

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
MEMBERS' SOUNDING BOARD: POLITICAL
MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

NOTE of MEETING of the MEMBERS'
SOUNDING BOARD: POLITICAL
MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS held in
the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters,
Newtown St. Boswells on 23 April 2015 at
10.30 a.m.

Present:- Councillors D. Parker (Chairman), S. Aitchison, M. Ballantyne, C. Bhatia, J. Mitchell.

Also Present:- Councillors S. Bell, J. Brown, A. Cranston, G. Edgar, I. Gillespie, J. Greenwell, B. Herd, W. McAteer, D. Paterson, F. Renton, R. Smith, R. Stewart, J. Torrance, G. Turnbull, T. Weatherston.

Apologies:- Councillor J. Campbell, V. Davidson, D. Moffat, A. Nicol; Chief Executive and Service Director Strategy and Policy.

In Attendance:- Clerk to the Council, Research and Policy Officer.

CONSULTATION ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR SCOTLAND'S PROPOSALS FOR WARDS IN THE SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL AREA

1. With reference to paragraph 16 of the Minute of the Meeting of Scottish Borders Council held on 2 April 2015, there had been circulated copies of an extract from the Minute of Meeting of the Local Government Boundary Commission held on 13 January 2015; an extract from the Local Government Boundary Commission Guidance Booklet; and the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland's Proposals for Scottish Borders Council Wards. At its meeting held on 13 January 2015, the Boundary Commission had agreed to provisionally adopt the proposal for a reduction in Councillor numbers for Scottish Borders Council from 34 to 32 as part of its proposals for Ward boundaries. The proposals for the Scottish Borders Council area received from the Boundary Commission on 18 March 2015 proposed an electoral arrangement for 32 Councillors representing 8 x 3-member wards and 2 x 4-member wards, reducing the number of wards in the area by 1 and reducing Councillor numbers by 2. The Chairman gave some background to previous reviews by the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland, emphasising the need to meet the criteria set by the Commission in any proposals put forward by the Council, the main one being parity of electors per Councillor. Ms Erin Murray, Research and Policy Officer, then gave a presentation showing some options for Members to consider in place of the Commission's proposals. As part of the Review, the Commission had placed the Council in a category which had a parity of 2,800 electors per Councillor, with an expectation of no more than +/-10% variation on this number. If this criteria was applied to existing Wards, then Wards 9 to 11 (Jedburgh & District, Hawick & Denholm, and Hawick & Hermitage) were currently on average -14% under parity, with the rest being within 8% of parity. A minor change proposed by the Commission was for the move of Charlesfield (approx. 80 electors) from the Jedburgh & District Ward to the Selkirkshire Ward. No property within the settlement of St Boswells was affected by this proposal and Members accepted this. Two options were proposed for Councillors to consider. The first was a proposal to place Newcastleton and Hermitage as part of a Hawick and District Ward, with the area north of Hawick moving to a Jedburgh & Denholm Ward, with the boundary between the Kelso & District Ward and the Jedburgh & Denholm Ward remaining as the current one. The second option was the same as the first option with the exception of a proposed move of boundary between Kelso & District and Jedburgh & Denholm Wards, moving the boundary further out from the edge of Kelso.

2. Members discussed the Commission's proposals and what the Council could make as a counter-proposal. It was the firm view that the Commission's proposal for an enlarged Jedburgh Ward would result in a Ward which was too large and in which Newcastleton had no affinity, with the preference for the latter to remain in a Hawick Ward. In response to a question from Cllr McAteer about whether Denholm could also be moved into a Hawick Ward, Ms Murray advised that this would mean the move of about 1500 electors which would take parity to approx. +20%, and undertook to provide Cllr McAteer with the new figures. Cllr Bhatia gave the example of Clovenfords, which was currently in the Tweeddale East Ward, but was strongly associated with Galashiels. Members of Clovenfords community attended Tweeddale Area Forum and accepted this, while continuing their association with Galashiels. Members also discussed whether the status quo should be put forward to the Commission but the majority view was that this may weaken any subsequent proposal and should not be considered. Cllr Moffat requested officers look at Newhorndean Farm which currently had the boundary between Mid and East Berwickshire Wards running down the middle of the Farm, with the preference being the whole Farm be placed in the Mid Berwickshire Ward. Members expressed a preference for the second option to be taken to Council as an alternative to the Commission's proposals and officers would carry out further work to support this alternative.

DECISION

AGREED:

- (a) **to thank officers for the work they had carried out in relation to the proposed Ward boundaries;**
- (b) **to support the move of Charlesfield from the Jedburgh & District Ward to the Selkirkshire Ward;**
- (c) **to support the second option to go forward to Council on 21 May;**
- (d) **that officers continue to work on supporting evidence for the second option; and**
- (e) **that Councillors would let the Clerk to the Council know of any other minor changes in relation to boundaries.**

The meeting concluded at 2.10 p.m.