



Petersfield Town Council's Response and Recommendations to Boundary Changes.

1. General/Introduction

1.1 Petersfield Town Council (PTC) welcome the opportunity to the Boundary Commissions (BC) initial proposals for changes to Wards within the town.

1.2 The Commission's proposals were much more significant and far-reaching than PTC had been led to believe in a prior meeting with an Electoral Officer of East Hampshire District Council and 2 reps from the Boundary Commission, and PTC is keen to participate in a re-think of boundaries, particularly if this improves the representation of residents at Town and "higher" levels of government.

1.2.1 The prior indications to PTC on the Review were that the edge of existing Wards were to be adjusted slightly. This included the possibility of some external Village Wards being grouped, but understood the latter to involve the more rural parishes with additional Councillors at Parish level, and to compensate District Councillors would reduce. Thus the outcome of this Review was unexpected and explains why PTC did not issue any recommendations/comments – in effect and at that time there was nothing to respond to. However, as mentioned above, PTC welcome the opportunity to partake in a wider discussion.

1.3 PTC has some issues with a blanket approach to equalising the electorate for each Councillor at District and Town Levels, and this is expressed below.

1.4 PTC's recommendations on the exact size and shape of Wards does require further work, but if the BC is in agreement with the recommendations, PTC is keen to work with the BC and East Hampshire District Council (EHDC) to come to a conclusion.

2. Comments on the BC's Proposal

The loss of two District Wards but the retention of all six at Town have several issues which concern us.

2.1 The misalignment between Town and District potentially complicates how residents are represented. For example, it will be less than straight-forward explaining how District Councillors describe who they represent; "Oh I represent "X" Ward but also part of the "Y" Ward". It is likely that the particular Councillor will not focus/recognise in speech and/or reference either Petersfield Ward - just the District one. Residents from St Peter's and Rother may feel that they are not represented or recognised fully at District.

PTC's proposals below, overcome these issues.

2.2 It is considered inappropriate to name a Ward in Petersfield as St Mary's under the proposed changes when St Mary's Church is in the neighbouring parish of Sheet. Members consider it would be far more suitable to retain the Ward name of St Peter's with this being the name of the parish church in Petersfield.

PTC's proposals below, overcome these issues.

2.3 Although not directly any responsibility of PTC, there is similarly a misalignment of District to County. There will be no coterminosity (having the same boundaries or extent in space and time) between District Wards and Hampshire County Divisions. In other words Hangers and Butser Division for Petersfield cross over the same Wards. Bell Hill and Heath Wards are now going to span both Butser and Hangers.

PTC's proposals below may help with this issue depending on how the Ward's are re-aligned

2.4 If two Wards representing residents of Petersfield (namely St Peter's and Rother) disappear at District level (but remain intact for Petersfield) it will be confusing for some residents. Many of the electorate are, regrettably, unaware of where they belong and who represents them and which Council does what – this may exacerbate the issue.

PTC's proposals below, overcome this potential issue.

2.5 If the Town and District boundaries are not the same, a possible impact is it may lead to voters being required to go to two different Poll Stations (one for Town and one for District) at the same election/polling day. District and Town Councillor elections are, of course, timed to take place on the same date.

Whilst it is recognised EHDC is the organiser of Polling Stations and they may well be able to deal with this so individuals vote at one station, we have low turnouts for these elections as it is and any complication will likely have a further detrimental effect. That said, increasing the use of postal votes may offset this in part, although PTC do recognise additional costs associated with this process.

3. Petersfield Town Council's Proposals

3.1 Introduction - The proposals below, in PTC's view, have a number of advantages, the key one being simplicity, both for the electorate at Town and District level, and for implementation.

3.2 Councillors - Petersfield is a large and varied town with significant assets and PTC is an active and pro-active Council.

Currently the town has 12 councillors and some often struggle with workload, particularly the younger ones with full-time jobs and young families. It has been publicly acknowledged that we need good quality, motivated individuals to stand for election, in particular younger volunteers. It is likely that where there is a smaller geographical Ward for both canvassing and representation, and where the Council's workload can be spread more widely (particularly those demands which are during the working day), younger volunteers may be motivated to step forward. PTC are also discussing a plan to engage with residents, well in advance of the next election, to explain what a town councillor does, why the town needs them and hopefully persuade more to stand for election. It also, of course, has

the massive benefit of increasing representation and making that representation more specific to the individual resident's locale.

The Proposals below suggest an increase in voluntary, unpaid, town councillors. Many towns and Parishes with similar or significantly smaller electoral rolls have more than the current 12 PTC councillors and the first two Proposals will increase our number slightly and this is something PTC is keen to achieve.

3.3 Proposal Number 1 - PTC's preferred route

3.3.1 Decrease the number of Wards within the town to five.

3.3.2 Each ward to have three town councillors, totaling 15 for the Town

3.3.3 Each of five district councillors represents an individual Wards.

3.3.5 Each Ward therefore has 3 town councillors and a district councillor.

3.3.6 Benefits are; simplify for residents both at the Town and District levels, increased representation in terms of PTC numbers, one extra district councillor to represent the town, and a more appropriately sized PTC (hopefully with more younger members).

3.3.7 One disadvantage of this Proposal over the first is PTC's concern that increasing the size of the Wards will lose focus on geographical areas and there will be an increase in the various "types" of environs (town/light industrial/rural) within a Ward. A second disadvantage is the potential loss of focus by town councillors and confusion by residents as to which councillor they address issues to.

3.4 Proposal Number 2 - Perfectly acceptable route for PTC

3.4.1 Increase the number of Wards within the town to eight.

3.4.2 Each ward to have two town councillors, totaling 16 for the Town

3.4.3 Propose that a district councillor represents two town Wards, totaling 4 district councillors.

3.4.5 Each Ward therefore has 2 town councillors and two wards share a district councillor.

3.4.6 Benefits are; simplify for residents both at the Town and District levels, improved representation at the Town level (it is recognised that this is not necessarily so at the District level), and a more appropriately sized PTC (hopefully with more younger members).

3.5 Proposal Number 3 - Retain the status-quo

3.5.1 In PTC's view, the current situation with six Wards and six district councillors works well (although PTC would like to increase our "ranks").

4. Going Forward

4.1 As of today's date work is still being undertaken by some members with map and street details. This is extremely detailed and complicated work and will take time and effort and it will not be

possible to achieve this before the end of consultation date but the principles, at least, have been commented upon.

4.2 Once the BC has had a chance to consider PTC's comments and Proposals, we can work with the BC and the EHDC to redefine the Ward boundaries in line with the BC's objectives.

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