

Cheltenham Borough Council Council - Minutes

Monday, 9th January 2023

6.00 - 6.22 pm

Present: Councillors Sandra Holliday (Chair), Matt Babbage (Vice-Chair), Glenn Andrews, Victoria Atherstone, Paul Baker, Adrian Bamford, Garth Barnes, Graham Beale, Angie Boyes, Nigel Britter, Jackie Chelin, Barbara Clark, Flo Clucas, Iain Dobie, Stephan Fifield, Bernard Fisher, Wendy Flynn, Tim Harman, Steve Harvey, Rowena Hay, Martin Horwood, Peter Jeffries, Tabi Joy, Paul McCloskey, Emma Nelson, Tony Oliver, John Payne, Richard Pineger, Julie Sankey, Diggory Seacome, Izaak Tailford, Simon Wheeler, Max Wilkinson, Suzanne Williams and David Willingham

In attendance: Claire Hughes (Monitoring Officer), Paul Jones (Executive Director for Finance and Assets), Gareth Edmundson (Chief Executive), Kim Smith (Electoral Services Manager)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Bassett-Smith, Collins, Lewis and Tooke.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

3. COMMUNICATIONS BY THE MAYOR

The Mayor welcomed Members and the public to the meeting. She told members that she had attended Cheltenham Open Door on Christmas Day, where Mark, the chef, prepared a fantastic lunch for guests. She said Cheltenham would be a poorer town without its volunteers, and gave huge thanks to Open Door and everyone involved.

She went on to thank Louis Savage, who stood down as ward councillor for Battledown in December, noting that he had brought a lot to council debates. She wished him well on behalf of all Members.

4. COMMUNICATIONS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Leader advised that consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework started before Christmas, giving the authority an opportunity to comment, and confirmed that it will be making a submission in due course.

She said the government has announced that it will provide funding for additional housing to be built or bought, in particular for refugees and asylum seekers who are currently being housed in expensive accommodation. She confirmed that the council would work up a submission for Cheltenham to send back to government.

Finally, in line with the climate change SPD, she confirmed that the council has purchased nine net zero homes as well as five affordable homes in the development at Shurdington Road, as part of its £180m commitment to provide more housing for Cheltenham residents.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were none.

6. MEMBER QUESTIONS

There were none.

7. BOUNDARY COMMISSION ELECTORAL REVIEW

The Executive Director for Finance and Assets introduced the report, advising Members that in November 2022, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England published its new proposals for Cheltenham, keeping 20 wards and 40 councillors, with new ward boundaries across the borough. Public consultation took place between 1 November 2022 and 9 January 2023, and once the Boundary Commission has considered all consultation responses, its final recommendations will be published in March 2023, followed by a draft order in both Houses of Parliament. Subject to parliamentary scrutiny, the new electoral arrangements are expected to come into effect at the authority's local elections in May 2024.

He thanked all Members who submitted views, and officers who worked with group leaders to formalise these into formal recommendations and to produce maps. If approved by Council, this will be submitted to the Boundary Commission as the council's formal response to the consultation. He added that this doesn't prohibit any individual member or group from making their own submissions, should they wish.

The leader of the Conservative group thanked the Executive Director for Finance and Assets and the Electoral Services Manager for their hard work on this complicated issue, which was much appreciated. He confirmed that his group was happy to support the proposals as a package, particularly as the original proposals didn't recognise the community but the current proposals do. He asked whether the council will write to voters who will move wards, and what will be the knock-on effects on polling stations.

The Executive Director for Finance and Assets confirmed that as soon as the proposals were ratified through an act of parliament, the council will write to all voters impacted by a ward change or change of polling station.

In debate, the Leader commented that it was unfortunate that the borough was having to go through a Boundary Commission review, but she was pleased by the cross-party work that had enabled the council to make its submission. She said it was disappointing that the government had not put any money aside to pay for the future communication with residents – the council will have to fund this from its own budget – and also that the county council was about to embark on a similar review, at considerable expense and additional officer time. It was a shame that the Boundary Commission couldn't have saved time and money by looking at all areas collectively. She offered sincere thanks to officers for the work they had done so far, and said that although the borough may not get exactly what it wants, it has at least put forward suggestions based on local knowledge and local communities.

