

DRAFT

Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 23 MARCH 2017

Councillors Present: Steve Ardagh-Walter, Peter Argyle, Howard Bairstow, Pamela Bale, Jeff Beck, Dennis Benneyworth, Dominic Boeck, Graham Bridgman, Paul Bryant, Anthony Chadley, Keith Chopping, Jeanette Clifford, Hilary Cole, James Cole, Richard Crumly, Rob Denton-Powell, Lee Dillon, Lynne Doherty, Adrian Edwards, Sheila Ellison, Marcus Franks, James Fredrickson, Manohar Gopal, Paul Hewer, Clive Hooker, Carol Jackson-Doerge (Vice-Chairman), Marigold Jaques, Mike Johnston, Graham Jones, Alan Law, Tony Linden, Mollie Lock, Tim Metcalfe, Graham Pask, James Podger, Garth Simpson, Richard Somner, Anthony Stansfeld, Virginia von Celsing, Quentin Webb (Chairman), Emma Webster and Laszlo Zverko

Also Present: Nick Carter (Chief Executive), Andy Day (Head of Strategic Support) and Peta Stoddart-Crompton (Public Relations Officer), Moira Fraser (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager), Honorary Alderman Royce Longton (Honorary Alderman), Gabrielle Mancini (Group Executive - Conservatives) and Honorary Alderman Andrew Rowles (Honorary Alderman)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Roger Croft, Councillor Billy Drummond, Councillor Dave Goff, Councillor Rick Jones, Councillor Gordon Lundie, Councillor Alan Macro, Honorary Alderman Joe Mooney and Councillor Anthony Pick

Councillors Absent: Councillor Jeremy Bartlett, Councillor Nick Goodes and Councillor Ian Morrin

PART I

88. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

89. Local Government Boundary Review

The Council considered a report (Agenda Item 3) which proposed new warding patterns based on the Council's agreed position to see a Council size of 42 + or – 1 number of Members with effect from the 2019/20 District Council Elections.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Graham Jones and seconded by Councillor Lee Dillon:

That the Council:

1. "approves the proposed warding patterns and proposed new names, where appropriate, for each ward as part of Stage 2 of the review of the Council's boundaries.
2. asks the Local Government Boundary Commission to look at whether the Greenham ward should be two single Member wards based on a view that there would be two distinct communities of the Racecourse development and the proposed new Sandleford development".

In introducing the item Councillor Jones proposed the following amendment:

AMENDMENT: Proposed by Councillor Graham Jones and seconded by Councillor Lee Dillon:

That the:

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“recommendations set out in paragraphs 2.1 and 2.2 be adopted subject to the following amendment:

Delegation be given to the Head of Strategic Support, in consultation with the Acting Leader of the Council, to agree the final ward names”.

Councillor Graham Jones noted that more Member engagement was needed in the process and some input in regard to new names for the wards would be welcomed. He asked that Members notify the Head of Strategic Support about any suggested changes by the 03 April 2017 at the latest. The Acting Leader would discuss any changes with the Leader of the Opposition and any subsequent changes would then be incorporated into the Council’s submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC).

Councillor Jones noted that the Council had already been through the first stage of the process and had agreed that the size of the Council should be reduced to 42 + or – 1. This amounted to a 20% reduction in the number of elected councillors post the 2019/20 election and would send a strong message to residents about making the Council more efficient.

The next stage was to submit the warding patterns to the LGBC. In developing the Council’s submission a number of principles had been adopted and a formulaic approach had been used to forecast future numbers of electors. The wards were based on parish boundaries, numbers of electors, electoral parity and existing identifiable boundaries such as railways and roads. The numbers were based on current population figures, potential development sites etc as well as the Office of National Statistics prediction that the population of West Berkshire would increase by 3.2% by 2022. Councillor Jones accepted that there might be some anomalies in the forecasting but that the process was as scientific as it could be.

Councillor Jones commented that if Members had a different view to that being proposed they, like the parish and town councils and residents, could of course make their own submissions to the LGBC. He cautioned however that in making any changes Members needed to be mindful of the ripple effect that a change in one area could affect on another. Councillor Jones thanked colleagues on the Working Group and the Opposition for all their input in developing the submission.

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

Councillor Lee Dillon stated that once the figure of 42 was agreed it was immaterial whether work on setting the wards started in the east or west. It would always be difficult to create a perfect balance and it was inevitable that a degree of ‘squeezing’ would ensue in the middle such as had happened in Mortimer.

