

WYCOMBE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HIGH WYCOMBE COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW – FINAL REPORT

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To consider the results of the second stage consultation and set out final recommendations in relation to parish arrangements in the unparished area of the Wycombe district following the Community Governance Review.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 This review report recommends that the Council:

2.1.1 Establishes a parish council or parish councils for:

- 1A the whole of the unparished area of High Wycombe to become a Town Council in due course;
- 1B one or more of the wards of Micklefield, Sands or Totteridge, in conjunction with a Town Council for the remainder of the unparished area; or
- 1C one or more of the parishes of Micklefield, Sands or Totteridge leaving the remainder unparished.

Should members decide to create any new parish councils it is proposed that:

- (i) there be no alteration to existing parish areas and that such parish councils reflect the existing parish areas;
- (ii) the name of such parish council(s) be the name of the parish and High Wycombe in respect of a parish council for the whole of the unparished area or the whole of the unparished area except for Micklefield, Totteridge and/or Sands; and
- (iii) the electoral arrangements be based on current parish and ward boundaries, with no warding except for the parish council of High Wycombe which would be based on current ward boundaries.

AND waits to progress the Reorganisation Order until the transition has been completed and the new Buckinghamshire Council becomes operational as a unitary authority. Implementation of the Review may be delayed with the expectation that a new local Council or Councils could be in place by May 2021 (recognising that there is significant work that would need to be undertaken);

2.1.2 **OR:** Defers taking a decision until after the new Buckinghamshire Council is created, to enable the new Council to decide the arrangements, recognising that further consultation may be necessary at that stage;

2.1.3 **OR:** Takes no action to create any further parish councils in the unparished area of Wycombe because other means of effective, convenient local governance reflective of community interests and identity will be established through the new Buckinghamshire Unitary Council and the creation of a Community Board and/or an Area Committee, and a further CGR will be undertaken following a Boundary Review of the new Buckinghamshire Council.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 The Council received four valid petitions to undertake a Community Governance Review (“**CGR**”) of the unparished area of High Wycombe, pursuant to the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (the “**2007 Act**”). The Regulatory and Appeals Committee decided on 18 March 2019 to combine the four petitions into a single review (“**the Review**”), as four single CGRs for each petition would necessarily overlap in area. CGRs must be concluded within 12 months of receiving a valid petition, therefore the Review must be completed by 10 December 2019.

3.2 The two petitions submitted on 10 December 2018 respectively requested:

3.2.1 a CGR with a view to forming a parish council in the ward of Totteridge; and

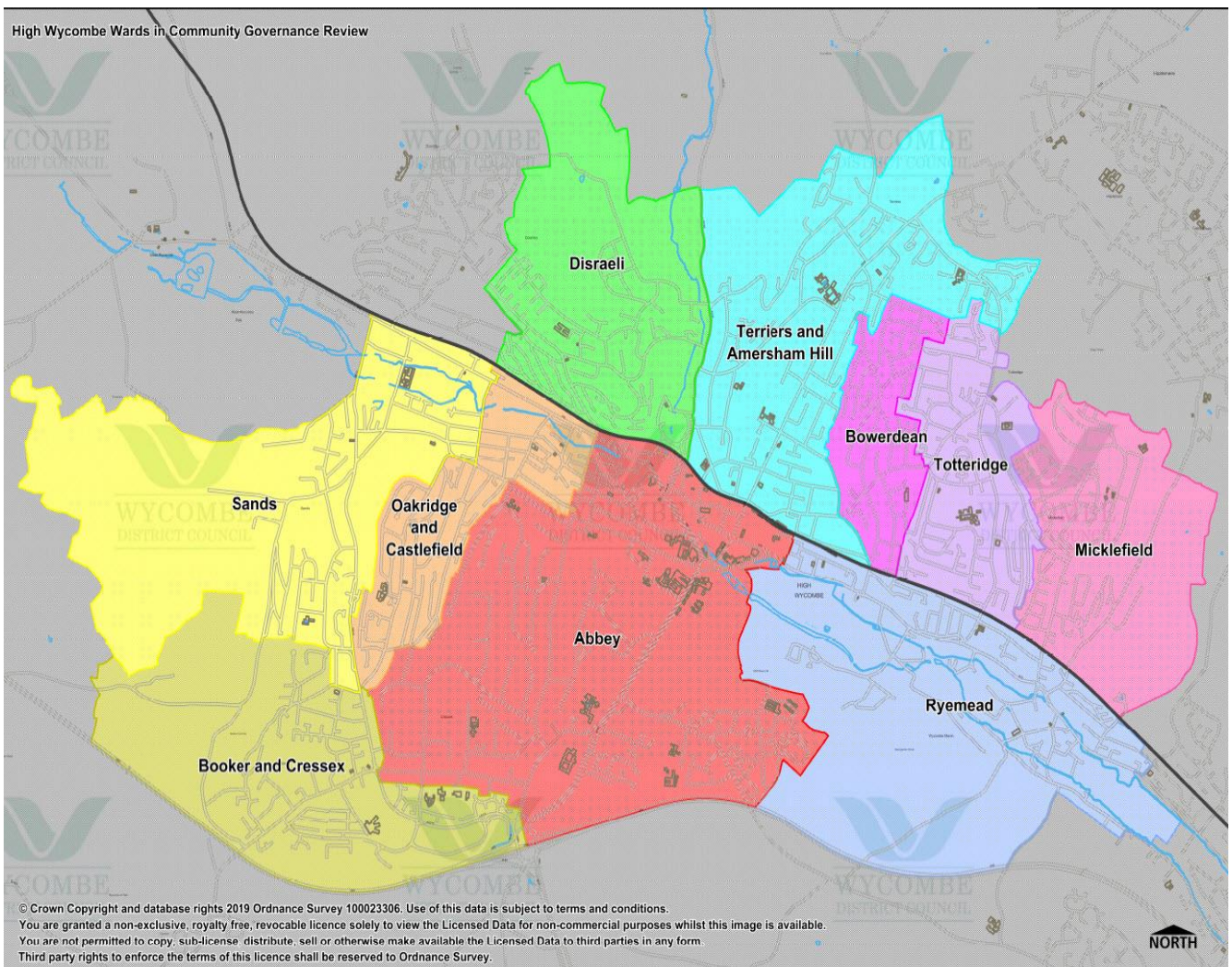
3.2.2 a CGR with a view to forming a parish council in the ward of Micklefield.

3.3 The two petitions submitted on 21 February 2019 respectively requested:

3.3.1 a CGR with a view to forming a parish council in the Sands ward; and

3.3.2 a CGR with a view to forming a town council for the whole of the unparished area, i.e. the wards of Abbey, Booker and Cressex, Bowerdean, Disraeli, Micklefield, Oakridge and Castlefield, Ryemead, Sands, Terriers and Amersham Hill and Totteridge.

