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| SUBJECT | <i>To consider the first consultation responses on the Community Governance Review</i> |
| RELEVANT MEMBER | Governance & Electoral Arrangements Committee Chairman - Councillor Patrick Hogan |
| RESPONSIBLE OFFICER | Head of Legal & Democratic Services, Joanna Swift |
| REPORT AUTHOR | Mat Bloxham, 01494 732143, mat.bloxham@southbucks.gov.uk |
| WARD/S AFFECTED | <i>Denham; Farnham and Hedgerley; Stoke Poges;</i> |

1. Purpose of Report

At the previous meeting held on 26 June, the Committee considered a report setting out requests received from Denham; Farnham Royal; and Stoke Poges Parish Councils to make changes to governance arrangements to their parish. After considering the requests the Committee agreed to conduct a Community Governance Review. The first stage of consultation for the review has now been completed. The Committee are therefore asked to consider the responses received during the consultation, whilst having regard to relevant legislation, guidance, electorate ratios and other information available, in order to make draft recommendations which will be subject to a second round of consultation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. To note the representations received during the first consultation as set out in Appendix 3.**
- 2. To agree that the following draft recommendations, or as amended by the Committee, be subject to a second stage of consultation, having regard to relevant guidance, electorate ratios, and other relevant information:**
 - a) Denham Parish Council – Removal of all Parish Wards**
 - b) Stoke Poges Parish Council – Reduce the size of the Council from 13 to 11 Parish Councillors**
 - c) Farnham Royal Parish Council – Remove 1 Parish Ward (by combining Farnham Royal South with Farnham Royal Central) to create a total of 2 Parish Wards**

2. Reasons for Recommendations

The purpose of a community governance review is to secure an arrangement which will bring about improved community engagement, better local democracy and will result in more effective and convenient delivery of local services.

The draft recommendations contained in this report take into account the identities and interests of the community in the area and those arrangements for community representation and engagement already in place. The draft recommendations also take into account representations received during the consultation with local people and local organisations. The draft recommendations have been made in accordance with legislation and have regard to relevant guidance by ensuring that they:

- Reflect the identities and interests of the community in that area, and
- Are effective and convenient.

Two other important considerations taken into account are:

- Community cohesion, and
- The size, population, and boundaries of the local community or parish

3. Content of Report

The Committee agreed at the previous meeting to conduct a Community Governance Review, and delegated authority to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee, to agree the Terms of Reference of the review. The agreed Terms of Reference are attached at Appendix 1.

Consultation

To inform the review the Council conducted a public consultation from 3 September to 12 October 2018 which invited local electors and other interested parties to submit their views and comments on the existing community governance arrangements, and/or propose changes.

As set out in the Terms of Reference, the consultation consisted of the following:

- a. The Notice (Appendix 2) & Terms of Reference (Appendix 1) of the review being published on the Council's website www.southbucks.gov.uk; and copies of documents relating to the review available to inspect at South Bucks District Council offices
- b. Asking the Parish Councils, for the areas under review, to advertise the review on their noticeboards and website

- c. Consulting local government electors, for the areas under review, by inviting responses to the consultation via notices, website, and social media
- d. Consulting other interested stakeholders, including the Parish Council and local Members, for the areas under review
- e. Welcoming comments from any other person or body that wishes to make representations
- f. Notifying Bucks County Council that a review is to be undertaken, and providing them with a copy of the terms of reference and consulting them in the matters under review
- g. Treating any petitions received during this review as a consultation response. However, none were received

Representations

A total of 13 representations were received (Appendix 3):

1 from Bucks County Council requesting Farnham Royal to retain a minimum of two wards to align with County electoral boundaries and endorsing consultation with BCC Ward Members.

3 relating to Denham Parish only:

- Resident - One ward for Denham
- Denham Parish Council - Council size remains the same and one ward for Denham
- Councillor Hollis – endorsing the Parish Council's representation

1 relating to Farnham Royal only requesting a single ward

7 relating to Stoke Poges only:

- Resident - Neutral / no changes proposed relating to this review
- Resident - Neutral / no changes proposed relating to this review
- Resident - Neutral / no changes proposed relating to this review
- Resident - Neutral / no changes proposed relating to this review
- Parish Clerk – Parish Council size reduced from 13 to 9 Councillors
- Resident – Parish Council size reduced from 13 to 10 Councillors
- Resident – Parish Council size reduced from 13 to 11 and unwarded

1 general response not specific to any parish, but proposing that the review take place following a decision on local government reorganisation in Bucks.

