

INCREASE IN MEMBERS ON SWAY PARISH COUNCIL – COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 On 13 September 2013, in response to a request from Sway Parish Council, the Committee agreed to undertake a Community Governance Review (CGR) in Sway with a view to increasing the number of members on the Parish Council from 8 to 11.
- 1.2 The law requires that when undertaking a CGR, the Council must 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 TO INITIAL CONSULTATION

- 2.1 The review was published and three responses were received to the initial consultation. One supported the increase to 11, another opposed it and one wished the numbers increased to 12. The Parish Council indicated that they would be happy to work with 12 members if that is what the public wished, and noted that it would put the onus on local people to come forward to stand for election.
- 2.2 As Sway residents had not demonstrated a clear preference for the way forward, and as the Parish Council had not enthusiastically supported an increase to 12, the Committee on 10 January 2014 decided to publish draft proposals to increase the number to 11, as originally requested by the Parish Council.

3. RESPONSES TO DRAFT PROPOSALS

- 3.1 The draft proposals were published on the District Council's website and in the February edition of "Sway News". Responses were requested by 26 February. At the time of writing this report, 19 responses have been received, 17 supporting an increase to 12, and 2 supporting an increase to 11. The closing date for responses was 26 February (the day following the preparation of this report), and any responses received on 25 and 26 February will be reported orally.
- 3.2 A range of reasons why an increase to 12 is considered more appropriate have been given by those who support the increase to 12. These include:
- The parish council is now functioning as a more professional organisation and is giving more meaningful consideration to, and is becoming involved in, a far wider range of issues affecting the parish;
 - There is a resultant increased workload on the existing parish councillors, particularly as three new committees have been established. A larger complement of councillors would help to spread the workload

- The current workloads on the parish councillors discourages diversity – young parents or working people would find it difficult to stand for election
- The workload of all parish councils is likely to increase with the Government's emphasis on localism
- There is a significant degree of interest in the parish council, and meetings are very well attended.
- No difficulties are foreseen in attracting residents to stand for election.
- Comparisons of the number of councillors in other similar-sized parishes show that up to 16 councillors was an acceptable number.

3.3 Of the two supporting an increase to 11, one, while supporting an increase, considered that it might be difficult to recruit an additional four members and that an uneven number of members would avoid difficulties with voting. The other letter of support gave no reason for favouring 11, but it was clear support for an increase.

3.4 The Committee is reminded that, nationally, the numbers of parish councillors representing the following electorates are typically:

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

Sway has 2,941 electors, so falls within the range of 9 – 16 councillors.

3.5 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 Sway Parish Council are increased to 12, the councillor:elector ratio would be 1:245.

4. ISSUE TO CONSIDER/NEXT STEPS

4.1 The case for an increase in the size of the Parish Council appears to have been clearly made. It is now for the Committee to consider whether an increase to 12 is warranted, or to agree an increase to 11, as per the parish council's initial request.

4.2 In the light of the significant support amongst respondents, the officers recommend an increase to 12 with effect from the quadrennial election of councillors in May 2015.

4.3 The Committee's recommendation requires the approval of the Council.

4.4 Once the Council has taken a decision on the matter, its final proposals and recommendations will need to be published. When that has been done, a Reorganisation Order will be made to give effect to the change. There is no further opportunity for representations.

5. FINANCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL, CRIME & DISORDER AND EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are very minor financial implications arising from this report and the making of the reorganisation order, and these will be met from existing budgets.
- 5.2 The diversity of the Parish Council might be improved through having a larger number of places on the council available to be filled. Reducing the workload on existing members might encourage residents from a wider pool to stand for election.
- 5.3 There are no environmental or crime & disorder implications.

6. RECOMMENDED:

- 6.1 That, as the Committee is satisfied that an increase in numbers on the Parish Council will –

- Reflect the identities and interests of the community in that area and
- Be effective and convenient

final proposals and recommendations to increase the number of members on Sway Parish Council from 8 to 12 with effect from the quadrennial election of councillors in May 2015 be published, and that steps be taken to ensure that those who may have an interest are informed of them; and

- 6.2 That, following the steps in 6.1 above, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to make a Reorganisation Order to give effect to paragraph 6.1.

Further information:

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Background Papers:

Published documents