3.4 The ten wards are shown geographically on the high level map below:



- 3.5 Previously, the ten wards of High Wycombe did not have a town or parish council because they were represented by the Wycombe District Council and the High Wycombe Town Committee. However, the Council will be abolished on reorganisation and any services and assets will transfer to the new Buckinghamshire Council in April 2020, with the exception of the historic property etc. held by the Charter Trustees.
- 3.6 A Working Group, drawn from Members of the Regulatory and Appeals Committee, was established to oversee the Review. External consultants were appointed to prepare an initial report (Local Government Resource Centre (**LGRC**)), following which a different external provider (Opinion Research Services (**ORS**)) conducted the public consultation exercise which concluded on 30 September 2019.
- 3.7 The process for carrying out a CGR is set out in the 2007 Act and associated statutory instruments and guidance issued jointly by (the former) Department for Communities and Local Government (**DCLG**) and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (**LGBCE**) in 2010 (the “**2010 guidance**”). Appropriate consultation has been undertaken; the views of the electors and other stakeholders in the area have been sought, and this report represents the final element of the Review.
- 3.8 As part of the reorganisation of local governance in the area, Wycombe District Council will be abolished as of 1 April 2020 and, accordingly, the outcome of the Review will be decided by the Shadow Executive of the new Buckinghamshire Council, and then implemented by the new unitary council.
- 3.9 The Local Government (Structural Changes) (Transitional Arrangements) Regulations 2008 provide that the powers to implement the recommendations of proposals resulting from a review during the transitional period sit with the Shadow Executive and thereafter with the new Buckinghamshire Council. The powers which will be carried out by the Shadow Executive are the powers under s86 and 96 to 100 of the 2007 Act including those which authorise making a reorganisation order to give effect to the recommendations of any review.

4 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW PROCESS

- 4.1 The process for undertaking the Review was as follows:

Action	Date
Two petitions received in relation to Totteridge and Micklefield parish councils, triggering the CGR	10 December 2018
Two petitions received in relation to Sands parish council and a town council	21 February 2019
Terms of Reference published	8 March 2019
The Regulatory and Appeals Committee: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approved the Terms of Reference for the Review 2. Made the decision to combine the four petitioned CGRs into one Review 	18 March 2019
Initial proposals considered and report prepared by Local Government Resource Centre	12 July 2019
Formal consultation on proposals conducted by Opinion Research Services	5 August 2019 to 30 September 2019

Action	Date
Submissions of consultation considered and Final Recommendations prepared	October – November 2019
Final Review Report published	13 December 2019
Results considered at Regulatory and Appeals Committee meeting	17 December 2019
Draft Final Report and Final Recommendations considered by Shadow Executive	7 January 2020

4.2 The Terms of Reference for the review were agreed at its Regulatory and Appeals Committee held on 18 March 2019. The Terms of Reference stated that the CGR would consider the subject of all four petitions that triggered the Governance Review, namely, to consider:

4.2.1 Whether to establish a parish council for the ward of Micklefield

4.2.2 Whether to establish a parish council for the ward of Totteridge

4.2.3 Whether to establish a parish council for the ward of Sands

4.2.4 Whether to establish a town council for the whole of the unparished area of High Wycombe

4.3 In addition to considering whether to establish any new governance, the Review must also consider whether it is appropriate to change existing governance arrangements and also a range of matters relating to the governance, financing, warding and electoral arrangements of any new council if created.

Consultation Questions

4.4 The Consultation sought views on the following questions:

- Would the creation of a new democratically elected town council for all ten wards protect High Wycombe's identity and heritage, promote the interests of the town, and represent local residents democratically?
- If a town council for all ten wards is not created, should Micklefield and/or Sands and/or Totteridge wards each form democratically elected parish councils (that is, up to three separate parish councils)?
- Is some other option more appropriate for any or all of the ten High Wycombe wards?

4.5 The consultation, conducted ORS, comprised four methods of seeking feedback from residents, businesses, surrounding town and parish councils, and other interested organisations:

4.5.1 a consultation questionnaire, which attracted 681 responses;

4.5.2 a telephone residents' survey, which comprised 803 interviews;

4.5.3 three focus groups made up of 23 participants, and

4.5.4 written submissions, of which six were received.

Methodology

- 4.6 For the consultation questionnaire, residents were able to submit a questionnaire response online via a link which was readily available on the Council's website. The Council also printed and distributed 1,000 copies of the postal consultation questionnaire – including in the Council's libraries – to ensure that the consultation questionnaire was available to all. Paper versions could also be requested from ORS or via a Freephone telephone number.
- 4.7 The telephone survey was conducted from ORS's social research call centre. A short summary of the proposals was included to be 'read out' within the survey for respondents who had not had the opportunity to read the consultation document.
- 4.8 The focus groups were recruited and facilitated by ORS, and were designed to be attended by a representative cross section of High Wycombe residents by age, gender, social grade, ethnicity, limiting illness / disability and geographical area.
- 4.9 The ORS report includes breakdowns of respondent profiles and some of the tables are replicated in section 5 below.

Findings of Consultation

- 4.10 The chief findings of the consultation are set out below; the full report can be found in the background documents (see paragraph 13 below), and the presentation of consultation findings is attached at **Appendix 1**, which sets out responses to specific questions, and also gives detail of other comments received.
- 4.11 As an overarching conclusion from the ORS report, it is clear that the "vast majority" of residents identify strongly with High Wycombe as a town, and there is most support among residents – overall, more than two-thirds of respondents – for a Town Council for High Wycombe.
- 4.12 As regards the three petitioned wards, the results understandably show that residents of Micklefield, Sands and Totteridge are more likely to each want their own parish council. However, we would also note that respondents from Totteridge and Micklefield are also more likely to identify strongly with High Wycombe than those living in the other wards. Sands also had a high majority of strong identification with High Wycombe.
- 4.13 When asked if residents identified with other areas of Buckinghamshire (which could also include their own ward), the results were as follows:
- 4.13.1 Micklefield: 44% of questionnaire respondents (4 of the 9 electors in the ward who responded to this question) expressed their attachment to Micklefield, and 8% of residents surveyed (2 of 23 electors) feel attached to their own area of Micklefield;
- 4.13.2 Sands: 44% of questionnaire respondents (22 of 50 electors) expressed their attachment to Sands, and 1% of residents surveyed (3 of 36 electors) feel attached to their own area of Sands; and
- 4.13.3 Totteridge: 16% of questionnaire respondents (1 of 6 electors) expressed their attachment to Totteridge; the ORS report does not confirm how many of residents surveyed in Totteridge feel attached to their own area.

In our view, this could indicate that, while three petitions were submitted with a view to forming parish councils for these three wards, the residents of the petitioned wards would also be content with a town council for High Wycombe, given their strong attachment to High Wycombe as a whole, compared to the relatively weak attachment to their own wards.

