

Taunton Deane Borough Council

At a special meeting of Taunton Deane Borough Council held at Shire Hall, Shuttern, Taunton on 23 August 2018 at 6 p.m.

Present The Mayor (Councillor Mrs Herbert)
 Councillors Aldridge, Berry, Mrs Blatchford, Booth, Bowrah, Brown, Cavill, Coles, Farbahi, Gaines, Habgood, Hall, Henley, C Hill, Mrs Hill, Horsley, Hunt, R Lees, Mrs Lees, Ms Lisgo, Mansell, Martin-Scott, Morrell, Parrish, Prior-Sankey, Mrs Reed, Ryan, Mrs Stock-Williams, Stone, Sully, Townsend, Mrs Warmington, Watson, Wedderkopp, Williams and Wren.

Mrs A Elder – Chairman of the Standards Advisory Committee

1. **Apologies**

Councillors Mrs Adkins, M Adkins, Beale, Coombes, Davies, D Durdan, Edwards, Gage, Govier, Mrs Gunner, James, Nicholls, Mrs Smith and Mrs Smith-Roberts.

2. **Declaration of Interests**

Councillors Coles, Hunt and Prior-Sankey declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council.

Councillors Bowrah, Brown, Cavill, Gaines, Henley, Hunt, Mansell, Mrs Reed, Mrs Stock-Williams, Stone, Townsend, Mrs Warmington and Watson all declared personal interests as Members of Town or Parish Councils.

3. **Public Question Time**

- (a) (1) Mr A Debenham stated that from a general assessment, many local residents despaired at the name chosen for the new Council - "Somerset West and Taunton Council" instead of the obvious "Taunton Deane and West Somerset Council", thereby retaining the historic prominence of our County Town, as well as sustaining the factual leading importance of Taunton Deane over West Somerset.

Why and on what evidential basis, was the Council now going ahead with this un-consulted upon name for the new merged authority? And how and when could this name be changed to something which Taunton Deane residents would support?

(2) From the viewpoint of having the most simple and direct democratic engagement between electors and their elected Councillors, I have campaigned for decades for there to be all single-Member Wards, these then being small enough to encourage Councillor candidates from more diverse backgrounds as well as the usual candidates representing political parties.

For the new authority I welcome the improvement of the proportion of single-Member Wards to 17 out of 59, but why not go the whole hog and abolish the complexity and unwieldy size of multi-Member Wards completely – particularly those with three Members?

(3) If multi-member electoral Wards unfortunately have to be retained, please could the now universally recognised fairer democratic voting system of “preference voting” be used, with the use of “transferable voting procedures” to determine the elected Councillors for that Ward?

In response, Councillor Jane Warmington thanked Mr Debenham for the early notification of his questions her responses to which were as follows:-

(1) In hindsight, it might have been sensible to have simply linked the existing Taunton Deane and West Somerset which few would probably have disagreed with.

However, because the new name was used in the Structural Change Order and accepted by Parliament, it could not now be changed by the extant Councils. The name had to remain as it was until the new Council was established and it would be up to the Councillors elected next May to decide whether the name should be changed and to what.

(2) The Local Government Boundary Commission England’s (LGBCE) criteria for each Member representing roughly the same number of people on the electoral role made this difficult particularly in the parishes where most were either much too small or slightly too big. One example is Bishops Lydeard which is too big to be represented by one Member yet this would actually be both practical and desirable locally.

The LGBCE had also reduced the number of single Member Wards initially suggested for Taunton when they felt the Unparished Area of Taunton would be better represented by sixteen rather than fifteen Councillors. Towns do not necessarily divide neatly into sensible chunks of 2,000 or so electors which the LGBCE also consider important. If practical one Member Wards were preferred but two or three Member Wards were acceptable, so most areas ended up a mix of all three.

(3) Currently this was something which was not normally available at any tier of Government and views on the wisdom of this did vary.

(b) Mrs J Calcroft stated that the LGBCE proposal seemed to be based on one Councillor per 2,000 electors. This satisfied one of their criterion based on electoral equality which was sound.

The details of the current number of electors within each Ward was obviously based on current statistics and was therefore reliable.

Her questions related to seeking some clarifications on the forecast numbers on which the number of Councillors seemed to be based.

Five of the proposed new Wards appeared to have increased forecast

numbers exceeding 1,000. Creech and Durston had a forecast of 1,200 increase in numbers and Trull and Pitminster a forecasted increase of over 1,074.

Then unsurprisingly there were two of the three main "growing garden town community" areas within the current Taunton Deane boundary with increased numbers - West Monkton and Cheddon had an anticipated 1,500 increase in forecasted numbers and Norton Fitzwarren and Staplegrove Ward had 1,302.

But, the third main "growing garden town community" area Bishops Hull and Comeytrove showed a forecasted decrease of 367! If like the other two major developments in Taunton Deane an increase of between 1,300 and 1,500 was assumed, this would put their forecasted electorate up to in excess of 8,000 and for parity would require four Councillors.

Mrs Calcroft asked:-

- On what date in the future were the forecasted numbers in the five Wards mentioned above based?
- How were they arrived at? and
- How often would an electoral review take place to ensure that the three identified "growing garden town communities" maintained electoral equality in relation to Councillor representation?

Councillor Jane Warmington thanked Mrs Calcroft for her questions. She undertook to provide her with a full written response in due course.