The full responses are shown in Appendix 3.

Denham Parish Council

Denham Parish Council's initial request proposed that all three of the current parish wards be removed so that the parish becomes unwarded. There was no request to change the Council size (number of Councillors). The reasons provided by the Parish Council were as follows:

- Not fair and equal representation as large variance in electors across wards three wards not required due to small area
- Single District ward for Denham (2015)
- Potential for elections in one ward and not others
- Request no reduction in Councillors due to workload

During the consultation 3 representations were made proposing that the wards for Denham Parish Council be removed.

Current arrangements:

| Ward | Polling Districts | Councillors | Electorate | Ratio | |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------|------------|-------|-------------------------|
| Denham South | SJ, SJA, SJHD | 7 | 3042 | 435 | |
| Denham North | SK | 7 | 2476 | 353 | |
| Denham South West | SS | 1 | 547 | 547 | Avg Parish Ratio |
| Total | | 15 | 6,065 | 404 | 384 |

| | Figures at June 2018 | Projected 2023 | Comments |
|--------------------|----------------------|----------------|--|
| Properties | 3483 | 3546 | Based on 1.8% increase (63 properties) |
| Electors | 6065 | 6206 | Based on 1.75 electors per property |
| Councillors | 15 | | |

Recommendations on Denham Council size

The current Parish Council size of 15 Councillors is broadly in line with Aston Business School and NALC guidance. No representations received proposed changes to Council size – one endorsed the current size. A slight increase in electorate is forecast over the next 5 years. It is therefore recommended that there be no change to the size of Denham Parish Council.

Recommendations on Denham Council warding arrangements

The Parish Council would like to remove all wards in the parish. Two other representations received supported this proposal. Removing the three parish wards would not affect principal Council boundaries. The key considerations are therefore:

Whether the number, or distribution, of the local government electors for the parish make a single election of councillors impracticable or inconvenient? This is testing the number of electors in the parish, their distribution and convenience of voting.

- If all parish wards were removed, and the election was contested, the ballot paper would show in excess of 15 candidates.
- One representation states that *“The election of Councillors to Denham Parish Council generally occurs in a single election; however given that residents traditionally have no party loyalty they are likely to be nominated in the ward in which they live. This could result in a situation where some wards are over represented triggering a by –election; in addition should the one Councillor representing Denham South West resign then this also would trigger a by- election, both situations causing unnecessary expense and work load on the Parish Council.”*

It is desirable that any area or areas of the parish could be separately represented on the Council? This is more subjective and is asking whether it is one parish but comprising different parts.

Representations received suggest that removing parish wards would be desirable since *“The Parish is small in area and there are no clear physical and social differences to warrant the present warding arrangements.”*

Having regard to guidance, and in light of the representations received, it is recommended that parish wards be removed from Denham Parish Council.

Stoke Poges Council

Stoke Poges Parish Council's initial request proposed that the Council size be reduced from 13 to 9 Councillors as the Parish Council felt that 9 was a more appropriate size, and because there had been 4 vacant seats during the previous 3 years.

During the consultation, responses proposed that the number of councillors be reduced from 13 to 9, 10, or 11. One representation also proposed that parish wards be removed; however there are no parish wards at present.

Current arrangements:

| Ward | Polling Districts | Councillors | Electorate | Ratio | Avg Parish Ratio |
|-------------|-------------------|-------------|------------|-------|------------------|
| Stoke Poges | SS | 13 | 3905 | 300 | 384 |

| | Figures at June 2018 | Projected 2023 | Comments |
|--------------------|----------------------|----------------|---|
| Properties | 1988 | 2035 | Based on 2.36% increase (47 properties) |
| Electors | 3905 | 3968 | Based on 1.95 electors per property |
| Councillors | 13 | | |

Recommendations on Stoke Poges Council size

The current Parish Council size of 13 Councillors is higher than NALC guidance suggests. 11 is suggested for an electorate of 3,500, and 12 for an electorate of 4,400. Aston Business School suggest between 9-16 Councillors for this electorate size. However, there is no legislative requirement for council size to be proportional to electorate.

The view of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England is "that each area should be considered on its own merits, having regard to geography, and the pattern of communities."

Where it is recommended that the Parish council should not be divided into wards the following factors must be taken into account:

- The number of local government electors
- Any change in that number which is likely to occur over the next 5 years.

A small increase in the electorate is forecast, but not to the extent to suggest that a reduction in Council size should be avoided.

A reduction in Council size to 11 Councillors would bring the elector ratio up from 300 to 355 which is closer to the South Bucks Parish Council average of 384.

It is therefore recommended that the size of Stoke Poges Parish Council be reduced from 13 to 11.

Recommendations on Stoke Poges Council warding arrangements

The Parish Council currently has no parish wards. No representations received suggested that the parish should be warded. Having regard to guidance and in light of the representations received it is recommended that the warding arrangements for Stoke Poges remain unchanged.

Farnham Royal Parish Council

The initial request from the Parish Council was to remove the current three Parish wards so that the parish becomes unwarded. The reason provided was to remove the potential for elections to occur in one ward and not others.

Current arrangements:

| Ward | Polling Districts | Councillors | Electorate | Ratio | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------|-------------------------|
| Farnham Royal Central | SFC | 3 | 1088 | 363 | |
| Farnham Royal North | SFN | 7 | 3210 | 459 | |
| Farnham Royal South | SFS | 1 | 361 | 361 | Avg Parish Ratio |
| Total | | 11 | 4659 | 424 | 384 |

| | Figures at June 2018 | Projected 2023 | Comments |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| Properties | 2536 | 2573 | Based on 1.46% increase (37 properties) |
| Electors | 4659 | 4889 | Based on 1.9 electors per property |
| Councillors | 11 | | |

Recommendations on Farnham Royal Council size

No representations received suggested a change to the number of Councillors. A comparison with the total electorate and NALC/Aston Business School guides suggests that a small increase in the number of Councillors could be considered.

Increasing the number of Councillors from 11 to 12 would move the electorate ratio from 424 to 388 – closer to the average for all Parishes in South Bucks. A slight increase in electorate is forecast over the next 5 years.

On balance, because no representations suggested making any changes to the Council size, and because guidance says each area should be considered on its own merits, no change is recommended.

Recommendations on Farnham Royal Council warding arrangements

The Farnham Common and Burnham Beeches County Electoral Division and Stoke Poges and Wexham Electoral Division split Farnham Royal Parish into two areas. It would not be possible to remove all Parish Wards for this reason. The Parish Ward of Farnham Royal South is within the Stoke Poges and Wexham Electoral Division. The map (shown at the end of Appendix 1) shows the wards within the Parish Boundary.

The representation received requests that all wards be removed. Although this is not possible, for the reason already provided, Members may wish to consider reducing the number of wards from 3 to 2. This can be achieved by combining Farnham Royal South with Farnham Royal Central.

Having regard to guidance and in light of the representation received it is recommended that the parish wards of Farnham Royal South and Farnham Royal Central be combined to reduce the total number of parish wards from 3 to 2.

4. Options

- a) To agree that the draft recommendations, as set out in this report, be subject to consultation, or
- b) To agree alternative draft recommendations, specifying reasons for the changes and having regard to guidance and representations received, to submit to consultation.

6. Corporate Implications

Financial

There are no direct financial implications to the Council arising from the recommendations of this report.

Legal

The Council has to power to carry out a Community Governance Review under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. In reaching its decision, the Council must take account of the views of local people and also have regard to statutory guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

Community

The recommendations from this review must take into account the views of local people. The responses received during the first stage of consultation are attached in full at Appendix 3.

8. Links to Council Policy Objectives

This report relates to theme 5 of the Chiltern and South Bucks Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Plan: Cohesive and Strong Communities: strong, confident and active communities

9. Next Steps

The next stage of the review is to submit the Committee's draft recommendations to public consultation. The representations received during this second stage of consultation will be considered by the Committee at the next meeting on 16 January 2019. The Committee will then be asked to agree final recommendations for consideration by Full Council.

The review timetable is shown below:

Timetable

Completed stages:

- Decision to conduct a review – 26 June 2018
- Terms of Reference Finalised – August 2018
- 1st Consultation period (6 weeks) – 3 September to 12 October 2018
- Governance & Electoral Arrangements Committee consider 1st consultation responses & prepare / develop draft recommendations – 29 October 2018

Next stage:

- 2nd Consultation period (6 weeks) – November to December
- Governance & Electoral Arrangements Committee consider 2nd consultation responses & prepare / publish final recommendations – 16 January 2019

Future stage

- Publish Reorganisation Order – February 2019
- Implementation – 1 March 2019 (before Notice of Election on 20 March 2019)

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| Background Papers: | https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-governance-reviews-guidance - DCLG/LGBCE Guidance https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/28/contents - LG&PIHA 2007 |
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