

## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** Council

**DATE:** 27<sup>th</sup> September 2018

**CONTACT OFFICER:** Community Governance Review Group  
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**WARD(S):** All

### **PART 1** **FOR DECISION**

#### **COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW OF PARISH COUNCIL ARRANGEMENTS** **WITHIN THE BOROUGH OF SLOUGH**

##### **1. Purpose of Report**

At its meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2018 the Council agreed to carry out a Community Governance Review within the Borough. The Terms of Reference of the Review were agreed on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2018 and a Member Review Panel was established to consider the review and make recommendations to the Council.

This report considers the responses to the first stage of the public consultation carried out as part of Review having regard to the law and the guidance on Community Governance Reviews issued by the (then) Department for Communities and Local Government.

##### **2. Recommendations**

The Council is requested to consider the recommendations of the Community Governance Review Group and determine whether to Resolve:

- (a) That in the light of the response to the first stage of the consultation a further consultation be undertaken, in accordance with the guidance on Community Governance Reviews, with the electors and other interested parties to gauge views on the future of Britwell, Colnbrook with Poyle and Wexham Court Parishes and their Councils as set out in the report.
- (b) That electors and other interested parties be consulted on proposed changes to the area and name of Wexham Court Parish Council and its electoral arrangements as set out in paragraph 7.23 and map attached at Appendix 2.
- (c) That a case for a new parish council in Slough has not been made.

If the Council agrees resolution (a) to (c) above, that the Council Resolve:

- (a) That the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage of the consultation process comprise the measures set out in section 4 (a) - Financial Implications, of the report, with the formal advisory

poll taking the form of all postal poll; and that the costs be met from within existing budgets.

- (b) That the Returning Officer be authorised to determine all matters in relation to undertaking the consultation following consultation with the Chair of the Review Group and other members of the Review Group if time permits including amending the timetable for the review if required.

### 3. **The Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan**

Effective governance arrangements are central to a successful modernised and transformational council and the Community Governance Review process is an essential part of those arrangements

### 4. **Other Implications**

#### (a) Financial

There will be a financial cost in conducting the next stage of the Community Governance Review particularly in respect of the consultation process. Costs to date for the Review have been accommodated within existing budgets.

Estimated costs for the Stage 2 consultation process are dependant on the nature and extent of the consultation undertaken and options are set out at Paragraph 8.4. It is anticipated that the consultation will comprise:

- A formal postal advisory poll in each of the three Parish areas
- A letter explaining the stage 2 consultation delivered to all residents in the parishes, interested groups and parties seeking comments and
- A letter to Parish Councils seeking views and
- Public notice of the consultation in local newspapers, council offices and the website.

Depending on the nature of the consultation, costs would range from £12,500 to £45,000. There is no specific budget provision for these additional costs, as far as possible, they will be contained within existing budgets.

#### Risk Management

| <b>Risk</b>                                   | <b>Mitigating action</b>                      | <b>Opportunities</b>  |
|---|---|---|
| Legal<br>Risk of legal challenge to decisions | Seek legal advice at all stages of the Review | Proposals must bring about improved community engagement, better local democracy and more effective and convenient delivery of local services |
| Property                                      | N/A   | N/A   |
| Human Rights                                  | None at this stage                            |   |

|                   |   |  |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Health and Safety | N/A   |  |
| Employment Issues | None at this stage  |  |
| Equalities Issues | EIA prepared  |  |
| Community Support | Ensure consultation is appropriate and engages all interested parties so that community support for the way forward is effectively sought | Community engagement improved as a result of the recommendations of the review |
| Communications    | Consultation is appropriate and engages all interested parties  | Residents given the opportunity to influence how their local area is governed  |
| Community Safety  | N/A   | N/A  |

|                        |   |  |  |
|------------------------|---|--|--|
| Financial              | See above – No financial provision exists for this review and costs to date have been absorbed within existing budget provision. Budget to carry out extensive consultation needs to be identified. There will be additional costs associated with on-going legal advice and any subsequent challenge to recommendations could involve additional legal costs | Ensure Statutory Guidance on Reviews is followed and recommendations are evidence based. |  |
| Timetable for delivery | The Review must be completed within one year of commencement.   |  |  |
| Project capacity       | Head of Democratic Services is the Review Manager currently supporting the Review with Project Officer support. ERS would be commissioned to administer any advisory poll.  |  |  |
| Reputation             | Ensure Statutory Guidance on Reviews is followed and recommendations are evidence based   |  |  |