A Member agreed with the Leader, and wanted to highlight what she had said about the relation between the different boundary reviews. He said he raised the issue in his own submission, and noted that if the original proposal had gone through, it would have led to a massive re-drawing of the county division areas – it was disappointing that such a major change could have been smuggled in. Like the Leader, he was disappointed that there was not much discourse between the boundary reviews and that they were not happening concurrently, but was happy with the cross-party consensus which, he felt, increased the chances of the proposed changes getting through.

A Member said she had spent many hours looking at the maps, researching, communicating with officers and others, trying to work out how Hester's Way can stay as it is while addressing neighbouring ward issues. She said the proposals don't reflect the interests and identities of the local community or promote effective local government; neither do they ensure the new wards are properly represented.

She went on to say that the proposed changes in Hester's Way conflict with the Hester's Way Neighbourhood Plan which is based on an area determined by the Cabinet to reflect the local community. The new ward will be an area of higher deprivation which will, over time, have a detrimental effect on the way the area and community is perceived, on the physical and mental health of its residents, and result in even lower turn-out at local elections. Data shows that councillors for deprived areas spend six hours more each week on council duties than their colleagues in more affluent wards; the Hester's Way ward boundary change will result in residents not being as effectively represented.

She recognised that the process has to be completed, but suggested that whatever was agreed today should be an interim measure. The council should not have to wait for the Boundary Commission to force its changes on the borough, with a few amendments; it should take control of its wards and how they are defined. To this end, she requested that the Leader support the continuation of

the boundary review working group, open to all, and take a novel approach as to how wards are defined – starting with no boundaries, engaging with the community in a meaningful way, looking at the naming and size and diversity of wards, to achieve a bold plan which is fit for the future and ensures that Cheltenham residents are represented in the fairest and most democratic way possible. She said she would abstain from the vote today and make her own representation to the Boundary Commission.

The Leader said the Member made a good point, but at the end of the day, the Boundary Commission decides when to carry out a review, and what the Member was suggesting would be a major piece of work for officers, who were already extremely busy at present. She said she would get back to the Member on her question, after checking what this suggestion would mean in terms of officer time. She agreed that CBC hasn't had a boundary review for 20 years, which is unusual, and that once the outcome of the parliamentary review is known and combined with what is coming for the district, this can be looked at holistically to see what it will mean for Cheltenham as a whole.

With no further comments from Members or officers, the Mayor moved to the vote, taking all the recommendations as one item.

Recommendation:

Council approves the submission of Appendix 2 to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England summarised as follows:

- **The whole of Furrow Close to be included within Prestbury Ward**
- **The whole of Pittville Campus to be included within Pittville Ward (Appendix A)**
- **Barlow Road, Village Mews, Wentworth Court and the properties between Welch Road and Dill Avenue to be retained within Springbank Ward (Appendix B)**
- **Fairview Street and when reaching the top of Fairview Street from 22-31 Glenfall Street and the north side of Glenfall Street from 21 to the east end of the street to remain in the proposed new All Saints Ward. The remainder of this area to be retained in Pittville Ward (Appendix C)**
- **Retain the whole of Clarence Road/Clarence Square within Pittville Ward (Appendix D)**
- **Area to the north of the A4019 to be retained in Swindon Village Ward (Appendix E)**
- **St. Peter's Ward to retain the current boundary with the exception of Malvern Road, to avoid isolated communities such as Pates Avenue (Appendix F)**
- **The current boundary for Wellesley Road to be retained within St. Paul's Ward and disregard new proposed boundary to be included in Pittville Ward (Appendix G)**

- **Move 58 and 67 Merestones Drive from Warden Hill to Park Ward (Appendix I)**
- **Change the name of 'Warden Hill' Ward to 'Warden Hill & Bournside' Ward**
- **Move the 'thin strip of land' on the railway from Warden Hill Ward to the Up Hatherley Ward (Appendix J)**
- **The proposed boundary between Benhall & The Reddings Ward and Springbank Ward is too far north in terms of community. Boundary to be drawn due west from the northern end of Telstar way to the borough boundary (Appendix K)**
- **Move the east side of Cheltenham Spa Station into St Mark's Ward from the proposed Warden Hill Ward (Appendix L)**
- **Retain Imperial Square and Montpellier Gardens within Lansdown Ward (Appendix M)**
- **Move area comprising Naunton Lane up to Churchill Road (including Badminton Close) from Leckhampton Ward to College Ward (Appendix N)**

33 in support

2 abstentions

APPROVED

8. ANY OTHER ITEM THE MAYOR DETERMINES AS URGENT AND WHICH REQUIRES A DECISION

There was no other business to consider.

Sandra Holliday
Chairman

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