

MINUTES

ELECTORAL REVIEW COMMITTEE

31 OCTOBER 2023

Present:

Councillor Stevens (Chair) Councillor Taylor
Councillor Anderson Councillor Hannell
Councillor A Williams

Officers:

Michelle Anderson (Electoral Services Manager)
Mark Brookes (Assistant Director, Legal and Democratic Services)
Trudi Angel (Democratic Support Officer)

Also in attendance:

Councillor Ron Tindall - Leader of the Council & Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Commercial

The meeting started at 7.30 pm.

1. MINUTES

There were no minutes to be agreed.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

5. REVISED PARLIAMENTARY BOUNDARIES

M Anderson advised they were changing from two to three constituencies in Dacorum. The Hemel Hempstead constituency will remain with Dacorum. The South West Herts constituency falls under Three Rivers District Council and Dacorum would be liaising with them over any registration issues for the Kings Langley area. The new constituency was Harpenden and Berkhamsted, which will be run by St Albans District Council. Dacorum will be handing over Berkhamsted, Tring and surrounding areas to them but

liaising with them closely as it will be Dacorum's register. The Polling Place Order needed to be updated as a result.

There were no questions.

The committee noted the outcome of the parliamentary boundary review.

6. POLLING DISTRICT AND POLLING PLACE REVIEW

M Anderson highlighted the key points in the report.

Polling district BAB to move into polling district BAA to tidy up the registers with regards to polling day to try and reduce the paperwork amount for the polling stations.

Nash House to move from polling district AFAA (Apsley Corner Hall Ward) to polling district BA (Nash Mills Ward) as this was set up incorrectly.

Polling district boundary of ALB to be amended to accommodate the whole of Woodfield Road, Leverstock Green. It was proposed the boundary line should be moved to the back of the houses on the edge of Bunkers Park to incorporate the whole street, this would affect 20 properties. Electors would be advised accordingly if it were to go through.

A change of polling station in Chipperfield was proposed to move from Chipperfield Youth Club to Chipperfield Village Hall which was next door. This had come about following the previous election when doing risk assessments for the polling station. It was deemed the village hall would be a great location for a polling station after a site visit and the people running the hall had no problems with DBC using the space. The village hall staff were keen as they were hoping footfall there would increase awareness of the village hall as a place to hire. The youth club have also been advised and they didn't have any specific thoughts.

There was a recommendation for a new polling placing in the Boxmoor ward as the previous had been demolished. Around 600 electors had been temporarily moved to Warners End Community Centre as a polling station even though this fell into the Chaulden and Warners End ward. A site visit was carried out at the Hemel Hempstead Methodist Church in the middle of the polling district. They were happy to be used and they had been granted usage of downstairs rooms with good access and parking facilities.

The Polling District and Polling Places review had to be carried out every five years. This was started in September, went out for a six week consultation and any responses were included in the report.

The Chair asked who the Elections Claims Unit were. M Anderson responded they were the government department where they have to submit all expenditure claims for Parliamentary and Police and Crime Commissioner Elections.

Councillor Tindall asked if Chipperfield Hall and Methodist Hall were aware that if when a general election was called that they would need a Thursday clear and that they didn't have anything they wouldn't be able to shift around. M Anderson responded that they had discussed this at the site visit and that they were made aware of the potential limited notice. The Methodist Church have things booked in but arrangements had been made so they were in different rooms to avoid impact.

The following recommendations were agreed.

1. That the following polling district amendments are implemented:
 - Polling District BAB (Nash Mills Ward) to move to Polling District BAA (Nash Mills Ward)
 - Nash House to move from polling district AFAA (Apsley and Corner Hall ward) to move to Polling district BA (Nash Mills Ward)
2. That the Polling District boundary for ALB is slightly amended to accommodate the whole of Woodfield Road in Leverstock Green. **Please note that this recommendation has since been retracted.**
3. That the polling station in Chipperfield is relocated to the Village hall
4. That a new polling place is created at the Hemel Hempstead Methodist Church to accommodate the AGBA Boxmoor Polling District
5. That Council note the outcome of the Polling District & Polling Place Review 2023 and approve the amended Polling District & Polling Place Order

7. POLLING PLACE ORDER

M Anderson advised they needed to update the Polling District & Polling Place Order based on what the committee had agreed. She had prepared a copy of the document which included the new constituencies, the new polling places listed and the merged polling districts for Nash Mills. This would need to be referred to full council in November to approve.

There were no questions.

The committee agreed to recommend the updated Polling Districts and Polling Places Order to the full council.

8. ELECTORAL REVIEW PRESENTATION

M Anderson shared a comprehensive presentation to the committee on the Electoral Review.

What is an electoral review?

M Anderson noted that every fifteen years the LGBCE (Local Government Boundary Commission England) will come to a council and recommend they carry out an electoral review. The last time Dacorum had this was in 2006 and thus they were due to conduct one. The review considers the electoral arrangements for the local authority, looking at the number of councillors, number of wards, boundaries between wards, names of each ward and the number of councillors elected to each ward.

What is the process?

Phase 1 is to look at councillor numbers. This would be based on a population forecast as at 2030, looking at five years beyond the end date of the review. Once councillor numbers have been agreed, they look at the warding arrangements across the borough. It is then taken through parliament when the order is laid, then finally moved onto the implementation phase.

Phase 1: councillor numbers

Councillor numbers are looked at based on a 2030 forecast. During the phase they are asked to make a case for a specific number of councillors they feel they should have. They can receive submissions from the council as one body or from individual councillors or political groups. They note every council is unique and that therefore there is no policy as to whether recommendation should be made for councillor numbers to change or not. They stress that any submission made must be based on evidence and have supporting documents with it. The submission deadline for this phase is the 11th of March 2024.

