

MINUTE
of
EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

Minute of Meeting held at 5.00pm in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 27 May 2015.

Present:

Provost Alastair Carmichael	Councillor Ian McAlpine
Councillor Tony Buchanan	Councillor Gordon McCaskill
Councillor Jim Fletcher (Leader)	Councillor Mary Montague
Councillor Charlie Gilbert	Councillor Paul O’Kane
Councillor Barbara Grant	Councillor Tommy Reilly
Councillor Elaine Green	Councillor Ralph Robertson
Councillor Kenny Hay	Councillor Jim Swift
Councillor Alan Lafferty	Councillor Gordon Wallace

Provost Carmichael in the Chair

Attending:

Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive; Andy Cahill, Director of Environment; Jacqueline Martin, Corporate Business Manager; Paul Landman, Senior Information Development Officer; and Eamonn Daly, Democratic Services Manager.

Apologies:

Deputy Provost Betty Cunningham; Councillors Danny Devlin, Stewart Miller and Vincent Waters.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1551. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR SCOTLAND – FIFTH REVIEW OF ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

1552. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the Council of 14 May 2014 (Page 1025, Item 1068 refers), when the Council homologated the response to the Local Government Boundary Commission opposing their proposals to reduce councillor numbers in East Renfrewshire from 20 to 18, the Council considered a report by the Chief Executive relative to the second phase of the Commission’s review. This phase of the review required the Commission to produce new electoral wards for East Renfrewshire based on the outcome of the preliminary part of the exercise to establish councillor numbers.

Despite the Council's opposition, the Commission adhered to its proposals to reduce councillor numbers from 20 to 18. In consequence, the Commission had drafted proposals which saw the number of electoral wards for East Renfrewshire reduced from 6 to 5, with 2 3-member wards and 3 4-member wards.

The report provided full details of the background to the changes. In particular, it was noted that not at the outset but in the course of the review the Commission had introduced deprivation in an area as a factor in determining councillor numbers as well as an increase in the number of electors per councillor. It was explained that both COSLA and the Society of Chief Executives in Scotland (SOLACE) had asked the Commission for evidence to support the introduction of deprivation data and that this evidence had not been provided, and it was further noted that the Commission had commissioned research into the role and workload of councillors to provide further evidence to support the inclusion of deprivation data. However, this research would not be available in time for the current review.

The report provided a full analysis of the Commission proposals. In particular the report explained that population growth was not adequately reflected in the Commission's scheme, that community links would be compromised, and there was a need for the boundaries between the Commission's proposed Giffnock & Thornliebank and Newton Mearns North and Neilston wards to be amended to reflect that the housing site at Hillfield lay within the Newton Mearns area.

The report further explained that the approval of the Commission's proposals ultimately lay with Scottish Ministers, with the options open to Ministers being outlined. As such, there was an opportunity to the Council to lobby ministers on the perceived defects in the proposed new arrangements.

Furthermore, it was explained that officers would seek further evidence from the Commission on the introduction of deprivation data into their methodology. Once this had been received and examined, officers would consider whether it would be appropriate to proceed with a legal challenge, it being noted that in the event legal challenge was being considered, a report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Council.

In response to a question from Councillor Grant, the Chief Executive explained how the Commission had reached the decision to introduce deprivation as a factor in determining councillor numbers, it being noted that the proposals had not been the subject of consultation.

Thereafter, in response to Councillor Swift, the Chief Officer (Legal & Procurement) was heard on the question of potential legal challenge by the Council and the likelihood of any challenge being successful. In addition, the Chief Executive explained that as things stood, there was no evidence linking levels of deprivation to councillor workload, and this was possibly one the main grounds for challenging the Commission's decision to introduce deprivation as a factor in determining councillor numbers. The Commission had initiated a piece of work to determine whether there was any evidence to support this assertion but had stated that this work would not influence the current review.

The Council agreed:-

- (a) to reject the Commission's proposed re-design of wards based on 18 councillors;

- (b) to seek to maintain the status quo and to reiterate to the Commission the Council's fundamental opposition to a reduction in councillor numbers as outlined in the Council's earliest response to the Commission; and
- (c) to note the intention to seek further evidence from the Commission on the use of deprivation as a factor and, dependent on the outcome the possibility of a legal challenge of both the methodology used and the effectiveness of the proposals, it being further noted that any final decision on a legal challenge would be submitted to a future meeting of the Council.

PROVOST

