

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRACY AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 13 SEPTEMBER 2023

Present: Councillor Cooper (Chairman) and Councillors
Bartlett, Cox, English, Hinder, Jeffery, Perry, Rose
and M Thompson

Also Present: Councillors Clarke, Gooch, Harper, Jones and S
Thompson

24. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Webb.

25. **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Councillor Hinder was present as Substitute Member for Councillor Webb.

26. **URGENT ITEMS**

The Chairman stated that there was an urgent update to Item 17 –
Community Governance Review (Parishes).

27. **ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED: That Councillor English be elected as Vice-Chairman of the
Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2023/24.

28. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS**

The following Councillors were present as Visiting Members for Item 17
Community Governance Review (Parishes) – Review Outcome:

- Councillor Clarke
- Councillor Gooch
- Councillor Harper
- Councillor Jones
- Councillor S Thompson

And Councillor Harper was also present as a Visiting Member for Items 14
– Annual Meeting Arrangements, and Item 15 – Governance Review
2023/24.

29. **DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

30. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillors Cooper and English stated that they had been lobbied on Item 15 – Governance Review 2023/24, and Item 17 – Community Governance Review (Parishes) – Review Outcome.

31. TO CONSIDER WHETHER ANY ITEMS SHOULD BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE BECAUSE OF THE POSSIBLE DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION.

RESOLVED: That all items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

32. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 JUNE 2023

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed.

33. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

34. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

35. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

36. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager gave a verbal update to the Committee on the work programme and set out the following items:

- November 2023 – Monitoring Officer Constitution Changes Report (include snagging items)
- November 2023 – Polling District and Polling Place Review Outcome (to recommend to Council)
- March 2024 – Part II Process Annual Review
- March 2024 (to be confirmed) – Governance Review Outcome

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

37. ANNUAL MEETING ARRANGEMENTS

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager introduced the report and outlined that there was an additional option to those in the report, which was to hold the Annual Meeting on 25 May 2024, though the recommendation was to follow the established timetable and hold the Annual Meeting on 18 May 2024.

The Committee considered the options including the fact that a Wednesday meeting would split the events of the Civic Parade and the Annual Meeting.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to approve Option 1, Saturday 18 May 2024 at 9.00 a.m., for the date and time of the Annual Council Meeting.

38. GOVERNANCE REVIEW 2023/24

The Director of Strategy Insight and Governance introduced the report and set out that during the review of the constitution last year it had been identified that further work was required to prepare for the reduction in Councillors from 55 to 49. The report set out the Terms of reference and options for how to conduct the review, whether via a working group, the committee or by officers.

The Committee considered the options and debated whether conducting the review via a working group or through the committee would be most appropriate. Whereas the previous review had been technical and detailed it was felt that this Governance Review would be at a high level and more about political choices in the structure and conducting it publicly through the Committee, which was politically balanced, would be preferable. However, it was acknowledged that there would be technical consequences to choices made so the Committee also felt it appropriate to ensure that cross group briefings were available as part of the review.

RESOLVED: That

1. The terms of reference for the review as set out at 3.1 in the report be agreed; and
2. Option 1, Conduct the review through Democracy and General Purposes Committee Meetings, as set out in 3.2 in the report, along with a briefing for all Members, be agreed as the approach for conducting the review.

39. OUTSIDE BODY APPOINTMENTS

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager introduced the report and highlighted that there were a significant number of vacancies to appoint to, and updated the Committee that the Hayle Park Nature Reserve vacancies were still under discussion as the Council's records did not match the information provided by the outside body so those vacancies would not be progressed until the need for the appointments was clear. The Committee were also updated that although a nomination had been received for the Vinters Valley park Trust vacancy, the Trust had requested that the vacancy not be filled as they were reviewing the vacancy in light of the change of Ward to take place in May 2024. It was therefore recommend that the relevant vacancy was not filled.

RESOLVED: That, with the exception of the Vinters Valley park Trust vacancy, the nominations as set out in Appendix 3 to the report be approved.

40. COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW (PARISHES) - REVIEW OUTCOME

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager presented the outcome of the Community Governance Review which was the culmination of 11 months' work, and highlighted that the Stage 2 consultation had resulted in a number of meaningful amendments to proposals, as set out in the report.

There was an update to the review which consisted of two elements, firstly a briefing on the process to be followed if the Review was implemented by Council, and secondly the updated table and review outcome on Parish Wards.

The briefing on the post Council process covered the permission required to alter parish boundaries that had been impacted by the Local Government Boundary Review, and requesting 'Related Alterations' to Borough Ward boundaries. It was highlighted that these processes would commence after Council, and delegated authority was therefore sought to the Director of Strategy Insight and Governance in order to be able to implement Council's decision. It was also noted that finalising of Borough Ward related alterations via the Local Government Boundary Commission for England might not take place until February/March 2024.

The Committee considered the review outcome and in response to questions raised by Visiting Members the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager clarified that a leaflet had been circulated to areas which were significantly impacted by the review; Barming, Loose and the changed areas around Grove Green and Weaving. It was highlighted that the Stage 2 consultation had received responses from around the Thurnham part of Weaving and that had resulted in amendments to the proposals put forward.

The Committee expressed support for the review outcome and the work carried out to deliver it. However, they wanted a firmer proposal on the proposed review timescale recommended in response to the interest shown from the Grove Green area not covered by the consulted proposals.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Community Governance Review set out at Appendix 1 to the report, with the additional information provided in the update, be approved;
2. The Council be recommended to:
 - (i) Adopt the outcome of the review; and
 - (ii) Give delegated authority to the Director of Strategy Insight and Governance to give effect to the Council's resolution; and

3. A report on whether to conduct a Community Governance Review in the area of Grove Green and Weaving be considered within 2 years.

41. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 7.56 p.m.