- 4.14 The consultation revealed the following:
- 4.14.1 89% of questionnaire respondents, and 86% of the residents surveyed identify strongly with High Wycombe.
 - 4.14.2 31% of questionnaire respondents and 21% of residents surveyed feel attached to other areas of Buckinghamshire.
 - 4.14.3 The principle of a town council or parish councils is generally supported, and is felt to be important within the “more remote” unitary local government structure to represent residents; give them a voice on a local level, as well as protect High Wycombe’s identity, history and heritage.
- 4.15 Almost half (47%) of those who supported the creation of a town council for High Wycombe did so because they wanted to see more local decision-making, or they wanted their area’s local needs to be taken into account.
- 4.16 The data shows that residents feel it is important to have a town or parish council, because it:
- 4.16.1 promotes the interests of the town;
 - 4.16.2 has democratically elected local representatives;
 - 4.16.3 preserves the town or area’s identity and heritage; and
 - 4.16.4 delivers some local services.
- 4.17 There were some dissenting voices raised (for example in the focus groups) in objection to the idea of a town or parish council(s), on the basis that: they would represent unnecessary bureaucratic duplication; influence at a unitary level would be minimal, and it could cost residents more money in council tax precept rises. Some expressed the view that it would be ‘unfair’ if parish councils were created for some wards but not others.
- 4.18 Of the nine organisations that responded to the consultation questionnaire, six preferred the option of creating a new town council for High Wycombe, whereas two preferred an alternative option, and one did not state a preference.
- 4.19 Six written submissions were received in response to the consultation. Four of these six responses were generally supportive of a local tier of government for High Wycombe. One group, the Pimms Action Group, supported the idea of a ‘unified’ town council but expressed the view that parish councils would lead to a “fragmented” High Wycombe. Downley Parish Council objected to any change to current ward boundaries and responsibilities because in their view, this would impact the ward of Disraeli disproportionately.
- 4.20 ORS noted in its conclusions that the level of response was not significant (i.e. 1513 responses out of an electorate of c.55,600 adults (based on 2011 census statistics)), despite strong efforts by the Council to raise awareness of the consultation. In ORS’ view this could indicate that the public does not consider the creation of a local council to be a high priority. On the other side of the coin, however, we would observe that the Council received four petitions to undertake CGRs in the space of two months, which demonstrates a strong current of support for creating local councils.

5 CRITERIA

- 5.1 The 2007 Act and the 2010 guidance require the decision-maker to have regard to the need to secure that community governance within the area under review:
- (a) reflects the identities and interests of the community in that area, and
 - (b) is effective and convenient.

Identities and Interests of the Community

- 5.2 The Guidance on Community Governance Reviews from CLG says the following in relation to the criteria:

“The identification of a community is not a precise or rigid matter. The pattern of daily life in each of the existing communities, the local centres for education and child care, shopping, community activities, worship, leisure pursuits, transport facilities and means of communication generally will have an influence. However, the focus of people’s day-to-day activities may not be reflected in their feeling of community identity. For instance, historic loyalty may be to a town but the local community of interest and social focus may lie within a part of the town with its own separate identity”.

- 5.3 A parish council which covers too large an area may not satisfy these criteria. However, there are no statutory upper or lower limits on the size of a parish. The 2010 guidance identifies that most parish councils contain fewer than 12,000 electors, although it notes that some are larger. Currently the largest parish council is Sutton Coldfield, with over 100,000 electors. The 2010 guidance notes that in some cases it might not be appropriate to divide a cohesive area into smaller parts, and makes explicit reference to Charter Trustee towns as potential examples of this. The LGRC report considered the communities of interest and this also comes out of the consultation undertaken by ORS (see background documents – paragraph 13 below).
- 5.4 LGRC considered that there was no particular community identity to any of the specific parish areas which were seeking a parish council for the area. That report considered a number of factors including access to services, population and geography in reaching that conclusion. These conclusions, however, were based on the information available from a desk-based analysis before the consultation was undertaken. The ORS consultation suggests that there is stronger sense of community identity than the paper analysis suggested, although this is stronger for the wider town of High Wycombe than for any particular pockets of robust community identity in the unparished wards.

“Place” Indices

- 5.5 The table given below shows a range of indices covering relative deprivation; income; employment; education, skills and training; health deprivation; crime; barriers to housing and services and living environment. This analysis shows that High Wycombe as a community entity is relatively prosperous, enjoying overall high health indices and high living environment indices. There are few indices that are very low which arguably helps evidence that High Wycombe is generally a successful community which is thriving.

Ward / Overall Rank and score	Index of Multiple Deprivation	Income	Employment	Education Skills and Training	Health	Crime	Barriers to Housing and Services	Living Environment
Abbey 1 (7.18)	8	7	8	7.5	9	6	5	7
Booker and Cressex 5= (5.88)	6	5	5	5	7	5	4	10
Bowerdean 6 (5.75)	6	4	5	4	8	6	5	8
Disraeli 4= (6.56)	7	5.5	6	4.5	8.5	6	6	9
Micklefield 7 (5.31)	5	3.5	4	3	8	5	5	9

Oakridge and Castlefield – 8 (4.5)	4	3	4	2	7	4	5	7
Ryemead 5= (5.88)	6	5	7	6	9	6	3	5
Sands 3 (6.63)	7	6	6.5	5	9	5	7	7.5
Terriers and Amersham Hill 2 (7)	7.5	6.5	7	8	9	6	6	6
Totteridge 4= (6.56)	6.5	5	6.5	4	8.5	7	6	9

Age

- 5.6 The table below shows a breakdown of age ranges for each of the ten wards in the unparished area of High Wycombe. The statistics included below are from the Office for National Statistics from the 2011 Census.

Ward / Total Population	Ages 0-9	Ages 10-17	Ages 18-29	Ages 30-64	Age 65+
Abbey – 10,365	1,094	1,344	2,577	4,172	1,178
Booker and Cressex – 4,974	489	447	678	2,287	1,073
Bowerdean – 5,574	833	691	1,163	2,420	467
Disraeli – 5,891	804	568	1,339	2,594	586
Micklefield – 5,807	956	628	960	2,618	645
Oakridge and Castlefield – 9,406	1,656	994	2,355	3,696	705
Ryemead – 7,088	1,050	515	1,571	3,636	316
Sands – 6,214	895	601	1,188	2,947	583
Terriers and Amersham Hill – 9,181	1,066	939	1,949	4,120	1,107
Totteridge – 8,683	1,046	899	1,048	4,407	1,283
Total: 73,183	9,889	7,626	14,828	32,897	7,943

- 5.7 These statistics show that the age demographic in High Wycombe is fairly evenly spread. Across all wards, the highest concentration of age population is within the 30-64 age bracket, with no ward

showing a particularly high concentration of either older or younger populations. Totteridge has a slightly higher percentage of older residents than Sands and Micklefield, and Micklefield has a slightly higher percentage of 17 year-olds and below, but neither difference could be deemed significant and there is little evidence to show that age could be a factor in determining a separate community identity for any of the three focus wards.

- 5.8 In relation to the Review, the respondents to the consultation questionnaire were also similarly spread in age; the lowest number of respondents were in the under 35 age bracket (11%) and the 75+ age bracket (6%). The lowest number of respondents to the telephone survey were the 65 – 74 and 75+ age groups (9% and 8% respectively). This reflects the LGRC analysis above.

Ethnicity

- 5.9 The table below shows the demographics of High Wycombe broken down into percentages of white, mixed multiple ethnic groups, Asian/British Asian, Black/African/Caribbean/Black British and Other Ethnic groups.

Ward	White %	Mixed/multiple ethnic groups %	Asian/Asian British %	Black/African/Caribbean/Black British %	Other ethnic group %
Abbey	62	4	27	6	1
Booker and Cressex	75	3	15	7	0
Bowerdean	46	4	42	8	0
Disraeli	65	4	24	7	0
Micklefield	71	6	13	10	0
Oakridge and Castlefield	35	4	51	9	1
Ryemead	79	5	10	6	0
Sands	66	5	23	5	1
Terriers and Amersham Hill	75	4	15	5	1
Totteridge	70	5	17	7	1

- 5.10 Ethnic population breakdowns, or communities of interest, are an important focus in CGRs since building or maintaining community cohesion is important if local governance arrangements are changing, as they are in Buckinghamshire. The figures above clearly show that High Wycombe enjoys a varied multi-cultural population and there are two wards with higher percentages of Asian/Asian British population. The wards of Bowerdean and Oakridge and Castlefield have a relatively high percentage of Asian/Asian British residents when compared with other wards. However, the wards of Sands, Micklefield and Totteridge do not have any particular differences which would indicate that they are separate communities to other parts of the town in relation to demographics.

