in respect of the proposed alteration to the polling place for Polling Districts COB/LHA (Lickey/Lickey Monument). It was confirmed that the usual polling place at the Trinity Centre (Lickey Parish Hall) was unavailable for the elections due to take place in May 2024. It was reported that the owners of the Trinity Centre were unwilling to change the current bookings due to the impact on the current user, a local nursery.

Therefore, alternative venues had been investigated. These were as follows:

1. Holy Trinity Church
2. NASUWT Education Centre
3. The Old Rose and Crown Hotel
4. Lickey Hills Primary School

In terms of the Holy Trinity Church site, it was explained that there was reasonable space for polling. However, the onsite parking provision was problematic and on street parking, although available, would need to be subject to a Health and Safety assessment due to the speed of motorists on this road and the proximity of the road from the pavement. In addition, there would need to be additional measures put in place to ensure adequate lighting on the site. Officers were also unsure as to whether a ramp would be able to be sited there for electors who experienced mobility difficulties and required alternative access.

Officers reported that the NASUWT Education Centre also posed challenges if selected as a Polling Place. The site was quite off road and potentially difficult for voters to find.

When investigating the Old Rose and Crown Hotel it was noted that this site also came with challenges and that an extra Polling Clerk would be required in order to assist with providing access to electors through a fire door. However, there was good onsite parking and a disabled parking space can be created. and that signage, both inside and outside of the premises was good. It was noted that there were some potholes in the car parking area, however, these could be fixed by the Environmental Services team in readiness should the venue be deemed acceptable to Members.

Officers accepted that the geographical location was not as ideal as the Trinity Centre as most electors within the Polling Districts resided in the

south of the District rather than the east where The Old Rose and Crown Hotel was located.

The Committee was informed that the Holy Trinity Church had offered to provide some communications, as had the Trinity Centre, to its members through the church newsletters as would the local parish council to inform residents of the change of venue.

Following the presentation of the report, Members queried the way in which Officers confirmed polling place bookings given that some elections were unscheduled, and the dates not known. It was explained that much of this was through good will of the venues when sites were required at short notice. It was confirmed that temporary buildings, such as portacabins, could be used. Or if necessary following discussion with the relevant Ward Member and Returning Officer that voters could use alternative polling places at short notice.

There were questions in respect of the financial implications when using multiple polling places for elections. It was reported that there were financial implications in terms of extra staffing costs and building hire. However, it was explained that, as there are no Local elections this year the cost of General and Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections costs were covered by Central Government.

Members raised whether there would be any issues in using a church as a polling place in terms of equality and diversity and whether a temporary building could be used on the usual Trinity Centre site. This was deemed unsuitable, and Officers confirmed that Members were being presented with the best options from all the venues that had been considered.

It was reported that car parking charges may be implemented by Birmingham City Council, in the future at The Old Rose and Crown Hotel site. This should certainly be considered if the venue was used as a venue for a polling place. Officers explained that there would need to be negotiations if this was the case and that there was precedent of venues waiving car parking charges on the days of elections.

Members were in agreement that Lickey Hills Primary School was not an option as they did not want to disrupt pupils' education. It was also stated that this was also the case for the nursery held at the Trinity Centre. Information on public transport available to access the Old Rose and Crown Hotel was discussed and that the location was at the bottom of a very steep hill which may be problematic for some electors.

However, it was suggested that there would potentially be complaints made by residents due to any changes made to the polling place and therefore the Old Rose and Crown Hotel was still the most suitable option.

Members were informed that any decision on Polling Districts COB/LHA (Lickey/Lickey Monument) would be discussed with the relevant Ward Member following any decision made by the Committee.

RESOLVED that the following changes to Polling Places take effect from 2nd May 2024

- a) The Salvation Army Hall in Carlyle Road be used as a Polling Place for Polling District ASA (Aston Fields North), ASB (Aston Fields South).
- b) Catshill Village Hall be used as a Polling Place for Polling District CAN (Woodrow).
- c) After discussion with the relevant Ward Member, the Old Rose and Crown Hotel be used as a Polling Place for Polling Districts COB/LHA (Lickey/Lickey Monument).

22/23

POSSIBLE COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW - FINSTALL PARISH

The Electoral Services Manager presented the report in respect of Possible Community Governance Review – Finstall Parish report.

Members were informed that Finstall Parish Council had made a request for a possible Parish Boundary change and therefore a Community Governance Review would need to be undertaken by Bromsgrove District Council.

The anomalies were centred around the location of Field View House within Finstall Ward. The suggestion was that the boundary be moved to follow the train line which would result in Field View House being part of the Bromsgrove Central Ward in the future.

In addition the parish would like to take in Polling District TAE, this is currently unparished and is in the same District Ward as Finstall Parish.

