

TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held at the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Royal Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1RS, at 6.30 pm on Monday, 5 December 2022

Present: Councillor Rob Wormington (Chair)
Councillors Barrington-King, Dawlings, Funnell, Knight (Vice-Chair), March, Moon and Rands

Officers in Attendance: Jane Clarke (Head of Policy and Governance) and Caroline Britt (Democratic Services Officer)

Other Members in Attendance: Councillors Dr Hall and Hill

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

GP1/22 No apologies were received.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

GP2/22 No declarations of interest were made by members at the meeting.

NOTIFICATION OF PERSONS REGISTERED TO SPEAK (IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 18 OR 19):

GP3/22 Cllr Dr Hall, Mr Anthony Harris and Mr Antony Staples had registered to speak on Agenda Item 5.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 21 SEPTEMBER 2021

GP4/22 Members reviewed the minutes. No amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting dated 21 September 2021 be approved as a correct record.

WHOLE COUNCIL ELECTIONS

GP5/22 A statement was read out by the Chair, Cllr Wormington, from Philip Wheeler, Tunbridge Wells Labour Party Branch Chair.

Registered Speakers – Cllr Dr Hall, Mr Anthony Harris and Mr Antony Staples

Jane Clarke, Head of Policy & Governance, introduced the report as set out in the agenda.

Questions and discussion from Members included the following:

- The Chair reminded Members that they were to consider the matter of referring this matter to Full Council rather than debating the substantive issue of the merits of different electoral systems. He asked that questions and debate be focused on the referral to Full Council.
- While the Electoral Review and the matter of Whole Council Elections were two separate subjects, they were linked and the timetable of the

Electoral Review (set by the Boundary Commission) impacted the topic of Whole Council Elections as they would need to tie in. 2024 was chosen for recommendation of Whole Council Elections back in 2021 to combine PCC (Police & Crime Commissioner) and Borough elections every 4 years which would significantly reduce costs of the Election As it would be shared with the Police.

- In terms of recharging Parishes, where elections could be combined with other Authorities, overall costs for each Authority were reduced e.g. if PCC, Parish and Borough elections were combined in 2024 costs for venue, staffing etc would be shared between all three, so only a third would be recharged to Parishes. When elections were not combined, the proportion recharged to Parishes would be greater, but Parish Council elections would always be combined in some way with a Borough election. If All-Out elections were agreed, Parishes were likely to want to be aligned to that election schedule.
- As Whole Council Elections weren't to come into effect until 2024, they would not effect Parish precepts until the next budgeting period.
- Over a 4 year period, the savings of Whole Council elections to the Council in comparison to the current system were approximately £260,000.
- The response rate to the Consultation was believed to be around average for a Council consultation, but the team who ran the consultation would be asked for further information.
- Jane Clarke and the Officers who put the report together were commended.
- It was queried as to what had changed between last year's consultation and decision and this year's and given where the Boundary Commission were with their review, whether the Consultation and debate were giving people false hope that that the Commission's response would change. The debate with elections boiled down to whether the savings of all-out elections were worth the risk of uncontested seats when Parties could not find 39 candidates.
- It was felt that the debate was to be left to Full Council, and that the decision of the General Purposes Committee was to refer the report and Consultation to Full Council.
- It was felt the issue was not Party political, and the issue was cross-Party, but this was disputed by the independent Member.

A recorded vote was requested:

Councillors	
Barrington-King	For
Dawlings	For
March	For
Funnell	For
Moon	For
Rands	Against
Knight	For
Wormington	For

For – 7 Against – 1

RESOLVED – That the General Purposes Committee considered the results of the consultation and referred the matter of Whole Council Elections on to a specially convened meeting of Full Council on 14th December 2022, where

the following motion was to be considered:

“That Tunbridge Wells Borough Council hereby adopts a scheme of whole council elections, meaning an electoral cycle of one election every four years with all councillors being elected, with the first such election being held in 2024”.

URGENT BUSINESS

GP6/22 There was no urgent business.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

GP7/22 The next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday 17th January 2023 at 6:30pm

NOTE: The meeting concluded at 7.15 pm.