(b) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

The conduct of a CGR is governed by Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 ("the Act"). Slough Borough Council as a principal council must comply with both Part 4, Chapter 3 (Sections 79 to 102) of the Act and the Terms of

Reference adopted by the Council for the purpose of carrying out the review. Section 100 of the Act states that a principal council must have regard to the Guidance on Community Governance Reviews the relevant sections of which are set out in full in Paragraph 8 of this report.

With regard to the dissolution of a Parish Council, the Council needs to be satisfied on the following points in each case:

- (a) Whether there is clear evidence of local support for the abolition of the parish and the dissolution of the parish council;
- (b) Whether such support has been maintained over a sufficient length of time (i.e. that the case for abolition has not been generated in the short term by an unpopular decision of the council, or a particular year's parish precept etc);
- (c) Whether the support is sufficiently informed (i.e. that a properly constituted parish council has had an opportunity to exercise parish functions and that local people therefore have had an opportunity to assess whether the parish council can contribute positively to local quality of life); and
- (d) Whether it can be demonstrated that suitable alternative arrangements are in place for engaging the local community.

(c) Equalities Impact Assessment

An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) was completed at the start of the Community Governance Review.

**5. Supporting Information**

- 5.1 At its meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2018 the Council agreed to carry out a Community Governance Review within the Borough area including the parishes and their electoral arrangements. The Council in May approved terms of reference for the review and a timetable, and appointed a Review Group comprising the Commissioner for Transformation and Performance, three further Labour Group Members and two Members of the opposition to consider the review and make recommendations to the Council.
- 5.2 The aim of the review is to consider and bring about improved community engagement, better local democracy and more effective and convenient delivery of local services, and to ensure that electors across the whole Borough are treated equitably and fairly.

**6. Background**

- 6.1 There are currently three parish councils within the Borough.
- 6.2 The Council must as part of the review consult with local people and take into account any representations made in connection with the review. The review must ensure that the proposed community governance reflects the interests and identities of the community. It must also make certain that the arrangements are effective and convenient for the electors of that community. The Review Group has now completed the evidence gathering first stage of the Review.

- 6.3 As agreed by the Council the review is focused primarily on the parished areas of the Borough but may also consider other forms of community representation which local people may have set up in the Borough and which help make a distinct contribution to the community such as residents' associations, community forums, neighbourhood working groups, tenant management organisations etc.
- 6.4 As Members will know, there are active residents and community groups in various parts of the Borough and it is clearly important that the review should also take these into account, especially if specific proposals are put forward by local people during the consultation stages of the review.
- 6.5 The review may consider the creation, abolition, merging or altering of parish councils and any subsequent electoral arrangements. New parishes may be created as a result of the geography of an area, the make-up of the local community, or sense of identity. All parishes must fall within the existing borough boundary. The timetable for the Review is set out at Appendix 1.

