

ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

2 February 2021

Community Governance Review for proposed new parish within the current Stoke Parish Area

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Denaro Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton
Ward(s) Affected	Avoncroft, Rock Hill
Ward Councillor(s) Consulted	Yes
Not a Key Decision	(Electoral Matters Committee has full devolved powers)

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 Members are asked to review the results of the consultation regarding a valid petition from Residents of the Stoke Heath Parish Ward (polling district RHA) of Stoke Parish Council, requesting that a Community Governance Review (CGR) be carried out on 'Making that area known as Stoke Heath Ward (RHA) a civil parish separate from Stoke Parish Council' and produce draft recommendations to be further consulted on in stage three of the CGR to be held 15 February to 17 May 2021.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **Members are asked to note the results of the consultation undertaken as a result of a valid petition regarding a parish separate from Stoke Parish Council consisting of polling district RHA.**
- 2.2 **Members are asked to consider and decide on the draft recommendations to be further consulted upon, either that**
- 1) the changes in the petition be adopted;**
 - 2) no change be undertaken; or**
 - 3) that an alternative proposal from the Committee be adopted.**
- 2.3 **Members are asked to consider how the consultation on the draft recommendations be carried out.**

3. KEY ISSUES

Financial Implications

- 3.1 There will be a cost for the second consultation exercise, but this can be met from existing budgets.

Legal Implications

- 3.2 On receipt of a valid petition, the Council has a responsibility to undertake a CGR in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (Part 4) and the associated Dept. of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Guidance on Community Governance Reviews, the Local Government (Parishes and Parish Councils) Regulations 2008 and the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended). The authority must have regard to the guidance issued by the Secretary of State (s100 (4) of the 2007 Act) and must give consideration to the views of local people in reaching its decision
- 3.3 Section 93 of the 2007 Act sets out the council's duties in undertaking a community governance review. In relation to deciding what recommendations to make, it provides that the council must have regard to the need to secure that community governance within the area under review:
- a) reflects the identities and interests of the community in that area, and
 - b) is effective and convenient.

Section 93 (6) provides that the council must "take into account" any representations received in connection with the review as one element of these considerations.

- 3.4 Section 2 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 states that there is a duty on principal councils to promote understanding among local people, which extends to parish councils

Service/Operational Implications

- 3.5 At the meeting of this Committee on 29 September a letter and questionnaire were agreed for the households within the Stoke Parish area. This questionnaire was also made available electronically via the District Council webpage dedicated to the review. In addition responses were invited from any other interested parties.
- 3.6 The consultation was due to be open from 14 October until 14 December but this was extended until 28 December because of COVID-19 restrictions.

Consultation Results

- 3.7 Consultees were asked the following questions:
- Do you think that there should be a new Parish created from the current Stoke Heath Ward?

- Do you think Stoke Parish creates a feeling of local community including for electors in Stoke Heath? (Consultees were further asked why they had given their particular answer)
- If a new parish were created would you be interested in standing to become a Parish Councillor?
- If the changes happen would you like to suggest names for the Parishes?
- Would you like to make any further comments?

3.8 There were 265 paper forms returned and 53 returns were made electronically through the website. This represents a 15% return from all households. In addition, there were submissions from the Parish Council and from a resident of the parish.

3.9 Returns were recorded so that Members of the Committee can appreciate which parish ward the answers relate to. RHA being Stoke Heath Ward and AVA/AVB being Stoke Prior Ward. Whereas the letters had the household polling district recorded on them, it was up to the person completing the questionnaire online to complete which Parish Ward they were in.

3.10 Question one asked:

Do you think that there should be a new Parish created from the current Stoke Heath Ward?

Answer	Post Reply		Website Reply			Total	Ward Split	
	RHA	AVA/AVB	RHA	AVA/AVB	None Recorded		RHA	AVA/AVB
Yes	40	42	20	4	10	116	60	46
No	49	130	12	3	3	197	61	133

The results show that there was a considerable trend not to create a new Parish. In Stoke Heath Ward the result was almost 50:50 regarding creating a new Parish.

3.11 The second question was:

Do you think Stoke Parish creates a feeling of local community including for electors in Stoke Heath?

Answer	Post Reply		Website Reply			Total	Ward Split	
	RHA	AVA/AVB	RHA	AVA/AVB	None Recorded		RHA	AVA/AVB
Yes	34	101	10	5	4	154	44	106
No	46	59	22	2	9	138	68	61

Things were less clear cut regarding the feeling of local community; with those in Stoke Heath Ward feeling less included. The reasoning for and against a feeling of local community is recorded in appendix 1 (those who said there was a feeling of local community) and appendix 2 (those who thought there is not one).

The main arguments put up in appendix 1 were:

- The central use of the recreation ground
- The Parish newsletter/magazine
- The Events held in the Parish such as fetes and film nights.

In appendix 2 the following subjects, amongst others, were named:

- The Parish Council concentrates on Stoke Prior
- The newsletter puts Stoke Prior first
- Stoke Heath residents feel ignored
- The two areas are different environments

3.12 The third question asked 'If a new parish were created would you be interested in standing to become a Parish Councillor?' This was a clear negative with 277 saying no and only 20 replying in the positive.

3.13 Households were then asked 'If the changes happen would you like to suggest names for the Parishes?' The current ward names were supported by 77% of the respondents. Other suggestions were:

- Stoke Works/Stoke Prior
- Charford South/Stoke
- Avoncroft/Stoke Heath
- Upper Stoke/Lower Stoke
- Stoke Heath North/Stoke Heath South
- South Charford/Avoncroft
- Grafton/Stoke Prior and Avoncroft
- West Stoke/East Stoke

3.14 Consultees were finally asked for any other comments, these can be found in Appendix 3. There were many different remarks included within this question but three items came up a number of times:

- Concerns about costs of Council Tax if a new parish were to be created
- That the area polling district RHA being considered for a new parish does not contain all of Stoke Heath (several consultees suggested it should contain polling district AVB as well as RHA)
- That the number of councillors representing each current ward should be reviewed.

- 3.15 There were a number of returns that used the questionnaire to comment on unrelated items which are not included in the appendices.
- 3.16 The letter from the Parish Council is attached in appendix 4. They are supportive of the status quo for several reasons that are listed in the letter.
- 3.17 The correspondence from a resident is in appendix 5 who is for the creation of a new parish and addresses, amongst other items, community identity.

Draft Recommendations

- 3.18 Option 1 is the proposal in the petition: to create a new parish from the Polling District RHA.
- 3.19 A consequence of option 1 is that Stoke Parish would then become the area encompassed by Polling Districts AVA and AVB. Electoral arrangements for parish any warding within the revised parish council areas, parish names and determining the number of parish councillors would have to be considered.
- 3.20 Option 2 is for no change.
- 3.21 Option 3 is for the Committee to make an alternative recommendation based on the results of the initial consultation.

Second Consultation

- 3.22 The agreed timetable states the second consultation on draft recommendations is due to commence on 15 February until 17 May 2021. Members of the Committee are required to decide how the consultation should be carried out bearing in mind this part of the review covers the election period for 2021.

Customer/Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 3.23 In conducting the review the Council will ensure that electoral equality is taken into consideration.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 The Act requires that the CGR must be completed within 12 months of the validation of the petition. No amendments of the act have been made due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation so the CGR still needs to be completed within the statutory timeframe.
- 4.2 It is not anticipated that the current situation will impact on the completion of the review. Meetings of the Committee can be held remotely. All other aspects of the review will be able to take place as they would do for any other CGR, as the

process is based on consultation.

- 4.3 In terms of Human Resources risks, the timetable for the review is concurrent with the election period in 2021 and use of officer time during the election period needs to be considered.

5. APPENDICES

- 1 Reasons for households having a feeling of local community
- 2 Reasons for households not having a feeling of local community
- 3 Other Comments Received from the consultation
- 4 Stoke Parish Council submission
- 5 Resident submission

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- DCLG Guidance
- Relevant Statutory provisions

7. KEY

N/A

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