

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 7 February 2013.

PRESENT: Councillor Brunton (Chair), Councillors Dryden, Harvey, Junier (as substitute for Cole), Kerr, Mawston, McIntyre, Sanderson, J A Walker and Williams.

PRESENT AS OBSERVERS: Councillors P Khan and McPartland.

OFFICERS: J Bennington, P Clark, C Davies and J Polson.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cole, C Hobson, P Purvis and J Sharrocks (substitute).

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest made at this point of the meeting.

MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD 17, 23 AND 30 JANUARY 2013

The minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 17, 23 and 30 January 2013 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

BOUNDARY COMMISSION -ELECTORAL REVIEW 2013

Since the meeting of the Board held on 30 January 2013 Members were advised of two minor amendments as shown on the plans displayed at the meeting in respect of:-

- taking into account access 20 houses, approximately, on Stockton Road had been transferred to Ironmasters Ward from Acklam Green;

- a minor boundary change between Linthorpe Village Ward and Crescent Ward affecting only two to three electors.

The above minor changes had been reflected in the map circulated at the meeting and in the draft submission.

The Board was advised of a query which had been raised in respect of the Marton Ward. It was agreed that subject to further discussion at a later date the Board continue to consider the draft submission.

An opportunity was provided for Members to examine the plans on display and the printed copy of the draft submission circulated at the meeting.

Members considered the draft report which had been updated on the Boundary Commission, Electoral Review 2013 prior to submission to Council on 20 February 2013 and ultimately the Boundary Commission.

As part of the background section of the report the Commission's criteria for initiating Further Electoral Reviews were outlined. In the case of Middlesbrough seven wards (30%) had an electoral variance of more than 10% from the average and one ward (Middlehaven) had an electoral variance more than 30% from the average.

The report outlined the various stages in carrying out the electoral review. The first stage involved determining the 'council size'. Based on the Office for National Statistics data and the methodology set out by the Commission, a projected electorate for 2018 of 101,559 had been agreed with the Commission. The Council view that the Council size should reduce from 48 elected Members plus the elected Mayor to 46 elected Members plus the elected Mayor had subsequently been accepted. In June 2012 the Commission went out to public consultation on such a proposal following which on 27 November 2012 the Commission instructed the

commencement of the next stage to consider the new pattern of ward arrangements with a closing date for representations of 18 February 2013. In view of the Council meeting already set for 20 February 2013 the Commission had agreed to an extension of the consultation period to 22 February 2013.

In considering the warding pattern the Commission had regard to the statutory criteria set down in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 in relation to :-

- the need to secure equality of representation;
- the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
- the need to secure effective and convenient local government.

The report outlined the overall process in considering the development of the Council's submission. In order to provide more meaningful opportunities for democratic participation it had been agreed that the Board should meet on a weekly basis. In order to engage as many Members as possible in the process it had also been agreed to run workshops to which all Members had been invited to attend with particular regard to utilising their knowledge of the communities they represented. In addition, presentations on potential proposals from the Labour Group, the Conservative Group and the Middlesbrough Independent Councillors' Association and also Councillor Williams had been made to the Board on 17 January 2013.

In terms of the initial considerations the report outlined the following:-

- the wards that had triggered the Electoral Review and working on the predicted 2018 elector population the variance based on the existing ward structure;
- that wherever possible, a maximum deviation of +/- 5% should be the target when future warding arrangements were considered by the Council;
- the best available estimates relating to new build housing that would come into occupation between now and 2018 and demolitions that would take place during the same period;
- given the current national and regional economic climate the view had been taken that if there was to be a variance of greater than +/-5% from the optimum elector/Councillor ratio, then wherever possible variance between 5% and 10% should be limited to areas of the Town where fewer opportunities for development existed and variance between 0% and 5% should be the target in areas where there was greater likelihood of new development.

The report provided information which had emanated from the Member Workshops and comments from Community Regeneration Officers in identifying what they considered to be identifiable, strong, 'natural' communities with which elector's identity strongly and/or had identifiable interests, and to consider the possible boundaries between those identified communities that would result in effective and convenient local government.

It was noted that as of 7 February 2013 only two comments had been received as part of the community consultation exercise one in relation to the Marton West Ward and the other in respect of the University Ward as set out in the report.

At its meeting held on 23 January 2013 the Board had agreed to commission Officers to undertake further work on the Labour Group proposals as it was considered that they most accurately reflected community identity, and were best fit in terms of electoral equality.

The Labour Group proposals adopted a radical re-warding of the Town comprising 23 wards all of which were two member wards with the exception of 1 three member ward and 1 one member ward. All of the proposed wards were within +/- 10% of the optimum elector/Councillor ratio, and 18 were within the +/-5% preferred by the Board.

The report included the following:-

- a map showing the current wards at Appendix 1;

- a map showing the Labour Group proposals at Appendix 2;
- an overlay map of both at Appendix 3;
- the ward proposals put forward by the Labour Group at Table 1;
- a map showing an overlay of the outcomes from the Members' workshops at Appendix 4.

For each ward the report provided a general introduction, brief description, proposed ward name, proposed number of Councillors, electorate forecast 2018, variance, and evidence and rationale.

It was noted that the two main proposals from the Labour Group and that from Councillor Williams and the Conservative Group shared many common features, especially in terms of community identity.

The detailed considerations taken into account in respect of the Labour Group proposals were as follows:-

- the residential areas of Middlesbrough had been gradually moving to the south of the Borough;
- over the next ten years it was considered that such a trend could continue with developments at Stainsby Hill, Grey Towers, Hemlington Grange and Rose Cottage;
- such a trend along with the demographic changes had had a significant effect on the distribution of where electors were living within the Borough boundary;
- advice of the Commission which notes that community identity was hard to define and was often subjective and that electoral equality was the only criterion which the Commission could measure with precision;
- the Labour Group had taken the view expressed by the Commission when it addressed the Council in February 2012 that the current pattern of wards, in itself, should not be a major consideration;
- the approach taken therefore had been that ward patterns should as far as possible reflect community; that interests and identities and boundaries of communities should be identifiable; but that ensuring electoral equality now and into the foreseeable future within those considerations was of primary importance;
- in making the proposals the Labour Group, were satisfied that the proposed ward structure would meet the Commission's requirement that no proposed ward was so large that it would be difficult for a Councillor to represent, or so small that its Councillor might not be able to contribute effectively to the wider business of the Council.

Members commented on the ward names some of which had initially been considered as working names and were subject to further consideration. The following changes were put forward:-

- (a) Neptune Ward be renamed Berwick Hills Ward;
- (b) Thornhill Ward be renamed Trimdon Ward;
- (c) Overdale Ward be renamed Park End and Priestfields Ward;
- (d) West Linthorpe be renamed Linthorpe West

ORDERED as follows:-

1. That the draft report be approved subject to the following amendments prior to submission to Council;

(i) that the ward names be changed as follows:-

- a) Neptune Ward be renamed Berwick Hills Ward;
- (b) Thornhill Ward be renamed Trimdon Ward;

- (c) Overdale Ward be renamed Park End and Priestfields Ward;
- (d) West Linthorpe be renamed Linthorpe West;

(ii) that in respect of schools all references to 'junior' be replaced with the word 'primary'.

(iii) that the use of 'Hemlington Estates' and 'Hemlington ward' within the context of the report be clarified.

2. That Officers be thanked for excellent work within the short timescale required by the Boundary Commission.