

# **CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL**

## **Minutes of a meeting of the Electoral and Polling District Review Sub Committee**

held on Friday, 15th November, 2024 in the Committee Suite 1,2 & 3,  
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

### **PRESENT**

Councillor J Clowes (Chair)  
Councillors S Edgar, J Clowes, D Jefferay and C O'Leary

### **OFFICERS**

Brian Reed, Head of Democratic Services  
Diane Barnard (virtual), Electoral Services Team Leader  
Leanne Austin, Electoral Services Officer  
Laura Bateman, Project Officer  
Nick Billington, Research and Intelligence Analyst  
Sam Jones, Democratic Services Officer

### **7 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Pearson.  
Councillor S Edgar was present as substitute.

### **8 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Chris O'Leary declared that part of the discussion would focus on the area of Tytherington where Macclesfield Conservative Club was located. Councillor Chris O'Leary indicated that he was not a Member or Trustee of this club, but the club was the landlord of the Macclesfield Conservative Association, of which Councillor Chris O'Leary was an officer.

### **9 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION**

The public speaking procedure was noted. There were no members of the public registered to speak.

### **10 CHESHIRE EAST ELECTORAL REVIEW - WARDING PROPOSALS**

The sub-committee considered a report relating to the draft recommendations of the Boundary Commission for England in respect of the Council's electoral arrangements.

It was confirmed to the sub-committee that officers had, in consultation with their legal representatives, been seeking clarification from the Boundary Commission for England on what restrictions (in terms of scope and timing) might apply to any future Community Governance Review

(CGR) of town and parish council governance that Cheshire East Council might wish to undertake in order to address concerns arising from the Boundary Commission's recommended changes to parish warding. The sub-committee were assured that the Borough Council is able to undertake such a CGR after the current Review's Order is made, but that the Council would need to seek consent from the Boundary Commission, and provide supporting evidence, in order to undertake such a review.

Councillor S Gardiner, who was not present at the meeting, provided a statement to be read:

*"Following my attendance at the last meeting of the sub-committee, I note the work undertaken by Mr Billington with regards to the potential for securing an alternative proposal to that set out in the Boundary Commission's latest proposal, namely the provision of three equal-sized single-member wards.*

*Having considered the information set out in the slides provided to members I note the proposal and the levels of divergence from the optimum ward size, in terms of constituent numbers. I appreciate that given the short time between the two meetings it was not possible to come up with any further options for consideration. Therefore, in light of the significant negative divergence that Mr Billington's draft proposals present, I accept his conclusion that this would be unlikely to satisfy the Commission as an alternative proposition.*

*It is therefore my position and that of Cllrs Dean and Coan that we should revert to the status quo of a single three-member ward to serve Knutsford as this presents a fairer and more equitable solution to the benefit of all Knutsford residents.*

*As stated previously the three ward councillors have since the inception of Cheshire East always worked in concert for the benefit of all the Town's residents, irrespective of whether those councillors were from the same political grouping or from a mix of political groups. We consider that arbitrarily creating one single member ward and one two-member ward will lead to an unacceptable disparity between the residents in the two wards to the detriment of those living in the single-member ward.*

*Additionally, this week I have been attending the Planning Appeal relating to land at Longridge which would be part of the single member ward, and I note with interest that excellent work from several members of the local community in opposing the proposal. These people came from across Knutsford and worked together to support a common goal. These people have also been supported by ward councillors throughout the process.*

*However, as a member of the Strategic Planning Board SPB, I either had to give up my place on that regulatory committee or had to avoid expressing any opinions about the proposal or discussing the application with concerned residents. Because Knutsford is currently a three-member ward I was able to share the responsibilities and allow my ward*

*colleagues to engage with the residents whilst I was able to keep my place on the Board, whilst remaining unfettered and yet still able to speak knowledgeably about the site and the impact of the proposal when a decision was made by SPB. Had I represented the residents of Longridge in a single-member ward that option would have not been open to me and I would have been forced to choose whether I remained on the Board when the item was considered or stepped back and spoke for my residents, thereby depriving other Board Members of my knowledge and planning expertise.*

*Finally, I should remind members of the position of the Town Council which was reported to last week's meeting, namely that they do not support the commissioner's recommendation to create one single member ward and a two-member ward. Although they recognised the democratic benefits that three single-member wards might afford, the logistics of creating three equal-sized wards would present some difficulties, as Mr Billington's report confirms. Furthermore, it presents an additional problem of having to sub-divide some of the newly-created parish wards presenting unnecessary confusion for residents and practical problems for Town Councillors in undertaking their duties and responsibilities.*

