

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRACY AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 20 NOVEMBER 2023

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillors Cooper (Chairman), Bartlett, Cox, English, Jeffery, Perry and Webb
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42. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rose and M Thompson.

43. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

44. URGENT ITEMS

The Chairman stated that there was an urgent update to Item 16 – Polling Districts and Polling Places Review 2023, which was accepted because it contained information relevant to the item’s consideration.

45. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

46. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

Councillors English and Perry disclosed that they were members of Tovil, Detling and Bearsted Parish Councils; and Staplehurst Parish Council respectively, in relation to Item 17 – Parish Election Cycle – Order. They intended to speak and vote on the item.

47. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillors Bartlett, Cooper, English, Jeffery and Perry stated that they had been lobbied on Item 14 – Policy Advisory Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Arrangements, Governance Review 2023/24.

48. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That all items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

49. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 SEPTEMBER 2023

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed.

50. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

51. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR LOCAL RESIDENTS

There were no questions from local residents.

52. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

53. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

54. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports of outside bodies.

55. POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS, GOVERNANCE REVIEW 2023/24

The Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance introduced the item and referred to the workshop that had taken place before the meeting attended by 19 Members. The workshop covered the options developed for consideration and provided Members an opportunity to ask questions, debate and present alternatives or improvements to the suggested Models. There was a vote taken at the end of the session:

- 11 votes for Model B (Cabinet plus Policy Advisory Scrutiny Committees);
- 4 votes for Model A (Current Model – up to 4 Policy Advisory Committees (PACs) plus 1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC));
- 4 votes for Model E (Cabinet plus Cabinet Advisory Committees and an Overview and Scrutiny Committee); and
- 0 votes for all other Models.

The Committee indicated that the session had been interesting but had not been binding. The Committee considered that models A and E were similar enough that they could be considered together, and there would be further work to do on model B. It was agreed that two options, one for a combined Model of A and E, and one for Model B should be worked on and presented to the Committee at its next scheduled meeting for further discussion, and recommendation to Council.

RESOLVED: That two Models including Model B and a combined version of Models A and E be worked up for presentation at the next scheduled committee meeting.

56. OUTSIDE BODY APPOINTMENTS

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager introduced the report and highlighted that there were several vacancies that had not received any nominations. It was advised that vacancies lasting for two full years would be considered for deletion. The Committee were asked to consider the nominations received and

make those appointments and to note the closure of Action with Communities in Rural Kent. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager clarified that communication with outside bodies was ongoing and that outside bodies varied significantly from each other. However, if one was due to be deleted the relevant outside body would be contacted.

RESOLVED: That

1. The nominations as set out in Appendix 3 to the report be approved; and
2. The closure of Action with Communities in Rural Kent be noted, with the Constitution to be amended by the Monitoring Officer to reflect the change.

57. POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW 2023

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager introduced the report and outlined the changes to boundaries following the polling district and polling place review and public consultation, as set out in the revised polling district table as part of the urgent update. This also included an extra recommendation for officer delegated authority to make further minor changes. The proposals for Thurnham electors were highlighted as the main change arising from the consultation. In addition the creation of smaller, temporary polling districts to accommodate pre-May 2024 register requests was brought to the Committee's attention.

With the impending deadline of register publication on 1 December, it was highlighted that minor changes, such as small shifts to polling districts or changes to codes might be required and delegation to officers was requested to make sure accurate information could be presented to Council on 29 November 2023.

The Committee were informed that changes to the Parish Election Cycle and minor alignments of Ward boundaries to Parish boundaries from by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) needed to be completed too, the latter might not be in place until March 2024.

In response to questions it was confirmed that there would be an additional polling place in Staplehurst so that three polling stations could be located there. One place to the West of the main road and one to the East that would host two polling stations as it did currently.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Council be recommended to agree the outcome of the Polling Districts and Polling Places Review 2023 set out at Amended Appendix 1 to the report; and
2. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager be given delegated authority to make minor changes to Polling Districts in Amended Appendix 1 to the report before the Council Meeting on 29 November 2023.

58. PARISH ELECTION CYCLE - ORDER

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager introduced the report and outlined how a Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, Section 53 order would allow alignment of all Parish Council election cycles with the Council's. It was highlighted that this would be administratively beneficial for the Council, financially beneficial for Parish Councils and an expected change which is in all parties' interests.

The Committee agreed that Parish Council elections that happened out of cycle were expensive and time consuming and that Parishes would likely be relieved to accept the new system.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to:

1. Agree that all Parish Council election cycles be aligned with Maidstone Borough Council's election cycle with the first such elections to take place in May 2024; and
2. Give the Director of Strategy Insight and Governance delegated authority to put in place the Order required to give effect to the Council's resolution.

59. DURATION OF MEETING

7.15 p.m. to 7.57 p.m.