
PERIODIC ELECTORAL REVIEW

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report sets out the views of the Electoral Review Working Group on the response received to the consultation on District Council's draft submission to the Local Government Commission.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Council undertook consultation on its draft submission to the Local Government Commission from 24 January to 22 February 2000. During that period over 100 requests were received for information and 26 responses were received. The Electoral Review Working Group at its meetings on 15 and 23 February considered the responses.
- 2.2 The following sections set out the Working Group's recommendations for change to the draft submission in response to the comments received. The page numbers referred to are those of the draft submission.

3 RECOMMENDED CHANGES TO THE COUNCIL'S DRAFT SUBMISSION

3.1 Size of Council – page 13

- 3.1.1 Two representations have been received expressing the view that the Council should consider increasing its Council size to 42. Whilst acknowledging that the Local Government Commission has indicated that the Council can look at a Council comprising 42 councillors, a majority of the Working Group was of the view that the current recommendation for 40 councillors should not be changed. The arguments set out in the original submission were felt still to be valid. A Council size of 42 would not necessarily ensure greater equality of representation any more than would a Council comprising 40 councillors.

3.2 Number of Councillors per Ward – page 13

- 3.2.1 Representations have been received from Rayleigh Town Council for the District to be served entirely by 2 councillors for each ward. The principal argument for this being that it would ensure consistency of representation across the District and that all electors had the same number of opportunities to vote during each 4 year municipal cycle. A uniform system of 2 councillors per ward would also make it easier to change to a system of bi annual elections in the event that legislation is introduced to allow for this.

3.2.2 Hullbridge Parish Council also argued that consideration be given to the introduction of 3 single councillor wards for the Hullbridge area.

3.2.3 The majority view of the Working Group was that the proposed mix of single and two councillor wards should be retained for the reasons set out in the draft submission. In particular, for the far east of the District, 2 x two councillor wards could only be achieved by drawing a boundary through the middle of Great Wakering and so creating two very large mixed urban and rural wards that would not secure effective and convenient local government. In the case of Hockley and Hullbridge, the introduction of a two councillor ward would mean the linking of the two parishes – a potential position resolutely opposed by Hullbridge Parish Council and which did not appear to make sense in terms of community identity.

3.3 Frequency of elections – page 16

3.3.1 Representations have been received from Rayleigh Town Council that if legislation is introduced, the Council should move to a system of bi annual elections. This would provide the opportunity for District Council elections to be held 2 years out of 4, County Council elections 1 year out of four and **all** parish elections to be held in the fallow year. The benefit of not combining parish council elections with District Council elections being a reduction in confusion and the chance for councils to be judged on their own track record.

3.3.2 The majority view of the Working Group was that the District Council should continue to hold elections by thirds but, as set out in the draft submission, should give consideration to the introduction of bi annual elections should the legislation be introduced to allow this. In so far as combined District and Parish Council elections are concerned, a majority of the Group felt that most parishes preferred combined elections as this helped to raise awareness and turnout at parish elections and also enabled the costs to be shared between the two tiers of local government.

3.4 Ward Boundaries and Names of Wards – page 18

3.4.1 **Rayleigh and Rawreth** – page 29.

3.4.2 Representations received from Rawreth Parish Council, Rayleigh Town Council and the County Councillor for the area support the District Council's proposal to continue to link Rawreth with Rayleigh rather than Hullbridge. The merits of the link with Downhall rather than Grange, as at present, are also acknowledged.

3.4.3 The Working Group was most grateful to receive a comprehensive submission from Rayleigh Town Council setting out that Council's views on how the District Council's present proposed ward boundaries might be further improved. Details of the proposals will be given orally

at the meeting. In principle, however, and subject to some minor adjustment to improve the number of electors represented by each councillor (details of which will be provided at the meeting although the effect on electorate numbers is set out in the appendix to this report), the Working Group supports the Town Council's proposed boundaries for west Rayleigh. However, the Working Group has reserved its view on the Town Council's proposals for east Rayleigh pending further information to be provided by the Head of Administrative and Member Services on the numbers of electors that would be included in each of the Town Council's proposed wards. In particular, the Working Group noted that initial analysis suggested that the proposals may result in electorates at the margin of the Local Government Commission's tolerance bands. The Head of Administrative and Member Services was therefore asked to report direct to this meeting on the consequences of the Town Council's proposals for east Rayleigh together with any suggestions that might ensure that the proposals secure equality of representation close to the District wide average. (this information will be provided at the meeting but the effect of the Head of Administrative and Member Service's suggestions is now set out in the appendix to this report)

