

**Community Governance Review
Working Group**

Friday, 29 April 2022, 10:00am

**Council Chamber – South Kesteven
House, St. Peter’s Hill, Grantham.
NG31 6PZ**



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

Committee Members present

Councillor Graham Jeal (Chairman)
Councillor Louise Clack (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Kaffy Rice-Oxley
Councillor Lee Steptoe
Councillor Mark Whittington
Councillor Ray Wootten
Councillor Linda Wootten
Councillor Ian Selby
Councillor Adam Stokes

Officers in attendance

Graham Watts (Assistant Director of Governance (Deputy Monitoring Officer))
Julie Edwards (Electoral Services Manager)
Deb Wyles (Consultation and Engagement Officer)
Lucy Bonshor (Democratic Officer)
Alice Atkins (Project Lead)

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mason, Councillor Ward and Councillor Manterfield.

Disclosure of interests

Councillor Whittington declared a disclosure of interest as a member of Barrowby Parish Council.

Notes from the meeting held on 14 March 2022

The notes from the meeting held on 14 March 2022 were proposed, seconded and **AGREED** as a correct record, subject to the following amendment to paragraph 2 on page 6 of the agenda (amendment in bold):

'Some Members felt that responses needed to meet or exceed the 2,000 mark in order for them to make an informed decision and it was suggested that Members of the Working Group be emailed weekly with the number of responses received.' Councillor Whittington requested it be formally recorded that he had voted against this amendment.

Overview of the Process for the Community Governance Review

The Assistant Director of Governance and Deputy Monitoring Officer provided an overview of the process for the Community Governance Review. A range of organisations had been contacted (listed in the minutes from the meeting held on 14 March 2022) and these included 6 Parish Councils, 14 Lincolnshire County Councillors who represented divisions within the South Kesteven area, all 56 South Kesteven Councillors and the two Members of Parliament for the area. The CGR consultation was available to be completed either in hard copy or on-line and a total of 1,472 responses had been received to the consultation, which in the context of the defined area was high.

The Assistant Director of Governance further noted that the meeting formed part of the first stage in this process which had involved a consultation seeking to address the question of whether there should or should not be a parish or town council in Grantham as well as the boundary arrangements and number of Councillors relating to a such a council. Any recommendations agreed would be presented to Full Council on 26th May which would consider whether it wished to take a proposal to consultation as part of the next stage of the Community Governance Review.

The Assistant Director of Governance thanked the Community Governance review team for their hard work throughout the process.

Results of the Community Governance Review Consultation

The Chairman proposed that the Working Group address the results to Question 1 first and then subsequently address the results of the remaining questions as there was less clarity in respect of Question 2 onwards in respect of the boundaries.

The Assistant Director of Governance and Deputy Monitoring Officer provided an overview of the results of the Community Governance Review consultation. Overall, when questioned whether a parish or town council should be set up to serve the town of Grantham, 66.17% responses had answered 'Yes', 20.31% had answered 'No' and 13.52% had answered 'Don't know/not sure'. It was noted that the responses to all other questions as well as all commentary was set out in the agenda pack.

Concern was expressed that some of those who had responded to the survey did not know what authority a town or parish Council held. It was also expressed that those

who had responded to the survey were likely to be the most politically engaged citizens and would therefore be well informed on the review.

Further concern was expressed over the validity of the results as there appeared to be duplicated answers within them. The Chairman responded that work was being undertaken by Democratic Services to factor any duplicated responses out, and that the vast majority of these responses had answered 'Don't know/not sure' to question 1, thus the removal of these results would not alter the overall preference for 'Yes'.

It was remarked that other local authorities had implemented town or parish councils following consultation with less than 1% response rate, and that the turnout for the survey in discussion had been 6.4%. Other Members felt that this turnout percentage was still too low to provide a mandate for any decision.

The need for a referendum, rather than a survey, was communicated by some Members who felt that the survey had not obtained accurate data and that a referendum would be more democratic. Other Members felt that residents would be unfavourable to discarding the survey results. The Working Group discussed the potential costs of holding a referendum and costing for different options ranged from £25,000 to £50,000.

There was debate as to the extent the 66% response for 'Yes' could be considered as an outcome for a parish or town council based on the results received.

One Member thanked the Electoral Services Manager and the Consultation and Engagement Officer for the support they had provided him with throughout the process.

Members discussed the comments provided by responders within the survey response data. It was noted that there was a significant number of positive comments regarding the implementation of a town or parish council, but also a number of comments expressing concern for the cost this would entail.

The Chairman noted that he had categorised the comments into 6 categories: negative with a reason (approximately 10%), negative without a reason (approximately 5%), positive without a reason (approximately 15%), positive with a reason approximately 55%), didn't understand the process (approximately 3%), concern about the process (approximately 8%). He stated that he felt that there was still considerable work to be done in respect of the boundaries for a parish or town council.

Support for a town or parish council in Grantham was expressed by some Members who cited that it would allow all SKDC residents to operate on a level playing field, it would be important for engagement at a local level and it would provide another layer of democracy people can access. It was also expressed that 99% of metropolitan towns in England currently had parish or town councils whilst just 13

other towns across England operated under the Chartered Trustees model of governance. Other Members felt that the establishment of a town or parish council should not take place unless a unitary authority was implemented.

The costs of a town or parish council were discussed. It was noted that other town councils had reported that their costs had been higher than expected and concern was expressed that town councils might not maintain services to the same level as district councils could.

(An adjournment took place between 11:10 and 11:20).

Following the adjournment discussion on the boundary and warding arrangements took place. One Member put forward a proposal to utilise the unparished area as the boundary for a Parish or Town Council for Grantham which was seconded. Further discussion followed and it was felt that more work was needed to be done in respect of where a Parish or Town boundary for Grantham should be, especially in relation to the parishes that sat on the outskirts of Grantham, as opinions were not clear from the consultation results.

A question was asked about the timetable and the Assistant Director of Governance and Deputy Monitoring Officer replied that there was no fixed timetable as the Council itself had instigated the Community Governance Review. He advised that if the decision was deferred for another year any established parish or town council would then sync with the existing parish council election cycle.

It was noted that consideration ought to be made to existing surcharges neighbouring village residents had to pay when using Grantham facilities. It was suggested that Democratic Services be authorised to engage in further dialogue with neighbouring communities around these anomalies.

Members expressed concerns relating to rushing the process through rather than extending the review deadline to engage further with residents.

Following the debate the proposer amended his proposal that further consultation in respect of the proposed boundary arrangements for a Grantham Parish or Town Council took place, particularly with residents and Parish Councils in the neighbouring parishes.

Draft Recommendations to Full Council

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** that the following recommendation be made to Full Council:

That the Community Governance Review Working Group recommends to Full Council the establishment of a Parish Council for Grantham, in principle, and that the Assistant Director of Governance be authorised to undertake further consultation in

respect of the proposed boundary arrangements, particularly with residents and Parish Councils of the neighbouring parishes to the unparished area of Grantham.

Close of meeting

The Chairman closed the meeting at 11.58.