

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee



held on Thursday, 26 July 2018 at 6.00 pm
in Meeting Room 1, 135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park, Milton, OX14 4SB

Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors Yvonne Constance (Chairman), Gervase Duffield, Ben Mabbett and Helen Pighills.

Officers: Susan Baker, Steven Corrigan, Matt Gaskin and Margaret Reed.

Also present: Councillors Sandy Lovatt and Emily Smith.

Number of members of the public: 4

35. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Charlotte Dickson.

36. Minutes

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2018 as a correct record and agree that the Chairman signs them as such.

37. Declarations of interest

The officer reminded the committee that members who were also town or parish councillors should not vote on items which could impact their town or parish councils.

Councillor Pighills made a statement that as a member of Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council she would not vote on any issue which could impact on the boundary of the town.

38. Urgent business and chairman's announcements

None.

39. Public participation

The list of public speakers who had registered to speak in relation to items on the agenda was tabled at the meeting.

40. Community Governance Review - Abingdon-on-Thames, Radley, St Helen Without and Sunningwell parishes

The committee considered the initial consultation responses in relation to the review of the boundaries between Abingdon-on-Thames, Radley, St Helen Without and Sunningwell parishes and whether to agree draft proposals to pursue on to the next stage of consultation as part of the community governance review.

Councillor Emily Smith, Vale of White Horse District Councillor for the Botley and Sunningwell ward, spoke in relation to this review. Her points included the following:

- The review should be deferred until after the May 2019 District and Parish elections because the proposed boundary changes would result in the creation of three new polling districts causing confusion for electors and complications in relation to the administration of the 2019 elections.
- The decision in December 2017 by Full Council to rescind its previous decision made in July 2014 that a community governance review should automatically be triggered when a significant development is proposed that sits adjacent to or straddles a parish boundary should be taken into consideration with regards to this proposal. Even though this review was triggered following the granting of planning permission on the land at Lodge Hill, the review is in the initial stages and continuing would confuse parish councils, be expensive in terms of officer time, risky and not transparent as the review would be out of sync with district-wide reviews taking place after the May 2019 elections.

Councillor Sandy Lovatt, of Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council, spoke in relation to this review. His points included the following:

- The proposed transfers of land should take place as the residents of the development in this area, present and future, are and would be part of Abingdon, are and would use the services and amenities in the town so would want a say on their provision and the future properties would be marketed as being in Abingdon.
- Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council are acting appropriately to mitigate the social, cultural and environmental impact of the development before more properties become occupied and this support for a boundary change is not motivated by financial reasons.
- There is little to no objection from neighbouring parishes as per the results of the initial consultation.
- It would become unsustainable to wait until all properties become occupied before amending the boundary so the review should continue and not be deferred.
- The effect on the May 2019 elections would be minimal due to the current largely unoccupied nature of the new properties.

The officers advised the committee that this community governance review was triggered in November 2017 before Full Council rescinded its motion in December 2017 regarding significant development proposals.

James Sunningwell, or Sunningwell Parish Council, spoke in relation to this review. His points included the following:

- The A34 is the natural boundary between the Sunningwell and Abingdon-on-Thames parishes, but the review should be delayed until after May 2019.
- Having a review now and after May 2019 would be confusing for electors, especially due to the uncertainties relating to unitary proposals in Oxfordshire and the impact of ongoing parliamentary and county boundary reviews. Even if this committee is not responsible for these changes, the public would be more respectful if a review was carried out in line with the district-wide review of governance arrangements after the May 2019 elections.

The officers confirmed that it would be unusual to undertake a review and not to implement any agreed changes at the next scheduled elections. A review could be undertaken now and not preclude a review of neighbouring areas after the May 2019 elections.

The committee debated the item and agreed that timing was an issue. However, with agreement in principle from affected parish councils and the need to honour the Full Council policy agreed in July 2014 in place when this review was started, it would be sensible to continue with the review before the May 2019 elections. The houses in the development area will be marketed as being in Abingdon and the concerns regarding risk to election administration are minimal. Delaying the review until 2023 would be more damaging as the population would have grown by then. The current population is low enough to minimise any risk associated with the changes and the initial consultation received no response from residents.

The committee also agreed to amend the proposed boundary to reflect the view that the A34 to the north and the Oxford Road to the east would be sensible boundaries.

Councillor Helen Pighills did not vote on this item as a member of Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council.

A motion, moved and seconded, to agree draft proposals for consultation with the inclusion of the proposed boundary with the A34 to the north and the Oxford Road to the east was carried on being put to the vote.

RESOLVED: to proceed with the community governance review in light of the initial consultation and to agree draft proposals for consultation in respect of the review of the boundaries between Abingdon-on-Thames, Radley, St Helen Without and Sunningwell with an amendment to the proposed boundary with the A34 to the north and the Oxford Road to the east, as shown on the map attached to the agenda pack for this meeting.

The meeting closed at 6.45 pm