

MINUTES of a meeting of the ELECTORAL REVIEW WORKING PARTY held in the Abbey Room, Stenson House, Coalville on THURSDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2023

Present: Councillor M B Wyatt (In the Chair)

Councillors S Sheahan, A C Woodman, J Legrys (Substitute for Councillor C A Sewell) and R L Morris (Substitute for Councillor K Merrie MBE)

In Attendance: Councillors P Moulton

Officers: Mr R Beesley, Mrs C Hammond, Mr T Devonshire and Ms K Hiller

13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor C Sewell and Councillor K Merrie.

14 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no interests declared.

15 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2023 were considered.

By affirmation of the meeting, it was

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting on 1 November 2023 be approved as an accurate record of proceedings.

16 ELECTORAL REVIEW OF NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE - COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION

Clare presented the report.

Councillor Sheahan sought confirmation that the submission could be amended by plus or minus one at the end of the process. In response, Richard Beesley, Association of Electoral Administrators Consultant, confirmed that during the warding arrangement stage council size numbers may increase or decrease by one or two members compared to the agreed Council Size, if the change meets local needs and arrangements better. He noted however, that the LGBCE would prefer not to amend the agreed number if it could be helped.

Councillor Wyatt asked what the financial difference between 38 and 39 Members would be for the organisation and in response Clare stated it would be the cost of one basic allowance.

Councillor Morris suggested that the cost of an extra Member would be a fair bit higher than that, and he set out the extra costs to be considered, such as the cost of an extra election and extra IT equipment. He queried whether this would provide good value for money.

Clare advised that the most substantive cost to consider would be the extra Member allowance, as dependent on the warding arrangements, there may not be a requirement for additional polling stations or staffing of them. The increase in election costs would

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come from the increased number of electors, therefore the figure would not be substantively higher.

Councillor Morris remained unconvinced that an increase in the size of the Council would provide good value for money.

Councillor Sheahan felt that it would provide good value for money as Members worked hard and worked many hours. Furthermore, multi-Member wards could also be utilised to save money.

Councillor Woodman felt that the public would not appreciate an increase in the cost of local politics or an increase in the size of the Council; nevertheless, he concurred with Councillor Sheahan that Members did work hard and did provide good value for money.

Councillor Wyatt argued that the balance of evidence suggested the submission should opt for either maintaining or reducing the size of the Council. Plus, each ward was unique, and each Councillor had different workloads, which also varied across time.

Councillor Sheahan stressed that the submission should not begin from abstract beliefs, but concrete evidence of the needs of the district. Councillor Sheahan suggested that in his view the evidence suggested that the submission should opt for 39 Members. The evidence he gave for this was population growth; the expanding number of Committees and the broadening of their functions, plus the increasing challenge of providing substitutes; and the increasing workload demands on Councillors due to issues such as increasing homelessness.

Councillor Legrys also felt, strongly, that the submission should opt for 39 Members.

Councillor Morris felt, quite strongly, that efforts should be made to reduce the number of Councillors.

Councillor Woodman felt that the increase in population size requiring an expansion of the Council argument, was not an argument which was applied to the Westminster Parliament. In his view, a couple of hundred extra constituents would not result in a qualitative change in his workload.

Councillor Legrys said that Councillor Woodman failed to consider the devolved parliaments in Scotland, Wales and the north of Ireland, as well as other ways, such as Mayoral authorities, that power was diffused nationally.

A motion to recommend to Council a submission that proposed a council size figure of 39 was moved by Councillor Legrys, seconded by Councillor Sheahan.

The motion was LOST.

A motion to recommend to Council a submission that proposed council size figure of 38 was moved by Councillor Wyatt, seconded by Councillor Morris.

Following a three to two vote it was

RESOLVED THAT:

The Working Party recommend to Council that the Electoral Review submission recommend a Council size of 38 Members.

It was noted for the minutes that the submission which was going forwards was not unanimously agreed upon by the Working Party.

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Officers advised that multi-Member wards would have no impact on the size of the Council and that Council would be asked at the meeting on 30 January whether it wished to express a preference on the issue of single/multi member wards

Clare clarified for Members that the submission would be finalised to include a summary that proposed that the Council retained 38 Members and that would be brought back to the next meeting of the Working Party to see prior to Council. It was noted that it was imperative that the submission was agreed by Council at its meeting due to the deadline for the submission being the end of January.

Councillor Legrys suggested that it therefore made sense to prepare two submissions for full Council on 30 January. Clare advised that she would draft a separate summary for 39 that would be brought for noting to the next meeting, but the submission to Council would be for 38.

Richard clarified that if the submission was not approved then the Council will not have formally made one, and this would be highly problematic. Richard set out for Members the next stages of the process.

The meeting commenced at 3.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 4.04 pm

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