Considerations to include are looking at the governance arrangements of the council, how decisions are made across all the responsibilities, council scrutiny functions relating to decision making and responsibilities from outside organisations. They also look at the representation or role of councillors in the local community and how they engage with people, conduct casework and represent local partner organisations.

Phase 2: warding arrangements

The local community then has two opportunities to give their views which are then consulted on. The first consultation on the warding arrangements will run from the 7th of May 2024 to 15th of July 2024. They consider all the responses and consult on draft proposals from the 1st of October 2024 to the 9th of December 2024. They publish the final proposals on the 1st of April 2025. Dacorum don't look at any of the consultation responses and everything goes back to the commission. Submissions must be based on

three statutory criteria, which are electoral equality, community identities and interests and looking at effective and convenient local government.

Implementation

The implementation will be at the next local elections in 2027.

Effective representations

For an effective submission they looking at rationale, not assertion. They also want to see people highlighting things they like and not just what they don't like, suggestion of alternatives, practical community examples and consideration of all statutory criteria. They cannot consider parliamentary boundaries, postcodes, house prices or insurance.

Things to consider

Considerations to include how DBC may want to submit proposals for councillor numbers, which must be done by the 11th of March. The same needed to be done for the warding arrangements too.

There were also considerations around mapping software licenses and how many they may need. Councillor Anderson asked if the software included parish boundaries, which M Anderson responded she still needed a response from the company. Councillor Hannell stated they had been told in the briefing that the parish council boundaries weren't moving. Councillor Anderson clarified he was suggesting having parish boundaries there as a reference. Councillor Taylor asked if the software looked at polling districts, which M Anderson clarified it did. He also asked if a ward has the same layout as a parish council, would it be a basis for keeping it where it was. M Anderson responded she would need to check that. She added Stevenage Council used the same software company and she was hoping to see how it works from them. There was agreement the county divisions wouldn't be helpful as they were fixed and irrelevant to the borough boundaries. Councillor Williams noted they could iron out the anomalies by moving boundaries in line with the county boundaries as a potential option. The main concern regarding the software was figuring out how to give access to the right people without costing a high amount in license fees. Accuracy also needed to be tested as sometimes things didn't show up quite right.

Councillor Williams stated he felt the justification for councillor numbers seemed a difficult process to come up with evidence. The Chair responded the key evidence was whether they had enough councillors to effectively deliver services they want. He proposed starting with a premise of 51 councillors, 2,200 per ward, starting from there and then working based on the 2030 projections.

M Anderson said they had a template council submission form. M Brookes added they would go through this and build up an evidence base by looking at existing government, scrutiny committees and other committees, getting a general feel for how many members they feel they need. They were building up a scrutiny review in the background and the evidence from that review would help. A survey was going to be circulated asking whether the committees are set out appropriately with enough members, the right level of work, etc. He also noted in a presentation they had talked about an average of 2,500 residents per member to work to.

Councillor Taylor asked if they had done comparisons with other district councils and that it could be useful to make those comparisons. M Brookes responded they hadn't and that it wasn't listed as one of the considerations they would look at. Councillor Williams felt they were around average in comparison to other counties and the number felt right. He added they would be better with an odd number of councillors to have clear outcomes. Councillor Anderson said he had concerns about increasing numbers of residents per member and suggested it could have a negative impact on community identities.

M Anderson added the Electoral Services Team had completed the past three year's electorate by polling district and the spreadsheet was now with the Planning department to consider the projected figures for 2030. Once all the information was on there, it should give a good starting point for considerations.

Councillor Tindall didn't like the idea of going below 51 councillors. There was agreement that if numbers started to be reduced then the geographical size of Dacorum had to be considered too. The general consensus was that 51 was a good number as a guide. There was discussion around whether making comparisons would be helpful, to which The Chair added it depended a lot on geographic consequences. He added that the boundary commission had said they also look at how the neighbourhoods fit together. Councillor Anderson added there was dilemma between top down planning and bottom up planning and meeting in the right place. He agreed that it had to be an odd number but needed more justification for 51 specifically. There was debate over how to accurately compare councillor numbers with smaller district councils with less people overall and there was correlation with geographic size of districts.

M Anderson said they needed to consider how often the committee would like to meet on this matter. She also noted that this wasn't a DBC review and although it is a review that affects them it is not run by them and they cannot change timetables and deadlines. She also pointed out the members briefing pack was a useful piece of information to look at.

Next steps

M Anderson outlined the next steps. Officers to provide the population forecast for 2030 by mid-November 2023. The outcome of the scrutiny review was aimed to be provided by January 2024. By the end of the year they also aimed to complete the submission template to set out the status quo and highlight areas for the committee to comment on. The next step for the committee was to have discussions within their groups, looking at the three criteria and thinking about how to respond to the consultation. If members were to do things by email and meet in January, to go with a full council response, they would need to go to full council on the 28th of February. She suggested they could work via email then meet as a committee in January to look at the template for submission, incorporating comments, group discussions and feedback before formulating a response. They would then liaise via email. Otherwise they could go back to another meeting to agree. If it was a full council response it would be taken to the 28th of February council meeting, but if by January they were looking at responding as political parties, it wouldn't need to be taken to full council.

Following a brief discussion the general consensus was that it would be better to do a full council response.

A January date for a next meeting was to be pencilled in and work would be via email until then unless otherwise necessary due to a particular problem potentially needing to be discussed.

The meeting ended at 8.27 pm.