

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee



held on Wednesday 19 October 2022 at 7.00 pm
in Meeting Room 1, Abbey House, Abbey Close, Abingdon, OX14 3JE

Open to the public, including the press

Present in the meeting room:

Members: Councillors Ron Batstone (Chair), Paul Barrow, and Alison Jenner

Officers: Susan Baker (Electoral Services Team Leader), Steven Corrigan (Democratic Services Manager) and Chris McMullin (Electoral Services Officer)

Remote attendance:

Officers: Steve Culliford (Democratic Services Team Leader), Jordan Kennedy (Electoral Services Officer) and Susie Royse (Broadcasting Officer)

Guests: Councillors Val Shaw and Emily Smith (local ward members)

21. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sarah Medley (Vice-Chair) and Mike Pighills.

22. Minutes

RESOLVED: to adopt as a correct record the minutes of the committee meeting held on 4 August 2022 and agree that the chair signs them as such.

23. Declarations of interest

Councillor Ron Batstone declared an interest in item 7, Community Governance Review – Grove, and item 8, Community Governance Review – Grove Technology Park, as he was a Grove parish councillor. Councillor Paul Barrow declared an interest in item 8, Community Governance Review – Grove Technology Park, as he was an East Challow Parish Councillor. Councillor Alison Jenner declared an interest in item 12, Community Governance Review – Sunningwell (Wootton and Cumnor), as she was a Cumnor Parish Councillor.

Officers clarified that where the committee members were also parish councillors, that member would be able to speak on that agenda item but not vote.

Vale of White Horse District Council – Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee minutes

24. Urgent business and chair's announcements

The chair announced the emergency evacuation arrangements.

25. Public participation

Several members of the public had registered to address the committee. The chair announced that public statements would be heard during the consideration of each relevant agenda item.

26. Community Governance Review - final recommendations

The committee considered the head of legal and democratic's report on eight community governance reviews. The committee had agreed to undertake the reviews at its meeting in March 2022 and agreed terms of reference on matters submitted by parish councils. In May, the committee had agreed draft proposals for consultation and agreed revised terms of reference to provide for a longer consultation period and time to analyse the responses.

Consultation had been carried out on proposals in each of the reviews. A schedule setting out the detail on each review was attached as a separate agenda item, along with the consultation results, an officer recommendation, and the justification for that recommendation. The committee was invited to agree the final recommendations for implementation. The minutes for each review are shown below.

The committee noted that after it had taken its final decisions on each community governance review, work would commence to make the necessary order to bring the changes into effect in time for the 2023 parish council elections. This included making applications to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to make related alteration orders to make district wards and county divisions coterminous with such changes. In July 2022, Council had authorised the head of legal and democratic, in consultation with the chair of this committee, to submit any such applications to the boundary commission.

The committee noted that the council was unable to make recommendations on an alternative style of governance for existing parishes. This was a matter for a parish council to decide. Therefore, the committee was unable to proceed with the request by North Hinksey Parish Council to change its style of parish from a parish council to a community council.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) agree final recommendations in relation to each item below in minutes 27 to 34; and
- (b) authorise the head of legal and democratic to make a reorganisation of community governance order to implement the changes agreed.

27. Community Governance Review - Grove

Councillor Ron Batstone declared an interest in this item as he was a Grove parish councillor, and as such he did not take part in the decision-making on this matter.

Vale of White Horse District Council – Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee minutes

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The committee considered the community governance review CGR-A on a proposal to create a single ward covering Grove for the purposes of parish council elections.

The 16 parish councillors were elected to serve the whole parish. The warding arrangements at parish level had been introduced as a consequential effect of the district ward arrangements implemented by the Local Government Boundary Commission in 2015. Following the change to the parish boundary with Wantage in 2019, Grove parish consisted of two wards: Grove Brook and Grove North. Grove Parish Council had asked for it to be covered by a single ward once more.

The committee considered that Grove was a largely homogenous settlement that did not readily lend itself to sub-division. The parish electoral arrangements in existence prior to 2015 had served the identities and interests of the village well and the committee considered that these arrangements would do so again.

RESOLVED: to create a single ward covering Grove for the purposes of parish council elections.