- 5.11 This provides further evidence that there is no particular evidence in favour of establishing separate parish councils for these wards and thereby different governance arrangements from the rest of High Wycombe. It may even be divisive and have a negative impact on community cohesion if specific wards are singled out and separated from the wider community which currently appears to be a stable community within the High Wycombe area. Indeed, this was raised by respondents to the consultation (as detailed further in the 'options' tables), who considered that it would be 'unfair' if some – but not all – wards were parished with their own parish councils.
- 5.12 The existence of other neighbourhood and community organisations may assist in meeting the needs of different ethnic communities, for example the Micklefield Mosque.
- 5.13 As regards the respondent profiles of the consultation questionnaire, it is noted that the percentage of white respondents far outweighed the other ethnic groups: 89% of respondents were white; 8% of respondents were Asian, and 3% of respondents were black, mixed and other.

Effective and Convenient Local Government

- 5.14 In deciding what is effective and convenient local government, the decision-maker should have regard to existing case law and recognised understanding of these terms. The concept has been long understood in the context of a local authority's ability to deliver quality local services conveniently, economically, efficiently and effectively, and to give local people a democratic voice in the decisions that affect them.
- 5.15 This requires consideration of existing governance arrangements and, in the case of High Wycombe, consideration of the impact of the new unitary Council on local governance, which would make decisions more remotely, unless local arrangements are put in place, for example with the creation of a community board or area committee.
- 5.16 The LGRC project team undertook an analysis of relevant financial, legislative, benchmarking and other information that would help inform the specific tasks. They also considered the impact of economy, efficiency and effectiveness in ensuring the continuous improvement in the delivery of the Council's corporate priorities and outcomes, both at a strategic and local level.
- 5.17 The High Wycombe Town Committee is an advisory committee on which all High Wycombe Town councillors serve. Its remit is to consider and advise the Council, the Cabinet, or any relevant committee on any issues affecting the High Wycombe Town area. These issues include, amongst others: the Wycombe Transport Strategy; High Wycombe Cemetery matters such as security and Muslim burial vaults; renaming of Library Gardens, and on street parking.
- 5.18 Consideration should also be given to the proposed localism plans set out in the County Council's business case. This involves the creation of Community Boards across the whole of Buckinghamshire. The County Council's business case is a document which the law requires the Shadow Executive to have regard to when it reaches a decision about the creation of the Town Council in accordance with the Buckinghamshire (Structural Changes) Order 2019.
- 5.19 Buckinghamshire Council also completed a public consultation between 12 August and 30 September 2015, in relation to its proposed approach for the establishment of Community Boards. This consultation found that a clear majority of respondents agreed with the proposed aims and objectives for Community Boards, as set out below.
- 5.20 As a result of this consultation, the Shadow Executive has decided – while this Review report was being prepared – that 16 Community Boards will be created in the new unitary authority, to consider a range of matters relating to the local area and make recommendations in relation to funding. The Community Boards would not themselves have more delegated powers to act. For all services, Community Boards provide an opportunity to enable:
- Consultation on major service changes;
 - Local input into the design and development of local commissioning arrangements; and

- A mechanism for facilitating partnership working on solving local issues.

- 5.21 The Community Board areas will be allocated funding to support local projects in accordance with the funding framework. Under the current plans being put forward by Buckinghamshire Council, the unparished area of High Wycombe will have a discrete Community Board which covers the unparished wards. The introduction of Community Boards will deliver a £5.17m gross investment and a net additional investment within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) of £1.5m in 2020/21 and £2m from 2021/22, after taking into account existing resources that can be re-allocated. This net additional investment can be accommodated within the MTFP. Full details of the Buckinghamshire Council reports on Community Boards can be found at paragraph 13.6 below.
- 5.22 This means that whichever of the options (set out below in paragraph 7) is ultimately implemented will run alongside the Community Boards. The Community Boards did not exist when the petitions were submitted, and could prove to be effective in fulfilling the residents' desire for local representation and efficient, effective and convenient local governance.
- 5.23 Such a Community Board for the unparished area of High Wycombe could potentially operate in a similar manner to the existing High Wycombe Town Committee. Whilst the local issues considered by each Community Board will vary, the core governance rules will apply to all. For example, the High Wycombe Community Board will provide a mechanism for Buckinghamshire Council councillors to collectively discuss and make recommendations on local issues. This would carry out the functions of the previous separate bodies in Wycombe of the Wycombe Community Partnership (Local Area Forum), run by the County Council, and the High Wycombe Town Committee, run by the District Council.
- 5.24 Alternatively, a new area committee could be established within Buckinghamshire Council. An area committee, if established, could be formed to carry out Executive functions, unlike the current High Wycombe Town Committee, as the total population of the new Buckinghamshire Council will be larger.
- 5.25 The main feature of a parish or town council is that it is independent and would be a new form of governance for the area. This would provide local governance at a tier below the new unitary council. A parish council is a separate legal entity which gives it the power to enter into contractual arrangements, employ staff and raise revenue which enables it to fund and manage local services in its area. It can also generate income and use that income to pay for services. Revenue generated or raised by the parish council must be used in the local area and be directed to the service of the local area. A town or parish council would give more local control over actions.

Current Arrangements

- 5.26 The current arrangements include Charter Trustees which deal with the historical and ceremonial aspects of the area. They precept to raise revenue to provide for this and employ a clerk to support the Trustees and the Mayor. There is also a committee within Wycombe District Council which is used to consider needs of the local area. Wycombe District Council also raises revenue through Special Expenses which is spent in the local area following consultation with the High Wycombe Town Committee. With the abolition of Wycombe District Council there is an option for the new unitary Council to create a similar local governance arrangement and to operate in a way that serves the local community through an area based board, as considered above.
- 5.27 In deciding what recommendations to make, consideration must be given to any other arrangements that have already been made, or that could be made for the purposes of community representation or community engagement in respect of the area under review. The guidance notes that "Place" matters, and that parish councils can play a central role in community leadership. It is necessary to consider also whether the same or better outcomes might be achieved by other forms of non-parish local governance. There are examples across the nation of other forms of local governance which are not based on democratically elected representatives. These include Area Committees, Neighbourhood Management, Area/Community Forums, Tenant Management Organisations, Residents and Tenants Associations and Community Associations. All such groups could exist in areas within High Wycombe and the Council could decide to recommend the formation or recognition of any of these types of local groups. Indeed, such groups could exist alongside a new parish council structure, as for instance is

the case in Wiltshire that operates an Area Committee structure as part of the Unitary Authority that functions alongside fully parished governance arrangements.