## **7. Results of Public Consultation**

- 7.1 The Review was launched on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2018 with a Council webpage, public notices posted at St Martins Place, libraries and community centres and notification by letter and email to local community and leisure organisations, housing associations, business organisations, the police, the health authority and local schools. Parish Councils were also formally notified together with the National Association of Local Councils, Berkshire Association of Local Councils, the Slough District Association of Local Councils and the Slough Council for Voluntary Service.
- 7.2 Parish council chairs were invited to make submissions to the Review Group and meetings were held with each of them in July and drop-in sessions arranged in each of the parish areas. Each Parish Council was asked to provide the following information (in advance of their meeting with the Review Group):
- a profile of the Parish Council;
  - an assessment of how the Council is doing;
  - what they think they do best, and the Council's plans and ambitions for the future;
  - an outline of the specific services the Parish Council provides;
  - a breakdown of the council's costs of providing public services;
  - an assessment of levels of take up and use of the services provided, and the income received from fees and charges etc;
  - Financial/budget information for the year 2017/2018 and 2018/19.
  - The attendance record of Parish Councillors at Parish council meetings;
  - A breakdown of staff employed by the Parish council;
  - Information on what methods the Parish Council currently uses to communicate with residents;
  - Their view of Parish arrangements and how they have operated and are perceived since the last review;
  - Any advice/training/support the Parish council has received since the last review.
- 7.3 Submissions have been made to the Review Group by the parish councils and 10 letters and emails have been received in response to the review, one of which

relates to Chalvey, five relate to Colnbrook with Poyle, none to Britwell, three to Wexham Court and one to the Langley area. In addition, 73 responses have been received to a survey carried out by the Slough Labour Party in the Wexham Court parish area. These responses are discussed in the following paragraphs. The Review Group noted that there had not been a large volume of responses to the first stage of consultation and took this into account in making their recommendations.

(a) Colnbrook with Poyle Parish Council

- 7.4 On 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2018 the Review Group met Councillor Pooja Bedi, Chair of the Parish Council together with Councillor Dexter Smith, (Chair of Policy and Finance Committee) who made a submission as part of their response to the public consultation. The submission and the notes of the meeting will be published on the Council's website together with the other views, comments and submissions received. The Review Group was advised that the Parish Council had been founded in 1995 at the request of the local community and played a significant role in looking out for and protecting the interests of those in the Parish. The Parish Council advised that it was undertaking sustained work in building a cohesive community that residents could take pride in and that Parish Councillors devoted a great deal of time and commitment to helping make the parish a better place in which to live and work.. They advised that there were several key matters affecting the area that the Parish Council was involved in including Heathrow expansion, cargo distribution and the Western Rail Link to Heathrow.
- 7.5 Five of the written submissions received in response to the review related to Colnbrook with Poyle Parish Council. A response received on behalf of several local businesses was positive and supportive of the Parish Council and another felt that the work of the Parish Council was important to the residents as it was the driving force to effect change and improvements. However others indicated a view that the Parish Council did nothing to benefit Colnbrook, that the current parish council was unviable and that, if it was to continue, needed to be more cohesive, functional and engaged with the local community.
- 7.6 Several residents attended a drop in session n Colnbrook on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2018. The notes of the meeting will be published on the Council's website. Views expressed at the drop in included concerns that the Parish Council did not communicate effectively or engage openly with residents and were not viewed as being open and accessible in terms of the information provided on the website and notice boards and that politics got in the way of business. Others were unclear as to the role and value of the Parish Council.
- 7.7 The Group acknowledged that the submissions with regard to the Parish contained conflicting views about the value of the services that the Parish provided and whether it benefitted, or was representative of, Colnbrook. The 2013 review had had concerns about the Parish Council's engagement with local people and the Borough Council had reserved the right to test public opinion in an advisory poll at or after the parish council elections in 2015. The Review Group did not consider it had been provided with substantial evidence that the parish council was engaging more widely with local people and had received views where the value of the Parish council was queried. The Working Group noted that the Parish Council had been established relatively recently (1995) at the request of local people and since that

time public opinion on the effectiveness of the Parish Council had never been gauged.

- 7.8 The Group agreed that electors and other interested parties should be consulted on whether the Parish is providing effective services and engaging with local people and that an advisory poll of Parish electors be conducted as part of the second stage of consultation.