- 3.4.4 Separately, the Working Group has considered the responses from 5 residents in Deepdene Avenue requesting that the whole of that road together with Appledene Close be included in the same ward. The Working Group believes that the views of the residents should be accepted and proposes that the whole of the two roads be included in the North Raleigh and Rawreth Ward. The Group has also considered representations that the name of this ward should be changed to Downhall and Rawreth in order to retain the historical and recognised name of Downhall. The Working Group commends this proposed change of name which also features in the Town Council's proposal.
- 3.4.5 The Working Group has also considered that the use of the name Sweyne to describe the additional ward in west Rayleigh be expanded to Sweyne Park. The Group acknowledged the merits of this suggestion and recommends accordingly.
- 3.4.6 **Hullbridge – page 27.** The Working Group has again considered the position of Hullbridge but has been unable to identify any better solution than that already set out in the draft submission.
- 3.4.7 **Hawkwell – page 24.** The Working Group has considered a minor change in the boundary between the proposed Hawkwell North and Hawkwell South Wards which will better reflect community ties. Details of the change will be provided at the meeting but the effect on electorates is shown in the appendix to this report.
- 3.4.8 **Tolerance band.** Following the request of the Chairman of the Council, further information has been sought from the Local Government Commission on the size of the tolerance band that it will

allow. Members will recall that the Chief Executive of the Commission had previously indicated that this would be + or – 10% from the average. A recent telephone conversation with the Commission on the Council's draft submission had suggested that the band may now be much smaller. Unfortunately, a response was not received from the Commission in time for the Working Group's meeting but it was agreed that the information should be reported direct to this meeting.

- 3.4.9 An email has been received from the Commission confirming that the primary goal of the review is to achieve equality of representation across the District. The Commission is now providing guidance that the tolerance in urban areas should be around +/- 2/3% and in rural areas, +/- 5/6%. This is new information that has not previously been available and Members will be aware the Council's current proposals have not been prepared on this basis. The Working Group was of the view that given the amount of work already undertaken on the review it was unrealistic for the Commission to expect the Council to make further changes to its proposals to accommodate the new advice at this late stage. The Working Group was mindful that the aim of the Council all along has been to balance equality of representation with the particular community identity and needs of the Rochford District. The Working Group was of the view that this should continue to be the Council's aim and that this should be conveyed most strongly to the Commission.

3.5 Consequential Effects on Parish Council Electoral arrangements – page 40

- 3.5.1 The Working Group considered the view of Rayleigh Town Council that it be served by 7 x 3 councillor wards and 1 x 2 councillor ward (Downhall and Rawreth). The Working Group supported this and the proposals before the Council this evening facilitate this.
- 3.5.2 Barling Parish Council has requested that the area of Great Wakering West that this Council proposed to link with Barling and Sutton for electoral purposes be permanently incorporated within the boundaries of the Parish of Barling. Whilst this may be an issue for the District Council to consider in the future as part of any review of parish boundaries, it is not a matter for the current review of electoral arrangements.
- 3.5.3 Great Wakering Parish Council made representations that the District Council's proposed Central Ward be divided for Parish Council electoral purposes. The projected electorate of the Central Ward would result in 8 councillors serving the area. The Parish Council feels that this would cause difficulty in representation and not result in efficient, effective or convenient local government. Instead the Parish Council proposes the creation of a Church End ward to the east with 5 parish councillors and a Town Field ward to the west with 3 councillors.

The Working Group supports this proposal.

- 3.5.4 Although not received as a response to consultation, the Working Group considered whether there was merit in recommending that all consequential changes to Parish Council electoral arrangements take place in May 2002. In order that those Parish Councils that are due to hold their ordinary elections in 2003 are not faced with elections two years running, the Secretary of State might be requested to extend the terms of office for the councillors concerned until 2007. After considering the issue in detail, a majority of the Working Group felt that this proposal should not be pursued.

4 SUBMISSION TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION

- 4.1 The Working Group has considered whether to distribute copies of the Council's final submission to the Local Government Commission to those who responded to the consultation process and other interested parties. Mindful of the costs involved, the Working Group does not feel that this should be done. So far as Parish Councils are concerned, the opportunity of the next meeting of the Partnership Sub-Committee could be taken to explain the changes that the District Council has made arising from the consultation.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Arising from the recommendations of this report, there will be further officer time spent in preparing a revised submission to the Local Government Commission. This is estimated at the equivalent of 3 man days.

6 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 These are set out in the report and in the Council's original draft submission.

7 RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 It is proposed that the Council
- 1 considers the responses received to the recent public consultation and the views of the Electoral Review Working Group and agrees the proposals to be included in the final submission to be made to the Local Government Commission.
 - 2 delegates authority to the Chief Executive to redraft the Council's submission to take account of any changes agreed at this evening's meeting subject to the revised submission being first seen by the members of the Electoral Review Working Group prior to its being sent to the Commission on 28 February. (HAMS)

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Background Papers:

None

For further information please contact Andrew Smith on (01702) 318135

APPENDIX

Effect of proposed changes on electorates

Ward	1999 electorate	2004 electorate	Variance from average
Downhall and Rawreth	3065	3276	+1%
Sweyne Park	3117	3137	-3%
Grange	2288	3237	0%
Wheatley	3148	3295	+2%
Whitehouse	3109	3183	-2%
Lodge	3165	3301	+2%
Rayleigh Central	3316	3336	+3%
Trinity	2907	3107	-4%
Hawkwell North	2948	3127	-3%
Hawkwell South	2970	3051	-6%