

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 – request to review the boundary between Abingdon-on-Thames and neighbouring parishes

Recommendation:

1. To agree to undertake a community governance review of the parish boundary between Abingdon-on-Thames parish and Radley and Sunningwell parishes following the elections in May 2019.
2. To authorise the head of legal and democratic services to draft and publish the terms of reference for the review.
3. To defer consideration of the requests for reviews of the parish boundaries between Abingdon-on-Thames and Sutton Courtenay and St Helen Without parishes until after the elections in May 2019.

Purpose of Report

1. To invite the committee to consider a request from Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council to review the boundaries between Abingdon-on-Thames, Radley, Sunningwell, Sutton Courtenay and St Helen Without parishes.

Strategic Objectives

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

Background

3. Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council has requested a review of the parish boundary between Abingdon-on-Thames parish and a number of neighbouring parishes for the reasons set out in the letter dated 3 February 2017 attached.

Consideration of request

4. At its meeting in July 2014 Council agreed the following resolution:
 - that a significant development proposal that sits adjacent to or straddles a parish boundary should automatically trigger a community governance review, such a review to take place on the inclusion of a site in a document that forms part of the approved Local Plan or when planning permission has been granted for the development of the site.
5. The areas marked as A and B on the map attached to the letter cover an area of land identified in the Local Plan and for which outline planning permission was granted in July 2017 for 900 dwellings, 50 retirement homes and a local centre. Therefore, in accordance with the resolution of Council, a review must be undertaken.
6. All the other proposals referred to in the letter are currently not included in the Local Plan, are not the subject of planning permissions or included in a neighbourhood plan area. Sutton Courtenay Parish Council has raised an objection to the proposal to transfer land from Sutton Courtenay parish to Abingdon-on-Thames parish – area marked D on the map submitted by Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council.

Timing of a review

7. The first stage of a review is the drawing up of terms of reference. In effect, this document becomes the council's policies for the conduct of the review. It should provide background information to help electors and other interested organisations to make informed submissions and should also refer to the legislative framework against which the review must operate. Publication of the terms of reference commences the review, which the council then has twelve months to complete.
8. Officers propose that a review of the area of land covered by A and B is undertaken following the 2019 elections. Notwithstanding the Council resolution set out in paragraph 4 of this report, there is a strong case for making an exception and not starting the review before 2019 because it would be beneficial to look at all possible changes to Abingdon at the same time. In addition, whilst it would be possible to undertake a review prior to the elections in May 2019 the council would be required to gain the prior consent of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) to make changes that impact on parish arrangements put in place by its review of the electoral arrangements for Oxfordshire County Council and Vale of White Horse District Council. Even if this consent was obtained the council would still need to make applications to the LGBCE to make related alteration orders to make district wards and county divisions coterminous with such changes. It is unlikely that this matter would be resolved prior to May 2019 and would therefore result in any new residents living in the area concerned voting in the parish of Abingdon but voting in either the district ward of Botley and Sunningwell or Kennington and Radley in May 2019. Such a scenario would be confusing for the electorate and not provide effective and convenient representation.
9. Officers propose that consideration of the requests for reviews of the other matters set out in the letter are deferred until after the elections in May 2019. The

committee will then be in a position to consider these requests with any others that are submitted as part of the scheduled review agreed by this committee at its last meeting.

Financial Implications

10. 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

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

Conclusion

12. Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council has requested a review of a number of parish boundaries. The committee is asked to consider the requests. In accordance with the Council resolution set out in paragraph four of this report the committee is invited to agree to this request, schedule the review for after the elections in May 2019 and authorise the head of legal and democratic services to draft and publish the terms of reference for this review. The committee is recommended to defer consideration of the other matters until after May 2019.

Background Papers

- None