5.28 The table submitted at **Appendix 2** illustrates the list of alternative community and neighbourhood bodies in the area and in High Wycombe there is also the Town Committee. Particularly in the High Wycombe area there are a number of groups that undertake activities within the Town, including:

- The High Wycombe Business Improvement District company (“**Bidco**”) that supports business in the Town to thrive and grow, holds events and festivals including Frogfest. However, whilst it undertakes some activities that a parish council could undertake, it is only focussed on the Town centre and does not cover the wider residential areas, nor are residents represented on the Bidco, since it comprises representatives of business ratepayers. .
- Most of the ten wards are served by some form of community centre, (e.g. Micklefield Community Centre and Micklefield Community Association) and there is a main museum located in the centre of town. There are several places of worship for various faiths across High Wycombe.
- There is a High Wycombe Local Area Forum and Local Community Partnerships, the role of which is to strengthen local democratic accountability by empowering locally elected councillors to take decisions, shape and influence service delivery and Council priorities in the local community area. It is noted that the Local Area Forums will be abolished as part of the reorganisation.
- Wycombe Projects, focussing on housing homeless people, based in the Old Tea Warehouse and supporting them to move on positively and independently in life.

5.29 Whilst there is a patchwork of more local governance which differs from ward to ward, the representation of smaller community organisations in the unparished area is relatively patchy and inconsistent across the wards, and none of the groups listed above appear to have a comprehensive coverage nor breadth of functions that a parish council would be able to offer to address local needs. This reflects the LGRC report, which does not suggest that there are any strong community or neighbourhood organisations that could fulfil the role of a Parish Council instead of creating new parish councils. Indeed the petitions in three wards would suggest that such neighbourhood and community interests are insufficiently strong.

5.30 It is important to stress that all other forms of local governance arrangements can and do run alongside parished governance, so it is not necessarily an either/or consideration.

6 ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

6.1 In deciding whether or not to create any new parish councils, members need to consider whether there should be any alteration to the existing parish boundaries in the area of the Review. There was no case from the ORS report supporting a change in existing ward boundaries, and furthermore it was the unanimous view of Downley Parish Council (which is adjacent to the Disraeli ward but which did not form part of the Review) that Downley’s boundaries should remain unchanged. It is therefore recommended that no change be made to existing parish areas and boundaries.

6.2 The size of the parishes should be taken into account, particularly in determining whether the arrangements would be practical and convenient. Members also need to consider any likely population growth within the next five years – the population numbers currently available for each ward, along with estimated population growth, are set out in paragraph 7.4.

6.3 In terms of the number of councillors to be elected for parish wards, the 2010 guidance advises that, while there is no provision in legislation that each parish councillor should represent the same number of electors, the LG BCE believes it is not in the interests of effective and convenient local government to have significant differences in levels of representation between different parish wards.

6.4 The recommended number of councillors, by size of the respective electorate, are:

Electorate	Councillor Allocation
Less than 500	5 – 8
501 – 2,500	6 – 12
2,501 – 10,000	9 – 16
10,001 – 20,000	13 – 27
Greater than 20,000	13 – 31

6.5 Therefore, on the basis of the table above, the size of the electorates (as per the table at paragraph 7.4), and the 2010 guidance, it is recommended that the councillor numbers for a Town Council / parish councils are as follows:

6.5.1 Town Council for whole unparished area: 23 councillors;

6.5.2 Parish Councils for Micklefield, Sands and Totteridge would currently have [9 or 10] councillors each, although based on the current population growth expected of the Sands ward, Sands may require [13 – 27] councillors in future; and

6.5.3 Town Council for remainder of unparished area (if all three parish councils established): 17 councillors.

6.6 Should members wish to create any new parish councils it is proposed that the electoral arrangements be based on current parish and ward boundaries, with no warding except for the parish council of High Wycombe, which would be based on current ward boundaries.

6.7 The earliest that an election could realistically take place for any new parish council would be May 2021, and the Reorganisation Order can make provision for this (or 2022), rather than 2020 or 2025.

Future Boundary reviews

6.8 The Buckinghamshire Structural Changes Order provides for 147 members to be elected to the new Buckinghamshire Council. It is recognised that it will be necessary within a fairly short timescale after vesting day and certainly to be completed before 2025, to conduct a Boundary Review across the whole of the area of the new Buckinghamshire Council.

6.9 The new Buckinghamshire Council electoral arrangements will be based on county divisions, not districts and wards. As a result, they don't align with parish and ward boundaries, and therefore will be looked at by the Boundary Commission when undertaking the Boundary Review. This is similar to the steps that were taken in counties like Cornwall and Wiltshire, and those reviews led to a significant reduction in numbers and a change to the warding arrangements for the whole of the area. Parish Council elections are conducted on very similar boundaries to the wards of local authorities. For this reason, the usual practice after a Boundary Review is complete is to conduct a CGR of the area to align the parish areas to the new warding arrangements. This happened in both Cornwall and Wiltshire. This would usually also take place before the 2025 elections in order to regularise the areas at the same time and before the elections. This would mean that a further boundary review of the area of High Wycombe is likely to take place within a few years of the current Review.

7 OPTIONS IDENTIFIED FROM REVIEW

7.1 As a result of the public consultation conducted by ORS, there are three main options (and further sub-options therein) identified for the unparished area of High Wycombe, namely:

7.1.1 To establish one or more parish councils for the unparished area.

7.1.2 To make no change to the existing arrangements, but create a Community Board or area committee.

7.1.3 To defer implementing the outcome of the Review until June / July 2020.

ORS Consultation Report

- 7.2 The ORS Report and Presentation of Findings (in the Background Documents) demonstrate that there is significant support for a Town Council, and strong identification with High Wycombe as a town. Furthermore, the results show that residents of Micklefield, Sands and Totteridge are significantly more likely to each want their own parish council, which is understandable as these were the three wards that petitioned for a parish council. It is noted that there was some opposition to the creation of local governance on the basis that it was unnecessary and possibly more expensive. As such, there will be some residents who will be disappointed whatever the outcome of the Review, but this is to be expected of any public consultation exercise.
- 7.3 Although the Terms of Reference considered each of the four petitions, it did not extend the geography to consider whether the parished area of Downley which forms part of the town community area (though, as stated above, this parish has no desire to change the existing ward boundaries or responsibilities), and so this option ought not to be considered further.
- 7.4 The LGRC report observes that – as the map contained in paragraph 3.4 shows – the wards of Micklefield, Sands and Totteridge do not stand out as discrete geographical areas and visually the wards appear to be established within the town of High Wycombe. Furthermore, the population sizes of Micklefield, Sands and Totteridge do not make them stand out as being remarkable in the unparished area, nor do the sizes of electorate, as can be seen from the table below.

Population Size and Estimated Growth

Ward	Population 2011 ¹	Electorate ²	Population 2017 ³	% Difference from 2011 Census	Population 2024 ⁴
Abbey	10,365	7,716	11,081	6%	11,746
Booker and Cressex	4,974	3,751	4,861	-2%	4,764
Bowerdean	5,574	4,014	5,630	1%	5,686
Disraeli	5,891	4,668	5,605	5%	5,885
Micklefield	5,807	3,969	5,750	-1%	5,693
Oakridge and Castlefield	9,406	6,496	9,738	3%	10,030
Ryemead	7,088	5,728	8,195	14%	9,342
Sands	6,214	4,733	9,780	6%	10,367
Terriers and Amersham Hill	9,181	7,103	7,004	11%	7,774
Totteridge	8,683	4,887	7,000	6%	7,420
Total	73,183	56,065	74,644	-	78,707

- 7.5 There has also been no attempt to examine alternative patterns of parishes than the three proposed.

