

Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee



Report of Head of Legal and Democratic

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Community Governance Review “Harwell East” final recommendations

Recommendation(s):

1. that the committee agree the name of the parish;
2. that the new parish should have a parish council;
3. that the effective date for the new parish council will be 1 April 2023, with elections for the parish council to take place in May 2023;
4. the parish council should return eight parish councillors;
5. that the parish should not be divided into wards;
6. to authorise the head of legal and democratic to draft the necessary Reorganisation Order;
7. to establish a shadow parish council prior to the first elections in May 2023 and that the head of legal and democratic, in consultation with the Chair of this committee, is authorised to make the necessary arrangements associated with its establishment.

Purpose of Report

1. To make final recommendations in respect of the new parish previously referred to as “Harwell East” parish.

Corporate Objectives

2. Community governance reviews contribute to the council's corporate objectives of working in partnership and working in an open and inclusive way.

Background

3. At its meeting on 4 August 2022 this committee considered a report on the background and previous decisions taken by full Council and this committee regarding the creation of a new parish on that part of the current parish of Harwell that lies to the east of the A34, as shown on the attached map. At its meeting on 4 August this committee agreed to consult on the name and governance arrangements for the new parish. The relevant guidance and reasons for the draft consultation proposals are set out in detail in the report to this committee on 4 August and are not repeated in this report.

Consultation

4. The consultation period on the draft proposals ran from 16 August until 30 September 2022. All households in the affected area were contacted via letter giving the background to the review and a link to the online consultation. The consultation was also advertised via the media, targeted social media and the council's website.
5. An Engagement Report setting out the findings of the consultation is attached.

Name of the parish and style of governance

6. As can be seen from the consultation responses, a majority of respondents did not support the proposed working title name of "Harwell East" parish. Of those suggesting an alternative name the majority included reference to Didcot specifically Didcot West parish or West Didcot parish. This clearly reflects the fact that a large number of residents in the area identify as being part of Didcot in respect of their community. A number of residents also made suggestions that reflect the fact that the area covered by the new parish covers not only part of Great Western Park but also Valley Park.
7. As committee members will be aware Didcot is not within the boundary of Vale of White Horse District Council. However, the consensus of responses clearly indicates a preference to include Didcot in the name of the new parish. The committee would need to provide sound reasons to depart from the views expressed by residents.
8. A majority of respondents supported the creation of a parish council as the style of governance for the parish. This is reflected in the recommendation.

Ordinary year of election

9. As set out in the report to this committee on 4 August 2022, there is a statutory requirement for ordinary elections of the whole council to take place every four years, which must be coterminous with the election of district councillors for that area. With elections scheduled for 4 May 2023 this should be the date councillors are elected to the new council. This proposal was supported by a majority of respondents.

Council size

10. Over half of respondents supported the draft proposal to have a council size of eight parish councillors which is reflected in the officer recommendation.

Parish warding

11. Over half of those responding to the consultation supported the proposal that the new parish should not be warded. As set out in the report to this committee on 4 August, officers do not consider that the number and distribution of local government electors would make a single election of councillors impracticable or inconvenient for a single ward or that the area includes different areas that should be separately represented.

Temporary parish councillors from 1 April 2023

12. The new council will be established with effect from 1 April 2023. However, the first elections to the parish council will not be held until 4 May 2023, with the councillors to be elected at those polls taking up office on the fourth day thereafter.
13. This council may make provision in the Reorganisation Order for the appointment of temporary parish councillors to run the new council during this interim period.
14. Officers proposes that a formal shadow parish council is created, prior to the first ordinary elections, which as set out earlier are proposed to take place on 4 May 2023. Officers propose that the head of legal and democratic, in consultation with the Chair, makes arrangements for the creation of the shadow parish council.

Financial Implications

15. 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 consultation, postage and printing. These costs are being met from within existing budgets.

Legal Implications

16. The Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee has delegated authority to deal with all matters relating to parish community governance reviews.
17. In carrying out a community governance review the council must follow the requirements laid down in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. It must also pay heed to the joint guidance on community governance reviews published by the Communities and Local Government Department and LGBC.
18. The council will implement any changes by making a reorganisation of community governance order.

Climate and Ecological Emergencies Implications

19. There are no implications arising from this report.

Risks and Options

20. 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

21. In 2014 Council agreed to establish a new parish of “Harwell East” recognising that the identity and interests of the community and convenient and effective local governance would be better served with the creation of a new parish. This committee agreed draft proposals for consultation in respect of the new parish and is now invited to make final decisions in respect of the new parish and its governance arrangements.

Background Papers: None