### **Review Group Recommendation – Colnbrook with Poyle Parish Council**

- 7.9 **The Review Group believes based on the evidence provided that there is a case for formally consulting on whether the Parish is providing effective services and engages effectively with local people and is therefore recommending that current Parish Council electors and other interested parties are formally consulted on this.**

#### (b) Britwell Parish Council

- 7.10 In July 2018 the Review Group met Councillor Ollie Isernia Chair of the Parish Council together with Parish Councillor Sean Wright and Jonathan Holder, clerk of Britwell Parish Council as part of the process of gathering evidence for the review. The Parish Council had provided information in advance of the meeting, as requested. During that meeting Councillor Isernia and Wright drew attention to the work and operation of the Parish since it had been reduced in size both geographically and in the numbers of Councillors as part of the 2013 Community Governance Review and outlined their future plans and ideas. Following an initial period where the Parish Council had to deal with a serious fraud matter the Chair confirmed that the parish Council had been able to focus increasingly on delivering value to those within the Parish.
- 7.11 The notes of the meeting will be published on the Council's website together with additional submissions received from the Parish Council following the meeting.
- 7.12 None of the written submissions received in response to the review relate to Britwell Parish Council. One resident attended the drop in session on 10<sup>th</sup> April - The notes of the drop in session will be published on the Council's website. The view expressed was that the Parish Council needed to be more transparent/accountable and that there was not enough engagement with residents. It should however be borne in mind that this view expressed was from one resident.
- 7.13 At their meeting with the Review Group held on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2018 the Parish drew particular attention to the fact that the Council had set up a Strategy Working Party in July 2017 which was meeting monthly and the Council was open to new ways to utilise the Community Centre and grounds to local people. The Parish advised that it wished to broaden ways in which residents can access its facilities and receive greater benefit than those from outside the Parish by developing a 'resident advantage' card. The Parish advised what methods it used to communicate with residents and that it was intending to canvass residents' views on proposed utilisation of Council services. In their presentation to the Review Group they drew attention to the good progress that had been made in strengthening the audit processes of the Parish and they also outlined future plans and new ideas.

- 7.14 However the Review Group in considering the information provided were not convinced that the Parish Council has made any significant improvements in the way it works, other than removing its direct involvement in running the bar, or that it was succeeding in bringing the community together despite it being a smaller Parish Council which the Borough Council had hoped would enable it to operate in a more strategic and focussed way and bring about improved community engagement and more effective and convenient delivery of local services. The Review Group also have concerns about the Parish Council's ability to operate effectively and transparently and, whilst some of its services are valued by local people, the Group believe that these and other services could be provided more efficiently and effectively for local residents by other means.
- 7.15 As part of the 2013 Community Governance Review the Borough Council formally consulted Parish electors on the abolition of the Parish Council and the outcome of the Postal Poll that was carried out was in favour of abolition. The Borough Council resolved that it would test public opinion again in four years time.

### **Review Group Recommendation – Britwell Parish Council**

- 7.16 **The Review Group believes based on the evidence provided that there is a continuing case for abolition of the parish and dissolution of Britwell Parish Council and is therefore recommending that current Parish Council electors and other interested parties are formally consulted on this option.**
- 7.17 The Review Group have considered what arrangements might be put in place to engage with communities in the area if the parish were to be abolished. The existing parish council building could continue to be used, linked with its outdoor recreation space, as a centre for local young people and sport. Members noted that the Britwell Hub provides a venue for recreational and social activities as well as learning and the local library. Parties and events could be supported by a temporary bar. A local Neighbourhood Action Group was established as part of the estate regeneration and residents have played a big part in supporting regeneration. A Northern Neighbourhood Forum has been established as part of the joint partnership between Osbornes and the Borough Council and it is intended that the Forum will be developed to have a wider remit focused on improving the area to meet local people's needs and engage with wider Council services.

### **Wexham Court Parish Council**

- 7.18 On 25th July 2018 the Review Group met Councillors Raja Fayyaz, the Chair of the Parish Council, Shaida Akbar (Vice Chair), Sarfraz Khan (Head of Finance) and Parish Councillor Paul Sohal as part of the process of gathering evidence for the review. The notes of the meeting will be published on the Council's website together with the other views, comments and submissions received.
- 7.19 At the meeting with the Review Group the Parish Council advised of its main activities and methods of communication with residents. The Parish advised that the two halls and Board Room were always in use and offered best value to the Parish residents and others at attractive rates. The Parish outlined other activities it was involved in and future projects. The Parish had provided some budget information and advised that accounts information was currently with the Parish



Council auditors. The Working Group requested sight of the financial records for the previous twelve months.

