

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the ELECTIONS PANEL held at Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon on Tuesday, 27 May 2003

PRESENT: Councillors I C Bates, D Harty, M F Newman, K Reynolds and T D Sanderson

APOLOGIES: P J Downes and J Taylor

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

that Councillor I C Bates be elected Chairman of the Panel for the ensuing Municipal Year.

Councillor I C Bates in the Chair.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

that Councillor K Reynolds be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Panel for the ensuing Municipal Year.

3. PERIODIC ELECTORAL REVIEW OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

The Panel considered a report by the Executive Director of Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) together with a copy of an extract from the consultation document prepared by the County Council, outlining the present position with regard to a periodic review of electoral arrangements for the County Council of Cambridgeshire.

The Chairman advised the Panel that the meeting had been convened to provide an opportunity for Members of the District Council to consider the draft proposals and to consider whether they wished to make any submissions, representations or comments to the County Council.

In considering the consultation document, Members acknowledged the difficulties in producing proposals that met all of the criteria specified by the Electoral Commission and referred to instances where the County Council's proposals appeared not to have complied with the guidance.

Members expressed concern with the method adopted to calculate the average number of electors per Member on individual District basis, which would result in an imbalance of electors per member at County level between the various Districts. In this respect, the Panel

suggested that an electoral review of Cambridgeshire should result in equality of representation across the County as a whole which should be one of the underlying principles of the review.

The Panel also expressed their concern as to the rationale behind the proposed increase in the number of County Councillors from 59 to 68. Attention was drawn to the rounding exercise that had been undertaken to allocate Councillors to each District. Although rounded appropriately in each of the other Districts, Members referred to the County Council's decision not to round up the number of Councillors in Huntingdonshire to 19 but to reduce this to 18. Under the circumstances, Members suggested that in order to place the District on a comparable basis with the others within the County, the size of the County Council membership should increase to 69 Members, with 19 Members representing divisions in Huntingdonshire.

The Panel expressed concern with the lack of coterminosity with District ward boundaries on the basis that this was likely to cause confusion amongst the electorate and was not conducive to establishing or recognising communities of interest at a local level. The Panel suggested that there was little community of interest in several of the divisions proposed and raised objections to the proposals for the towns of both Huntingdon and St Neots where parish wards had been split which appeared to be contrary to the Commission's guidance.

With regard to those options included in the consultation document upon which comments had been invited, the Panel outlined their preference for Option 2 in the Ramsey/Warboys/Somersham area on the basis that 2 of the 3 proposed divisions were coterminous with District ward boundaries.

Whilst appreciating the clarity of single member divisions throughout, the Panel commented that, in the case of Huntingdonshire, this would result in divisions which lacked coterminosity with District wards, had little community interest in some areas, crossed parish ward boundaries and had a greater than 10% variance from the average. The Panel therefore suggested that the option of multi-member divisions should be considered.

Having regard to concerns expressed with the consultation document, the Panel considered an alternative scheme based upon 19 Members for multi-member divisions in Huntingdonshire which were coterminous with district ward boundaries. (A summary of the scheme has been appended in the Minute Book.) The Panel suggested that the comments raised and the alternative scheme be conveyed to the County Council and subject to receipt of any further information on the latter's final submission the alternative scheme and comments be sent to the Boundary Committee as representing the District Council's formal comments on the Review. Whereupon, the Panel

RESOLVED

- (a) that the alternative scheme of 19 Councillors based upon multi-member divisions in Huntingdonshire be approved for submission to the County Council,

together with the concerns and comments raised by the Panel outlined above;

- (b) that, in the absence of any opportunity for further comments on the County Council's final submission to the Boundary Committee, the alternative scheme and comments referred to in (a) above be submitted to the Boundary Committee for consideration; and
- (c) that a further meeting of the Panel be convened on 25th June 2003 in the light of further information emerging from the County Council.

Chairman