¹ Source: ONS Statistics for 2011 Census

² Source: WDC 2019 Electoral register

³ ONS Mid-2017 Population Estimates for 2017 Wards

⁴ Population estimates for 2024 based on same rate of change between 2011 Census and 2017 Population Estimates

7.6 This report goes on to consider the options identified in further detail, as well as the pros and cons and legal implications of the same.

7.7 **Option 1A: Establish a town council for the whole of the unparished area.**

Details	
<p>Parish and town councils vary enormously in size across the country, and continue to have two main roles: community representation and local administration. It is desirable that a parish should reflect a distinctive and recognisable community of place, with its own sense of identity.</p>	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The residents feel it is important to have either a town or parish council, particularly within a “more remote” unitary local government structure in order to have representation that takes into account residents’ needs and wishes, as well as protecting High Wycombe’s identity and heritage. Example consultee response: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>“Each year it (Wycombe) holds a ceremony unique in the world – the weighing in of the mayor and councillors, and again they are all weighed after their year in office. All these historic facts are our heritage and must be preserved and built upon for future generations”.</i> • The majority of consultees associated with High Wycombe rather than other areas. • Simpler to create one local council rather than multiple (Options 2 and 3 below). • The parish council would have the unfettered right to raise money by precept and the ability to take action independently of the new Buckinghamshire Council in order to meet local needs. • More efficient and effective local governance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra costs of precept for local electors, particularly following council tax harmonisation for unitary governance. • Extra layer of unnecessary governance. • The most common reasons for consultation respondents who did not want a town council related to concerns over wasting money, a rise in council tax and concerns over too much bureaucracy, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>“Extra layers of governance are expensive, and economies of scale increasingly decide the best option for service delivery”.</i> - <i>“Town councils are expensive and a poor use of taxpayers money [...] Any change will only cost the residents of Wycombe more money and offer an inferior service”.</i> - <i>“[It] would deliver [...] greater saving to taxpayers by eliminating repetition of bureaucracies and allow a larger regional body to have a greater buying power for services and supplies”.</i>

7.8 **Option 1B: Establish a parish council for one or more of the wards of Micklefield, Sands or Totteridge, in conjunction with a Town Council for the remainder of the unparished area.**

Details	
<p>➤ The name(s) and number of members of the parish council(s) would need to be agreed after further consideration.</p>	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This option is the most closely aligned with the requests contained in the petitions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This would involve the creation of many bodies rather than just one as in the first option, making local governance potentially less efficient and effective.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The residents feel it is important to have either a town or parish council, particularly within a “more remote” unitary council. • The parish council(s) would have the unfettered right to raise money by precept and the ability to take action independently of the new Buckinghamshire Council in order to meet local needs. • More efficient and effective local governance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra costs of precept for local electors, particularly following council tax harmonisation for unitary governance.
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7.9 Option 1C: Establish a parish council for one or more of the wards of Micklefield, Sands or Totteridge, independent of the rest of the unparished area.

Details	
As per Option 1A.	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The residents feel it is important to have either a town or parish council, particularly within a “more remote” unitary council. Example consultee responses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>“A Parish Council is essential for the future... a voice, locally to raise issues”.</i> - <i>“I do think it’s important having someone look after the area.. it’s important to have a voice to represent us”.</i> • Parish councils act as sounding boards for local opinion, and have an important role in providing and improving local services and amenities – which, as above, was identified as an important aspect to the local electors during the consultation. • The parish council(s) would have the unfettered right to raise money by precept and the ability to take action independently of the new Buckinghamshire Council in order to meet local needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of the responses to the consultation felt that it would be ‘unfair’ for only some of the wards to have a parish council, not all – for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>“I feel quite strongly that every parish should have representation and that there should be some channel that allows the local people to have a voice. Why anyone would think that it’s right to give that to three and not to the res; it’s bonkers?!”</i> • This would involve the creation of many bodies rather than just one as in the first option, making local governance potentially less efficient and effective. • Extra costs of precept for local electors, particularly following council tax harmonisation for unitary governance.

7.1 Option 2: No proposed change to existing arrangements; to include the creation of a Community Board or Area Committee for High Wycombe with powers to advise on the spending of Special Expenses.

Details
<p>The creation of a Community Board would be followed by a further Community Governance Review of the whole area of Buckinghamshire after the Local Government Boundary Review.</p> <p>Community Boards provide an opportunity to enable:</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Consultation on major service changes; ➤ Local input into the design and development of local commissioning arrangements by residents, community organisations and partners; and ➤ A mechanism for facilitating partnership working on solving local issues. <p>Budgets would be allocated to each Community Board, but spending decisions would be reserved to executive decision-makers and partners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The creation of an Area Committee would be followed by a further Community Governance Review of the whole area of Buckinghamshire after the Local Government Boundary Review. ➤ Under the Local Government Act 2000, councils can delegate to Area Committees those functions and executive decision-making that pertain to their area. Only councillors elected for the area covered can make decisions. 	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistency of structure across the whole of Buckinghamshire • Could offer convenient and efficient local governance • Community Boards: >£5m resources available across Buckinghamshire • Area Committees can have considerable delegated executive powers • Clear link with and can influence mainstream priorities and budget in the principal council • Could offer convenient and efficient local governance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertainty as to how such boards will work and how the involvement of local people in decision-making would be facilitated • Leaves part of Wycombe district unparished Ward councillors may not have much influence with the Cabinet • Potentially no involvement of local people in decision-making

7.2 Option 3: A decision to defer implementing the outcome of the Review until June / July 2020 and make no decision until after the new Buckinghamshire Council has acquired unitary status and the new Members have been elected.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deferral would mean that the Shadow Executive's decision is not rushed, and would allow more time for further consultation (if desired), now that the initial proposals have been refined. • The extra time would enable the stakeholders in the area involved to take stock following the transition to the unitary council. • It remains to be seen what the functions responsibilities and assets of the parish council would be – this would be clearer following the transition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delay in implementation of some months following completion of the Review.

8 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Parish councils have a wide range of powers under different acts of Parliament, and have the unfettered right to raise money by precept. Therefore the parish council(s) would have the ability to take action independently of the new Buckinghamshire Council in order to meet local needs.
- 8.2 In addition to the precept levied by the Charter Trustees, Wycombe District Council also levies Special Expenses in the High Wycombe area. The current (2019/2020) charge for a Band D property is made up of Special Expenses of £11.82 and the Charter Trustee precept of £2.62, totalling £14.50. This charge goes towards funding the delivery of some specific services in High Wycombe such as High Wycombe Cemetery. Special expenses are different to the council tax charged by parish councils, the amount of which is determined exclusively by the parish council. One of the main concerns about the creation of new governance that was voiced during the consultation was whether it is cost effective to put in place an additional tier of governance and to levy further tax within the area to pay for the governance. Parish councils can generate additional revenue by raising income themselves by charging for local services that they may provide such as burial services or charges for allotments provision.
- 8.3 Included below is the High Wycombe Town Committee Special Expenses budget for the year ending 31 March 2020:

HIGH WYCOMBE TOWN AREA					
Budgets for the year ending 31st March 2020					
SUMMARY					
2018/19 Approved Budget £	2018/19 Net Forecast £		2019/20 Gross Expenditure £	2019/20 Income & Credits £	2019/20 Net Expenditure £
SPECIAL EXPENSES					
167,500	163,114	Recreational Grounds (Local)	163,500	0	163,500
38,300	19,386	Allotments	19,100	(60)	19,040
166,400	172,994	High Wycombe Cemetery	292,300	(153,600)	138,700
20,500	28,000	Financial Assistance to Vol Groups	28,000	0	28,000
3,000	0	Town Twinning	3,000	0	3,000
20,000	26,700	Community Grants/Financial Assistance	26,800	0	26,800
1,700	0	War Memorial	3,000	0	3,000
2,700	0	Footway Lighting and Bus Shelter	2,700	0	2,700
420,100	410,194	Total Special Expenses	538,400	(153,660)	384,740
(11,700)	(11,700)	Capital charges credit			(11,700)
(4,600)	(4,600)	Interest on balances			(8,200)
(27,428)	(27,428)	Council Tax Support Contribution (CTS Grant)			0
376,372	366,466	Total including Interest, Capital Charges and CTS Grant	538,400	(153,660)	364,840
404,000	0	Queensway Cemetery Phase 1			404,000
780,372	366,466	Net spending for year			768,840
(898,501)	(1,033,138)	Balance b/f			(1,047,981)
780,372	366,466	Net Spending for the year			768,840
(381,309)	(381,309)	Collection Fund precept			(274,320)
(499,438)	(1,047,981)	Balance c/f			(553,461)

In addition to the above there is also a proposed annual budget of £7,000 for maintenance of the grounds of St Lawrence Closed Church Yard for 2019/20.

- 8.4 It is unlikely that an annual council tax charge based on the current Special Expenses and Charter Trustee rate only would continue if a new Council is established. If services were transferred to a new parish council for High Wycombe, the new parish council would incur additional expenses other than those required for delivering the services provided through the District Council and the Town Committee. The new council may have to fund infrastructure such as premises, support functions such as HR and accountancy and they would have to employ a 'Proper Officer' (a clerk or chief executive) and a 'Responsible Financial Officer' as a minimum. The likelihood of establishing a new parish council for High Wycombe on the illustrative council tax charge of £14.50 as shown above would therefore be unlikely. It is likely that creation of a new parish council would result in an increase to the current tax charge. The council tax precepts for parish councils in the Wycombe area range from £15 to £115.

8.5 The table below shows the following to help illustrate the difference in income a parish council can generate depending on its tax base:

- 2018/19 Band D tax base for the unparished area of High Wycombe;
- Indicative tax bases for the ten wards of High Wycombe based on the current special expenses charge, and the precept generated by this; and
- Indicative tax bases for the ten wards of High Wycombe, based on a £50 indicative charge and the precept generated by this. There is a significant variation covering other parish council charges in the area but £50 would be less than half of the highest (£115). This gives a more realistic idea of the amount that would be levied by a new parish or Town Council.

Ward	Indicative Tax Base (based on Band D properties)	Indicative Council tax charge (based on current special expenses and Charter Trustee charge)	Precept (income generated by the council tax charge)	Indicative Council tax charge (based on other Wycombe parish councils)	Precept (income generated by the council tax charge)
Abbey	3,374.66	£14.50	£48,932.57	£50.00	£168,733.00
Booker and Cressex	1,640.53	£14.50	£23,787.69	£50.00	£82,026.50
Bowerdean	1,755.56	£14.50	£25,455.62	£50.00	£87,778.00
Disraeli	2,041.59	£14.50	£29,603.06	£50.00	£102,079.50
Micklefield	1,735.88	£14.50	£25,170.26	£50.00	£86,794.00
Oakridge & Castlefield	2,841.08	£14.50	£41,195.66	£50.00	£142,054.00
Ryemead	2,505.19	£14.50	£36,325.26	£50.00	£125,259.50
Sands	2,070.02	£14.50	£30,015.29	£50.00	£103,501.00
Terriers and Amersham Hill	3,106.56	£14.50	£45,045.12	£50.00	£155,328.00
Totteridge	2,137.37	£14.50	£30,991.87	£50.00	£106,868.50
Whole of unparished area of High Wycombe	23,208.46	£14.50	£336,522.67	£50.00	£1,160,422.00

8.6 In addition to the Charter Trustee levy and the Special Expenses, the Bidco also levies tax which is also applied in the Town of High Wycombe, although it is dedicated to the business area in the centre of the unparished area, and funds are provided by non-domestic ratepayers.

8.7 It will also be important to look at the way in which the Special Expenses for the High Wycombe area are currently applied and the method by which decisions are made about the spending in relation to the unparished area.

8.8 While it is possible for the principal council to establish a parish council and to determine its first year precept, in subsequent years new members would have the opportunity to take independent decisions about revenue charges, which is likely to see some increase to local tax payers over time.

Local Government Re-organisation

8.9 The transition that is underway in Buckinghamshire is the most significant governance change in the area for over forty years. The size and significance of the transition programme together with the

delivery of existing services within the area is fully absorbing the available resource. It has also been necessary to recruit significant additional resource from outside the area to deliver transition.

- 8.10 The creation of a new council – particularly a Town Council of the size proposed for the whole of the unparished area of High Wycombe – is a significant undertaking. It will necessarily require a review and decisions about a range of other matters, including the name of the new parish or town; the electoral arrangements; the number of members and the proposed staffing structure of the new Council as well as the financing arrangements referred to above. The creation of a Town Council would also lead to the dissolution of the Charter Trustees and the transfer of their assets and any liabilities to the new Council. This would all be required to establish the most basic of parish or Town Councils. The impact of this work on the wider transition could be significant. It would present challenges if this was to be delivered at the current time, with all the work required to implement the new unitary authority.
- 8.11 If the new parish council(s) takes over responsibility for both functions then the funding of £14.50 for the Special Expenses and the Charter Trustees arrangements could enable the current level of funding to the area to continue, including to the Cemetery and to meet other local needs.

9 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 As noted in paragraph 3.1, the Review ought to be concluded by 10 December 2019 and published as soon as practicable, however a decision to implement the recommendations is not required to be made during the transition to the unitary authority structure.
- 9.2 Advice from Leading Counsel states that the Review should make a recommendation, *“but the recommendation could be to decide between identified options, with the pros and cons of each identified. These options could include a deferral of a substantive decision”*. Furthermore, *“the conclusion can be not to make any change at this time. But this would entail further consultation at a later time and a decision in all the circumstances then prevailing”*. Further consultation would be required at that stage, which would be based on any preferred option of the new Buckinghamshire Council.
- 9.3 Leading Counsel further advises that *“it could be reasonable to delay the making of the Reorganisation Order until after the first business meeting of the New Council, notwithstanding that this will be well after the CGR review has been completed and the ordinary election date of parish councils will have passed”*. The delay should be for a reasonable period, before the results of the consultation and advice provided on the same become obsolete, following which the process would effectively need to start afresh, rather than being consultation being refreshed in the event that deferral was only for a reasonable period after the new Buckinghamshire Council is operational.
- 9.4 In making any decision the Shadow Executive needs to take into account all relevant considerations, ignore irrelevant considerations and not come to a decision that no reasonable authority could come to. Regard must be had to the Council’s fiduciary duties to Council Tax payers and other contributors to the Council’s finances.
- 9.5 Relevant considerations include:
- 9.5.1 The outcome of the consultation process which must be conscientiously taken into account. The consultation outcome does not need to be followed, particularly in light of the relatively small response, but must be properly considered alongside other relevant considerations.
- 9.5.2 The other ongoing changes to local governance including the effects of transition to unitary governance on representation, access to services and support from the new authority and existing organisations.
- 9.5.3 The financial impact of tax harmonisation between all of the district councils across Buckinghamshire, which may adversely affect Wycombe residents, and the effect of harmonising in one year.

