Request for Reduction Of Council Size: Edmondsley Parish Council

Report of Colette Longbottom, Head of Legal and Democratic Services

Purpose of the Report

1. To consider the request from Edmondsley Parish Council to reduce the number of Parish Councillors on the Parish Council from 11 to 7.

Background

2. In March 2011, Edmondsley Parish Council expressed an interest in reducing their council size from 11 members to 8 for the following reasons:

   (i) The parish council had been unable to fulfil a full compliment of councillors for a considerable length of time;
   (ii) It was felt that a reduction in council size would ensure that the Council was able to continue to be active and effective for the community it serves;
   (iii) There was a desire to reduce the council size in line with recommended guidance.

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);
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.

Review

Further dialogue took place between the Parish Council and the County Council whereby consideration was given to an adjustment to the Parish Council's original request for a further decrease in council size from 11 to 7. This had been suggested following consideration of further evidence that the Parish Council had operated with 6-7 parish councillors for a considerable length of time and the five-year electoral forecast for Edmondsley Parish indicated that no significant population increases were anticipated. Further reduction was considered to be more in line with recommended guidance.

The Parish Council were in agreement that the review proceed on that basis and requested that the County Council to proceed with the review.

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

The relevant notice advertising the proposed reduction was published in the Northern Echo on 25 October 2012 and individual letters were sent to local county councillors, the Member of Parliament for the North Durham Constituency, Chester-le-Street and District Area Action Partnership ( "AAP"). No objections to the request have been received during the consultation period. Responses were received as follows:-

Councillors A Bainbridge and Councillor K Davidson both responded to the consultation and had no objections to the proposals.

The County Durham Association of Local Councils was of the view that working with fewer councillors would have no detrimental effect on the Council and offered their support to reduce the size of the Council.

Chester-le-Street and District AAP supported the case for a reduction of council size and stated that the reduction would not have any detrimental impact on the local community. The AAP enjoyed a good working
relationship with the Parish Council in addressing and raising issues through the Parish. The AAP sought clarification that if the population were to increase that the Parish Council could consider making representations for an increase of council size. The Council acknowledges that it has a duty to keep such arrangements under review and would consider any future request from the parish council, if it wished to revisit and review its arrangements in light of potential housing development, although this would be unlikely given that the five-year electorate projection and that fact that there is no such development identified with the local plan.

Conclusion

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

The County Council are RECOMMENDED to proceed with that an order be made reducing the number of councillors on Edmondsley Parish Council from 11 to 7.

Background Paper(s)
Edmondsley Parish Council Community Governance Review File

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Appendix 1: Implications

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.