

COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON

TUESDAY, 22 NOVEMBER 2016

Councillors Present: Steve Ardagh-Walter, Howard Bairstow, Pamela Bale, Jeff Beck, Dennis Benneyworth, Dominic Boeck, Graham Bridgman, Paul Bryant, Keith Chopping, Jeanette Clifford, Hilary Cole, James Cole, Roger Croft, Richard Crumly, Rob Denton-Powell, Lee Dillon, Lynne Doherty, Billy Drummond, Adrian Edwards, Marcus Franks, James Fredrickson, Dave Goff, Nick Goodes, Clive Hooker, Carol Jackson-Doerge (Vice-Chairman), Marigold Jaques, Mike Johnston, Graham Jones, Rick Jones, Tony Linden, Mollie Lock, Gordon Lundie, Alan Macro, Tim Metcalfe, Ian Morrin, Graham Pask, Anthony Pick, James Podger, Quentin Webb (Chairman), Emma Webster and Laszlo Zverko

Also Present: John Ashworth (Corporate Director - Environment), Nick Carter (Chief Executive), Andy Day (Head of Strategic Support), Martin Dunscombe (Communications Manager), Rachael Wardell (Corporate Director - Communities), Robert Alexander (Group Executive (Conservatives)) and Moira Fraser (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Peter Argyle, Councillor Anthony Chadley, Councillor Sheila Ellison, Councillor Manohar Gopal, Councillor Alan Law, Honorary Alderman Royce Longton, Councillor Richard Somner, Councillor Anthony Stansfeld and Councillor Virginia von Celsing

Councillors Absent: Councillor Jeremy Bartlett, Councillor Paul Hewer and Councillor Garth Simpson

PART I

43. Declarations of Interest

All Councillors present declared an interest in Agenda Item 3, but reported that, as their interest was a personal but not a disclosable pecuniary interest, they determined to remain to take part in the debate and vote on the matter.

44. Council Size Boundary Review - Phase 1 (C3029)

(All Councillors declared a personal interest in Agenda item 3 by virtue of the fact that as Councillors they could be affected by the reduction in the number of Councillors being proposed. As their interest was personal they determined to take part in the debate and vote on the matter).

The Council considered a report (Agenda Item 3) which appraised them of the work that had been undertaken in relation to the Boundary Review (Council Size) and recommended a single figure as the proposed future number of Members with effect from the 2019/20 District Council elections.

Prior to the Motion being introduced the Chairman explained that Councillor Graham Jones would be proposing the recommendation as set out in paragraph 2.1 of the report and as part of his introduction he would also be proposing an amendment to the recommendation set out in paragraph 2.2 of the report which had been circulated to all Members in advance of the meeting.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Graham Jones and seconded by Councillor Steve Ardagh-Walter:

That the Council:

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“2.1 approves and adopts the Governance Report.”

AMENDMENT: Proposed by Councillor Graham Jones and seconded by Councillor Alan Macro:

That:

“2.2 for the purposes of Phase 1 of the Boundary Review process, the Council be requested to agree that the number of Members required from 2019/20 be reduced from the current number of 52 to 42 (+ or -1).”

Councillor Graham Jones noted the current boundaries were established in 2002. Since then the profile of the wards had changed over time as developments were erected. As a result of the development the disparity between the number of electors in various wards had grown. This imbalance meant that it had become necessary to revisit the ward boundaries and this was seen as an opportune time to examine the number of Members the authority needed to effectively govern the district.

In terms of governance the authority operated a Strong Leader Model supported by an Executive. The Council had scrutiny arrangements in place to hold the Executive to account and to review decisions which had an impact across the district. Quasi judicial committees such as Licensing and Planning were also in place as part of a comprehensive governance structure. The governance needs had however to be balanced against a membership that was affordable. These proposals could generate around £70k of savings.

At the September 2015 Council meeting it was agreed that the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC) would be approached about undertaking a Council Size Boundary Review so that the discrepancies between wards could be corrected.

Councillor Graham Jones noted that typically each Ward Member in West Berkshire represented around 2208 residents which was significantly lower than many other authorities in the South East e.g. Wiltshire (3538) and Portsmouth (3502). He noted that some other nearby unitary authorities operated with fewer than 52 Councillors e.g. Bracknell (42 Councillors). From this data it was apparent that if Members were minded to approve the recommendations, as amended, West Berkshire Council would not be an outlier in terms of its configuration. The implications of the changes for Councillors were clear and he urged Members to have the courage to do the right thing for the residents of West Berkshire.

Councillor Graham Jones noted that the amendment had originally been proposed by the Liberal Democrat Group. They had originally suggested a figure of 44 (+ or – 1) Councillors but following discussions between the Leaders this had been revised down to 42 (+ or -1). Councillor Jones’s personal view was that he would have preferred a figure of 40 (+ or -1) but that he felt that it was more important to present a unanimous view to the LGBC.

Councillor Steve Ardagh-Walter stated that he was pleased to second the Motion in relation to paragraph 2.1. As paragraph 2.2 was the subject of an amendment he would only be seconding the first recommendation.

Councillor Alan Macro, in seconding the amendment to recommendation 2.2, stated that it was the role of a Councillor not only to represent the residents of their own ward but also to represent the residents of the district as a whole. The compromise that needed to be sought was the ability to effectively represent those residents against the ability to have a useful Council. He commented that West Berkshire was one of the most sparsely populated parts of the South East of England.

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Decreasing the number of Councillors to 42 would constitute a 24% increase in the number of residents a Councillor would be representing. This would be the fourth highest figure for a district unitary authority. Councillor Macro noted that some wards already covered a large geographical area and noted that one single member ward currently covered eight parishes. Attending all eight parish meetings could be difficult for a ward member that chose to do so.

Councillor Macro acknowledged that modern technology did make it easier to contact residents but highlighted that Members did not have electronic contact details for all their residents and indeed some residents did not have access to electronic communication. This would still mean that Members would need to distribute leaflets and do some 'door knocking' to keep their residents informed.

The Amendment was put to the vote and declared **CARRIED**.

The debate then returned to the Substantive Motion. Councillor Steve Ardagh-Walter accepted that decreasing the number of Councillors would mean that the workload of individual Councillors might increase but felt that in the current financial climate this was the right thing to do.

(Councillor Mike Johnston arrived at 7.13pm)

Councillor Graham Jones questioned some of the statistics that were quoted by Councillor Macro. He also noted that issues such as the geographical size of wards, rurality and deprivation issues were outside of the criteria for this exercise.

The Substantive Motion was put to the meeting and duly **RESOLVED**.

(Councillor Mike Johnston did not vote on this item as he was not present for the whole discussion)

(The meeting commenced at 7.00pm and closed at 7.15pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature

(The meeting commenced at 7.00pm and closed at 7.15pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature