

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Community Governance and

Electoral Issues Committee

held on Tuesday 13 October 2015 at 6.00 pm

at the Meeting Room 2, 135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park, Milton OX14 4SB



Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors Yvonne Constance (Chairman), Ed Blagrove, Charlotte Dickson, Gervase Duffield, Debby Hallett and Ben Mabbett

Officers: David Buckle (Returning Officer), Margaret Reed (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), Steven Corrigan (Democratic Services Manager), Sarah Ling (Elections Team Leader), Philippa Rugman (Electoral Services Officer)

Number of members of the public: 0

5 Apologies for absence

None

6 Minutes

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2015 as a correct record and agree that the Chairman sign them as such.

7 Declarations of interest

None

8 Community Governance Review

The committee considered the report of the head of legal and democratic services on those matters referred by Council at its meeting in July 2014 and a further request for a review from Longworth Parish Council.

The committee agreed to undertake reviews of CGR13 (Grove and East Challow), CGR21 (Radley and Kennington), CGR24 (Wantage, Grove and Lockinge) and Longworth parish. In agreeing to undertake a review of CGR14 (arrangements for a new parish East of Harwell) the committee was of the view that this should be undertaken when the development had been progressed for implementation at the May 2019 elections.

The committee considered whether to invite parish councils to submit further proposals for changes to community governance arrangements. The committee considered that as a major review had just been undertaken the council would deal with issues on an ad hoc basis in response to requests rather than inviting another full review.

RESOLVED TO:

1. undertake a community governance review of CGR13 (Grove and East Challow)
2. undertake a community governance review of CGR21 (Radley and Kennington)
3. undertake a community governance review of CGR24 (Wantage, Grove and Lockinge)
4. undertake a community governance review of CGR14 (parish arrangements for a new parish East of Harwell East) at a time to be agreed for implementation before the 2019 election
5. undertake a review of the warding arrangements in the parish of Longworth
6. authorise the head of legal and democratic services to draft the terms of reference for items 1, 2, 3 and 5 above for consideration at a future meeting.

9 Final report of the Returning Officer on the delivery of the May 2015 Elections - Henley, Oxford West and Abingdon and Wantage parliamentary constituencies; South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse districts; and various parish and town councils

The returning officer presented his final report to the committee. The committee discussed the following issues:

- Paragraph 8 regarding the verification of electors. The officer clarified that all electors who had failed to be verified were approached either via phone call or email, provided they had given these details with their application. Across South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse there were only 100 of the 932 cut-off registrations which were unable to be verified.
- Paragraph 9 regarding the organisation of the registers. It was noted that this was an issue due to a switch between software suppliers and was currently being addressed by the new software company Xpress. The committee queried the decision to switch software suppliers in the run up to the 2015 election. The returning officer clarified that a full risk assessment had been taken before the decision was made. It became evident that staying with the old software company had become a higher risk than switching to a different supplier which had a reliable track record dealing with the transition to IER.
- Paragraph 18 which details parish ballot papers for Watlington parish were erroneously sent to voters in North Hinksey and Wheatley. Officers clarified that this was only the second issue of postal votes which were sent out so only small numbers of electors were affected, about 70 in each instance. This issue was quickly identified and those affected were hand delivered a correct ballot paper within 24 hours of the error being discovered.
- Paragraph 19 regarding the absent votes which were not sent abroad. The returning officer explained that although this was an unfortunate error, it was mitigated by offering proxy votes to those affected. An estimated 123 voters, at most, were affected across the three parliamentary constituencies.

The committee reviewed the key actions points going forward and considered them to be sound measures to avoid repeat errors for future elections.

The meeting closed at 7:20pm

Chairman

Date