Members considered the proposals and queried what the process would be if the Community Governance Review was not undertaken. It was reported by Officers that if that was the decision taken by the Committee it might result in a petition being put together by residents and if

sufficient signatories were gathered then a Community Governance Review would have to be undertaken anyway.

The financial and resource implications were raised by Members. However, Officers reassured Members that these would be covered by existing budgets.

This was identified as an important responsibility and part of the democratic accountability of the Committee that it established and reflected the identity and interests of the community in that area and that it was effective and convenient for the electorate.

If Members agreed to undertake the Community Governance Review, then terms of reference would need to be drawn up and agreed by the Committee. The consultation period would be up to one calendar year and could be either a light touch review or a more in-depth review. Once the consultation period was finished then the findings would be brought back to the Committee to assess the most appropriate outcome.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the report be noted.
- 2) a Community Governance Review on Finstall Parish Council in regard to the areas detailed within the report and Appendix 1 be undertaken.

23/23

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND - WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY DIVISIONS REVIEW

The Electoral Services Manager presented the Local Government Boundary Commission for England - Worcestershire County Divisions Review for members consideration.

In doing so, it was highlighted that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) had recently published its draft proposals for the new Electoral County Divisions in Worcestershire. Included in the draft proposals were recommendations of eight Divisions, seven of which were single Members and one with two Members.

Members were informed that these proposals were currently out for consultation, and that individuals and political parties could make a submission on this consultation. Bromsgrove District Council could also make its own submission. However, Officers explained that as there was

currently a review underway by the LGBCE in respect of the Bromsgrove District wards that unless there were any further anomalies, such as the changes to Finstall Parish Council, as discussed earlier in the meeting, then no other submission should be made.

It was noted that the LGBCE would publish their final recommendations following the consultation period on 2nd July 2024 and these recommendations would be in place for the Worcestershire County Council elections in May 2025.

Following the presentation of the report, Members expressed their concerns regarding the draft proposals, particularly in respect of the Clent Hills Division proposal which recommended that Bell End, Bell Heath, currently in Belbroughton Division, be moved to the Woodvale Division. It was noted that the residents within the Belbroughton Division had no connectivity with Woodvale and most residents looked to Belbroughton to access their local amenities, such as schools, doctor's surgeries and for shopping. Residents had expressed their concerns in respect of moving Divisions and as elected Members representing the District's communities it would be appropriate to send a submission stating residents' concerns as part of the consultation process.

Members understood the residents' concerns and the importance of a community identity and the impact that this might have should it change as proposed. It was further stated that Belbroughton was a rural Division which significantly differed from the proposed new Division.

It was confirmed that Worcestershire County Council (WCC) had already made a submission regarding these recommendations and that Bromsgrove District Council should certainly make its own submission in order to raise the issue at every level as part of the consultation process.

The Committee discussed ways in which the submission would be drafted. Some Members expressed that this should be a wider Council discussion and decision. However, it was confirmed that due to the tight timeframes and that Council had delegated authority to the Electoral Matters Committee at its Annual Council meeting, to make decisions on behalf of the Council, then the wording could be drafted at this meeting. Officers also confirmed that all Bromsgrove District Council Members had received information on the proposed changes and were reminded that individuals and political parties could submit their own submission should they wish to do so.

Members queried why this matter had not been presented to the Committee prior to this meeting. It was confirmed that as there was due to be changes to the Ward Divisions in the near future coupled with the difficulty in scheduling Committee meetings due to lack of available meeting dates this matter could not be presented for Members' consideration.

In addition to the discussion in respect of Bell End, Bell Heath and Sling Common remaining within the Clent Hills division, Members also stated that there were some concerns over the proposal that Alvechurch and Wythall Division be combined into one Division with two Members. It was noted that these two Divisions were very different, both geographically and in size and this proposal would not be appropriate for its residents.

Following this detailed discussion, it was

RESOLVED that

- a) The report be noted.
- b) a submission be made to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England in respect of the Worcestershire County Divisions Review, in addition to the changes within Finstall Parish, as follows:

“The areas of Bell End, Bell Heath and Sling Common have no connection with the Woodvale County Council Division.

Therefore, Bromsgrove District Council sees no reason as to why these areas should be included in the Woodvale Division and should remain within the Clent Hills Division as the Clent Hills Division is where residents look to go for their shopping, their education and their doctor's surgery. In addition to this, the whole area also sits within Bellbroughton Parish Council's jurisdiction.

Furthermore, Bromsgrove District Council is of the opinion that Alvechurch and Wythall remain separate Divisions with a single Member for each of these separate Divisions”.

24/23

TO CONSIDER ANY URGENT BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED TO THE HEAD OF LEGAL, DEMOCRATIC AND PROPERTY SERVICES PRIOR TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE MEETING AND WHICH THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS TO BE OF SO URGENT A NATURE THAT IT CANNOT WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT MEETING

There was no Urgent Business on this occasion.

The meeting closed at 7.05 p.m.

Chairman