

# Special Advisory Group

## 7 July 2017

<b>Report title</b>	Community governance review	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Andrew Johnson Resources	
<b>Key decision</b>	No	
<b>In forward plan</b>	No	
<b>Wards affected</b>	Tettenhall Wightwick; Tettenhall Regis	
<b>Accountable director</b>	Kevin O'Keefe, Governance	
<b>Originating service</b>	Democratic Services	
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<b>Report to be/has been considered by</b>	Council	19 July 2017

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### Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Advisory Group is recommended to:

- (1) Recommend to the Council that it should not implement a parish council for the wards of Tettenhall Regis and Tettenhall Wightwick, based on the outcomes of the community governance review.

### Recommendations for noting:

The Advisory Group is asked to note:

- (1) That the outcomes of the citywide community governance review, together with proposed recommendations for Council to consider, will be reported to the Advisory Group in September.

## 1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To provide an update on the progress of the community governance review to the advisory group, to enable it to make recommendations to Council.

## 2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Council received a formal request for a community governance review, specifically in relation to Tettenhall Wightwick and Tettenhall Regis, to which it has a statutory obligation to respond. As the request meets the legislative criteria for triggering a review, the Council has agreed to undertake a community governance review during 2017. The review will be in two parts – a specific review focused on the two Tettenhall wards and a wider review looking at the city as a whole.
- 2.2 A principal authority can initiate a community governance review of its own volition or in response to a petition from local electors. Guidance from the government in 2010 recommended that a community governance review should take place every ten to 15 years. A review should consider the arrangements for parish councils (including, where they are already in existence, whether they should be discontinued) with the objective of ensuring that local government arrangements are 'effective and convenient' as well as reflecting 'the identities and interests of the community in that area'.
- 2.3 The working timetable agreed by the advisory group was as follows:

Date	Activity
Oct 2016	Draft terms of reference submitted to Special Advisory Group for approval.
Nov 2016	Terms of reference submitted to Council for approval.
Oct 2016 – Jan 2017	Preparation of detailed project plan, consultation documents and costs.
Jan 2017	Approval of consultation documents by Special Advisory Group.
Feb – April 2017	(a) Web consultation in respect of city-wide community governance review. (b) Local consultation in respect of Tettenhall community governance options.
April – May 2017	Survey fieldwork (to be carried out by professional market research organisation).
May – June 2017	Preparation of final report and recommendations.
June 2017	Consideration of report and recommendations by Special Advisory Group.
July 2017	Consideration of report and recommendations by Council.

NB: because it was not possible to appoint a survey contractor after the first tender exercise, the fieldwork was delayed. Consequently, the Tettenhall fieldwork concluded at the end of May and the work across the rest of the city in mid-June.

### **3.0 Citywide review**

3.1 Because of the delay in completing the fieldwork outlined above, it has not been possible to include any proposals arising from the citywide review. Consequently, this paper focuses almost entirely on the Tettenhall review and the question of whether there should be a parish council in the two Tettenhall wards. A report on the rest of the city will be submitted to the advisory group after the summer break.

### **4.0 The Council's consultation**

4.1 In February 2017, the Council sent out an information booklet to all households in Tettenhall Regis and Tettenhall Wightwick. This outlined the reasons for the community governance review and explained how residents could contribute to it. One positive from the subsequent Ipsos MORI fieldwork is that 62% of residents were aware of Tettenhall and District Community Council's proposal for a parish council.

4.2 As part of the initial consultation, the Council promoted an online survey, both through the information booklet and its own publicity (e.g. via social media). There were 131 responses to the survey, of which 95% lived in the Tettenhall area. However, this equates to less than 1% of the people who live in Tettenhall and is obviously self-selecting and may not be representative of the community (i.e. in terms of age, gender, ethnic background, etc.).

4.3 The key headlines from the survey were:

- 54% of the respondents (69 people) were 'not in favour at all' of the parish council proposal.
- 12.5% of the respondents (16 people) were strongly in favour of the proposal.
- 57% (72 people) were not willing to pay more council tax for a parish council.
- A quarter of respondents cited another level of bureaucracy and having to pay more council tax as the main drawbacks of the proposal.
- A small number of people identified some local benefits for residents (e.g. improved services, promoting the Tettenhall village identity).

