

INCREASE IN MEMBERS ON ELLINGHAM, HARBRIDGE & IBSLEY PARISH COUNCIL – COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report deals with a request from Ellingham, Harbridge & Ibsley Parish Council (“EH&I PC”) to increase the size of the parish council from 8 to 10, with effect from the quadrennial elections in May 2015. Their request is at Appendix 1.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (“the Act”) sets out the requirements and procedure for changing the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils, including varying the number of council members. The Act enables District Councils to change the size of parish councils by making an order, but only after the District Council has undertaken what is termed as a community governance review (“CGR”). It is for the Committee to decide whether to undertake reviews. Prior to 2007, varying numbers on Parish Councils was a simple process. This is no longer the case

- 2.2 A CGR involves the following stages:

- (1) Setting terms of reference of the review (if the Committee wishes to undertake a review in respect of EH&I PC, suggested terms of reference are set out in Appendix 2);
- (2) Publicising the terms of reference (for the purposes of the Act, the review formally commences when the terms of reference are published);
- (3) Undertaking consultations with the local government electors for the area and any other person or body who appears to have an interest in the review;
- (4) Considering representations;
- (5) Preparing and publishing draft proposals;
- (6) Undertaking consultations on the draft proposals;
- (7) Considering representations;
- (8) Publishing recommendations;
- (9) Making an order to bring into effect any decisions arising from the review.

A review must be concluded within 12 months of the publication of the terms of reference.

- 2.3 When undertaking a CGR the District Council must have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State and the Electoral Commission. However, subject to this, it is for the Council to decide how to undertake the review.

3. REQUEST FROM EH&I PC

3.1 The request from EH&I PC is to increase their numbers from 8 to 10. There is no formal 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 number of councillors shown:

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

3.2 EH&I PC has 955 electors, so it falls within the national average of between 6 and 12 councillors.

3.3 With regard to sizes of parish councils within New Forest District, there are no Parish Councils directly comparable with EH&I, but those closest in numeric terms are:

Parish Council	Electors	Councillors
Beaulieu	695	8
East Boldre	722	7
Hyde	798	7
Burley	1,158	6
Ashurst & Colbury	1,771	8
Netley Marsh	1,776	10
EH&I	955	8

However, Damerham with 432 electors, has 9 Councillors.

3.4 Historically, EH&I PC had 10 councillors but, because of a spate of vacancies and difficulties filling those vacancies, the number was reduced (at the request of the Parish Council) to 8 with effect from the 2007 elections. In 2007 only 6 candidates were nominated for the 8 vacancies. All candidates were elected unopposed, with the Parish Council co-opting 2 members to the remaining two vacancies. In 2011, there were 8 candidates for the 8 vacancies, so all were elected unopposed. It will be seen from the attached Appendix 1 that EH&I PC is confident that, if their request for an increase to 10 is granted, sufficient residents will come forward to fill the 10 places on the Council in May 2015.

3.5 Because of the need for consultation with EH&I residents twice during the statutory process, and for reports to this Committee at different stages, the timetable for conducting a CGR in time for the May 2015 elections is extremely tight. The notice of election for the May 2015 elections will be published on or around 26 March 2015 and all formalities attached to the CGR must be completed by then. EH&I PC has, however, undertaken to publish special editions of its parish newsletter which may be used as the medium for consulting residents.

3.6 The timetable would then be:

September – November 2014	Initial consultation with EH&I residents
14 November 2014	GP&L Committee to consider initial responses and agree draft proposals
November – December 2014	Consult on draft proposals
16 January 2015	GP&L Committee to consider responses to draft proposals
23 February 2015	Council to decide whether to make an order to increase numbers

4. ISSUES TO CONSIDER

4.1 To comply with Government guidance, the primary consideration for the Council in considering EH&I PC's request will be whether their request will result in "effective and convenient local government". A further important consideration is that community governance in the area reflects the identities and interests of the community.

4.2 New Forest District Council has traditionally agreed to Parish Councils' requests to vary the numbers on Parish Councils. The District Council has taken the view that Parish Councils are best placed to judge the number of members appropriate for their circumstances.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Resources involved will be mainly employee time. The Parish Council has undertaken to produce, at its cost, special editions of its newsletter to facilitate the consultation process.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL, CRIME & DISORDER AND EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 None.

7. RECOMMENDATION

7.1 That a Community Governance Review be undertaken in Ellingham, Harbridge and Ibsley Parish with a view to increasing the number of parish councillors from 8 to 10, with the terms of reference set out in Appendix 2 to this report.

Further information:

Rosemary Rutins
Democratic Services Manager
Tel: (023) 8028 5588
e-mail: rosemary.rutins@nfdc.gov.uk

Background Papers:

Published documents

APPENDIX 1

ELLINGHAM, HARBRIDGE AND IBSLEY PARISH COUNCIL

Rosemary Rutins
NFDC Democratic Services

21 July 2014

Dear Rosemary,

Request to increase number of members for Ellingham Harbridge & Ibsley Parish Council

The Parish Council currently has 8 members and we wish to increase the number to 10. Our electorate is currently over 950 and looking at the guidelines for number of members for the size of electorate (501-2500 electors between 6-12 members), we feel it is reasonable to request an increase from 8 to 10 members. I have outlined our motives for this request as follows:-

- The Parish Council needs to increase its numbers to allow the workload to be spread over a larger base and to ensure that councillors have the time to involve themselves in the detail of issues, rather than merely carrying out an overview role.
- The increasing number of planning applications that we deal with. Last year we received over 60 applications to review, with each application requiring at least 3 hours to visit the site, prepare, upload documents for viewing at the meeting and then present at the meeting. This results in some members not wanting to present their own planning applications. Having only 8 members, it necessitates for all members to sit on both the Parish Council and the Planning Committee meeting each month.
- The increasing number of consultations that we are required to distill for the parishioners, and respond to. These documents are regularly lengthy, all need to be read to assess whether it is relevant to our parish, and then disseminated to the members and responded to.
- Last year each councillor had over 1500 emails to read and digest.
- It is not unusual for two councillors to be away at one time, leaving 6 members and the clerk at our meetings.

- Being a large parish covering over 1200 acres with three main settlement areas, having more members living amongst the communities helps the Councillors to best represent local opinions and feelings.
- The Community Plan project was successfully completed, however now the members want to be able to have time to work on implementing it.

The current workload imposed on each councillor every month amounts to approximately two days. Given that this is all voluntary work it imposes a significant pressure on councillors which borders on being a burden. The Planning Committee Chairman in particular has significant issues with keeping Councillors motivated to deal with an increasing workload and without an increase in numbers struggling to keep existing members on the committee.

Two candidates were interested in our co-option vacancy earlier this year, and other residents have expressed great interest and we are confident we will be able to fill the vacancies.

Kind regards,

Natasha Mackenzie

APPENDIX 2

PROPOSED COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW OF ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS – ELLINGHAM, HARBRIDGE & IBSLEY PARISH COUNCIL

RECOMMENDED TERMS OF REFERENCE:

- 1) To review the number of members on Ellingham, Harbridge & Ibsley Parish Council in the light of the Parish Council's request to increase the numbers from 8 to 10 with a view to implementing any changes that might be agreed with effect from the next quadrennial elections in May 2015.
- (2) That the review be undertaken in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and any statutory guidance