

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the
Community Governance Review Sub-Committee
held on Tuesday, 20th December, 2011 in the Municipal Executive Suite -
Municipal Buildings, Earle Street, Crewe CW1 2BJ

PRESENT

Councillor D Marren (Chairman)
Councillor P Groves (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors G Baxendale, R Cartlidge, B Murphy and P Whiteley

In attendance

Councillor S Hogben

Officers

Lindsey Parton, Registration Services and Business Manager
Paul Mountford, Democratic Services Officer
Lesley Seal, Communications Manager (Performance and Capacity)
Tim Oliver, Media Relations Officer

24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor R Cartlidge declared a personal interest in the Crewe Community Governance Review as the Mayor of Crewe and as a Crewe Charter Trustee.

25 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

There were no members of the public present.

26 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 21st October 2011 be approved as a correct record.

27 FEEDBACK ON CONSULTATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

The four week consultation period with key stakeholders/interested parties had taken place from 14th November to 16th December 2011.

137 emails and 61 letters had been sent to stakeholders. By the date of the Sub-Committee's meeting, 62 responses had been received by letter,

email or online response form. 87% of respondents supported a Town/ Parish Council as their highest preference.

RESOLVED

That the outcome of the initial consultation exercise be noted.

28 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE PROJECT PLAN

The community governance project plan had been updated and circulated to the Sub-Committee for consideration.

RESOLVED

That the revised community governance project plan be approved.

29 NEXT STAGE OF CONSULTATION - BALLOT OF ELECTORS

The Sub-Committee considered the next stage of the process in light of the response from the stakeholder consultation.

The key issues for consideration were the wording of the ballot paper and the associated publicity/information leaflets.

In view of the public and stakeholder feedback to date, Members felt that the wording of the ballot paper should simply ask whether there should be a single town council for Crewe. It was agreed that the question to be asked should be a positive one, ie "Do you want a single town council for Crewe", rather than a negatively worded question such as whether the voter objected to such a proposal.

In considering the wording for the ballot paper it was felt that there was no evidence of support for more than one parish council. A significant percentage of consultees had specifically expressed a preference for a single town council, whereas no such support had been voiced specifically to request more than one parish council. In addition, in carrying out the previous Crewe Community Governance Review in 2009/10 there had been relatively low support for the option of four parish councils on the ballot paper at that time (20.8% of those who expressed a preference had opted for 4 separate parish councils, as opposed to 79.2% of electors who had expressed a preference for a single town council). The Sub-Committee also noted the call from electors for a simple question on the ballot paper. One consultee had specifically requested the ballot paper question to be "Do you want a Town Council for Crewe" and similar pleas had been made at the public meetings held in September 2011.

There was some discussion about the implications of a low turnout in the ballot and whether any particular motive could be attributed to those who had not voted. It was suggested that the information leaflet accompanying the ballot paper could include a comment to the effect that a failure to vote

would be interpreted to mean that the individual was not opposed to the establishment of a town council. The Officers advised that such a comment should only be included as a direct quote from a particular Member and should not appear to be the opinion of the Council as it could leave the Council open to challenge. The Officers undertook to seek legal advice on the suggestion.

It was agreed that for clarity, the period of the ballot should be for the whole of the month of February 2012.

Members noted that the Leighton ward of Crewe was partly unparished and that the unparished part included approximately 400 electors who would be included in the ballot. It may be that if given a choice, some or all of those electors would prefer to be included in Leighton parish. It was agreed that the printing of the ballot paper should allow for the analysis of responses by polling district in Leighton.

Members turned their attention to the publicity arrangements for the ballot and in particular to the two information leaflets; the small A5 one to be included with the ballot paper and the larger A4 one to be available to provide additional information for those who want it. It was agreed that the A5 leaflet should be worded simply, and should focus on encouraging people to vote in the ballot. It should also urge people to encourage their neighbours to vote and to speak to their local ward councillors for further information and advice. It was also suggested that the envelope containing the ballot paper and leaflet could be designed in such a way as to encourage people to open it.

The communications plan now needed to be developed to support this next stage of the Review including a press release at the start and part way through the review and public notices on notice boards in Crewe.

RESOLVED

That

(1) the wording on the ballot paper should be:

“Do you want a single town council for Crewe?”

(2) the printing of the ballot paper should allow for the analysis by polling district for the unparished area of the Leighton ward;

(3) the period of the ballot should be for the whole of the month of February 2012 and that the general consultation period, including the website, be extended to the end of February ;

(4) the Officers be authorised to prepare the ballot paper, information leaflet and outgoing envelope on the basis agreed by Members; and

(5) A communications plan be developed to support the remaining stages of the Review.

30 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday, 26th January 2012 at 9.30 am at Westfields.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 11.42 am

Councillor D Marren (Chairman)