
REPORT OF THE ELECTORAL REVIEW WORKING GROUP: FUTURE DISTRICT COUNCIL ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS - FURTHER DRAFT PROPOSALS FROM THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report informs Members of the recommendations of the Electoral Review Working Group on the further draft recommendations of the Local Government Commission for England for the future electoral arrangements of this Council.
- 1.2 The review currently being undertaken by the Local Government Commission is a statutory review. It is a matter for the District Council as to whether it submits observations on any proposals from the Commission.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Working Group met on 12 December to consider the Local Government Commission's further draft recommendations for this Council's future electoral arrangements. The Commission's proposals are subject to public consultation until 8 January 2001. A copy of the review report has been sent previously to all Members of the Council.

3 THE COMMISSION'S REVISED DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Working Group noted that following public consultation earlier this year, the Commission received 68 objections to its original proposals for Rochford. As a result of these objections, the Commission has published further draft recommendations. If approved these recommendations provide for the number of councillors to be reduced from 40 to 39 and the number of Wards from 23 to 19. In future there would be 4 x 3 Member Wards, 12 x 2 Member Wards and 3 x single Member Wards. The Commission still proposed that the Council elects Members by thirds.

4 VIEWS OF THE WORKING GROUP

- 4.1 The Group acknowledged that the Commission's revised draft recommendations took much greater account of existing parish boundaries and community identity. Whilst disappointed that the Commission had felt it necessary to introduce a proposal to reduce the total number of District Councillors, the Group nevertheless recognised that the Commission saw this as necessary to achieve the electoral equality it was seeking. The Commission's further recommendations were therefore probably the best that could be achieved and the Group felt that the Council should signal to the Commission that it would be

prepared to accept the principle of what was now proposed.

- 4.2 The Group then went on to consider the detail of the Commission's proposals and, in particular, two anomalies which it was felt that the Commission should be asked to address.
- 4.3 In Great Wakering, there are 19 properties in Alexandra Road (33 Electors) that under the Commission's proposals will remain in the Central Parish Ward. These properties are detached from the rest of the Central Ward, and the Working Group considered that there would be merit in the properties concerned being transferred to the West Ward. Subject to the support of Great Wakering Parish Council for this change in Parish Ward boundaries, the Working Group recommends that the Council put this suggested revision to the Commission.
- 4.4 In Hockley, the Commission proposes that the area around Hampsted Gardens be included in the new Hockley North District Ward. Whilst the area is linked with the remainder of the proposed North Ward by the inclusion of part of the parish of Ashingdon, for Parish purposes it will become a geographically isolated area from the rest of the proposed North Ward of the Parish. This is contrary to normal electoral practice and the Commission had indicated to the Head of Administrative and Member Services that this was a drafting error on their part. The Working Group therefore recommends that the Commission be asked to redraw the proposed North Ward boundary along the western curtilage of Greensward School and Plumberow Primary School. This would provide a connecting strip of land between the two areas of land without transferring any electors. It would also have the benefit of locating a possible polling station in the North Ward.

5 OTHER ISSUES

- 5.1 The Working Group was reminded that following the present period of public consultation, the Commission would produce final recommendations for the Rochford District. These are due to be published at the end of February 2001. The final recommendations will then be considered by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The Secretary of State may accept, modify or reject the Commission's recommendations although he must first allow a period of six weeks to elapse so that any interested parties may make representations direct to him on the Commission's recommendations. If the Secretary of State is minded to support the Commission's proposals, they would be implemented from May 2002 when the District Council would be required to hold an all out election.
- 5.2 The Working Group was reminded that previously, the Council had made representations to the Commission that any consequential changes in Town and Parish Council electoral arrangements arising from the review should not be implemented until the first following

ordinary Town or Parish elections in or after 2002. Although this is an issue that will be considered by the Secretary of State when producing an Order to give effect to the Commission's recommendations, the Working Group felt that it was important for the Council to be seen to be maintaining its support for this proposition. The Working Group therefore recommends that this proposal be included in the Council's response to the Commission's further recommendations.

- 5.3 Finally, the Working Group has given some initial consideration as to the arrangements for implementing any electoral changes arising from this review. Once an Order implementing change is approved, the Council will need to consider any revisions necessary in polling districts and polling places. There would also be a need to inform electors of changes to electoral arrangements and the location of polling stations. The Working Group therefore agreed to ask Council to consider re-appointing the Group in the next Municipal year to consider these issues and to make recommendations to the Council.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 A limited amount of senior officer time will be required to draft the Council's formal response to the Local Government Commission's further recommendations. There will also be a call on officer time to deal with the implementation of any changes to the Council's electoral arrangements. The extent of the latter will be estimated once the Order implementing change is passed.

7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The review is being undertaken under provisions contained within the Local Government Act 1972 and the Local Government and Rating Act 1992.

8 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There will be consequential changes to Parish electoral arrangements arising from the Commission's proposed changes to District Council electoral arrangements. The Council also agreed at its last meeting that this Council's response to the Commission's further recommendations should be circulated to Town and Parish Councils so that they may be aware of the District Council's stance on the latest proposals.

9 RECOMMENDATION

- 9.1 The Council is **RECOMMENDED**

- (1) to inform the Local Government Commission that it is prepared to accept the Commission's further recommendations for

electoral change in Rochford, but asks that

a) the District Ward boundary for the proposed Hockley North Ward be redrawn to follow the western boundary of Greensward School and Plumberow Primary School rather than the eastern boundary as presently proposed.

b) (subject to the support of Great Wakering Parish Council being forthcoming) the boundary of the proposed central and west wards of the Parish of Great Wakering be redrawn in the area of Alexander Road to follow the rear curtilage of the properties numbered 95 to 101, 113, 115, 173 to 177 and 166 to 176.

c) the consequential changes in the electoral arrangements of town and parish councils be introduced at the first following ordinary elections of those councils in or after 2002.

- (2) to agree in principle to reappoint this Working Group in the next Municipal Year to consider the implementation of any changes in the District Council's electoral arrangements, the matter to be further discussed at the annual meeting of Council in 2001.
(HAMS)

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Background Papers:

Guidance, Draft Recommendations and Revised Draft Recommendations published by the Local Government Commission.

Submissions to the Local Government Commission published by the District Council.

Correspondence with Town and Parish Councils, the public and other interested parties.

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