

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Community Governance Review **Date:** Thursday, 18 November 2010
Place: Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.30 - 8.45 pm

Members Present: Councillors J Philip (Chairman), D Stallan (Vice-Chairman), D Jacobs, C Whitbread and D Wixley

Other Councillors: Councillors R Morgan and A Boyce

Apologies:

Officers Present: I Willett (Assistant to the Chief Executive) and P Sewell (Democratic Services Assistant)

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(a) Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct, Councillor R Morgan declared a personal interest by virtue of being Chairman of Matching Parish Council. The Councillor had determined that his interest was not prejudicial and he would stay in the meeting.

2. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee's Terms of Reference were noted.

3. MORETON, BOBBINGWORTH AND THE LAVERS - COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

At the Council meeting on 30 June 2010 (minute 32), it was decided to launch a Community Governance Review in respect of Moreton, Bobbingworth and The Lavers (MBL) Parish Council. The reasons for this were three-fold:

- (a) to combine the three existing wards of High Laver, Little Laver and Magdalen Laver into one new ward known as "The Lavers";
- (b) to achieve a closer alignment of the ratio of electors to Councillors between the three new MBL parish wards; and
- (c) to achieve savings in the cost of elections to the Parish Council by virtue of having only three wards.

The 2007 guidance placed a duty on the Council to "ensure that community governance within the area under review will be reflective of the identities and interests of the community and is effective and convenient". The Council had to determine whether the number of electors or their distribution would make a single election impractical or inconvenient, and whether it was desirable for any areas of a parish to be represented separately.

The Council also had to consider the following:

- (a) the number of local government electors in the parish;
- (b) any change in the number or distribution of electors over the following five years;
- (c) identifiable boundaries; and
- (d) any local ties which are broken by the fixing of any boundary.

Under the relevant legislation, the review had to be completed by June 2011, and the Council had now completed the first stage of the consultation process. This consultation covered households in the three Laver wards, and demonstrated a majority support for the warding change. The existing Laver names would still be used locally, with the combined name of "The Lavers" being used primarily for the Electoral Register. No action was required by the Local Government Boundary Commission as the external boundaries were not affected.

Stage 2 of the consultation would have to involve the examination of any other issues that were raised during the initial consultation. Some of these responses showed support for a boundary change to Matching Parish around Matching Green. This boundary was seen to divide a single community, and was thus viewed by some as detrimental to community governance. Pursuing this matter further would require wider consultation with local residents. If not pursued, reasons would have to be given to the supporters from stage 1.

As this boundary was also a District Ward and a County Division demarcation, any proposal to alter these boundaries to match the Parish boundary agreed by the Council would have to be referred to the Local Government Boundary Commission. This Commission was not currently considering any changes in this area, and any proposals made by the Council would have to make a strong case to change the boundary on all levels. Though some concerns were raised over the upcoming Parliamentary Constituency Review, it was decided by members that this review could not be taken into account at this stage.

This change could not come into place before Matching Parish Council (MPC) elections in 2011 as the 2011 electoral register was currently in its final stages of production. It could, however, be achieved in May 2012 to coincide with MBL elections, requiring the terms of office at MPC to be curtailed after one year with both Parish Council elections being held in 2012. MPC Councillors could be elected in 2011 for one year based on the present boundaries, with those elected in a new election in 2012 based on new boundaries serving for the following three years. This option would consequently have higher cost implications. The boundary change would call into question the number of Councillors in both Parishes, as The Lavers Ward would have fewer electors and Matching more. Polling stations would remain the same, with High Laver (East) and Little Laver continuing to vote in Matching Green, and High Laver (West) voting in Magdalen Laver.

The preliminary proposal concerning the boundary change at Matching Green saw the existing boundary being changed so that 170 electors would move from MBL to Matching along the Southern boundary of Matching Parish Council. This move was prompted by the comments received from the public during the first stage consultations, which saw this boundary as dividing the Parish and the local community unnecessarily.

The second change to this boundary was discussed to the west of Matching Green at Hobbs Cross, moving 25 electors from Matching to MBL. The change was not raised by the public during stage 1 consultations. The Committee was not convinced that it would provide a definitive improvement for community governance. It was, however, recognised that this issue could potentially be raised by residents in the second stage of consultation.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the proposed re-warding of the three Lavers wards be included in the next round of consultation as a firm proposal;
- (2) That the boundary change at Matching Green be agreed for consultation purposes, subject to following additional matters being included in the consultation:
 - (a) the reduction of Parish Councillors in MBL either by one or by two, with the effect on electoral ratios being set out;
 - (b) the increase of Parish Councillors in Matching either by one or by two, with the effect on electoral ratios being set out;
 - (c) the timeline being amended by extending the consultation period from 21.12.2010 to 21.1.2011;
 - (d) reference to timing of elections;
 - (e) details of the consequential effects on District Council and County Division electorate totals;
 - (f) no specific proposals in respect of the Hobbs Cross area;
- (3) That further consultation be undertaken with MBL and Matching Parish Councils including discussion about the exact definition of the proposed boundary for consultation purposes; and
- (4) That the Local Government Boundary Commission and Parliamentary Boundary Commission to be consulted further on their likely attitude to consequential changes for District Ward, County Electoral Division and Parliamentary Constituency boundaries.

4. PROPOSED COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW - GREENSTED WARD (ONGAR TOWN COUNCIL)

It was noted that there had been no further developments on the proposal to transfer part of the Greensted Parish Ward of Ongar Town Council to the Parish of Stanford Rivers, but the issue would continue to be monitored.

5. PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY REVIEW

The Committee noted that though there was little information at this stage on how the review would be conducted, the Boundary Commission had stated that they were required to report to Government by October 2013, in time for implementation of new constituencies at the General Election in May 2015. Recent Government announcements indicated the objective of the review was to reduce the number of Parliamentary Constituencies in England by approximately 50, beginning in Cornwall

before running North-East across the country. The target electorate was 75,000 and, anecdotally, it was understood that the review would give priority to electoral equality over Local Government boundaries or community links.

Though it remained unclear as to the extent to which the Commission would consult Councils about changes, previous electoral reviews suggested that the Commission's response deadlines might not fit with the programme of Council meetings. The proposed changes to the Committee and its terms of reference would address this need to meet those deadlines where there may not be time to make recommendations to the Council. However, if the timescale did permit, the Committee would still report to Council with recommendations.

RESOLVED:

That a report be made to the Council recommending as follows:

- (a) that the name of the Committee be changed to "Electoral and Community Governance Review Committee"; and
- (b) that the terms of reference of the Committee be extended to allow the Committee to respond to any proposed Parliamentary Constituency Review Consultation if there is insufficient time to submit recommendations to the Council, all such responses to be subject to ratification at the next available Council meeting.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the next meeting would be held in the week commencing 28 February 2011.

CHAIRMAN