

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEWS

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1.0 Summary

- 1.1 The Council is requested to endorse the recommendations of its Community Governance Working Party (CGWP) in respect of the reviews recently undertaken in the Oswestry and Tasley areas, following publication of the Final Proposals documents.
- 1.2 This work was undertaken by a Working Party comprising Mr D G Lloyd, (Chairman) Mr T Barker, Mrs K D Calder, Mr N J Hartin, Mr A N Mosley, Mrs D M Shineton and Mr P M Whiteman, established by Cabinet on 13 April 2011.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended:
- (a) That the Council adopts the recommendations of the Community Governance Working Party in respect of Oswestry, specified in Section 2 of the Report attached at Appendix 1, and consent be sought from the Local Government Boundary Committee for England to make the Reorganisation Order.
 - (b) That the Council approves the recommendations of the Community Governance Working Party in respect of Tasley, contained in Section 2 of its report attached at Appendix 3.

REPORT

3.0 Oswestry Review

3.1 This review commenced on 16 May 2011 when the Terms of Reference were published by the CGWP. A large number of local organisations, including the four separate parish and town councils, the political parties, elected members, stakeholders and local residents were contacted and invited to submit their comments in respect of the Council's proposals to counteract the anomalies created at the time of local government reorganisation in Shropshire. This concerned the overlay of new electoral boundaries which in 2013 will result in the redrawing of Oswestry Town Council's warding arrangements, thereby creating a serious imbalance in the levels of electoral equality within the town and a serious imbalance in the councillor : elector ratios in four of the town's existing six wards. Full details are contained in paragraphs 3.2 to 3.4 of Appendix 1 to this report.

3.2 In addition, the opportunity was also taken to consider generally:

- The number of members of the Oswestry Town Council;
- The division of the parish into wards;
- The number of members per ward;
- The names of the individual wards;
- Whether there should be any minor adjustments to the boundaries of the town and the adjoining parishes, in particular around the A5/A483 Oswestry By-Pass, as well as the Trefonen Road/Broomhall Close area of the town; and
- Whether there should be any other changes to Oswestry Town Council's mutual parish boundaries with the Oswestry Rural, Selattyn and Gobowen and Whittington Parish Councils.

3.3 Very few responses were received from those contacted at the time of the initial invitation with the exception of the Oswestry Town Council and the surrounding three parish councils. These bodies have been actively engaged in the process from the beginning and have given considerable help and assistance throughout. At the draft stage the CGWP published proposals for a town council with 18 seats, based on revised external boundaries and with five new town wards. However, local concerns regarding democratic accountability and transparency led to a revised set of Final Proposals.

3.4 Again, these were based on a town council of 18 seats and revised external boundaries for the town, but with seven new town wards. These changes improved the electoral equality across all of the new wards such that all of

them are within the 10% tolerance normally expected by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE). They have also met with the universal approval of the Oswestry Town Council and the three surrounding parish councils.

- 3.5 Oswestry's present electoral arrangements are subject to a five year moratorium imposed by the Electoral Commission in 2009 as part of the reorganisation of local government in Shropshire. So, the Council is required to first obtain the consent of the LGBCE before making the Reorganisation Order necessary to affect these changes.
- 3.6 Similarly, because the moratorium affects a number of unitary divisional boundaries, the LGBCE's approval is also required before the town council and unitary divisional boundaries in and around Oswestry can again be made coterminous. Discussions on this point are ongoing and the Council has been assured that the requisite orders can be made in good time for the local government elections in 2013.
- 3.7 Since the publication of the Final Proposals document, one further representation has been received from Mr and Mrs Cato of Broomhall Close, Oswestry, a copy of which is attached at Appendix 2. It concerns an increase in the level of Council Tax from householders in Broomhall Close because of the different levels of Council Tax levied by Oswestry Town Council and Oswestry Rural Parish Council. For a Band D property this amounts to £48.32 and for a Band F property £69.79 based on 2011/12 Council Tax levels.
- 3.8 This same point was made at the draft proposal stage by a neighbour and was considered by the CGWP during its deliberations. The Working Party concluded that the additional cost of approximately £1 per week (for a Band D property) to be outweighed by the overall improvements in electoral equality across the town, as well as the benefit of more effective and convenient local governance for the residents of the Broomhall Close/Trefonen Road area.
- 3.9 The Council is therefore requested to adopt the recommendations of the CGWP, set out in Section 2 of Appendix 1 and to seek the consent of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to make a Reorganisation Order for Oswestry.

4.0 Tasley Review

- 4.1 The Council gave public notice of the Community Governance Review of Tasley and also published the terms of reference for that review on 1 August 2011. This was in response to a request from the Parish Council to an increase in membership from five to seven councillors.
- 4.2 At present the five members represent 627 electors, giving a ratio of 125.4 electors per councillor. The number of electors in Tasley is set to increase markedly by 2016 to a projected total of 1,042 electors. This would result in the ratio increasing to 208.4 electors per councillor unless the number of councillors is increased.

- 4.3 The CGWP considers that Tasley Parish Council's request for two additional members is consistent with the formula published by the Aston Business School and also the National Association of Local Councils which has been used locally in recent years as a guide.
- 4.4 As with the Oswestry review, details of the proposals were made known to local residents, local members and other stakeholders at the initial, draft and final proposal stages. Comments received from the two unitary councillors for the Bridgnorth West and Tasley division, Mr L J P Winwood and Mr J Hurst-Knight, are supportive of an increase in membership.
- 4.5 By increasing the total number of members to seven, the Parish Council will reduce the councillor : elector ratio to 1:148 electors per councillor and provide effective and convenient local governance for the whole of the Tasley Parish.
- 4.6 Accordingly, the Council is requested to adopt the recommendations of the Community Governance Working Party.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Keith Barrow

Local Member

Keith Barrow, Joyce Barrow, Martin Bennett, Bill Benyon, Vince Hunt, David Lloyd, Trevor Davies, Steve Charmley, John Hurst-Knight and Les Winwood.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Final Proposals – Oswestry

Appendix 2 – Schedule of comments received following the publication of the final proposals document.

Appendix 3 – Final Proposals – Tasley