



Democracy and Standards Committee Monday 07 October 2024

Report Title	Community Governance Reviews
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Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	

List of Appendices None

1. Purpose of Report

To seek approval on the principle of undertaking Community Governance Reviews of local Town and Parish Council electoral arrangements from September 2025.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. Following the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's (LGBCE's) review of electoral arrangements for North Northamptonshire Council, the final recommendations were taken forward into the North Northamptonshire (Electoral Changes) Order 2024. Article 4 and Schedule 2 to the Order set out the changes that are relevant to local parish and town council electoral arrangements. These include abolishing some of the existing parish wards and replacing them with new parish wards as well as making changes to the number of councillors representing those wards. To ensure the identities and interests of local towns and parishes are reflected in future community governance arrangements, this report sets out an outline timetable that will enable Community Governance Reviews to be undertaken

and completed within the recommended 12 month period and prior to the May 2029 local government elections.

3. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Democracy and Standards Committee:

- 3.1 Approve the principle of undertaking Community Governance Reviews in respect of the electoral arrangements for Town and Parish Councils.
- 3.2 Approve the outline timetable for the review as set out in paragraph 5.5.
- 3.3 Reason for Recommendations
 - To enable reviews to be undertaken in accordance with legislation and guidance.
 - To ensure that community governance arrangements continue to support effective and convenient local governance and reflect the identities and interests of local communities in Town and Parish Council areas.

3.4 Alternative Options Considered

It is considered good practice that, where a Community Governance Review is initiated by the principal council, it should take no longer than 12 months to complete. As part of the process, it is essential to ensure adequate time is allocated to consultation to promote meaningful engagement in the review, and for the submission of representations from local communities.

Option 1 - Begin the reviews in autumn 2024 with a view to implementing the outcomes in time for May 2025 elections. Starting the review before the May 2025 elections would require an extremely compact timetable with completion within a three-month period. This is considerably shorter than the recommended 12-month period and would significantly restrict opportunities to undertake meaningful consultation and enable Members to fully consider proposals and make recommendations. This would have a negative impact on the review process and may result in outcomes that do not effectively reflect the identities and interests of local communities. This option would also place significant additional pressure on the core election team. The team is currently undertaking the annual canvass as well as a full polling district and place review prior to updating the register of electors to reflect the new electoral arrangements detailed in the North Northamptonshire (Electoral Changes) Order 2024.

- 3.5 **Option 2** – Begin the review in September 2025. This option would see the review starting after the May 2025 elections and completed in the autumn of 2026. The period following the May 2025 elections would provide an opportunity for those parish and town councils impacted by the new electoral arrangements detailed in the Electoral Changes Order to settle in before considering any future proposals for change.

The proposed timetable facilitates two 10 week periods of consultation to enable Members and local communities sufficient opportunity to consider proposals and prepare representations and other feedback and to consider recommendations prior to creation of the final Reorganisation Orders. Where appropriate and necessary the timings also provide an opportunity to prepare and implement interim governance arrangements during the period between making the Community Governance Reorganisation Order and the scheduled May 2029 elections.

4 Report Background

- 4.1 Since 2008 district councils have had responsibility for undertaking Community Governance Reviews and for making decisions in connection with giving effect to recommendations made in those reviews.
- 4.2 The principal relevant legislation giving effect to the conduct of Community Governance Reviews including matters such as the creation of parishes and their electoral arrangements is Part 4 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 together with the relevant parts of the Local Government Act 1972. In addition the Council must also have regard to guidance published in 2010 by the Secretary of State and the LGBCE.
- 4.3 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 requires that local people be consulted as part of the Community Governance Review process and that representations received in connection with the review are taken into consideration. Local people must also be notified of the outcomes of the review and any decisions taken.
- 4.4 The North Northamptonshire (Electoral Changes) Order 2024 abolished some parish and town council wards and replaced them with new wards. The Order also made provision for the number of councillors to be elected for each of the new wards.
- 4.5 The review would provide the opportunity to consider alternative arrangements to those provided in the North Northamptonshire Council (Electoral Changes) Order and to consider new proposals that would enable effective and convenient governance and further reflect the identity and interests of local communities.

4.6 Timing of the Community Governance Review

- 4.7 It is recommended that the Community Governance Review commences on 1 September 2025 with publication of agreed Terms of Reference.

