

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES TASK GROUP

ABERDEEN, 27th September, 2010. - Minute of Meeting of the ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES TASK GROUP. Present:- Councillor John Stewart, Chairperson; and Councillors Crockett (as substitute for Councillor Young), Donnelly, McCaig, Wendy Stuart and Yuill; and Mr Alexander Bisset and Mr Guus Glass, Aberdeen Civic Forum.

Also in attendance:- Ian Milton, ERO; David Gow and Lauren Kennedy, Office of the Chief Executive; and Roderick MacBeath, Legal and Democratic Services.

INTERIM REVIEW OF ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR WARDS 6, 7 AND 8 (TILLYDRONE / SEATON / OLD ABERDEEN, MIDSTOCKET / ROSEMOUNT, GEORGE STREET / HARBOUR)

1. The Task Group had before it a letter dated 6th August, 2010, from the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland on the Interim Review of electoral arrangements for Wards 6, 7 and 8 (Tillydrone/Seaton/Old Aberdeen, Midstocket/Rosemount and George Street/Harbour) which explained that, following consideration of a discussion paper on options, the Commission had reached an interim decision not to make any proposals for changes to the electoral arrangements for Aberdeen City meantime.

The discussion paper, which was appended to the Commission's letter, summarised the criteria which were applied to determine whether an Interim Review was warranted; noted that strict application of the appropriate category would suggest a council size based on the December, 2009, electorate of thirty-nine councillors compared to the present number of forty-three and set out the implications of adjusting the numbers of electors in each of the three wards under consideration (all of which were larger than the norm) given the complexity of making adjustments to neighbouring wards. The option of retaining the status quo which had been accepted by the Commission had been proposed on the grounds that the disparities in the electorate were due more to a significant loss of electorate in the wards outside of those identified for review rather than any circumstances occurring within them and because no solution to the disparities through boundary change or a change in councillor numbers was proportionate to the present situation. Accordingly, the Commission had not brought forward any proposals for change with remedial action being deferred to the next statutory review of electoral arrangements when more fundamental issues could be addressed appropriately, with this review to be concluded between 2014 and 2018. In the meantime, the Council was required to submit its formal response to the Commission's proposals by 22nd October, 2010.

The Task Group recommended:-

that the Commission's proposal to make no change at present be supported.

ADMINISTRATION OF FUTURE ELECTIONS IN SCOTLAND

2. The Task Group had before it a copy of the consultation paper issued by the Scottish Government on the administration of future elections in Scotland which examined the recommendations of the Gould Report and sought responses in particular on questions relating to the election timetable, the process for deciding the format and effectiveness of ballot papers, the positioning of candidates' names on ballot papers, the maintaining of secrecy of the ballot, the counting of ballots, the auto-adjudication of ballot papers and alternative voting arrangements.

The Chairperson proposed that, rather than attempting to achieve a consensus, it would be appropriate for each party, if it so wished, to submit its own response directly to the Scottish Government on any of the questions. Officers noted that it would be their intention to respond on a number of operational matters, particularly suggestions which would incur additional costs, and it was indicated that such responses would address the following issues:-

- The moving of the closing date for receipt of nominations to the 23rd day before polling would be welcomed;
- Given that where electronic counting is used it is necessary to request electors not to fold their ballot papers, the use of folders or envelopes to carry the ballot to the ballot box would be an unnecessary expense as this issue had been addressed in the 2007 elections by simply requesting voters to hold their ballot face down;
- That the randomising of the order of candidates on ballot papers within wards would be an unwarranted expense and that it would be extra work for administrators in randomising the ballot papers; however it was noted that the order on the ballot papers was of consequence within parties at multi-member ward STV elections
- That at present, the introduction of advanced voting, for example in supermarkets or shopping centres, would be likely to lose local knowledge of the electorate, increase the likelihood of fraud, require additional personal identifiers on polling cards and necessitate additional equipment to manage the administration of a city-wide register although such options would become more practical once a technical solution existed:

In addition to the above, some members of the Task Group also noted, in respect of overnight counts, that evidence of tiredness on the part of staff at previous counts could have implications for speed and accuracy.

The Task Group recommended:-

- (1) that individual political parties, the Civic Forum and, through the Forum's representatives attending, individual community councils, be invited to submit their own responses to the Scottish Government directly by the deadline of 15th October, 2010; and
- (2) that the areas in which officers intended to submit their own responses be noted.

TENEMENTAL ADDRESSES ON ELECTORAL REGISTER

3. The Chairperson invited members to take advantage of the attendance of officers representing the Electoral Registration Officer and the Returning Officer by asking any pertinent questions, and proceeded to identify difficulties in determining the precise addresses of voters residing in tenement blocks arising from the present practice of listing all voters within the block together, rather than doing so by the component addresses. Mr Milton noted discussions were underway to standardise the identification of various types of accommodation across Scotland and that work was progressing towards the listing of individual addresses.

The Task Group resolved:-

to note the position.

- **JOHN STEWART, Chairperson.**