7.20 Three of the written submissions received in response to the review relate to Wexham Court Parish Council. 73 responses have been received to a survey of Wexham Court residents carried out by the Slough Labour Party, the majority of which appear to be dissatisfied with the Parish Council judging by respondents' answers to the questions posed in the survey and their written comments. A summary of the response to the survey will be published on the Council's website.

7.21 The Review Group were advised that as part of a rolling series of audits of the Parish Councils an audit of Wexham Court Parish Councils governance arrangements was undertaken as part of the approved plan for 2018/19. The objective of the audit was to ensure that the money being received by the Wexham Court Parish Council via precept payment was being spent in line with delegated authority. The Council's Internal Auditors (RSM) reviewed the governance arrangements in place to provide assurance to the Council that the precept collected for parish was being used as intended.

The internal audit report is still in draft form, and therefore cannot be published at this time. However, it does appear that the control framework in place at the Parish requires significant improvement. The Internal Auditors also identified a number of issues where it was felt immediate management action was necessary to strengthen both financial and governance procedures.

The Review Group was advised that once the report is finalised, the Council will discuss with the Parish Council the most suitable mechanism for overseeing the implementation of the actions.

7.22 In the light of the evidence received the Review Group continues to seriously doubt that the Parish Council is working in the best interests of local residents or that its governance arrangements are sound. The Review Group's attention has been drawn to a number of concerns, one being relationships between parish councillors and staff, and others relating to the appointment and management of staff, financial management, procurement arrangements, and its lettings policies. In one way or another, these matters are all fundamental to the good management of a parish council, its reputation and efficiency. Wexham Court Parish Council was urged to review and resolve these matters, and if necessary to seek professional advice on employment matters as part of the Community Governance Review in 2013. The Working Group has concluded that there is a case for abolition of the parish and dissolution of the Parish Council and is recommending that parish electors and other interested parties are formally consulted on the option to abolish the Parish Council;

### **Wexham Court Parish Boundary, number of Councillors and Name Boundary**

7.23 It continues to appear to the Review Group that there is little public awareness of what the Parish Council does and an impression that its main focus and activities serve only a small part of the parish area. The Council wishes to ensure its review leads to parishes that are based on areas which reflect community identity and interest and which are viable as an administrative unit. Members of the Review Group noted the new housing at Wexham Green and the recent housing

development at William Hartley Yard. If the option to abolish the Parish Council was not supported the Group proposed that the Parish boundary be redrawn along the existing Polling District boundary along the middle of the road in Knolton way. This would result in a smaller parish area that was in close proximity to the Parish Hall and allow the Parish Council to work more collegiately and develop communication with both electors in the new housing development and employees residing in the accommodation blocks at Wexham Park hospital, which are poorly served with facilities/poorly connected. A smaller Parish Council would enable the focus to be on communication with the new emerging residential communities and in an area less well connected to services in the main urban area of Slough. The revised area would be coterminous with the current WLA polling district (see attached map at Appendix 2) and comprise 1027 properties - 1325 electors (5 year forecast to 2022 – 1461 electors).

### **Number of Councillors**

With a reduction in geographical area a consequent reduction in the number of Councillors from 11 to 7 is recommended with effect from May 2019.

### **Name**

The Group also proposed that the Parish be renamed Wexham Green to more accurately reflect the revised parish area.