- 9.5.4 The likelihood of the new Buckinghamshire Council undertaking a CGR itself following transition.
- 9.5.5 The capacity of the new Council to address the implementation of the review in the near future due to limited resources.
- 9.5.6 Consideration should also be given to the localism plans set out in the Buckinghamshire County Council business case and the proposed creation of Community Boards and their potential to create more effective and convenient local governance. The business case is a document to which the law requires the Shadow Executive to have regard when it reaches a decision about the creation of the Town/parish Councils in accordance with the Buckinghamshire (Structural Changes) Order 2019.
- 9.5.7 Alternative governance is possible within the area which could continue to provide effective and convenient local governance, and there is the additional option under the unitary Council (not previously available in Wycombe) for the Town Committee to continue to carry out functions, potentially with delegated powers as an Area Committee.
- 9.6 Where a reasoned decision is taken explaining the rationale for departing from statutory guidance that is reasonable and not perverse, then a court will not usually overturn any decision made by that authority (provided it is Wednesbury reasonable in all of the circumstances). The court does not substitute its own judgement in place of the authority's judgement as to the relevance and impact of particular considerations – it decides whether the decision-maker has properly been advised and addressed its mind to all relevant considerations.
- 9.7 The 2007 Act also prescribes when a CGR must make certain recommendations as to whether a newly constituted parish should have a parish council:
- 9.7.1 If a parish has fewer than 150 electors it must not have a parish council; and
- 9.7.2 If it has more than 1000 electors, it should have a parish council.
- 9.8 Therefore, if the Shadow Executive proceeds with any of the first three options, they must also recommend that the new parish should have a parish council, given the size of the electorates of the wards and area as a whole.
- 9.9 The 2010 guidance notes that the aim of these thresholds is to extend the more direct participatory form of governance provided by parish meetings to a larger numbers of electors. Equally, the thresholds help to ensure that both the population of a new parish for which a council is to be established is of sufficient size to justify its establishment and also that local people are adequately represented.
- 9.10 Charter Trustees were originally created by s.246 of the Local Government Act 1972 to maintain the continuity of town charters and city charters on the abolition of districts with borough status. Duties of charter trustees are ceremonial, rather than administrative, and include the election of a Mayor.
- 9.11 Creating a town or parish council for the whole or part of the unparished area of High Wycombe would dissolve the Charter Trustees, and the 2010 guidance notes that proposals for doing this need to be judged against the following considerations:
- 9.11.1 the effect on the historic cohesiveness of the area; and
- 9.11.2 what are the other community interests in the area?
- 9.11.3 Is there a demonstrable sense of community identity encompassing the charter trustee area?
- 9.12 From the ORS report it does not appear as though there are particularly strong community interests in the High Wycombe area, although one resident specifically expressed opposition in a written

submission to the dissolution of the Charter Trustees in the event of a new town council being created, and concern was raised about preserving the heritage of High Wycombe.

- 9.13 If it is recommended that a new parish is constituted, the recommendations must include:
- 9.13.1 the suggested name of the parish;
 - 9.13.2 whether or not the new parish should have a parish council (see paragraph 9.6.2 above); and
 - 9.13.3 whether or not the new parish should have one of the alternative styles (i.e. community, neighbourhood, or village).
- 9.14 The 2010 guidance explains that the 'alternative styles' of parish are available in recognition that, where a new parish is being created, people living there may wish for the style of their parish council to reflect the local community in a different way and may prefer one of the alternative styles.
- 9.15 Issues relating to financial, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report. It is anticipated that an Equalities Impact Assessment will be published when the final recommendation has been selected.

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 This review report recommends that the Council:
- 10.1.1 Establishes a parish council or parish councils for:
 - 1A the whole of the unparished area of High Wycombe to become a Town Council in due course;
 - 1B one or more of the wards of Micklefield, Sands or Totteridge, in conjunction with a Town Council for the remainder of the unparished area; or
 - 1C one or more of the parishes of Micklefield, Sands or Totteridge leaving the remainder unparished.
- Should members decide to create any new parish councils it is proposed that:
- (i) there be no alteration to existing parish areas and that such parish councils reflect the existing parish areas;
 - (ii) the name of such parish council(s) be the name of the parish and High Wycombe in respect of a parish council for the whole of the unparished area or the whole of the unparished area except for Micklefield, Totteridge and/or Sands; and
 - (iii) the electoral arrangements be based on current parish and ward boundaries, with no warding except for the parish council of High Wycombe which would be based on current ward boundaries.
- AND** wait to progress the Reorganisation Order until the new Buckinghamshire Council becomes operational as a unitary authority, deferring implementation of the Review until after the transition has been completed with the expectation that new local Councils could be in place by May 2021 at the earliest;
- 10.1.2 **OR:** Defers taking a decision until after the new Buckinghamshire Council is created, to enable the new Council to decide the arrangements, recognising that further consultation may be necessary at that stage;

- 10.1.3 **OR:** Takes no action to create any further parish councils in the unparished area of Wycombe because other means of effective, convenient local governance reflective of community interests and identity will be established through the new Buckinghamshire Unitary Council and the creation of a Community Board and/or an Area Committee, and a further CGR will be undertaken following a Boundary Review of the new Buckinghamshire Council

11 NEXT STEPS

- 11.1 If the Shadow Executive chooses to accept the final recommendations to create a new town council and /or parish councils, a Reorganisation Order will be drafted and this will be published together with the reasons for the changes, making maps available for public inspection. The Order may also include provisions with respect to the transfer of staff and assets. There are also various bodies that must be notified of the changes including the Local Government Boundary Committee for England.
- 11.2 The Shadow Executive will also need to consider the transfer of services, assets and staff to any new parish council(s). This separate piece of work will need to be undertaken outside of the CGR process.
- 11.3 If the Shadow Executive elects to defer implementation until the new Buckinghamshire Council has acquired unitary status, a timeline for implementing the results of the Review will be drawn up and this will be published together with the reasons for the deferral.

12 APPENDICES

- 12.1 Appendix 1: ORS Presentation of Consultation Findings
- 12.2 Appendix 2: Community and Neighbourhood Organisations
- 12.3 Appendix 3: Map of High Wycombe wards in the Review, showing the current number of councillors

13 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 13.1 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, Part 4.
- 13.2 Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) – Guidance on Community Governance Reviews 2010
- 13.3 LGRC Report: www.wycombe.gov.uk/highwycombeCGR
- 13.4 ORS Report: Consultation on Findings: www.wycombe.gov.uk/highwycombeCGR
- 13.5 Pack of public documents, including the Terms of Reference, is available here: www.wycombe.gov.uk/highwycombeCGR
- 13.6 Community Board Reports can be found via this link, in Agenda item 7: <https://shadow-buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=136&MId=135>

Bevan Brittan LLP

12 December 2019