

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

ELECTORAL AND BOUNDARY REVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Electoral and Boundary Review Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 15 October 2024.

PRESENT: Mr A Kennedy (Chairman), Mr D Jeffrey (Vice-Chairman), Mrs P T Cole, Mr R C Love, OBE and Mr A Brady

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr B Watts (General Counsel), Sian Connelly (Operational Delivery Officer), Ryan O'Connell (MBC – Democratic and Electoral Services Manager) and Joel Cook (Democratic Services Manager – Clerk)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

17. Substitutes

(Item 1)

Apologies were received from Dr Sullivan (Mr Brady substituting), Mr Hook, Mr Thomas and Mr Baker.

18. Declarations of Interest on any items on this agenda

(Item 2)

Mr Kennedy (Chair) declared that he was a paid political agent.

Mr Jeffrey declared that he was a paid political agent, Chair of the Kent Conservatives and a Member of the Association of Electoral Administrators.

19. Minutes - 27 March 2024

(Item 3)

RESOLVED the minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2024 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

20. Maidstone Borough Council Community Governance Review

(Item 4)

Maidstone Community Governance review

Ms Sian Connelly (Operational Delivery Officer – KCC) and Mr Ryan O'Connell (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager – Maidstone Borough Council) were in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Connelly provided background and context for the item, outlining the Community Governance Review undertaken by Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) in 2022/23 which resulted in recommendations being considered and approved by Maidstone Council in September 2023 and relevant Governance

Order coming into force in April 2024. Following the review, MBC had identified that some areas where Parish and County boundaries were no longer co-terminus. Consequently, MBC was consulting KCC via the Electoral and Boundary Review Committee on proposed alterations to remedy the issue. Any KCC views submitted would form part of the evidence submitted to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), which would subsequently make a decision on any required changes.

2. Ms Connelly clarified that the benefit of the changes would be to reduce the number of separate registers which would be required at polling stations, would reduce the likelihood of polling errors and make the administration of the register more straightforward. Local Members had been consulted on the issue and one response had been received and responded to on technical points relating to the scope of the review.

3. Mr O'Connell provided further information relating to the proposed changes to the Langley area, noting while the current number of electors was low, there was a requirement to consider and scope electorate growth. Therefore, future housing developments had been taken into account in calculating the potential increase.

4. Ms Connelly, Mr Watts and Mr O'Connell responded to comments and questions from Members, including.

- a) It was confirmed that the Parish changes had already been applied, with the relevant considerations regarding precepting boundaries. The proposals subject to the consultation at this stage involved minor changes to the divisional boundaries to align with the confirmed Parish boundaries. It was highlighted that local community views and community identity was taken into account as far as possible in finalising the Parish Boundaries.
- b) On that basis, it was important to emphasise that the boundary changes, if approved by the LGBCE, would not take effect until the next election period.
- c) Members commented on the benefits of advising electors of the changes at the earliest possible time. In terms of options for notifying electors prior to the requirement to send the required Poll Cards, Mr Watts confirmed that this issue could be explored separately.
- d) It was clarified that the LGBCE would have to take a view on the elector growth projection, recognising that housing development and growth were challenging to predict accurately in terms of timescales and practical change.

RESOLVED to note, comment on and endorse the proposed alterations to County Division boundaries in the Maidstone area.

21. County Scale of Election Fees and Expenses update - 2024-2025
(Item 5)

1. Ms Connelly provided an overview of the item, highlighting the previous decision of the Committee to approve the prior scale of fees for 24/25 which was intended to align the scale of fees for all elections by following changes brought in by the Department for Housing, Levelling Up and Communities (DHLUC) at the time.

Districts and Boroughs had also aligned their fees to match the same approach. However, since the last decision by the Committee in March 2024, DHLUC had updated its scale of fees and these had been used for the PCC election and general election. Therefore an updated scale of fees, now in line with the final DHLUC scales, had been produced for consideration and approval by the Committee.

2. Members discussed the cost implications should overnight counts be progressed for County elections. With comments made to support the implementation of arrangements to incentivise and support overnight counts being undertaken. Mr O'Connell commented from an election delivery perspective that overnight counts presented additional staffing challenges including recruitment and operational resilience, recognising that it involved some staff working over 24 hours straight.
3. Mr Watts, as County Returning Officer, advised that in view of the reliance of KCC on the work of the District and Borough Councils in delivering the elections, consideration of an overnight count would have to be subject to careful discussion with them as key partners. Mr Watts confirmed that delivery of a safe and proper election was the priority and the technical arrangements all had to support this priority. He noted that should an overnight count be viable, the consideration to how to recognise the unsocial hours element would be appropriate and necessary.
4. Responding to comments regarding the superannuation of the Deputy Returning Officer payments, Mr Watts advised that under Securing Kent's Future, full costing of this would be required before any agreement could be sought.
5. Mr Watts confirmed, recognising the comments from Members, that the DRO pay element and the update on the overnight count consideration, would be brought back to the Committee as part of consideration of the 25/26 scale of fees.

RESOLVED that the updated County Scale of Election Fees and Expenses 2024/25 be agreed