

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL

28th September 2023

Report by the Democracy and Standards Committee

Report Title **Community Governance Review of Parishes in the West Northamptonshire Area**

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List of Approvers

Monitoring Officer	Catherine Whitehead	13/09/2023
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List of Appendices

Appendix 1: West Northamptonshire Community Governance Review Terms of Reference.

1. Purpose of Report

1.1. This report invites the Council to review and agree terms of reference for a community governance review of parish arrangements within West Northamptonshire.

2. Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that the Council:

- a) Agrees that the Terms of Reference for a community governance review of parishes in West Northamptonshire, as set out at Appendix 1 to this report, be adopted;
- b) Notes the recommendation of the Democracy and Standards Committee that, rather than establishing a task and finish group to provide democratic input into the review, officers consult relevant ward members when drawing up proposals for consultation and eventual adoption.

3. Reason for Recommendations

- 3.1 The recommendations will help ensure community governance arrangements within West Northamptonshire are reflective of the identities and interests of communities and support effective and efficient electoral processes.

4. Report Background

- 4.1 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (the Act) devolved powers to local authorities to review parish arrangements within their respective areas and agree changes. The Act created the title of community governance reviews to cover such activity.
- 4.2 A community governance review provides an opportunity for authorities to put in place strong, clearly defined boundaries and to remove any anomalous parish boundaries that exist. This can particularly be the case where a boundary review has recently been undertaken, as is the case in West Northamptonshire, resulting in anomalies between revised council wards and existing parish boundaries. Statutory guidance issued by the Government emphasises the importance of undertaking reviews to address boundary anomalies when they arise.
- 4.3 A community governance review also enables the Council to consult on, and consider matters relating to, the governance arrangements of parish and town councils in West Northamptonshire. A review can consider:
- a) Altering the existing boundary of a parish.
 - b) Creating, merging or abolishing parishes.
 - c) Changing the name of an existing parish.
 - d) The electoral arrangements for parishes (e.g. how many parish councillors are required and parish warding).
 - e) Grouping parishes under a common parish council, or de-grouping parishes.
 - f) The “style” of a parish (enabling an area to be known as a town, community, neighbourhood or village rather than a parish).
- 4.4 The need to address boundary anomalies arising from the recent boundary review, as well as addressing any issues raised by parish and town councils, are the principal reasons for conducting a review at this time.
- 4.5 When conducting the review, the Council must act in accordance with the requirements of the Act, the associated regulations and statutory guidance. The Council will need to consult and take account of any representations received in connection with the review. When undertaking the review, the Council must also have regard to the need to secure community governance arrangements that are effective and convenient and which reflect the identities and interests of the community in the area under review. In summary, the review should seek to ensure community governance:
- a) reflects the identities and interests of the community in that area;
 - b) is effective and convenient, and
 - c) takes into account any non-parish, arrangements for the purposes of community representation or community engagement in the area (i.e., residents’ associations).

- 4.6 The Council will be required to complete the review within 12 months of publishing the terms of reference (Appendix 1). Completion of the review is defined as the publication of the Council’s final recommendations.
- 4.7 Officers working on the review have made provision for reasonable periods for consultation with parishes, local electors and other stakeholders for the consideration of evidence presented and for decision-making. The outline timetable for the review is set out below:

Activity	Start date	End date
Pre-consultation with parish councils	July 2023	18 August 2023
Publication of Terms of Reference	29 September 2023	-
Research and information gathering, arranging local meetings if required	29 September 2023	28 November 2023
Initial consultation	28 November 2023	27 January 2024
Consideration of draft submissions received and preparation of draft recommendations	27 January 2024	26 April 2024
Draft recommendations published and consulted on	26 April 2024	25 July 2024
Consideration of consultation outcome	25 July 2024	24 Sept 2024
Council decision and publication of proposals	26 September 2024	-
Review of polling districts and places	30 September 2024	30 November 2024
Election with new arrangements in place	1 May 2025	-

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1 The Council can choose to undertake a review at any time. However, the conclusion of the recent electoral review of the Council’s own ward boundaries means it was cause difficulties in terms of electoral efficiency if a review were not undertaken prior to the next scheduled election for both parish and town councils and this authority, which will take place in May 2025.
- 5.2 The Council would be under a duty to carry out a community governance review if it received a valid community governance petition for the whole or part of the council’s area. In accordance with the statutory guidance, the Council has sought to manage this by undertaking to conduct a review following the review of ward boundaries, which will allow the outcome of that review to be taken into consideration.
- 5.3 By way of initial consultation prior to the publication of the terms of reference for the review, the Council has written to all parishes in West Northamptonshire. This consultation, alongside the outcome of the recent boundary review, has served to inform the draft terms of reference and ensure any parish councils who wish to be involved in the review are afforded the opportunity. Further details of the initial consultation are set out in Section 6 below. This means that the review will encompass not just the areas the Council has identified as requiring review, but also areas identified by parishes.
- 5.4 The statutory guidance invites authorities to consider the benefits of undertaking a review of the whole of its area in one go. The Council has taken account of this by writing to all parishes in West Northamptonshire to invite expressions of interest.

5.5 Community Governance Reviews must be completed within 12 months, and the Council's proposed timeline follows this model. Due to the potential number of parish areas under review, it is suggested that the Council make the most of the 12-month allowance in order to conduct consultation and draw up recommendations.

6. Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Resources and Financial

6.1.1 There are no resources or financial implications arising directly from the proposals. While there will be costs associated with undertaking the review, such as those arising from consultation, these will be met from existing budgets.

6.2 Legal

6.2.1 The powers and duties of the Council to conduct a community governance review flow from the Local Government and Public Involvement and Health Act 2007 and associated secondary legislation and statutory guidance. At the conclusion of the review, the Council will be required to publicise the outcome in accordance with this legislation.

6.3 Risk

6.3.1 There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report.

6.4 Consultation and Communications

6.4.1 The Council has made provision for periods of consultation within the review timetable as required. Consultation will be undertaken in line with the applicable statutory guidance.

6.4.2 Additionally, early consultation has taken place with parish and town councils within West Northamptonshire. This period of consultation, which ended on 18 August, was designed to inform the draft terms of reference and aid the Council with its preparations for the review.

6.4.3 The Council received over 60 responses from Town and Parish Councils. A large majority of these were requests from parishes to be included within the terms of reference for the review but did not outline specific changes. Engagement with these parishes to ascertain whether any changes are required is ongoing and so the number that will lead to recommended changes is likely to fall. The Council should note that such expressions of interest may not necessarily lead to recommendations for changes. A number of parishes expressed an interest in participating but specifically requested no changes, while eight outlined a preference for specific changes to boundaries or the number of councillors. Some of these overlap with areas already identified by the Council as requiring review following the review of boundaries.

6.5 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny

6.5.1 None. A community governance review is a matter for the Council and, through delegation, the Standards and Democracy Committee.

6.6 **Climate Impact**

6.6.1 None.

6.7 **Community Impact**

6.7.1 The outcome of the review will have an impact on communities in West Northamptonshire. The Council will undertake consultation on this impact prior to making final recommendations.

7. **Background Papers**

[Guidance on community governance reviews \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)