
Community Governance Review 2023/24

Summary

To consider Final Recommendations of the Electoral Review Committee in respect of the Community Governance Review 2023/24.

Proposals

That Council:

- 1) Approve the changes to community governance arrangements as set out below as recommended and detailed by the Electoral Review Committee in the Final Recommendations:

Recommendation 1 – Mere/Zeals

Recommendation 2 – North Bradley/Trowbridge

Recommendation 3 – Salisbury (St Francis & Stratford/Milford Divisions)

Recommendation 4 – Royal Wootton Bassett/Brinkworth

Recommendation 5 – Chippenham (Pewsham/Hardens & Central Divisions)

Recommendation 6 – Trowbridge (Grove/Lambrook Divisions)

Recommendation 7 – Calne/Calne Without

Recommendation 8 – Bradford-on-Avon

Recommendation 9 – Melksham (Forest and South Divisions)

Recommendation 10 – Westbury/Dilton Marsh

Recommendation 11 – Southwick/North Bradley

- 2) To authorise the Solicitor of the Council to take all necessary measures to make and approve the Community Governance Order(s) to bring into effect for 1 April 2025 all of the changes detailed under resolution 1, subject to any required consents by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England;
- 3) To authorise the Electoral Registration Officer to make any necessary changes to polling districts to bring them into line with the agreed governance changes at the appropriate time, to be reported to the Electoral Review Committee.

Reason for Proposals

To ensure effective and convenient local governance and reflect community interest and identity.

Perry Holmes - Director, Legal and Governance

Community Governance Review 2023/24

Purpose

1. To consider the Final Recommendations of the Electoral Review Committee.

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 2.10.7-2.10.9 of Part 3B of the Wiltshire Council Constitution. This would include setting the scope for any review, its methodology 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. These was published on 11 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.
6. There was also provision to consider minor alterations to any other parishes not listed above if considered appropriate. These were not subject to detailed pre-consultation surveying, owing to their minor nature. Where the committee determined there may be grounds for correction of a potential boundary anomaly, it contacted those parishes when a draft recommendation was made or as soon as practicable.
7. In preparing any recommendations and making any decision the Committee and Full Council 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.
8. Council tax precept levels would not be a valid criterion to approve or disapprove of a proposal.
9. In relation to electorate forecasting and the impact on any consideration, the guidance on Community Governance Reviews has been listed 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’.

10. 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’.*
11. Considering the entire guidance document as a whole and in context, the Committee is satisfied, as in previous reviews, that consideration of future projections is a relevant factor, within that period as set out in the guidance.

Main Considerations

Pre-consultation

12. During Stage One of the Review additional proposals for the areas set out in Paragraph 5 were sought. During Stage Two the Committee undertook pre-consultation information gathering. The information gathered included notes of sessions with unitary members and parish councils, projected electorate data and housing development, emailed representations and 125 responses to an online survey.
13. The Committee considered all the relevant information and agreed Draft Recommendations to be consulted upon at its meeting on 9 January 2024.
14. Draft Recommendations were made for the following areas, which included several where minor potential boundary anomalies had been identified which had not received extensive information gathering:

Mere, Zeals, North Bradley, Trowbridge, Salisbury, Brinkworth, Royal Wootton Bassett, Clyffe Pypard, Broad Town, Chippenham, Calne, Calne Without, West Overton, Wilcot, Huish and Oare, Bradford-on-Avon, Melksham, Westbury.
15. For other areas under review the Committee did not make any recommendations for changes to electoral or boundary arrangements.

Consultations

16. A consultation was therefore held initially set to be from 12 February 2024 - 18 March 2024. Where the Committee proposed to transfer electors from one parish to another, or even from one ward to another, a letter was sent to those potentially affected. A briefing note was also circulated to impacted parish councils.
17. A public meeting was held on 18 March in Mere for the proposed changes relating to Mere and Zeals. Due to the date of the public meeting the consultation survey had beforehand been extended until 28 March 2024.
18. At its meeting on 4 April 2024 the Committee considered all the relevant information responding to the Draft Recommendations. This included the public meeting notes and

details of parish representations and a further 24 public representations either from an online survey or emailed/written representations.

