

Community Governance Review

Introduction

Cotswold District Council (the Council) is proposing a Community Governance Review to consider requests submitted by two parish councils. The changes include one parish council seeking to move to a parish meeting and another seeking to increase the number of councillors.

A Community Governance Review (CGR) allows for these requests to be considered by all stakeholders and provides the opportunity to put in place strong, clearly defined boundaries, which reflect local identities and facilitate effective and convenient local government.

The Council would usually undertake a CGR every 5 years or so, however considering these requests and the possibility of changes local government more generally, we are asking all parishes within the district if there are any changes they would like to be considered.

A CGR can consider the following:

- amending the area of the parish
- abolishing a parish council and moving to a parish meeting
- creating a new parish council
- changing the name of the parish
- electoral arrangements i.e. warding, number of councillors
- grouping or de-grouping of parishes

Any changes requested should:

- reflect the identities and interests of the community;
- be effective and convenient;

they should also take into account:

- the impact of community governance arrangements on community cohesion; and
- the size, population and boundaries of a local community or Parish; and
- any other arrangements for community representation or engagement

In undertaking the review, the Council will be guided by Part 4, Chapter 3, of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, and the Local Government (Parish and Parish Councils) (England) Regulations 2008.

More information

To help with any discussions for changes, the following is a summary of changes that can be requested. If you need more information or assistance, please do get in touch.

Parish Boundaries

- Parish boundaries must be readily identifiable by permanent features, e.g. watercourses, major roads, or railway lines. Boundaries between parishes should also be easily identifiable, often with open space between built communities.

Potential Growth

- Consideration will be given to any current and planned or potential development within the area during a period of five years from the start of the Review process
- This will seek to 'future-proof' the review and avoid the need for further reviews in the short to medium term.

Council Size

The Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) specifies that each parish council must have at least five councillors.

There are no rules relating to the allocation of councillors between parish wards, other than each parish ward must have at least one parish councillor.

Whilst consistency across councils is important, local circumstances are key in any decision and each area will be considered on its own merits.

The Council will have regard to:

- Population and electorate
- Geography
- Pattern of communities within the area
- Existing levels of representation
- Potential growth within the area over 5 years from the start of the review
- Take-up of seats at elections

The Council has adopted the following scale in determining the number of councillors:

Electorate	Number of Councillors
not exceeding 200	5

201 - 500	7
501 - 1,000	9
1,001 - 2,000	11
2,001 - 4,000	13
over 4,000	15

This scale is a guide but is not absolutely prescriptive, and the Council acknowledges that other scales are operated across the country, including a more complex version devised by the National Association of Local Councils (involving smaller electorate band widths and incremental increases of one across councilor numbers).

In the case of any potential increase in councillor numbers, the Council will have regard to whether previous elections and by-elections have been contested or whether there have been difficulties in attracting sufficient candidates to stand for election, leading to uncontested elections and/or a need to co-opt members in order to fill vacancies. Similarly, a particular issue or temporary set of circumstances is not likely to support a permanent change in numbers.

In the case of any potential decrease in councillor numbers, this Council will need to look at the frequency of contested elections, whether co-option has been the 'norm', and whether a parish council has functioned perfectly well with reduced numbers over a period of time.

Parish Warding

Parish warding is the division of a parish into wards for the purpose of electing councillors. The Review will consider any existing or proposed parish wards, including the number and boundaries of any wards, the number of councillors to be elected for any ward and the names of wards.

There should be a clear rationale behind any warding (or de-warding) proposals, which reflects the identities and interests of the community of the area and is effective and convenient.

Regard should also be had to the size, population and boundaries of any ward, together with the number of councillors to be elected for each ward and the number of electors they will represent.

Consideration will also be given to whether the number, or distribution, of local government electors for the parish would make a single election of councillors impracticable or inconvenient; and/or whether it is desirable that any area or areas of the parish should be separately represented.

'Small' Parishes and Grouping of Parishes

It is possible to group parishes together to form a common parish council. This may be worthy of consideration by two or more adjoining small parishes, who wish to move from meeting to council status, particularly as parishes with less than 150 electors are unable to establish their own parish councils.

Existing Parish Councils with Small Electorates

There are a number of parish councils in the District with either under or only just over the threshold of 150 whereby, under current legislation, a parish council could be created.

Provided these Councils still reflect community identities and provide effective and convenient local government, it can continue to have a parish council - i.e. there will be no automatic presumption to seek to dissolve any existing parish council with an electorate of 150 or less.

However, these councils may seek to move to a parish meeting and this can be considered as part of the review process.

Parish Meeting Areas with Larger Electorates

For parish meeting areas with more than 150 electors, the review process provides an opportunity for those areas to seek council status, if they wish to.

New Parishes

Principles to be taken into account when creating new parish councils are:

- where the number of electors is 1,000 or more, a parish council must be created
- where the number of electors is between 151 and 999, a parish council may be created with a parish meeting being the alternative form of governance
- where the number of electors is 150 or fewer, a parish council shall not be created.

Although the District is currently entirely parished, it is still possible to create a new parish either by amalgamating two or more parishes (similar to grouping) or by separating part of an existing parish (similar to warding but on a larger scale).

It would need to be demonstrated that any proposed new parish would reflect the identities and interests of the area better than the existing arrangements and would also be effective and convenient.

Abolition of Existing Parishes and Dissolution of Existing Parish Councils

The abolition of parishes, and dissolution of parish councils, is rare, and would not be undertaken unless clearly justified. Clear and sustained local support for such a course of action would need to be demonstrated.

Nevertheless, the dissolution of a council, and a reversion to meeting status, might be the best course of action to retain effective and convenient government of the area.

Parish Names

Parishes may request a change to their name to reflect new or changed circumstances.

Submitting Proposals

Proposals for change can be made by parish/town councils or parish meetings. Any proposals should clearly identify the change requested and the support, or otherwise for it. Parish/town councils must consider any proposal for change at a formal meeting, however proposals from electors will be considered. Such proposals will be shared with the relevant parish council for comment before any included in the review process.

Any requests for changes to parish areas should be made in writing either by email to elections@cotswold.gov.uk or by post to Electoral Services, Cotswold District Council, Trinity Road, Cirencester, GL7 1PX