### **Review Group Recommendation – Wexham Court Parish Council**

- 7.24 As part of the 2013 Community Governance Review the Borough Council formally consulted Parish electors on the abolition of the Parish Council and the advisory Poll that was carried out returned a majority in favour of retention of the Parish Council. The Council resolved that it would test public opinion again in four years time if it still had concerns about the Parish Council's governance arrangements.
- 7.25 **The Review Group seriously doubts that the Parish Council is working in the best interests of local residents or, based on comments made by parish councillors and others, that its governance arrangements are sound. It has therefore concluded that there is a case for abolition of the parish and dissolution of the Parish Council and is recommending that parish electors and other interested parties are formally consulted on:**
- The option to abolish the Parish Council;
  - If that is not supported, a change to the Parish Boundary and name.
- 7.26 The Review Group have considered what arrangements might be put in place to engage with communities in the area if the parish were to be abolished. Members noted that the parish facilities could equally well be run by the borough council. The parish hall could be developed to provide a community hub operating on the same principles as the one in Chalvey, opening up to the wider local community and encouraging its use for community functions.
- (c) New Parish Council
- 7.27 One comment was received setting out the view that a Parish Council for Langley should be considered. The comment was a personal one and not made by, or on behalf of, the Langley Neighbourhood Forum. The Working Group welcomed the

submission but did not consider that it provided enough evidence that the establishment of a Parish Council was warranted. There was no information on local support for such a proposal or on questions such as what services a new parish council might provide, the level of parish precept that would be needed to fund a new parish council of this size, and what the parish boundary might be.

- 7.28 The resident identified a number concerns about consultation with Langley residents about major issues and raised a perceived disadvantage that, unlike Iver and Datchet, there was no Parish Council to formally consult. The Working Group felt that the Langley Neighbourhood Forum should work closely with the Borough Council and Ward Councillors to ensure that Langley views were represented.

### **Review Group Recommendation – New Parish Council**

- 7.29 **That a case for a new parish council had not been made.**

## **8 Draft Proposals**

- 8.1 Section 100 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 provides for guidance to be issued regarding community governance reviews and for local authorities to have regard to that guidance. The key paragraphs relating to abolition of parishes and the dissolution of parish councils, are set out in full as follows:
- 117.** While the Government expects to see a trend in the creation, rather than the abolition, of parishes, there are circumstances where the principal council may conclude that the provision of effective and convenient local government and/or the reflection of community identity and interests may be best met, for example, by the abolition of a number of small parishes and the creation of a larger parish covering the same area. If, following a review, a principal council believes that this would provide the most appropriate community governance arrangements, then it will wish to make this recommendation; the same procedures apply to any recommendation to abolish a parish and/or parish council as to other recommendations (see paragraph 90 -97). Regulations provide for the transfer of property, rights and liabilities of a parish council to the new successor parish council, or where none is proposed to the principal council itself.
- 118.** Section 88 of the 2007 Act provides for a community governance review to recommend the alteration of the area of, or the abolition of, an existing parish as a result of a review. The area of abolished parishes does not have to be redistributed to other parishes, an area can become unparished. However, it is the Government's view that it would be undesirable to see existing parishes abolished with the area becoming unparished with no community governance arrangements in place.
- 119.** The abolition of parishes should not be undertaken unless clearly justified. Any decision a principal council may make on whether to abolish a parish should not be taken lightly. Under the previous parish review legislation, the Local Government and Rating Act 1997 , the Secretary of State considered very carefully recommendations made by principal councils for the abolition of any parish (without replacement) given that to abolish parish areas

removes a tier of local government. Between 1997 and 2008, the Government rarely received proposals to abolish parish councils, it received only four cases seeking abolition and of these only one was approved for abolition by the Secretary of State.

**120.** Exceptionally, there may be circumstances where abolition may be the most appropriate way forward. Under the 2007 Act provisions, the principal council would need to consider local opinion, including that of parish councillors and local electors. It would need to find evidence that the abolition of a parish council was justified, and that there was clear and sustained local support for such action. A factor taken into account by the Government in deciding abolition cases, was that local support for abolition needed to have been demonstrated over at least a period equivalent to two terms of office of the parish councillors (i.e. 8 years), and that such support was sufficiently informed. This means a properly constituted parish council should have had an opportunity to exercise its functions so that local people can judge its ability to contribute to local quality of life.