5 Issues and Choices

- 5.1 The LGBCE's final recommendations that were taken forward into the North Northamptonshire (Electoral Changes) Order 2024 impact some parish and town council ward boundaries and other electoral arrangements.
- 5.2 The opportunity to consider undertaking community governance reviews in early 2024 to consider potential amendments to the new boundaries and other matters was superseded by a number of unscheduled large scale elections including the Wellingborough Recall Petition and subsequent Parliamentary by election. This was followed shortly afterwards by the scheduled Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner election in May and then the UK Parliamentary General Election on 4 July 2024. These events placed unprecedented demand on the core election team and other service areas, and it was felt there was insufficient resource available to conduct reviews until after the parliamentary election had taken place.
- 5.3 A commitment was made to contact Parish and Town Councils and initial contact requesting expressions of interest in the review was forwarded to all parish and town council clerks on 11 April 2024. The responses ranged from considering changes to councillor numbers, parish ward names and internal parish ward boundaries to major projects including creating a new parish at Priors Hall Park. Following the Parliamentary General Election, Parish Clerks were contacted again on 20 August 2024. An update was provided in relation to next steps and that a report would be presented to Democracy and Standards Committee at the October 2024 meeting.
- 5.4 The community governance review will involve preparatory work and the extent and duration of this element of the process will depend on the scale and complexity of the review. It is particularly significant where proposals relate to making changes to existing arrangements, such as the creation of new parish areas or new parish wards. Consideration must be given to the matters of interest, desk-based research undertaken to gather relevant information, detailed maps prepared and draft terms of reference drawn up. An extensive review requires input from a diverse range of council service areas and sufficient time and resource must be allocated to facilitate each stage of the process.
- 5.5 It is proposed that the review should commence 1 September 2025. The proposed outline timetable is as follows:

Stage of Review	Activity	Indicative Date
Initial report to Democracy and Standards Committee	Agreement on principle of undertaking the review and outline timetable.	07 October 2024
Preparation	Consideration of matters of interest, information gathering, desk based research, local meetings and briefings, preparation of draft Terms of Reference for agreement by Democracy and Standards Committee.	Summer 2025
Commencement	Publication of terms of reference including timetable for the review.	01 September 2025
Stage 1 Consultation – Initial submissions invited	Initial submissions invited	01 September to November 2025 (for a period of 10 weeks)
Stage 2 Consideration of submissions received	Representations to be collated and investigated; draft recommendations to Committee to be prepared	December to March 2026
Further report to Democracy and Standards Committee	Agreement on draft recommendations	March 2026
Stage 3 Consultation – draft recommendations	Publication of agreed draft recommendations for further submissions/representations	April to June 2026 (for a period of 10 weeks)
Stage 4 Consideration of submissions	Final recommendations are prepared following consideration of final submissions	July to August 2026
Decision of Committee	Agreement on final recommendations ready for preparation of Reorganisation Order. Publication of final recommendations – concludes the review	August 2026
Order made	Publication of Order (and if necessary request made to Local Government Boundary Commission for consequential order to change district wards as appropriate).	August 2026 - exact date TBC

6 Next Steps

- 6.1 Following agreement from the Democracy and Standards Committee on the recommendation to undertake reviews in the period defined in the outline timetable, preparations will be made to formulate a project team to ensure successful delivery. Relevant information in respect of the participating parishes, towns and neighbourhood forums will be collated in readiness for drawing up draft Terms of Reference. A further report will be presented to Democracy and Standards Committee to agree the Terms of Reference, publication of which marks the start of the review.

7 Implications (including financial implications)

7.1 Resources and Financial

- 7.1.1 The cost of undertaking the reviews is already included within existing budget provision.

7.2 Legal and Governance

- 7.2.1 The principal legislation concerning community governance reviews and associated parish electoral arrangements is the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the Local Government Act 1972. The Council must also have regard to guidance published in 2010 by the Secretary of State and the LGBCE. This report seeks approval to commence a review that will be conducted in accordance with the above legislation and guidance.

7.3 Relevant Policies and Plans

- 7.3.1 Ensuring local communities have electoral arrangements that are effective and convenient and represent local interests and identities facilitates greater participation in the democratic process, enabling communities to influence local representation and policies that impact them. It helps to promote community identity, contributes to local economic development, and provides opportunities for greater sustainability.

7.4 Risk

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

8.1 Consultation

Local government electors must be consulted as part of the review. In addition, the council must also consult any other person or body or local authority that may have an interest in the review. The outline timetable proposes two 10 week periods of consultation.

9.1 Equality Implications

9.1.1 There are no identified equality implications arising from the proposed recommendations in this report

10.1 Climate Impact

10.1.1 The review is primarily an office based exercise. Some visits may be made to local briefings and meetings within the council area.

11.1 Community Impact

11.1.1 The report seeks to ensure that by undertaking community governance reviews, local communities have the opportunity to shape the electoral and governance arrangements for their local area.

11.2 Crime and Disorder Impact

11.2.1 The process of the review is unlikely to impact crime and disorder in the Council area.

12 Background Papers

Guidance on Community Governance Reviews - Department for Communities and Local Government, Local Government Boundary Commission for England (March 2010)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-governance-reviews-guidance>