He thanked Officers for all the work they had put into developing the proposal which was a good building block to work on.

(Councillor Mike Johnston arrived at 7.12pm)

Councillor Dillon commented that, in his opinion, the ward that stood out the most was Cold Ash which would now start in Donnington and end in Yattendon and the voters on either end were likely to feel that they had very little in common with each other. He commented that if the residents were not happy they could also submit their comments to the LGBC.

Councillor Graham Bridgman congratulated Officers that had undertaken this difficult task and he stated that the result was broadly well worked, keeping rural areas contiguous with parish boundaries. He stated that a possible solution for Mortimer would be to include Beech Hill with Burghfield although he could see the logic of keeping the village in the Mortimer Ward. He had been asked by residents to convey their view which was

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that they had grown accustomed to having two ward members and that they felt that reducing it to a single member ward would lead to a diminution of support they would receive.

Councillor Alan Law stated that for the first time since he had been elected he had split loyalties. Although he was usually loyal to his party he also had a duty of loyalty to his constituents who were against the proposal to split Basildon Ward into two separate wards. The four villages in his current ward had a sense of joint community. They shared a school, vicar and monthly magazine and felt that they did not have much in common with the Downlands Ward or the Eastern Urban Area. They considered themselves to live in the 'Goring Gap' and had close ties with Goring and Pangbourne and not the Ilsleys or Compton.

He noted that paragraph 2.7 of the report stated that 'Wherever possible however, existing Community links have been retained' but felt that this had not been applied to the Basildon Ward. He noted that Members had been encouraged, should they wish to submit a counter proposal, to consider the domino effect of any changes. He had attempted to do this but it had proved very difficult. He was therefore disappointed that Officers had not been asked to come up with a number of options for Members to select the most optimal one from. Councillor Law asked if the recent planning appeal decision in North Newbury had been factored into the calculations. As he would be submitting a different proposal to the LGBC he could not be hypocritical and vote in favour of this motion.

Councillor Anthony Stansfeld stated that his residents would prefer to see a three Member Ward covering Inkpen and Hungerford.

Councillor Garth Simpson stated that the residents of Cold Ash would prefer to see the ward revert back to its civil parish boundary. He noted the requirement that a ward should not have any gaps but felt that this could be overcome. Cold Ash Parish Council would be submitting its own proposals to the LGBC.

Councillor Mollie Lock commented that the residents of Wokefield were upset about moving out of the Mortimer Ward as they tended to look to Mortimer Village for their services.

Councillor Clive Hooker stated that when he had stood to be elected as a Ward Member for the Downlands Ward he understood that one of his main roles was to support the parish councils. Currently he attended around 50 parish council meetings per year. Increasing the size of the Downlands Ward to cover eight parish councils and three parish meetings would make it impossible for him to continue to attend all their meetings. It would also be financially difficult for him to attend meetings where his journey would be around 40 minutes in duration and he felt that this change would diminish the service provided to residents.

Councillor Paul Bryant stated that he was concerned about the impact the recent planning appeal in North Newbury would have on his current ward. He was also concerned that this might be the first of a number of anomalies that might ensue over the next few years which would skew electoral parity. His residents and parish council were not overly concerned about the changes.

Councillor Emma Webster stated that her residents too were not overly concerned as their children would still attend the same schools, they would still be able to access the same facilities and they would still be able to engage with their elected Members. She reminded Members that they were not elected to attend parish council meetings instead they were elected to represent all their residents and in any event boundaries were always changing. The key would be about being accessible and finding new ways to

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engage with residents. Members had been asked to make many difficult decisions over the past few years and she felt that this was not one of them.

Councillor Graham Jones commented that he was pleased to see a passionate debate from Members on behalf of the communities they represented. He acknowledged the arguments raised and respected the opinions of his fellow Members. However, change was inevitable and he reminded Members that this process was not an exact science. The Working Group had considered a number of options and proposals but no solutions had been developed that were better than the one being presented at this meeting.

In respect of the planning appeal in North Newbury, the projections were based on the best possible information available at the time. Changes might arise before 2022 but he noted that Shaw would be able to absorb the additional electors.

In closing he reminded Members that they, their parish councils and residents could make their own submissions to the LGBC. They were an independent body that could evaluate all the consultation responses.

Councillor Jones thanked Officers for the work that they had done on this difficult task and he felt that the results they had produced were highly commendable.

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

(The meeting commenced at 7.00pm and closed at 7.31pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature