

Motion to undertake new Community Governance Reviews in Sawbridgeworth and Buntingford

Proposed by: Councillor Angus Parsad-Wyatt (Sawbridgeworth)

Seconded by: Councillor Cllr David Woolcombe (Buntingford)

Having received petitions from the residents of Sawbridgeworth and Buntingford, each supported in excess of the 7.5% statutory threshold of the respective local government electorate,

this Council notes that:

1. Community Governance Reviews (CGRs) relating to Sawbridgeworth and Buntingford were completed in 2025 and resulted in proposals to introduce parish warding arrangements.
2. Both Sawbridgeworth Town Council and Buntingford Town Council expressed opposition to warding during those reviews.
3. Significant numbers of residents in both towns have since signed formal petitions requesting that East Herts District Council abandon the current warding proposals; and undertake fresh Community Governance Reviews that properly consult local residents and reflect the identities and interests of the communities concerned.
4. The petitions in both towns reached or exceeded 10% of the local government electorate, substantially above the 7.5% statutory threshold set out in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, as amended by the Legislative Reform (Community Governance Reviews) Order 2015.
5. The strength of resident engagement in both Sawbridgeworth and Buntingford represents a clear and exceptional expression of local democratic opinion.
6. While the completion of CGRs within the previous two years removes the automatic duty on the Council to undertake further reviews, it does not remove the Council's discretion to do so.

Council therefore believes that:

1. Community governance arrangements should command clear local confidence and reflect the identities and interests of local communities.
2. The scale and consistency of resident opposition in both Sawbridgeworth and Buntingford indicates a loss of confidence in the

previous CGR outcomes; and raises wider concerns regarding consultation and resident engagement.

3. The statutory guidance on Community Governance Reviews requires that outcomes reflect the identities and interests of local communities and command local support. Where those conditions are demonstrably absent, the Council has both the discretion and, in the interests of good governance, a responsibility to revisit its decisions.

4. Undertaking fresh, robustly consulted CGRs would provide an opportunity for this Council to rebuild trust with the electorate, ensure democratic legitimacy, and secure governance arrangements that are effective and locally supported.

Council resolves to:

1. Undertake new Community Governance Reviews for both towns at the earliest practicable opportunity.

2. Ensure that those reviews include:

- o clear, transparent, and widely publicised consultation with residents;
- o engagement with the relevant town councils and community stakeholders; and
- o full consideration of whether warding reflects local identity and effective governance.

3. Publish: i) Terms of Reference for the new CGRs; and ii) a timetable for completion in accordance with statutory guidance as soon as practicable.