28. Community Governance Review - Grove Technology Park

Councillors Ron Batstone and Paul Barrow declared personal interests as Grove and East Challow Parish Councillors respectively. As such, they could not vote on this matter. This left the meeting inquorate. Therefore, the committee was unable to consider the community governance review CGR-B, on a proposal to amend the boundary of Grove parish to include Grove Business Park, currently in East Challow parish. This item was deferred to a future meeting of the committee, potentially in November 2022.

29. Community Governance Review - Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor and Fyfield and Tubney

The committee considered the community governance review CGR-C, on a proposal to amend the parish boundary east of Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor to include land currently in Fyfield and Tubney parish.

Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor Parish Council had requested the boundary change. This was opposed by Fyfield and Tubney Parish Council.

Officers recommended that no change was made to the current boundary.

The committee agreed with the officer's recommendation. Whilst the land in question was included in the Local Plan as an allocated housing site, a recent application for housing on that site had been refused. A further outline planning application had been submitted but was yet to be determined. The case for changing the boundary rested on whether planning permission was granted. Therefore, the request to change the boundary was considered premature. In addition, the committee could not consider the views of people directly affected by the proposed change—the new residents of the site—in advance of any development. Also, the land in question lay in a rural location. The current boundary between the parishes reflected the “no man's land” between communities, providing a natural easily identifiable boundary between the communities.

RESOLVED: to make no change to the current boundary between Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor and Fyfield and Tubney parishes.

30. Community Governance Review - North Hinksey (parish name change)

The committee considered the community governance review CGR-D, on a proposal to change the name of the parish from North Hinksey parish to Botley and North Hinksey parish.

Andrew Pritchard made a statement objecting to the proposed name change of the parish.

Councillor Emily Smith, a local ward member, made a statement in support of the proposed name change.

Officers recommended changing the parish name in line with the parish council's request. The majority of consultation responses supported this.

The committee agreed with the recommendation as the inclusion of Botley in the parish name would better reflect the geography and community it covered.

RESOLVED: to rename the parish Botley and North Hinksey parish.

31. Community Governance Review - South Hinksey and Kennington

The committee considered the community governance review CGR-E, on a proposal to amend the parish boundary south of South Hinksey to include the former Westwood Hotel site, currently in Kennington parish. The committee also considered an additional proposal to include the boundary of the property The Copse within South Hinksey parish.

Councillor Emily Smith, a local ward member, made a statement in support of the proposed boundary change at The Copse and of no change to the boundary at the Westwood Hotel site.

South Hinksey Parish Council had submitted the proposal for the boundary changes. Kennington Parish Council had objected to the transfer of the Westwood Hotel site into South Hinksey parish but had not responded before the committee meeting in relation to the proposed boundary change at The Copse.

The committee noted that, of the four responses received, all strongly supported the committee's draft proposal to make no change to the parish boundary at the Westwood Hotel site. The committee supported the officers' recommendation on this.

Officers had also recommended that the whole of the garden known as The Copse should be included within South Hinksey parish boundary. The committee agreed with the officers' recommendation.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) include the whole of the garden known as The Copse within South Hinksey parish;
- and

(b) make no change to the parish boundary at the Westwood Hotel site.

32. Community Governance Review - Sunningwell (Wootton and Cumnor)

Councillor Alison Jenner declared an interest in this item as she was a Cumnor parish councillor, and as such did not take part in the decision-making on this item.

The committee considered the community governance review CGR-F, on a proposal to amend the parish boundary to include within Sunningwell parish the area of Boars Hill currently in Wootton and Cumnor parishes.

Mike Woodward, a Sunningwell resident, made a statement objecting to the proposed parish boundary change.

Kate O'Donovan, Chairman of the Boars Hill Association, made a statement in support of the proposed parish boundary change and to also transfer those Boars Hill properties currently in Cumnor parish to Sunningwell parish.

Colin Weyer, Chairman of Sunningwell Parish Council, made a statement in support of the proposed parish boundary change.

Mr Greenman, a Sunningwell parish councillor, made a statement in support of the proposed parish boundary change.

Ian Bristow, Chairman of Wootton Parish Council, made a statement objecting to the proposed parish boundary change.

Laurence Brockliss, a Wootton parish councillor, made a statement objecting to the proposed parish boundary change.

Councillor Emily Smith, a local ward member, made a statement in support of no change to the parish boundaries.

Councillor Val Shaw, a local ward councillor, made a statement in support of no change to the parish boundaries.

Following consideration of the consultation responses, officers had recommended making no change to the current boundary between Cumnor and Sunningwell parishes. However, officers recommended transferring the properties within the Boars Hill area of Wootton parish to Sunningwell parish. The officers' justification for this final recommendation was set out in the schedule appended to the agenda.

The committee considered, on balance, that there was no overwhelming reason to change the boundaries and move properties on Boars Hill (within Cumnor and Wootton parishes) into Sunningwell parish. This council's consultation results did not show strong support for boundary changes with an almost equal number expressing a view in support of and opposing a change. The community of Boars Hill already benefitted from a well-established sense of community identity and community cohesion across the various parishes. The unification of Boars Hill under one existing parish would not further this

sense of community. The view was expressed that the creation of a new parish for Boars Hill might be worth considering in the future.

RESOLVED: to make no change to the current boundaries between Cumnor, Sunningwell and Wootton parishes.

33. Community Governance Review - Uffington

The committee considered the community governance review CGR-G, on a proposal to increase the number of parish councillors from six to seven.

Uffington Parish Council had put forward the request. Two further responses had been received in support of the proposal.

Officers concurred, recommending an increase in the size of the parish council. The National Association of Local Councils recommended that the minimum number of members of a parish council should be seven, and that this number should apply to all councils with an electorate up to 900. The committee considered that Uffington Parish Council's request was reasonable as it had an electorate of approximately 650. The committee supported the proposal.

RESOLVED: to increase the size of Uffington Parish Council from six to seven parish councillors.

34. Community Governance Review - Wootton

The committee considered the community governance review CGR-H, on a proposal to review the name of Wootton parish to reflect the settlement of Boars Hill.

Councillor Emily Smith and Councillor Val Shaw, local ward councillors, both made statements objecting to a parish name change.

Officers recommended that the committee made no change to the name of the parish. At its meeting on 26 May 2022, the committee had agreed to consult on a name change. Whilst the initial local engagement exercise showed support for the proposal, the results from this council's consultation showed that 61 per cent of respondents opposed the proposal. Officers considered that, whilst the name change might serve to better reflect the communities within the area of the parish, the area known as Boars Hill covered a number of parishes, not just Wootton. A name change, whilst seeking to improve community identity within the area, would therefore be misleading. Many rural parishes did not include the details of each hamlet or community in their name but still achieved community identity.

The committee concurred that there should be no name change.

RESOLVED: to make no change to the name of Wootton parish.

35. The timing of future community governance reviews

Officers presented a proposal to amend the requirement to carry out community governance reviews every four years. In 2017 the committee had agreed to undertake a

community governance review every four years after the scheduled parish council elections, with any agreed changes implemented in time for the next scheduled elections. However, this had proved resource intensive. It also invited parish councils to consider and submit speculative requests, often on a repeat basis.

Legislation provided for community governance reviews to be conducted at any time. Guidance, issued by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and the Department for Communities and Local Government suggested that reviews could be triggered by:

- changes in population, or in reaction to specific or new local issues
- new housing developments expanding communities over time
- councils exercising their discretion, but conducting a review every 10 to 15 years
- a petition for the whole or part of the council's area, subject to rules around previous reviews carried out by the principal council

The guidance suggested that councils should consider undertaking a community governance review of its whole area in one go, rather than carrying out small scale reviews in a piecemeal fashion of smaller areas. However, specific reviews could be undertaken at any time, for example to adjust minor parish boundary anomalies.

The committee considered that committing to undertake a review every four years was contrary to the above guidance, was unnecessary, and caused tension between parish councils. Instead, this council should rely on statutory guidance provided on the timing of a community governance review, including the provision for a district wide review every 10 to 15 years. The committee recognised that it was possible for specific reviews to be carried out at any time to address anomalies.

RESOLVED: to authorise the democratic services manager to carry out future reviews at timescales provided for in the government guidance, in consultation with the chair of the committee.

The meeting closed at 8.20 pm

Chair:

Date: