

**GENERAL PURPOSES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE – 10 JANUARY 2014****INCREASE IN MEMBERS ON SWAY PARISH COUNCIL –  
COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW (CGR)****1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Following consideration of a request from Sway Parish Council, this Committee on 13 September 2013 agreed to commence a “community governance review” in Sway with a view to increasing the numbers on Sway Parish Council from 8 to 11.
- 1.2 The review commenced with the publication of an article in the November issue of “Sway News”, requesting residents’ comments on the proposals. “Sway News” is a village magazine widely available in Sway. An article also appeared on the District Council’s website. As is required by law, Hampshire County Council was advised of the review.
- 1.3 This report requests the Committee to agree draft proposals for publication and comment.
- 1.4 The Committee is reminded that the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 requires the District Council, when undertaking a CGR, to aim to ensure that community governance in the area under review –
- Reflects the identities and interests of the community in that area; and
  - Is effective and convenient

**2. RESPONSES/GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

- 2.1 Three responses were received to the invitation for initial submissions. These are attached as Appendices 1 – 3. Members will note that one response supported the increase to 11, one opposed it and one wishes the numbers increased to 12 rather than 11.
- 2.2 Sway Parish Council was asked to comment on an increase to 12 rather than 11. They have indicated that they would be happy to go along with the suggestion if that is what the public wish, and have noted that it would put the onus on local people to come forward to stand for election.

**3. DRAFT PROPOSALS**

- 3.1 It is now for the Committee to formulate draft proposals and to consult on them.
- 3.2 The responses from residents to the Parish Council's request for an increase to 11 are split evenly – one in favour (from an existing parish councillor but writing in a personal capacity), one against, and one seeking a higher number. As reported to the Committee on 13 September, there is no guidance on the size of parish councils, but the minimum number is 5. The DCLG reports that, nationally, local councils

representing the following electorates have, typically, the following number of councillors:

- Less than 500 electors – between 5 and 8 councillors
- Between 501 and 2,500 electors – between 6 and 12 councillors
- Between 2,501 and 10,000 electors – between 9 and 16 councillors

(Sway has 2,941 electors so would fall into the category that has, typically, between 9 and 16 councillors)

3.3 Parish Councils in New Forest District of similar size to Sway have –

Brockenhurst (2,904 electors) – 11 councillors (1 councillor : 264 electors)  
Bransgore (3,538 electors) - 10 councillors (1 councillor : 354 electors)  
Lyndhurst (2,450 electors) - 12 councillors (1 councillor : 204 electors)

If the numbers on Sway Parish Council are increased to 11, the councillor : elector ratio would be 1:267.

3.4 There is no real consistency in the elector : councillor ratio throughout the District. The Committee has in the past considered each case for changes to councillor numbers on its merits, recognising the wide variation in the services offered by, and circumstances of, individual councils. It has taken into account existing arrangements and national examples to guide its decisions, but has over-ridingly tried to arrive at the “right fit” for each parish.

3.5 Sway residents have not expressed a clear preference for the way forward, and the parish council has not enthusiastically supported the suggestion for an increase to 12 rather than 11. All members of the Committee will be aware of the difficulties many parish councils in the district experience in recruiting suitable candidates and retaining them as councillors. Only four candidates stood for the eight places on the Sway Parish Council at the 2011 quadrennial elections. However, it is understood that there has been a marked rejuvenation of public interest in the Parish Council and its affairs over the past 18 months. In addition, as reported to the Committee in September, the Parish Council is now actively involved in a number of additional projects and tasks. The Parish Council’s original motivation for an increase in numbers to 11 is attached at Appendix 4 – the contents of that statement formed the basis for the Committee agreeing to initiate the review.

3.6 In all the circumstances, it is suggested that this Committee agrees to draft proposals to increase the numbers on the Parish Council to 11. This recommendation is put forward as it reflects the Parish Council’s original, considered, request, and in the light of the fact that it has not wholeheartedly supported an increase to 12.

#### **4. NEXT STEPS**

4.1 Once the Committee has agreed draft proposals the proposals must be published. The manner in which this must be done is not prescriptive, but it is suggested that a further article be published in “Sway News”, on the District Council’s website and that Sway Parish Council be requested to give publicity to the proposals on their website and on Parish notice boards as well.

4.2 Responses to the draft proposals will be submitted to the Committee in March 2014.

**5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Resources involved in the review to date have been exclusively officer time. This position is expected to continue. There was no cost to the Council for the space in “Sway News”.

**6. ENVIRONMENTAL, CRIME & DISORDER AND EQUALITIES & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are none.

**7. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 7.1 That draft proposals to increase the number of members on Sway Parish Council from 8 to 11 be published; and
- 7.2 That the matter be further considered by the Committee at its meeting in March 2014.

**Further information:**

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**Background Papers:**

Published documents

**From:** Stephen Tarling  
**Sent:** 05 November 2013 18:08  
**To:** Rosemary Rutins  
**Subject:** Proposed increase to the numbers on Sway Parish Council

Dear Mrs. Rutins,

I am replying in a personal capacity to your article in the November 2013 edition of Sway News on the subject of a proposed increase to the numbers on Sway Parish Council

I strongly support this proposal. This was prompted by the paper "Sway Parish Council Governance" some 18 months ago, which you can see at

<http://www.sway-parish-council.org.uk/id6.html>

Table 1 there shows a comparison of local Parish Councils including in terms of the population per councillor; and this certainly shows Sway is out of line with the average. Parishes of comparable size include Lyndhurst with 12 councillors and Brockenhurst with 11.

Since the number of councillors was last decided, not only has the population of Sway increased considerably, but also the facilities provided by the Parish Council have increased considerably, we also now have to deal with both NFDC and NFNPA; and as a result of the Localism Act and the large number of concomitant changes, and increases in both responsibility and expectations, the workload of Sway Parish Council has also increased considerably.

I am a co-opted councillor, chair of the Sway Planning and Transport Committee see <http://www.sway-parish-council.org.uk/id2.html> & <http://www.sway-parish-council.org.uk/id12.html> I also survey rights-of-way footpaths as part of my councillor role, see <http://www.sway-parish-council.org.uk/id5.html> & <http://www.sway-parish-council.org.uk/id12.html> and I attend various NFNPA meetings and HALC training sessions and meetings. I am on the Sway Village Design Statement Steering Group see <http://www.swayvillage.org.uk/> and I convene the Land Use Interest Group – see for instance <http://swayvillage.org.uk/land-use-assessment-completed/> This is all interesting work and I try to give as much time as I can to all of these; and I am in the fortunate position of being just about able to do these things. However this sort of workload is a lot to ask (and Sway councillors draw no expenses or allowances). So I have been concerned that others may have previously been reluctant to put themselves forward as councillors, being daunted by the resource implications. I fear that the current modest number of councillors may also discourage diversity – it would be a lot to ask of, for instance, a young parent or a hard-working modestly paid person to become a councillor, given the current workloads.

Sway Parish Council urgently needs to get a grip on our finances – we have a precept less than half of the NFDC average (per band D household) and yet a splendid and expensive sporting facility – and there are now plans afoot to extend that.

So for each and all of the reasons above I strongly support this proposal. At extremely modest cost to NFDC this would strengthen Sway Parish Council, improve our governance, ensure we maintain financial oversight, potentially encourage a little more diversity and wider representation on the council, and would ensure Sway Parish Council is altogether better prepared for the future.

Sincerely, Stephen Tarling

Dr. Stephen E. Tarling

**From:** helen pinkney  
**Sent:** 20 November 2013 13:46  
**To:** Rosemary Rutins  
**Subject:** Proposed Increase in numbers Sway Parish Council

The November Sway parish news asked for resident's views on the proposal to increase the size of the parish council.

I would like to register my views against it.

The council wishes to increase its size to deal with wider issues/ increase its workload. The area already has an additional layer of bureaucracy (in the splendid parks authority) and a further level is at best unnecessary. It would excessively complicate the administrative procedure for residents of the area.

The parish say they want to be come more involved in the details of issues; I feel this is best left to the professional officers of NFDC, NFPA and HCC.

Yours truly  
H Pinkney

**From:** John Thomas [mailto:john@sway-pc.org.uk]  
**Sent:** 28 November 2013 12:59  
**To:** Rosemary Rutins  
**Subject:** proposed increase in Sway P.C. members

Dear Mrs Rutins.

I would like you to consider increasing the amount of councillors to 12 as Sway has approximately 2900 electors and as the national average suggests up to 12 councillors, now is the time to implement the highest amount.

The reasoning behind this being that as time progresses more workload falls on this small group of unpaid local representatives. So as is happening in Sway there are to be three sub-committee's by the time of the next election.

It will then spread the workload and and time spent by all involved, and hopefully therefore bring in more local people willing to stand for election for our village, which has not happened at previous elections.

I have been attending the meetings at Sway over the last couple of years and see that it is a struggle for all involved.

Yours sincerely,

Len Thomas

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### SWAY PARISH COUNCIL

#### **Reasons for Supporting an Increase in the Size of the Parish Council**

The Parish Council has become a much more active body in the local community and has also changed its operational structure to meet increasing demands.

The Council has introduced a new Planning and Transport Committee and an Amenities Working Group both of which meet monthly in addition to monthly meetings of the full Council. The Council is also looking to introduce a Finance or Policy Committee in the near future which will also meet monthly. All these changes are part of the process of the Council being a much more open and transparent local authority. The Councillors are getting more heavily involved in the workings of the Council and the level of public participation at meetings and elsewhere has greatly increased.

In order to achieve these changes effectively the Council needs to increase its number to allow the workload to be spread over a greater number and to ensure that Councillors have the time to ensure that they are involved in the detail of the work rather than carrying out an overview role. It is very difficult to achieve this with current numbers. It would also hopefully provide an opportunity to increase the skills level of the Council as a whole.

The Council is also becoming more closely involved in developing community facilities and this is going to put increased pressure on the existing members to cover the workload. I do not foresee that involving diminishing over the coming years more likely increasing.