

Questions and feedback from Pensioners Forum

Community Governance Review

Q1 Who is on the Steering Group?

A1 Six cross-party members are on the CGR Steering Group – Cllr Mackintosh, Cllr Eldred, Cllr Larratt, Cllr Wire, Cllr Mason, Cllr Beardsworth

Q2 Why is the Council able to say no to what people vote for?

- turnout, marginal, etc considerations to be taken into account

A2 The General Purposes Committee agreed for 12 proposals made in the first stage to go forward for detailed consultation in the second stage. The list of proposals can be found at www.northampton.gov.uk/cgr or by contacting Keith Mitchell on keithmitchell@northampton.gov.uk tel 01604 837072. The detailed consultation on the 12 proposals is being undertaken in two parts – a survey of views from people and organisations across the Borough as well as a local advisory poll (referendums) of the registered electors in the areas affected. The Council will take account of evidence provided in both of these parts when deciding to approve proposals or not. Under the CGR guidance from Central Government, the Council is responsible for undertaking the consultation and also for making the decision on whether proposals are implemented. There is no requirement to undertake a poll but NBC wanted to include this consultation method as well as a survey. The type of poll being undertaken is governed by different legislation to a normal election and the results are advisory rather than definitive.

Q3 Will we end up paying twice e.g. if my area takes on street lighting will I have to pay the parish and still have to pay the NCC which calculates its council tax including providing street lighting?

A3 If services are taken over from the County by a Parish, the County's costs will be reduced and they may decide to reduce their Council Tax charge, but that decision is up to the County.

Q4 Can't we have community area meetings/parish meetings instead? You dont have to pay for those like you do for parish council.

A4 These are forms of community governance and petitions could have been established in favour of these.

Q5 Why haven't I been asked - I live in Parklands?

Cllr Oldham says he thinks people stop collecting signatures once got enough to meet the required threshold.

A5 Information about the CGR was publicised in early February in the press, on the radio, to local community groups, community centres, on the Council's website, at public briefings. It was then

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down to individuals in each area to set up a petition and to canvass support from local residents. These lead petitioners have employed various ways to promote their petition but may have chosen not to contact every household.

Q6 How will I know about the next stage? How will I get a chance to say no?

A6 The detailed consultation on the 12 proposals agreed by the GP Committee to go to this second stage is being undertaken in two parts – a survey of views from people and organisations across the Borough as well as a local advisory poll (referendums) of the registered electors in the areas affected. The survey is taking place over the 7 weeks from 3 September to 15 October. This has been publicised in the last 2 weeks in the press, on the radio, to local community groups, to community forums, community centres, on the Council's website, and at public briefings to be held on 11 September 1-3pm and 13 September 6-8pm at the Guildhall. There is also a display in the One Stop Shop for the next 7 weeks. Information and the survey can be obtained online or from the One Stop Shop or from community centres, Parish offices, or by emailing or phoning Keith Mitchell – keithmitchell@northampton.gov.uk tel 01604 837072.

The advisory poll will be held on 15 November in affected areas when you will be able to vote YES or NO to the local proposal.

Q7 Are we having postal votes?

A7 Due to the high costs of a postal vote, the advisory poll will be undertaken at polling stations only.

Q8 How are the boundaries of proposed parish councils defined?

A8 The proposed parish boundaries have been defined by the lead petitioners/campaigners. In the main, these boundaries follow existing ward boundaries.

Q9 Feedback: people are confused which ward they now live in as boundaries have changed. This makes it very difficult to understand this process which is all under the new and unfamiliar boundaries.

A9 The new ward boundaries approved in 2011 have been available on the Council's website since then. There is a detailed map in the CGR consultation document that shows the current ward boundaries and the proposed new parish boundaries. Detailed maps of proposed new parishes can be found on the CGR web pages at www.northampton.gov.uk/cgr

Q10 Feedback: why haven't you provided petitions explicitly letting people know they can petition against having the already existing ones?

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Community Governance Review

A10 The Council's CGR information document published in early February did state that CGRs allow people to create, merge, alter or abolish parish councils.

Q11 Feedback: surely the next step is devolving powers to the parishes? Creating a unitary county council? People don't realise. This is the first time the leading party at NBC is not supporting a unitary Nton. If you devolve more there won't be a case for a unitary Nton. You'll also find that NCC cllr = NBC cllr = parish cllr and getting income for all of these roles.

A11 Officers unable to answer – this is a political question.

Q12 Feedback: why is the information so ambiguous and full of jargon? People won't realise what this work is about - it looks like something the planning consultants might have done.

Cllr Oldham: shares people's concerns that they need to have all the facts on this.

A12 The Council is obliged to refer to the official title of the review and to the relevant legislation. We have endeavoured to use meaningful phrases, such as Parish Council reviews, and more detailed explanations wherever possible.

Q13 Feedback: it doesn't make much sense to me - where's it coming from? is it the Big Society? why are we being asked now?

A13 The local Conservative party manifesto included a plan to undertake the CGR. In addition, Government guidance suggests that it is good practice to carry out a Community Governance Review every 10 – 15 years. There has not been a review of community governance arrangements in the town in recent years and in many parts of the town there are no parish councils.

Q14 Why is no other council in the East Midlands or the county doing this?

A14 Government guidance suggests that it is good practice to carry out a Community Governance Review every 10 – 15 years. Other Councils in the East Midlands or the County will make their own decisions on the frequency of carrying out such a review. There are many councils across the East Midlands that have undertaken a CGR recently or are currently undertaking a CGR including Wellingborough Borough Council, Bolsover DC, Erewash BC, High Peak BC, South Derbyshire, Hinckley & Bosworth BC, Blaby DC, North West Leicestershire DC, Harborough DC, Charnwood, Erewash BC.

Q15 Will we end up with half the town parished and half not - or could NBC decide that so much of the town is parished that it will force the rest of the town to be parished against the wishes of the people?

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Community Governance Review

A15 Cllr Oldham: in W Hunsbury I just said I'd like it to match the ward boundary; proposed parish area - it would depend on who the cllr leading the petition is and what they've decided with their residents have decided what they want the parish to be considered as; yes some of the town will be parished and some won't be - as some wards have not got petitions people in them won't get the opportunity to be asked to vote.