

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

COUNCIL – 16 DECEMBER 2015

REPORT BY HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC AND LEGAL SUPPORT  
SERVICES

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COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW REQUEST: BISHOP'S  
STORTFORD TOWN COUNCIL

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WARD(S) AFFECTED:     None

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**Purpose/Summary of Report**

- To consider a request from Bishop's Stortford Town Council for a Community Governance Review (CGR) of its electoral arrangements.

**RECOMMENDATION FOR DECISION: that EITHER:**

<b><u>RECOMMENDATION FOR DECISION:</u> that EITHER:</b>	
<b>(A)</b>	<b>a Community Governance Review of the electoral arrangements of Bishop's Stortford Town Council (including its town boundary) be undertaken, with the detailed terms of reference for, and the timing of, the review to be determined by the Chief Executive, OR</b>
<b>(B)</b>	<b>notwithstanding the specific request from Bishop's Stortford Town Council, as detailed in the report now submitted, a Community Governance Review of the entire District be undertaken, with the detailed terms of reference for, and the timing of, the review to be determined by the Chief Executive.</b>

1.0 Background

1.1 Under provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement Act 2007 (the 2007 Act), Council has the power to review and make changes to community governance within its area. The term community governance in this context relates to parish and town councils only.

- 1.2 The 2007 Act streamlined the process of taking decisions to give effect to recommendations made in a community governance review (e.g. the creation of new parishes and the establishment of parish councils) and about other matters such as making changes to parish boundaries and electoral arrangements.
- 1.3 In undertaking a CGR, Council must follow guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 1.4 The Secretary of State has no direct involvement in a review. The role of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England is limited to giving effect to consequential recommendations for related alterations to the electoral areas of principal councils.
- 1.5 In the guidance, the Secretary of State highlights that "... in many cases, making changes to the boundaries of existing parishes, rather than creating an entirely new parish, will be sufficient to ensure that community governance arrangements to continue to reflect local identities and facilitate effective and convenient local government. For example, over time, communities may expand with new housing developments. This can often lead to existing parish boundaries becoming anomalous as new houses are built across the boundaries resulting in people being in different parishes from their neighbours."
- 1.6 The guidance also details that a "...community governance review offers an opportunity to put in place strong, clearly defined boundaries, tied to firm ground features, and remove the many anomalous parish boundaries that exist....".
- 1.7 A CGR also offers the Authority an opportunity to consider the future of what may have become redundant or moribund parishes, often the result of an insufficient number of local electors within the area who are willing to serve on a parish council.
- 1.8 Should the Authority undertake a review then it would need to take into account how any potential changes to parish boundaries would impact on the boundaries of other tiers of local government.
- 1.9 The Chief Executive of Bishop's Stortford Town Council sent an 'e'-mail to the Head of Democratic and Legal Support Services in October 2015 advising that Bishop's Stortford Town Council had:

*resolved formally to request a review of the ward boundaries within the parish of Bishop's Stortford and of the parish boundary*

*of Bishop's Stortford having regard to:*

*development which has occurred since the boundaries were last reviewed, which has 'crossed' the parish boundary and, members argue, caused ward boundaries to be inappropriate, and*

*development likely to occur either as already consented in outline or full or envisaged within the draft District Plan, which breaches the parish boundary particularly towards the South.*

## 2.0 Report

2.1 Council is under a duty to carry out a CGR review if it receives a valid community governance petition for the whole or part of the council's area. However, the duty to conduct a review does not apply if:

a) it has concluded a community governance review within the last two years which in its opinion covered the whole or a significant part of the area of the petition, or

b) it is currently conducting a review of the whole, or a significant part of the area to which the petition relates.

2.2 Notwithstanding the duty mentioned in para 2.1 above, Council may undertake a CGR at any time. The Secretary of State's guidance identifies that a "...review may need to be carried out, for example, following a major change in the population of a community to re-draw boundaries which have become anomalous, for example following new housing developments being built across existing boundaries. Principal councils should exercise their discretion, but it would be good practice for a principal council to consider conducting a review every 10-15 years – except in the case of areas with very low populations when less frequent reviews may be adequate."

2.3 The last electoral review that affected town/parish council electoral arrangements took place in 1998.

2.4 In receiving the request from Bishop's Stortford Town Council now detailed, Council is invited to consider the potential benefits of undertaking a review of the whole of its area in one go, rather than carrying out small scale reviews in a piecemeal fashion of two or three areas. However, it should be recognised that a full-scale review will not always be warranted.

### 3.0 Undertaking a Community Governance Review

- 3.1 The 2007 Act and statutory guidance allow Council to decide how to undertake a CGR, provided it complies with the duties specified in the legislation.
- 3.2 Council will need to consult local people and take account of any representations received in connection with any review. When undertaking a review it must have regard to the need to secure that community governance reflects the identities and interests of the community in the area under review, and the need to secure that community governance in that area is effective and convenient.
- 3.3 Council will also need to consult "...local government electors in an area under review, and others (including a local authority such as a county council) which appears to have an interest in the review. In the case of a CGR where a parish council already exists, as a local authority, it too should be consulted. Other bodies might include local businesses, local public and voluntary organisations - such as schools or health bodies." Council must take into account any representations it receives as part of a community governance review.

### 4.0 Timing

- 4.1 Should Council determine to undertake a review then it is required to complete it (and associated consequential recommendations for principal area ward/division boundaries) within 12 months of commencement. A review begins when the terms of reference of the review are published and it concludes with the publication of recommendations.

### 4.0 Conclusion

- 4.1 CGRs will make recommendations in relation to parish/town council electoral arrangements as defined by the terms of reference set out at the start of the review process.
- 4.2 Following due statutory process, if the Council accepts the recommendations arising from a review it will make an order to implement the proposals.
- 4.3 The specific request from Bishop's Stortford Town Council

concerns its administrative boundary and also its future governance as it is seeking a review of its warding arrangements which in turn affect the number of councillors to be elected for each ward and the ward names. This process requires Council to take account of community identity and interests in an area and "...whether any particular ties or linkages might be broken by the drawing of particular ward boundaries". In terms of the number of councillors representing a ward, Council should seek to ensure adherence to the principle that "...each person's vote should be of equal weight..."

- 4.4 Any changes to a parish/town councils electoral arrangements come into force at ordinary elections (e.g. May 2019) and not by-elections.
- 4.5 Council is invited to consider the request for a CGR from Bishop's Stortford Town Council. It has discretion over whether or not to undertake a review for that authority (and affected neighbouring parishes). It could, if so minded, determine to undertake a review of the entire District's community governance arrangements (for parish/town councils).
- 4.6 A map showing the existing electoral wards and town boundary for Bishops Stortford will be available at the meeting.
- 5.0 Implications/Consultations
- 5.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

### Background Papers

None

Contact Officer: Jeff Hughes – Head of Democratic and Legal Support Services – Extn: 2170  
[jeff.hughes@eastherts.gov.uk](mailto:jeff.hughes@eastherts.gov.uk)

Report Author: Jeff Hughes – Head of Democratic and Legal Support Services – Extn: 2170.