4.4 The main benefits identified by respondents were:

- More say in local services would lead to improvements.
- Opportunity to participate (e.g. standing as parish councillor).
- Greater involvement for 'outlying' areas, such as Castlecroft.
- Retaining and promoting Tettenhall's village identity.
- Greater say for local people.

NB: the benefits were identified by very small numbers of people in all cases, sometimes only one person. The most popular benefit (10% of respondents) was a greater say for local people.

4.5 The main drawbacks identified by respondents were:

- Increased council tax, particularly for those on low incomes.
- The limited powers of parish councils.
- Distancing Tettenhall from the rest of the city.
- Lack of clarity about what a parish council would actually do.
- Another level of bureaucracy.
- Unnecessary – ‘currently well served by the City of Wolverhampton Council’.

4.6 In addition to the survey work, two public meetings were held in March. These were reasonably well attended, with 71 and 67 attendees respectively. The meetings were structured around a presentation from the Cabinet member, followed by a question and answer session. The primary concern was a lack of information about what the parish council might do, which is a limitation of the process if nobody is campaigning on behalf of the proposal. Straw poll votes at the end of each meeting showed a lot of people either against or undecided about a parish council, with only a small minority in favour.

4.7 A small number of emails and letters were received, with the majority arguing against the parish council proposal (although some respondents were in favour and outlined various potential benefits for the community). In addition, a petition ‘against the formation of a parish council for Tettenhall’, with over 200 signatures, was received from a group of local residents.

## **5.0 Professional fieldwork**

5.1 During the phase two consultation, Ipsos MORI conducted telephone fieldwork in the Tettenhall area to gather a representative sample of responses. The advisory group had considered the option of a postal ballot on the proposal but felt that, given the very low turnout at previous such polls (e.g. local plan referenda) and the self-selecting nature of the respondents, a professional survey would ensure a better understanding of the views of the whole Tettenhall community. The core objective of the research was to understand awareness and support for the parish council proposal, in addition to the willingness of residents to pay an increase in their council tax needed to fund it. A copy of the full report from Ipsos MORI is attached as appendix one.

5.2 The key findings from the survey, which are summarised in the report, are:

- Amongst the residents of Tettenhall 50% of residents support the parish council proposal. Awareness of the proposal is high (62% had heard of it), which means the majority of respondents to the survey are responding from an informed viewpoint.

- However, three in ten (29%) oppose it and a further one in five (18%) residents are ambivalent towards the proposal (i.e. neither support nor oppose), which means that a sizeable minority (47%) do not support it.
- There is less support for the parish council proposal in Tettenhall Wightwick than Tettenhall Regis. In Regis, support was 54% but in Wightwick it was only 45%.
- Those who say they were previously aware of the proposal are significantly more likely to actually oppose it than those who were not previously aware of it (37% of those aware of it said this compared to only 17% of those who had not heard of it).
- There is a significant aversion amongst Tettenhall residents to pay for a new parish council through an increase to council tax (the precept) - nearly half (46%) say they are not prepared to pay the necessary increase, compared to only 37% who say they would pay it.
- Residents want a parish council to fulfil the role of maintaining and enhancing the aesthetic appearance of Tettenhall. Therefore, keeping the local area free from litter (48%) and the upkeep of parks, open spaces and allotments (42%) are the two main priorities for any new parish council.
- Over half (53%) of residents want a 'hybrid parish council' (i.e. one which delivers 'some services and influences City of Wolverhampton Council-run service provision').
- Resident satisfaction with the area they live in is extremely high (93% say they are satisfied).
- Resident satisfaction with the City of Wolverhampton Council is also high, with 73% of respondents either fairly or very satisfied with service provision. This is slightly lower than satisfaction across the whole city (80%) but still compares favourably with the national average of 65%.