19. At the meeting the Committee resolved to withdraw recommendations relating to Clyffe Pypard/Broad Town, and West Overton/Wilcot, Huish, and Oare.
20. It resolved to confirm the remainder of the recommendations for consideration by Full Council. It also considered a further two minor boundary matters which had been brought to its attention during the consultation period, and made additional Draft Recommendations relating to internal boundaries in Melksham, and in Southwick/North Bradley.
21. As it is a requirement that any option resolved by Full Council must be consulted upon, the Committee agreed to undertake a consultation on those additional Draft Recommendations relating to several recommendations.
22. A further online consultation was therefore held from 10 April 2024 - 5 May 2024. All households potentially affected were written to directly on two occasions along with communications with the town and parish councils involved.
23. There were 3 responses to that consultation. These were considered by the Committee along with all other relevant information at a meeting on 7 May 2024. The Committee considered all the information, and confirmed its additional for Full Council.

Final Recommendations

24. The Committee also took account of the statutory guidance provided by the Secretary of State and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (“LGBCE”) in making its recommendations. Consent of the LGBCE would be required for several of the recommendations.
25. As a result of all the meetings and consultations, the Final Recommendations were therefore prepared, and are attached at **Appendix A**. These were published on 10 May 2024.

Safeguarding Implications

26. There are no safeguarding implications.

Public Health Implications

27. There are no public health implications.

Procurement Implications

28. There are no procurement implications.

Equalities Implications

29. There are no equalities implications.

Environmental and Climate Change Implications

30. There are no environmental implications.

Workforce Implications

31. There are no workforce implications.

Financial Implications

32. Additional consultation, if requested by Council to consider further options, could incur additional resources. In particular in relation to the cost of physically mailing those affected in certain areas if appropriate. However, none of the areas under review have currently proposed major options which would require significant resources.

Legal Implications

33. 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.

34. As several recommendations impact areas adjusted by the LGBCE as consequential changes following their Electoral Review of Wiltshire Council within the last five years, they would need to consent to any draft Community Governance Order involving those areas.

35. Additionally, some changes to parish boundaries proposed were such that the parishes involved would cross current unitary Division boundaries, but were either not large enough to form their own distinct wards, which is required when crossing Divisions, or it was not considered warding was appropriate. The LGBCE could be requested to amend the Divisions to align to the parish boundaries.

36. Should they consent to such a parish change Order, the Council would at that point be able to formally request Electoral Division changes, where this was appropriate following a community governance change. This detail is included within the recommendations from the Committee and included as part of its consultations.

Risks

37. A failure to consult appropriately or provide appropriate reasoning for any decision to change governance arrangements would be potentially vulnerable to challenge. For these recommendations the Committee has undertaken several consultations, adjusted its proposals accordingly, and set out its reasoning in detail including responding to representations from affected parties, thus limiting any such risks.

Options

38. Council may approve or not approve any of the Final Recommendations.

39. The Council may only approve proposals which have been consulted upon. If minded to approve an alternative proposal which has not been subject to consultation, Council would need to instruct the Committee to undertake additional consultation before it could be approved.

Conclusion

40. The Committee has conducted a thorough and extensive review of parish governance arrangements in the areas set out in the report.

41. It has undertaken consultation and engagement beyond the level is required by legislation or guidance.
42. It has prepared recommendations it considers align to the statutory criteria to better reflect the identity and interests of local communities and provide more effective and convenience local governance.

Proposal

43. The Committee therefore proposes the following:

That Council,

- 1) Approve the changes to community governance arrangements as set out below as recommended and detailed by the Electoral Review Committee in the Final Recommendations:

- Recommendation 1 – Mere/Zeals
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Perry Holmes - Director, Legal and Governance

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13 May 2024

Appendices

Appendix A - Final Recommendations

Background Papers

[Guidance on Community Governance Reviews](#)