

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

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Following a request from the Ellingham, Harbridge & Ibsley Parish Council (EH&I PC) to increase the size of the Council from 8 to 10, this Committee on 19 September 2014 agreed to undertake the first stage of a “community governance review”, the process that must be followed before numbers on a parish council may be varied. In arriving at this decision, some members of the Committee expressed doubt that the increase in numbers was necessary, particularly in view of the fact that the Parish Council had, in 2007, been unable to fill vacancies following an increase in the size of the Council approved a few months earlier. In addition, Committee members’ experience was that it was becoming increasingly difficult to find local people to serve on parish councils and they were concerned that the current reported interest in serving on EH&I PC would not be maintained.
- 1.2 However, notwithstanding the reservations expressed, the Committee agreed to commence the first stage of the review in order to assess local opinion.

2. CONSULTATION

- 2.1 The legislation prescribing the steps to be taken in undertaking community governance reviews (the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007) requires extensive consultation with local people, twice. To fulfil the requirement for seeking residents’ initial views, the article attached as Appendix 1, prepared by the District Council, was sent to each household in the parish. The Parish Council arranged its circulation. Members will see that, as requested, the article included the Committee’s reservations about the need for an increase in numbers. Responses were requested by 30 October.
- 2.2 Thirteen have been received from residents of the parish. Eleven are in favour and two are against an increase.

Reasons put forward by those in favour of an increase are:

- The amount of time required to deal effectively with parish affairs, especially planning applications, is onerous
- The Council is hardworking, takes its representative duties seriously and it is evident it needs more numbers effectively to cover the workload of a wide and diverse area
- The Council historically had 10 members – numbers were reduced only because there was difficulty filling vacancies – but now there are volunteers willing to serve so there is no reason not to reinstate the number to 10.
- The Parish Council is best placed to determine the appropriate number of members to serve the parish adequately.

Those opposed support the General Purposes and Licensing Committee's reservations about the need for more members and have said:

- Too much time is spent dealing with planning applications. Modern technology should be used more extensively to view plans and sites
- There have been only two contested elections since 1976 – in 1979 and 2003 (district council officers are unable to confirm this)
- Few local people attend meetings which does not demonstrate a high level of public interest
- There is no need for all members of the parish council to be members of the planning committee
- The planning committee does not meet every month because sometimes there are no applications to consider
- The Council creates work over and above that which is necessary or what residents want. Councillors should find out residents' wishes.
- The council should allocate two members to each of the three main settlement areas, a total of six councillors. This would leave two "extra" members, which should be sufficient
- The council has worked well with the current number of eight, and sometimes six, members

3. ISSUES FOR THE COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER

- 3.1 It is now for the Committee to consider whether to proceed with the community governance review. If so, the Committee should formulate draft proposals and consult on them. The Parish Council has agreed to facilitate that consultation by publishing a special edition of its newsletter, or otherwise arranging for delivery of the District Council's consultation.
- 3.2 As reported to the Committee on 19 September, there is no national guidance on the size of parish councils. EH&I's electorate is 955. The DCLG reports that parish councils with electorates between 501 and 2,500 have, typically, between 6 and 12 councillors.
- 3.3 There are no parish councils within New Forest District of directly comparable size to 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

But Damerham, with 432 electors, has 9 Councillors.

- 3.4 Members are reminded that the primary consideration for the District Council is whether increasing the numbers on the Parish Council will result in "effective and convenient local government". A further important consideration is whether community governance in the area reflects the identities and interests of the community.

- 3.5 The District Council has, in the recent past, agreed to parish councils' requests to vary numbers on parish councils. In doing so this Council has taken the view that parish councils are best placed to judge the optimum number of members appropriate for their circumstances.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The resources involved in the review are mainly employee time. The Parish Council has undertaken to bear the cost of the circulation of the necessary District Council consultations.

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

- 5.1 There are none.

6. RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 That the Committee determines whether to proceed with the community governance review in Ellingham, Harbridge & Ibsley with a view to increasing the number of parish councillors from 8 to 10.

Further information:

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

Background Papers:

Published documents
Correspondence from residents supporting or objecting to the proposal

APPENDIX 1



SHOULD THE PARISH COUNCIL INCREASE ITS MEMBERS FROM 8 TO 10?

Your Parish Council wants to increase the number of parish councillors from 8 to 10, for the reasons set out in their letter to the District Council below. If a change is made, the increase will take effect from the May 2015 elections.

New Forest District Council can vary the size of parish councils after following certain statutory requirements, which include consulting local residents who are eligible to vote (electors).

By law, parish councils must have at least 5 councillors, but, other than this minimum, there are no statutory or recommended numbers. Ellingham, Harbridge and Ibsley has 955 electors. Typically, across the country, parish councils with 501– 2,500 electors have between 6 and 12 councillors. Within New Forest District, parishes with 501 – 2,500 electors have between 7 and 10 councillors, with those parishes with larger electorates within the range having, typically, more councillors than those towards the lower end.

What does the District Council think?

At this stage, District Councillors have reservations about the parish council's need for more members. The parish council does not have more duties or responsibilities than those of other parish councils with comparable electorates and which operate successfully with fewer councillors. Historically, EH&I Parish Council had 10 councillors but, because of a spate of vacancies and difficulties in filling those vacancies, the number was reduced, at the request of the Parish Council, to 8 from the 2007 elections. In 2007 only 6 candidates were nominated for the 8 seats. The Parish Council had to co-opt two members to bring its numbers up to the full complement. At the 2011 elections there were 8 candidates for the 8 seats, so again there was no election.

The Parish Council is confident that enough residents will come forward to serve on an enlarged parish council. While being very pleased that there is interest amongst residents in serving on the Parish Council, District Councillors are concerned that the current interest will not be maintained and the parish council will once again find itself in a position where it is unable to fill vacancies.

Tell us what you think:

Please send your views on the proposed change by e-mail or letter to arrive by not later than Thursday 30 October 2014 to:

rosemary.rutins@nfdc.gov.uk or

Rosemary Rutins

New Forest District Council

Appletree Court

Beaulieu Road

Lyndhurst

SO43 7PA

Telephone: (023) 8028 5588 (ask for Rosemary Rutins)

Next steps:

If, after considering the responses to this consultation, the District Council decides to move to the next stage of the statutory process, the District Council's proposals will be published and further views invited. A final decision will then be taken for implementation at the May 2015 elections.

YOUR PARISH COUNCIL'S REQUEST TO THE DISTRICT COUNCIL:**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.