4. **Warding Arrangements for the New Council**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the Warding Arrangements for the new Council.

Following the decision of the Secretary of State to confirm his 'minded to' decision to create a new Council, it was necessary for the Local Government Boundary Commission England (LGBCE) to establish the electoral arrangements in time for the May 2019 local elections.

The Structural Change Order that was approved by Parliament made provision for the size of the new Council to be 58 Councillors. The LGBCE therefore invited interested parties to submit any proposals to them by 4 May 2018 in regard to establishing warding arrangements for the new Council area based on this size to enable them to determine the number of Wards, the Ward boundaries, the number of Councillors to be elected to each Ward and the names of each Ward.

On 3 July, 2018, the LGBCE published its draft recommendations for the new electoral arrangements for Somerset West and Taunton Council. It was proposed that the new Council should have 59 Councillors who should represent 6 three-Councillor Wards, 12 two-Councillor Wards and 17 one-Councillor Wards.

These proposals were currently subject to a full public consultation process which ran until 27 August, 2018 and views were being sought for alternative

boundaries or Ward names which met the LGBCE criteria – Electoral Equality, Community Identity and Effective Local Government – which they had to follow as part of the electoral review process.

The draft recommendations did closely reflect the proposals submitted by the two Councils with the main difference being the LGBCE exercising their discretion to increase the size of the new Council from 58 to 59 Members to provide better electoral equality; this was being done by the allocation of one additional Councillor to the Unparished Area of Taunton (from 15 to 16) with the recommendations for the rest of the area reflecting the Councils' submissions with the two exceptions of the Parish of Sampford Brett being placed with Williton and Watchet (rather than in South Quantock) and the Parish of Treborough being part of the Exmoor Ward (rather than the Old Cleeve and District Ward).

In terms of process, the New Council Working Group had established a cross party sub-group to assist officers with reviewing the draft recommendations and formulating a draft response for the two Councils to consider endorsing at Special Meetings to be held on 20 August 2018 (West Somerset Council) and 23 August 2018 (Taunton Deane Borough Council), respectively.

The sub-group had met with officers on 6 August, 2018 and reviewed the draft recommendations, particularly focussing on where there were changes from the submission made on behalf of the two Councils. Overall, the sub-group recognised that the recommendations broadly reflected the wishes of the two Councils and incorporated some of the suggestions made by Town and Parish Councils and therefore should be welcomed in this regard.

It was further acknowledged that by the LGBCE allocating an additional seat to the Unparished Area of Taunton, this had the dual benefit of enhancing the local democratic representation for this part of the new Council area and providing a better overall electoral equality whilst not prejudicing and altering significantly the distribution of seats across the rest of the area as proposed in the Councils' original submissions.

The sub-group did identify a number of matters that it considered should be put forward to the LGBCE to consider addressing to further enhance their final recommendations. These related to the moving of one property between Wards in the Unparished Area of Taunton to align better with the proposed warding pattern, suggesting some changes to the proposed names of some of the new Council Wards and to request that the warding schemes for Minehead and Wellington Town Councils should be coterminous with the proposed Wards for the new district Council and that the names are the same as well.

The sub-group was strongly of the view that, if at all possible, it would add weight to any representations made by the two Councils if those representations were the same and so it was agreed that identical reports would be submitted to the two respective meetings for consideration.

Resolved that the following representations be made to the Local Government Boundary Commission England, as a response to the public

consultation process in regard to their draft recommendations for the new Council:-

- (1) The Council broadly supported the draft recommendations and welcomed the proposals including the increase in the number of Councillors to 59 to allow 16 Councillors to represent the Unparished Area of Taunton;
- (2) The Council supported the proposed new Council District Ward boundaries with the one specific suggested amendment that the Ward boundary for the Wellspings and Rowbarton Ward be slightly adjusted to enable the property known as 191 Cheddon Road to be moved from this Ward and included in the proposed Priorswood Ward;
- (3) The Council requested that the following proposed Ward names be changed as set out below:-
 - 'Tangier' be changed to 'Manor and Tangier';
 - 'Vivary West' be changed to 'Wilton and Sherford';
 - 'Vivary East' be changed to 'Vivary';
 - 'Minehead South' be changed to 'Periton and Woodcombe';
 - 'Brendons and Wiveliscombe' be changed to 'Wiveliscombe and District';
 - 'Creechbarrow' be changed to 'Halcon and Lane'; and
 - 'North Curry and District' be changed to 'North Curry and Ruishton';
- (4) The Council strongly requested that the proposed Minehead Town Council warding arrangements as set out in paragraph 80 of the recommendations be changed to ensure that the Town Council Wards were coterminous with those proposed for the District Council in Minehead (given that elections for the town and district councils are usually held at the same time) as set out in paragraphs 68, 69 and 70 of the recommendations, with the names being the same for both the District and Town Council Wards to avoid confusion; and
- (5) The Council strongly requested that the proposed Wellington Town Council warding arrangements as set out in paragraph 81 of the recommendations be changed to ensure that the Town Council Wards were coterminous with those proposed for the District Council in Wellington (given that elections for the Town and District Councils were usually held at the same time) as set out in paragraphs 57, 58 and 59 of the recommendations, with the names being the same for both the District and Town Council Wards to avoid confusion.

(The meeting ended at 8.38 p.m.)