

Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee

Report of Head of Legal and Democratic Services

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To: COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE AND ELECTORAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

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Community Governance Review – review of the size of Kidmore End Parish Council

Recommendation:

1. To agree to undertake a second stage consultation proposing a reduction in the number of parish councillors for Kidmore End Parish Council from 12 to 10.
2. To authorise the head of legal and democratic services to undertake the consultation.

Purpose of Report

1. To invite the committee to agree to undertake a second stage consultation on a proposal to reduce the number of parish councillors for Kidmore End from 12 to 10.

Strategic Objectives

2. Community governance reviews contribute to the council's strategic objective of building thriving communities.

Background

3. At its meeting on 6 March 2017 the committee agreed to undertake a community governance review (CGR) of Kidmore End Parish Council in response to a request from the parish council to reduce the number of parish councillors from 12 to 10 to address the reduced electorate that had existed since 1977 when the boundary of the parish was changed as a result of the transfer of properties to Reading

Borough Council. To date no governance review had been undertaken to address this change.

Initial consultation

4. The purpose of the first stage consultation was to seek views on the number of parish councillors for Kidmore End Parish Council. The consultation took place between April 2017 and 30 June 2017. Only one response was received from Kidmore End Parish Council itself attached as an appendix to this report.

Size of parish councils

5. When considering the number of councillors to be elected for a parish the council must have regard to the number of local government electors for the parish and any change to that number that is likely to occur within five years of the date on which the terms of reference were published. The number of registered electors for the parish of Kidmore End is currently 1048 and is not expected to alter significantly during the next five years.
6. Joint guidance issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England in 2010 provides further information on community governance reviews and the factors influencing size and membership of parish councils. On size, the guidance says:

“154. In practice, there is a wide variation of council size between parish councils. That variation appears to be influenced by population. Research by the Aston Business School Parish and Town Councils in England (HMSO, 1992), found that the typical parish council representing less than 500 people had between five and eight councillors; those between 501 and 2,500 had six to 12 councillors; and those between 2,501 and 10,000 had nine to 16 councillors. Most parish councils with a population of between 10,001 and 20,000 had between 13 and 27 councillors, while almost all councils representing a population of over 20,000 had between 13 and 31 councillors.

155. The LGBCE has no reason to believe that this pattern of council size to population has altered significantly since the research was conducted. Although not an exact match, it broadly reflects the council size range set out in the National Association of Local Councils Circular 1126; the Circular suggested that the minimum number of councillors for any parish should be seven and the maximum 25.

156. In considering the issue of council size, the LGBCE is of the view that each area should be considered on its own merits, having regard to its population, geography and the pattern of communities. Nevertheless, having regard to the current powers of parish councils, it should consider the broad pattern of existing council sizes. This pattern appears to have stood the test of time and, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, to have provided for effective and convenient local government.

157. Principal councils should also bear in mind that the conduct of parish council business does not usually require a large body of councillors. In addition, historically many parish councils, particularly smaller ones, have found difficulty

in attracting sufficient candidates to stand for election. This has led to uncontested elections and/or a need to co-opt members in order to fill vacancies. However, a parish council's budget and planned or actual level of service provision may also be important factors in reaching conclusions on council size.”

7. The National Association of Local Councils Circular 1126 recommends:

Electors	Councillors	Electors	Councillors
Up to 900	7	10,400	17
1,400	8	11,900	18
2,000	9	13,500	19
2,700	10	15,200	20
3,500	11	17,000	21
4,400	12	18,900	22
5,400	13	20,900	23
6,500	14	23,000	24
7,700	15	45,000	25
9,000	16		

8. The above table suggests a parish council size of 8 parish councillors for a parish the size of Kidmore End. However, as set out in paragraph six above, there is a wide variation in council size. The request from Kidmore End Parish Council for 10 parish councillors reflects the range reported as typical by the Aston Business School. In addition, Kidmore End Parish Council has been able to attract upto 10 parish councillors. This suggests there is interest locally in standing as a parish councillor. In addition officers are of the view that any reduction in the number of parish councillors, even to the NALC figure, should attract the support of the parish council if there is no other evidence (for example parish councillor vacancies) to justify a reduction.

Financial Implications

9. Under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, local authorities have responsibility for undertaking community governance reviews. The process is prescribed and involves officer time and other associated costs, such as postage and printing. These costs will be met from within existing budgets.

Legal Implications

10. The Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee has delegated authority to deal with all matters relating to parish community governance reviews.

11. All community governance reviews will be undertaken in accordance with the requirements laid down in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the joint guidance on community governance reviews published by the Communities and Local Government Department and LGBCE in 2010.

12. The council will implement any changes by making a reorganisation of community governance order.

Risks

13. There is a risk that someone could challenge the outcome of a particular review item through judicial review. Council officers will mitigate against this by ensuring that at all times the council follows the requirements laid down in the 2007 Act and guidance.

Conclusion

14. The council has completed the initial consultation stage of a community governance review of the size of Kidmore End Parish Council. In light of the response to the consultation and the evidence that an allocation of 10 parish councillors is reasonable and sustainable, the committee is invited to agree to undertake a second stage consultation on reducing the number of parish councillors from 12 to 10 for Kidmore End Parish Council.

Background Papers

Report (agenda item 7) to Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee on 6 March 2017