*Therefore, the Town Council concluded by a significant majority ( with a few members abstaining and no votes against) to reject the Boundary Commissioner's proposals and to request that Knutsford remain a single three-member ward as at present, albeit moving the new housing estate under construction on land off the Northwich Road into the Knutsford Ward from High Legh Ward, which reflects the recent changes to the Parish boundaries.*

*I understand that the Town Council does intend to make separate representations to the Boundary Commissioner to conform their position and to explain why they have taken this stance. It should be noted that the Town Council is currently made up of 6 Conservative Councillors and 9 Independents."*

Councillor K Hague provided a statement to be read:

*"The forecasted variance in my Ward is at 10%, which is right on the target, but still a little more negative than I would like. This could potentially throw off balanced representation, especially if population changes don't align with projections. It also seems as if there aren't really many alternative boundary options being considered. It feels like a missed opportunity looking into more configurations might have helped boost community representation or bring the variance down a little further."*

Councillors C O'Leary and D Jefferay stated the proposal from the Boundary Commission relating to Tytherington and Springwood were not acceptable and were unfair, as they would not allow for easy administration of local government, cohesive communities or equity of votes.

Councillor D Edwardes, a visiting Member, expressed concern at the lack of statistics within the Boundary Commission's report concerning the number of people surveyed, and stated that responses to a petition in relation to boundaries in Tytherington were being collated and would be submitted to the Commission before the 9 December 2024 consultation submission deadline.

Councillor C O'Leary stated that at a previous meeting of the predecessor sub-committee to this sub-committee [*Electoral Review Sub Committee*], Mr Godden provided proposals, and at that meeting, the then Chair of the sub-committee, who was also the leader of the Labour Group and the Leader of the Council, asked that Officers support Mr Godden in preparing some alternative proposals. Councillor C O'Leary requested information about whether such support was provided and, if so, whether any support was provided to any other members of the public. Councillor C O'Leary, also asked whether the then Chair made it clear to officers that Mr Godden was representing the Tatton Labour Party? Officers committed to providing a written response.

The sub-committee, in accordance with its delegated powers, resolved to fully and formally determine the Council's response to all remaining draft recommendations set out in the Commission's report, and not to refer any decisions to the Corporate Policy Committee or Council:

**RESOLVED:**

**(Unanimously)**

To delegate powers to the Head of Democratic Services, in consultation with sub-committee members, to finalise the details of the Council's formal response to the Boundary Commission where he deems this to be necessary.

**(Unanimously) BOLLINGTON & RAINOW AND MACCLESFIELD BOROUGH WARDS**

To note the Draft Recommendations proposals for Bollington & Macclesfield Borough warding and express the Council's deep concern over these proposals and specifically the proposals for the areas covering the northern section of Springwood Way (the properties along/ off Livesley Road), Bollingbrook, Beechwood Mews/ Beech Farm Drive and polling district 4AC1 (Coare Street, Brynton Road etc), and the implications for the Macclesfield Tytherington area's Borough (and parish) warding.

**(Unanimously) KNUTSFORD BOROUGH WARD(S)**

To continue to support the Borough Council's original (warding consultation stage) submission option, of a single ward for Knutsford, covering the Town Council area.

**(Unanimously) CREWE PARISH WARDING**

To accept the Commission's recommendations for parish warding for Crewe.

**(Unanimously) KNUTSFORD PARISH WARDING**

To note that, in keeping with the Council's continued support for a single Borough ward for Knutsford, covering the Town Council area, it proposes no changes to Knutsford's existing parish warding.

**(Unanimously) MACCLESFIELD PARISH WARDING**

To note the Draft Recommendations proposal for Bollington & Macclesfield parish warding, express the Council's deep concern over these proposals, particularly the extreme electoral inequality involved.

To express concern in particular about the range in electors per seat ratios, from under 225 (the recommended Springwood parish ward) to around 4,600 (Tytherington) and the comparatively high ratio for the Central parish ward (around 4,500), which does not reflect its unique workload challenges.

**(Unanimously) SANDBACH PARISH WARDING**

To acknowledge the Commission's recommendations for parish warding for Sandbach, but raise concerns over the potential implications of the unusually large seat allocation (9 seats for Elworth & Ettiley Heath) for the Town Council's governance and notify the Commission that, consequently, the Council may seek consent for an early Community Governance Review for Sandbach.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 11.48 am

Councillor J Clowes (Chair)