## 6.0 Options

- 6.1 The phase one consultation demonstrated a level of opposition to the parish council, but the Ipsos MORI survey, which provided a more representative sample of local opinion identified that exactly half of Tettenhall residents might be expected to support the introduction of an additional layer of community governance. However, nearly half were either against or undecided so, as Ipsos MORI explained in its report, 'a sizeable minority (47%) do not support it'. The consultation work, therefore, does not provide a conclusive steer for the decision-making process.
- 6.2 The absence of a convincing majority, either for or against the proposal, is compounded by the responses to the questions about the financial implications of a new parish council. Residents were advised what the national average parish council precept equated to based on their current property and council tax band (NB: the national average precept for a band D property is £57.40 (2016/17 data), which would then be

lower for a band A property and higher for a band H property). They were then asked whether they would be willing to pay this or not. Overall, just over a third of residents (37%) would be prepared to pay the precept, with just under two thirds (63%) either unwilling or unsure. This position is more stark when broken down by ward – in Tettenhall Regis, 43% of residents would be willing to pay the precept but, in Tettenhall Wightwick, it was only 30%. Even amongst those who were in favour of the parish council proposal, less than two thirds (65%) would be willing to pay.

- 6.3 In light of the above, whilst half of Tettenhall residents would be expected to support a parish council in principle, this position is undermined by a lack of commitment to meet the consequent financial costs. Even if the parish council only assumed a minimalist advocacy role, there would still be running costs. The majority of residents (73%) would favour a parish council that delivered services, with the most popular options being to do with street cleaning, community events and traffic calming, which would inevitably raise the precept above a minimal level. Moreover, although there is a small supporting majority (54%) in one of the two Tettenhall wards (Regis), there is not a majority in the Wightwick ward. It is therefore proposed that the Council should not support the implementation of a parish council for the two Tettenhall wards.
- 6.4 One option that was raised at a public meeting was for the Council to hold a referendum on whether to implement a parish council or not. The argument was that this would be a more democratic approach, albeit not representative, enabling every resident to have a say, not just a sample. This would still be a possibility, although it would obviously delay the outcome of the review until the late autumn (assuming a referendum took place in September/October). However, given the cost (estimated to be £25-30,000, in addition to the costs already incurred of £50,000, none of which is funded by the government), this option is not recommended.
- 6.5 The Council could decide to implement a parish council for only Tettenhall Regis, given the small majority in favour. This would potentially be administratively difficult as the local plan covers both wards, not just Tettenhall Regis. Furthermore, whilst support in principle is higher, there is still not a majority prepared to support the resulting precept (43% willing; 44% unwilling; others unsure).

## **7.0 Financial implications**

- 7.1 There are two significant elements of cost associated with the review. Expenditure in the region of £14,000 was incurred in the production and postage of the review guide and a further £36,000 was spent on the consultation work undertaken by Ipsos MORI. These have been funded from the £50,000 budget set aside for community governance review in 2017-18.

[GE/26062017/O]

## **8.0 Legal implications**

8.1 Under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, decisions on whether to implement parish council arrangements and the associated electoral provisions were delegated to principal authorities, with due regard to the views of local people. This legislation was updated in the Legislative Reform (Community Governance Reviews) Order 2015.

8.2 Given the equivocal outcome of the consultation undertaken by the Council, advice was sought from James Goudie QC, who is a leading counsel on local government administrative issues. In his advice, he approved the draft report and did not suggest any amendments to the proposed recommendations. He also did not consider that a referendum was necessary, given the consultation already undertaken.  
[TS/23062017/T]

## **9.0 Equalities implications**

9.1 As no changes to the community governance arrangements in Tettenhall are proposed as a result of the review, there is no requirement for an equality analysis.

## **10.0 Environmental implications**

10.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

## **11.0 Human resources implications**

11.1 There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

## **12.0 Corporate landlord implications**

12.1 There are no corporate landlord implications arising from this report.

## **13.0 Schedule of background papers**

Report to the Special Advisory Group, 2 May 2017: *Community Governance Review update*

<http://wolverhampton.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s41448/Community%20Governance%20Review%20Update.pdf>

Report to the Special Advisory Group, 13 January 2017: *Community Governance Review – draft consultation document*

<http://wolverhampton.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=165&MId=5971&Ver=4>

Report to the Special Advisory Group, 21 October 2016: *Community Governance Review*

<http://wolverhampton.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=165&MId=5968&Ver=4>