

# County Council

20 February 2013

## Request for Reduction Of Council Size: Trimdon Parish Council



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### Report of Colette Longbottom, Head of Legal and Democratic Services

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#### Purpose of the Report

1. To consider the request from Trimdon Parish Council to reduce the number of Parish Councillors on the Parish Council from 21 to 13.

#### Background

2. In March 2012, Trimdon Parish Council expressed an interest in reducing their council size for the following reasons:
  - (i) Most parish councils with greater budgets than Trimdon operate with fewer Councillors;
  - (ii) the Parish Council is seeking "Quality Status". One of the main criteria for this is adherence to the democratic process;
  - (iii) the Parish Council is concerned that the people of the Parish have proper representation and firmly believe that the Council size needs to be reduced;
  - (iv) the Parish Council believes that a reduction of Councillors will ensure that the Council is able to continue to be active and effective within the community it serves.
3. In undertaking any form of community governance review the County Council is guided by the following:
  - Section 93 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007;
  - Guidance issued by the Secretary of State (Guidance on Community Governance Reviews published in March 2010 by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE);
  - Relevant parts of the Local Government Act 1972 ("the 1972 Act");
  - following regulations which guide, in particular, consequential matters rising from any review (if applicable):
    - (i) Local Government (Parishes and Parish Councils) (England) Regulations 2008 (SI2008/625);

(ii) Local Government Finance (New Parishes) Regulations  
2008 (SI2008/626).

4. On the size of parish councils, legislation establishes five councillors as the minimum but does not make any link between the number of electors and the size of the council. The National Association of Local Councils (NALC), the body which represents Parish Councils, has indicated that it believes that seven should be minimum size.
5. Research conducted by Aston Business School in 1992, indicates that councils servicing parishes between 2,501 and 10,000 people have 9 to 16 councillors. Trimdon has 3882 registered electors.

### **Warding Arrangements**

6. The Parish is currently split into 2 wards – Old Trimdon Ward comprising Trimdon Village and Trimdon Grange, and New Trimdon Ward comprising Trimdon Grange and Trimdon Colliery. The Councillor split is 13 and 8 respectively.
7. In the event of the Council size reducing to 13 Councillors, the suggested warding arrangements are as follows:
  - Old Trimdon Ward – 8 Councillors
  - New Trimdon Ward – 5 Councillors

### **Review**

8. In reviewing this request the Council should consider:
  - Whether the decrease in size is sustainable in the medium to long term;
  - Any recognised good practice on council size; and
  - The other options open to it.

### **Consultation**

9. The relevant notice advertising the proposed reduction was published in the Northern Echo on 30 November 2012 and individual letters were sent to local county councillors, the Member of Parliament for the North Durham Constituency, East Durham Area Action Partnership ("AAP"). No objections to the request have been received during the consultation period. Responses were received as follows:-
10. Councillor P Brookes responded to the consultation and was fully supportive of the proposal, particularly because of the problems which had been experienced by the Parish Council in attracting candidates to join the Council.
11. The Right Honourable Mr P Wilson, Member of Parliament for the Sedgefield Parliamentary Constituency, responded to the consultation and had no objections to the proposals.

12. The County Durham Association of Local Councils responded to the consultation and while they were not in objection to the proposal, they did make observations as follows:
- CDALC were concerned about the loss of local democracy in the Trimdon area due to such a substantial reduction and queried why Trimdon Parish Council were not seeking more candidates to stand for election rather than reducing numbers;
  - CDALC questioned whether Trimdon Parish Council would be leaving themselves more exposed to election costs, highlighting that the reduction could mean a greater likelihood of an election being called with the possibility of costs being incurred.
13. In response to the concerns raised by CDALC, Trimdon Parish Council have advised as follows:
- Rather than the Trimdon area losing local democracy, the reduction would actually allow the Parish Council to wholly participate in the democratic process. It was acknowledged that there would be a greater likelihood of an election being called, the Parish Council would welcome the opportunity to be a fully democratically elected and accountable body.
  - The Parish Council are keen to work towards achieving Quality Status, the criteria of which requires that a minimum of two thirds of the Council must have been elected.
  - Trimdon Parish Council last had a full election in 2007 which was uncontested, since then they have held 3 by-elections to fill vacancies, 1 contested and 2 uncontested. As such Trimdon Parish Council believe that the reduction will be a pragmatic approach to resolving a long running problem

## Conclusion

14. The review is focused entirely on the size of the Parish Council. The only options which can be considered are to leave the Parish Council at the current size, or to reduce its size. There has been no objection to the proposal and the reasoning behind the Parish Council's request appears appropriate under the circumstances.

## Recommendations and reasons

15. The County Council are **RECOMMENDED** to agree the request and that an order be made reducing the number of councillors on Trimdon Parish Council from 21 to 13.

## Background Paper(s)

Trimdon Parish Council Community Governance Review File

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**Appendix 1: Implications**

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**Finance - None**

**Staffing – None specific in this report.**

**Risk – Identified in previous reports.**

**Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – None specific within this report.**

**Accommodation – None specific within this report.**

**Crime and Disorder – None specific within this report.**

**Human Rights – None specific within this report.**

**Consultation – Within the body of the report.**

**Procurement – None specific within this report.**

**Legal Implications – Within the body of the report.**