

Wiltshire Council

Electoral Review Committee

9 January 2024

Community Governance Review 2023/24

Purpose

1. To agree provisional draft recommendations for the areas included in the Community Governance Review.

Background

2. A Community Governance Review is a process whereby a principal authority can adjust the governance arrangements of parishes within its council area. This can include amending the number of councillors or wards, the external boundaries, or even the creation/merger/abolition/grouping of entire parishes.
3. The Electoral Review Committee (“the Committee”) has delegated authority from Full Council to oversee any review process in accordance with paragraphs 2.9.6-2.9.8 of Part 3B of the Wiltshire Council Constitution. This includes setting the scope for any review, its methodology, consultation details, and timescales, as well as preparing recommendations for consideration by Full Council.
4. At its meeting on 26 June 2023, the Committee approved areas for a review to take and delegated approval of terms of reference. This was published in September 2023.
5. Following withdrawal of some requests for review, the parishes specifically included within the Review were: Winterbourne, Laverstock & Ford, Firsdown, Idmiston, Durnford, Mere, Zeals, North Bradley, Trowbridge, Chippenham, Salisbury, Lacock, or any parishes surrounding those listed, and any issues involving those parishes. There was also provision to consider minor alterations to other parishes not listed if considered appropriate.
6. During the first phase of the review additional proposals for the areas set out in Paragraph 5 were received from parishes or other parties. Where these were received before the pre-consultation phase began, they were included within the pre-consultation information gathering. The information gathering also included:
 - Sessions between representatives of the Committee and affected unitary members and parishes;
 - An online survey of received proposals, with over 125 responses received;
 - Details of emailed representations.
7. An information pack compiling the relevant materials, including session notes, proposal details, parish council responses and public representations by email, post or online survey, has been included at **Appendix A**. Except where providing the formal response of a body or group, responses have been anonymised.

Main Considerations

8. The Committee is asked to prepare draft recommendations for each area of the Review for appropriate public consultation where needed. If no changes are recommended to be made, then the review will conclude for that area.
9. A consultation is proposed to take place between 24 January 2024 to 1 March 2024. The Director will have the authority to amend the consultation dates if appropriate following consultation with the Chairman of the Committee.
10. In line with the Committee's previous discussions it is recommended that, where this is appropriate, any public meetings, if held, be held in areas where significant changes are recommended. Further that those living in areas subject to proposals of being transferred from one parish to another be contacted in writing. Any other proposals would be consulted online.
11. Following any consultation, the Committee will consider any responses and determine whether it wishes to amend its recommendations and/or undertake further consultation. It will then prepare final recommendations for consideration by Full Council. Full Council is currently scheduled to meet on 21 May and 23 July 2024.

Statutory Criteria

12. In preparing draft recommendations the Committee must take account of the statutory criteria for reviews and the need to ensure that community governance within the areas under review:
 - Reflects the identities and interests of the community in that area; and
 - Is effective and convenient.
13. Council tax precept levels would not be valid criteria to approve or disapprove of a proposal.

Electorate Forecasting

14. The guidance on Community Governance Reviews has been included as a background paper. That guidance makes clear that the principal council '*must also consider any change in the number or distribution of electors which is likely to occur in the period of five years beginning with the day when the review starts*'. Therefore, the Committee is required to consider the likely position of these factors as they would exist by 2028, but not beyond that period.
15. The guidance further states that '*planning assumptions and likely growth within the area, based on planning permissions granted, local plans or, where they are in place, local development frameworks, should be used to project an accurate five-year electorate forecast. This ensures that the review does not simply reflect a single moment, but takes account of expected population movements in the short to medium term*'.

Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE)

16. Where the Local Government Boundary Commission for England made consequential changes to parish arrangements when implementing the changes to Wiltshire Council divisions for the May 2021 elections, they would need to consent to any further proposed change to that parish's arrangements within the next five years. Therefore, consideration would need to be given to the likelihood of consent being granted.
17. In particular, if a parish is proposed to be split between electoral divisions, a ward would need to be established. In line with previous LGBCE advice, a minimum of 75 electors would need to be projected to be in any such ward by the May 2025 local elections.
18. Where a ward could not be created, consideration would need to be given to whether the LGBCE would consent to amend the division boundary itself, and this would also need to be consulted upon.

Next Steps

19. Considering the guidance and all the information provided, the Committee will need to make provisional draft recommendations and reasoning for that recommendations for the areas included within the Review.
20. The Committee should include details of any necessary or recommended consequential matters, such as warding and councillor numbers, to accompany that recommendation.
21. The Committee should also consider any further minor areas covered by the scope of the review where it may be appropriate to recommend changes, including those not previously subject to pre-consultation surveying.

Safeguarding Implications

22. There are no safeguarding implications.

Public Health Implications

23. There are no public health implications.

Procurement Implications

24. There are no procurement implications.

Equalities Implications

25. There are no equalities implications.

Environmental Implications

26. There are no environmental implications.

Workforce Implications

27. There are no workforce implications.

Financial Implications

28. Consulting on the draft recommendations will incur resources, in particular in relation to the cost of physically mailing those affected in certain areas if appropriate.

Legal Implications

29. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 gives the Council the power to undertake CGRs and sets out the criteria for such reviews. There is also statutory guidance on the conduct of such reviews with which the Council would have to comply.

Risks

30. A failure to consult appropriately or provide appropriate reasoning for any decision to change governance arrangements would be potentially vulnerable to challenge. Online consultation has been undertaken appropriately in the past.

Options

31. The Committee may recommend changes to any aspect of the governance arrangements of a parish or area subject to review.

32. This includes recommending changes which have not been suggested by any parish, group or individual at this stage, if the Committee considers it appropriate based on the evidence it has gathered.

33. The Committee may also recommend that no changes are made.

34. Where recommending the transfer of an area from one parish to another, or merger of parishes, any recommendation consulted upon would need to include details of consequential matters such as the warding arrangements of the parish(es) in question.

35. If recommending a change which would split a parish between unitary divisions, the Committee may also recommend requesting that the LG BCE amend those divisions to be coterminous with the parishes, if appropriate. It would need to consult upon such a request as well as the parish level change.

Proposal

36. That the Committee make provisional draft recommendations for each area of the Review, and delegate to the Director of Legal and Governance in consultation with the Chairman, the preparation of a detailed draft recommendations document, including reasons for any proposed changes to be consulted upon.

Perry Holmes - Director, Legal and Governance

Report Author: Kieran Elliott, Democracy Manager (Democratic Services), 01225 718504, kieran.elliott@wiltshire.gov.uk

Appendices

Appendix A – CGR Information Pack (including electorate forecasts, initial proposals and pre-consultation responses)

Background Papers

[Guidance on Community Governance Reviews](#)