**121.** Where a community governance review is considering abolishing a parish council we would expect the review to consider what arrangements will be in place to engage with the communities in those areas once the parish is abolished. These arrangements might be an alternative forum run by or for the local community, or perhaps a residents' association. It is doubtful however, that abolition of a parish and its council could ever be justified as the most appropriate action in response to a particular contentious issue in the area or decision of the parish council.

**122.** In future, principal councils will wish to consider the sort of principles identified above in arriving at their decisions on whether or not to abolish a parish council. In doing so, they will be aware that decisions about community governance arrangements, including decisions for the abolition of a parish council, may attract a challenge by way of judicial review.

8.2 The legislation provides that recommendations can be made for the continued existence of a parish, the alteration of a parish, the alteration of the area of a parish, or the abolition of a parish.

8.3 One way of testing local support for or against the abolition of a Parish Council would be to consult local government electors for each of the parish areas by way of a poll and, in order to meet statutory requirements, also to consult the Parish Councils and other persons or bodies which appear to the Council to have an interest in the review. The Council conducted postal advisory polls to test support for or against the abolition of Britwell and Wexham Court Parish Councils as part of the 2013 Community Governance Review.

8.4 The consultation could be organised as a conventional poll with local electors having the option to vote at a polling station or apply for a postal vote in the usual way, if they are registered for a postal vote. The poll could be carried out on an all-postal basis or alternatively the Council could commission an independent door step survey comprising a statistically sound sample of the population. The outcome of the poll or survey cannot be binding on the Council as it is required by law to consult widely and consider representations from parish councils and other persons or bodies which

appear to have an interest in the review. The poll/survey would therefore be advisory. There are pros and cons associated with the different types of polls/survey as set out below.

| Type of Poll/<br>Survey | Pros   | Cons  | Costs<br>(estimate)  | Other Council's   |
|-------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| All postal poll         | All electors receive voting slip<br>Turnout may be greater than with a conventional poll<br>Mechanism used by others and Slough as part of CGR   | More costly than a conventional poll                                | £10 – 12 k total   | Slough undertook an all postal parish poll in 2013 in two Parishes                                      |
| Conventional Poll       | Electors understand the process<br>Existing postal voters receive a postal vote  | Turnout may be low  | £7k per Poll   | Portsmouth City Council commissioned a conventional poll in July 2009 for operational and cost reasons. |
| Door step survey        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guaranteed response from statistically sound sample of population</li> <li>• Meet market research professional standards</li> <li>• Independent in asking the question and analysing</li> </ul> | Costly<br>Difficult to deliver the consultation and results quickly | Cost will be affected by the time in which the survey must be carried out and the report presented – a shorter time period would mean the researchers would need to put more field staff in increasing their costs.<br>Costs could be in the region of £40,000<br>Actual costs would depend on specification and timing. |   |

The Working Group have recommended that the consultation include all postal polls in line with the polls undertaken as part of the 2013 consultation.

- 8.5 The Council's recommendations, whatever form they take, must bring about improved community engagement, better local democracy and result in the more effective and convenient delivery of local services. Without appearing to predetermine the outcome of a poll the Council must be seen to have considered how it proposes to support local communities if either or both of the parish councils

were to be abolished and how it would arrange the delivery of existing and new services either directly or through other local agencies or voluntary groups. The Council's plans in this regard would reassure local residents that those services that they enjoy locally would continue in some form and indeed that other services would be provided and that their needs would be met in what might otherwise appear to be an uncertain future.

## **9 Timetable**

- 9.1 The timetable for the Review is as set out at Appendix 1. The timetable may need to be adjusted to take into account preparation, receipt and consideration of consultation materials and a special Council meeting will be convened if necessary.

## **10 Appendices**

Appendix 1 Timetable for Community Governance Review

Appendix 2 Map of proposed alteration to area of Wexham Court Parish Council

## **11 Background Papers**

Consultation responses.