

North Somerset Council

REPORT TO THE PLANNING & REGULATORY COMMITTEE

DATE OF MEETING: 8 FEBRUARY 2017

SUBJECT OF REPORT: COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

TOWN OR PARISH: PORTISHEAD

OFFICER/MEMBER PRESENTING: ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER

KEY DECISION: NO

RECOMMENDATIONS

The views of members are sought from between the following two options, that:

(a) Portishead Town Council be advised of the need to seek a petition of 1991 electors to demonstrate sufficient support for their proposal to increase the membership of the council from 14 councillors to 18 councillors prior to a community governance review being carried out;

or

(b) the Electoral Registration Officer be authorised to undertake a Community Governance Review of electoral arrangements of the parish of Portishead under the terms of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007;

1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report seeks approval to enable the Electoral Registration Officer to carry out a review of electoral arrangements within the parish of Portishead under the terms of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 in order to provide arrangements that are reflective of the identities and interests of the community in that parish, and are effective and convenient. The initial part of the recommendation would enable sufficient support to be demonstrated by the electorate of Portishead in order to justify consideration of an increase in the membership of the town council.

2. POLICY

In relation the Council's responsibilities under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

3. DETAILS

From February 2008, principal councils have responsibility for undertaking Community Governance Review's (CGR) under the terms of the Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The purpose of such a review is to provide a mechanism where parish boundaries and related electoral arrangements (including provision of parish council wards where necessary, and allocated numbers of parish councillors) can be amended where appropriate. The power to carry out such a review is devolved to the Council and does not involve the Local Government Boundary Commission for England unless any related changes are recommended to North Somerset ward boundaries.

The 2007 Act requires principal councils to ensure that community governance within the area under review will be reflective of the identities and interests of the community in that area; and are effective and convenient.

It is good practice for a principal council to consider conducting a Community Governance Review every 10-15 years. The most recent full review of parish boundaries and related electoral arrangements within North Somerset took place during the period 2008 to 2011 and this provided for a revised allocation of 14 parish councillors. The then Portishead & North Weston Town Council in their initial response to that Review sought a reduction in the size of the council from the then total of 18 to 12 as it considered the membership of the council at that time to be too large and unmanageable. At a future district ward review the Town Council intended to apply for the creation of an additional ward to serve the significant growth in population and proposed that at that time the membership increase to 14. As a result of that review a membership level of 14 was provided across seven wards effective from the May 2011 full parish council elections.

A full electoral review of North Somerset carried was out by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England during the period 2012 to 2014 and enabled the Commission to make changes to parish electoral arrangements only where these were a direct consequence of recommendations for unitary council wards. This resulted in a revised allocation of 14 town council seats between the four new wards of Portishead effective from the May 2015 full parish council elections and is set out as the current allocation in the paragraph below.

Portishead Town Council seeks a further review of electoral arrangements for that parish to provide a ratio of 3 town councillors to each North Somerset councillor in future. The Town Council propose that there should be a total of 18 councillors elected to serve the parish allocated as follows (existing allocation in brackets): East Ward 6 (currently 5), North Ward 3 (currently 2), South Ward 3 (currently 2) and West Ward 6 (currently 5).

Any change proposed to the electoral arrangements of the parish of Portishead arising from this review would take effect at the next scheduled election of parish councillors to be held in May 2019.

North Somerset Council may not recharge the cost of carrying out a Community Governance Review.

The 2007 Act permits a principal council to seek that a petition be submitted to demonstrate sufficient support for a proposal prior to a community governance review being carried out. For a petition to be valid it must meet certain conditions including that it is signed by the requisite number of local electors based on the relevant petition threshold. The petition threshold for an area with more than 2,500 local electors is 10% of eligible electors. Based

on the electorate of Portishead at the January 2017 Register of 19,915 electors this would require a petition of 1991 signatures to be submitted.

4. CONSULTATION

Any review would include consultation with local people, the parish council and other stakeholders including use of the eConsult register of Council consultation projects. Consultation will take place at an initial stage to determine issues for consideration, and subsequently to gain awareness of views on any proposed changes.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The conduct of the review is estimated to involve a specialist electoral officer in approximately 40 hours of additional work which may not be recharged to the parish council.

6. RISK MANAGEMENT

None.

7. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

Polling arrangements were overhauled in relation to the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places carried out in autumn 2014 in compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act, the findings of which will be taken into account in undertaking these reviews.

8. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Sustainability – Outcomes from a Community Governance Review should endeavour to ensure that parish electoral arrangements are effective and convenient and that, wherever practicable, related polling arrangements are readily accessible to electors without the need for lengthy car journeys wherever possible.

Legal – This review will be carried out to comply with the requirements of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

9. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

See two alternative options within the Recommendations above.

AUTHOR

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Community Governance Review file