

BOUNDARY REVIEW COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Boundary Review Committee held on Thursday 19th July 2012 at 6.00 p.m. in the Civic Offices, Telford

PRESENT: Councillors R J Sloan (Chairman), K T Blundell, S Davies, N J Dugmore, A J Eade, A D McClements.

BRC-1 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 21st June 2012 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

BRC-2 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor R A Overton.

BRC-3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

BRC-4 FURTHER ELECTORAL REVIEW

Members considered a further report of the Assistant Director - Law, Democracy & Public Protection which provided the information that Members had requested at their meeting of 21st June. In particular, the report provided Members with information on two possible models for mapping council size: a council size of 40 members and a council size of 50 members.

The Electoral Services Team Leader provided Members with information to support the report. Members were reminded of the statutory criteria in this review: electoral fairness, the respect for parish boundaries, the drawing up of clear and identifiable boundaries between wards, respect for communities of identity and consideration of electorate forward projections. Members were informed that the first stage in the mapping exercise had been the mapping of clear physical barriers that existed in the Borough: arterial routes such as the Queensway, the M54 and the A442 Whitchurch Road along with greenbelts and parklands in the Borough. These were physical barriers that in many respects were reinforced by their coterminosity with parish boundaries, and they often provided dividing lines between communities.

There had then been an attempt to map communities of identity in the Borough. In such an exercise there would inevitably be some difficult areas that had overlaps or no clear identity, for example, at Sutton Hill – Madeley, Randlay – Stirchley, Malinslee – Dawley, Dawley Bank and Lawley Bank, Apley Castle – Leegomery – Hadley, in Wellington (where the communities of identity might include Shawbirch, Dothill or Arleston) and in Newport (where within the compact

parish boundary there were arguably no distinct communities of identity). The meeting was informed that these communities of identity often did not provide the building blocks for a ward on their own, either being too large or too small in terms of their electorates. Furthermore, the communities of identity could be difficult to split or partition to provide single member wards in such a way as to provide wards that were meaningful to the electors that they were intended to serve. Members were also reminded once more of the limitations that the parish boundaries themselves created in this review.

The Electoral Services Team Leader informed Members that an attempt had been made to identify future development based on August 2011 forward planning projections. These and the newly-received June 2012 projections were circulated to Members. While there were limitations to these projections and the electorate projections that could be deduced from them, Members noted that they provided guideline quotas of 2,476 electors per member in 2012 rising to 2,682 in 2018 for a 50-member council and 3,095 in 2012 rising to 3,352 in 2108 for a 40-member Council. The resultant maps of how warding arrangements might operate were considered, and the limitations of the mapping exercise were emphasised. However, the Electoral Services Team Leader suggested that the exercise had shown certain 'pinch points' across the Borough which were likely to be the areas that would be difficult to resolve in the review. These included the shortfall of electors in The Gorge parish to provide a single member ward, the considerable new development that was scheduled in the western part of central Telford, the shortfall of electors in Wellington that might need to be remedied by taking in electors from Shawbirch or Admaston in Wrockwardine parish, the shortfall of electors in Newport for four or three wards under the different models, the risk that it might prove necessary to use 'rural' areas to top up shortfalls in the electorates of adjoining 'urban' areas and the creation of 'mixed' urban-rural wards, and how best to amalgamate the rural areas into wards with the necessary electoral quotas. Officers also commented that the provision of draft mapped communities was only indicative at this stage and served to highlight the different levels of electorate (which would be a key indicator of Council size) that higher or lower numbers of members would lead to.

Members initially considered whether there were other ways in which such an exercise could have been undertaken, and whether an area-based approach or whether a quota-based approach might have been appropriate. However, Members were advised that any mapping exercise was likely to result in the same problems because a warding exercise would always be constrained by the numbers of electors within the communities of identity and within the confines of the parish areas.

Members noted the growth projections that had been provided in the planning projection reports that had been circulated to the Committee. These projections showed the extent and likely planning permissions across the Borough and the

number of housing units that would result. Members discussed the accuracy and limitations of these figures and they were reminded that these projections were continually shifting and changing. Members were also reminded that the final electorate projections that would be provided to the Commission as the basis of the review would also be required to consider and account for national and sub-regional demographic trends and to compensate for over-estimation.

Members questioned the 40- and 50-member models that were being put forward by the group representatives. A discussion ensued about Member workloads and about appropriate governance arrangements. Some Members considered that it was not appropriate to consider council size without also considering the future governance arrangements of the Authority: only those arrangements could answer the question of how many members would be required to effectively manage the authority, scrutinize its work and represent its electors. Other Members cited the increasing population of Telford, the level of deprivation in certain wards and the current difficult economic climate which together would inevitably increase the expectations that the public would have of their elected members. Members also gave consideration to the new responsibilities that would come forward, particularly in the areas of public health and welfare reform. It was also considered that the ethos of the Council and its co-operative approach were further considerations in the council-size debate. Members considered the levels of ward work that were required of elected members and the expectations of the public with regard to the ward member role. It was commented that the promotion of equality and diversity among the different members of the Council could be jeopardised if the Council fell below a certain size.

The Members noted that the next meeting of their Committee was intended to move forward to considering some of these issues in greater detail. The Committee therefore requested that the following documents be prepared for their next meeting:

- the outcomes of the workload survey of all Members that had been undertaken;
- further detailed work on committee memberships and workloads;
- an assessment of the additional workloads that were likely to be generated by statutory changes, such as health and wellbeing and welfare work, and by corporate cultural changes, such as the moves towards increased community involvement and the co-operative council.

Members noted that their next meeting was scheduled for 23rd August, and they requested that these documents should be provided to them in draft format one

week before the agenda issue date so that Members' comments could also be incorporated where appropriate.

Next meeting 6.00 p.m. 23rd August Committee Room 2.

The meeting ended at 7.30 p.m.

Chairman:

Date: