

Northumberland County Council Community Governance Review 2022 Final Recommendations

A Review of the electoral arrangements of the Parish of Hepscott under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007

Background

Northumberland County Council resolved to undertake a Community Governance Review (CGR) of Hepscott Parish in Northumberland County in the light of changes required as a result of the Community Governance Review in relation to Morpeth, Hebron and Hepscott of 2020 ('the Morpeth Review')

Initial consultation

On 8 September 2022 the Council published terms of reference to conduct a Community Governance Review of the Parish to consult on what the consequential electoral arrangements for Hepscott Parish should be to ensure that effective local governance arrangements that promote community cohesion were maintained or improved.

The terms of reference timetable published on 8 September was then amended to include the publication of a draft and final recommendation reports to be published in order to allow for reasonable periods of consultation with local electors and stakeholders.

Initial consultation took place on 8 September 2022 for a four-week period involving the Division County Councillor (H.G.H. Sanderson) and Hepscott Parish Council. A press release was issued to cover interested electors with articles appearing in the media, and information given on how to make representations. Relevant information was also published on the Council's website.

Three responses were received as part of the consultation process.

Analysis of responses to Initial Consultation

Comments arising from the consultation process support an increase in the number of Councillors elected to Hepscott Parish Council. The additional Members would be required to ensure adequate representation for the South Fields Estate which was yet to be completed and for parts of the large Parish area which could not currently be reached by the existing Parish membership. **This proposed increase does fall within the guidance and is supported.**

Further comments relate to the ward arrangements for the Parish. In 2025, the area of land that was Hepscott Stobhill Manor ward will become part of Morpeth Town Council area following the Morpeth review in 2020. Moving forward as a result of this change, Hepscott Parish does not feel that the division into wards is beneficial for the Parish and has requested that its remaining area (currently Hepscott Parish

ward) should not be divided into wards for the purpose of electing councillors. **This proposal is supported as several Parish Council's within Northumberland are un-warded and can be managed as part of the election cycle.**

Draft Recommendations

Draft recommendations were published, and a further period of consultation took place from 18 November to 19 December 2022 when the draft recommendations were published on the Council website and interested parties provided the opportunity of commenting further on the proposals.

There were no further comments.

The law, duties and guidance

In undertaking the review, the Council will be guided by Part 4 of Chapter 3 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (referred to as 'the 2007 Act'), the relevant parts of the Local Government Act 1972, guidance on CGR's issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England in March 2010. Also, the following Regulations which guide consequential matters arising from the review: Local Government (Parishes and Parish Councils) (England) Regulations 2008 (SI2008/625).

Following the guidance on community governance reviews referred to above, a CGR must reflect the identities and interests of communities and should take account the impact of community governance arrangements on community cohesion and the size, population and boundaries of a local community or parish.

Before making any recommendation or publishing final proposals the Council will take full account of the views and suggestions of by local people and organisations and will comply with the statutory consultation requirements by:

- Consulting local government electors and other persons or bodies who appear to the Council to have an interest in the review.
- Considering any representations received in connection with the review.
- Notifying consultees of the outcome of the review; and,
- Publishing all decisions taken and the reasons for such decisions.

In particular, the Council will consult:

- Local government electors/residents in the Parish of Hepscoth.
- The Parish Council of Hepscoth.
- Northumberland County councillors (as appropriate); and

Timeline and key stages

8 September 2022	Issue press release and publish terms of reference and notices within the Parish
7 October 2022	Deadline for any comments/objections
18 November 2022	Publication of draft proposals
23 December 2022	Publish final recommendations
18 January 2023	Report to Council informing it of the outcomes of the review and making recommendations for Council to resolve upon
Spring 2023	Making of the relevant order, subject to the Council's decision

Electoral Forecasts

When considering the electoral arrangements of the parish, the Council must consider any likely future change in the number or distribution of electors within five years from the day the review commences.

The review will use the latest electorate figures available at a parish level together with the estimated delivery of new dwellings within the five-year period taken from the Council's most recent statutory development plan.

Information from the Council's land and property gazetteer indicates that predicted new build in the Hepscoth Parish area (South Fields estate) will result in an additional 104 new properties completed within the review period, giving an additional 177 electors.

Considerations

Legislation requires that the Council must ensure that community governance within the area:

- reflects the identities and interests of the communities in the area,
- is effective and convenient and takes into account any other arrangements for the purpose of community representation or engagement in the area.

In considering proposals for change, the Council will take the following into account:

- Parish status (council or meeting)
- Electorate – existing and forecast growth.
- The review aims to ensure that parishes reflect community identity and interest and that they are viable administrative and democratic units.
- Parishes with 150 or fewer local government electors cannot have a council and can only be a parish meeting (unless the parish already has a council).

- Between 151 and 999 local government electors the review can recommend that the parish should have a council (optional) and where the parish has 1000 or more local government electors the review must recommend that the parish has a council.

Council size (number of councillors)

The minimum number of parish councillors that a council can have is five. A quorum for a parish council is three or a third, whichever is the greater number.

National research guidance suggests the following levels of representation for parish councils:

Electorate	Councillor Allocation
Less than 500	5 – 8
501 – 2,500	6 – 12
2,501 – 10,000	9 – 16
10,00, - 20,000	13 – 27
Greater than 20,000	13 – 31

Government guidance is that each area should be considered on its own merits having regard to population, geography, and the pattern of communities. The Council will pay particular attention to existing levels of representation and existing council sizes which have stood the test of time.

In considering requests to change the number of councillors on any individual parish council, the Council will review the electoral history for the parish including the number of contested elections that have been held, the number of vacant seats following normal parish elections (every 4 years) and the history of co-options (i.e., has the council been able to fill vacancies).

Summary

Hepscott Parish Council was established in 2011 by way of an electoral changes order that set out a Parish of seven councillors divided between two wards, Hepscott ward with five councillors (1053 electors) and Hepscott Stobhill Manor ward with two councillors (299 electors).

In January 2021, Northumberland Council agreed to a community governance request to move an area from Hepscott Parish to Morpeth Parish, which effectively removed Hepscott Stobhill Manor ward from Hepscott Parish.

Despite losing 299 electors as a result of this change, Hepscott Parish will grow by 177 electors as a result of new build in the Parish area, giving them a potential 1230 electors.

Final recommendation

Taking into account the guidance, the statutory obligations and the result of the consultation exercise, the Council's final recommendations are as follows: -

- (1) the number of Parish Councillors on Hepscoth Parish Council be increased from seven to nine.**
- (2) that Hepscoth Parish Council should not be divided into wards for the purpose of electing councillors**
- (3) authorise the Monitoring Officer to make, sign and seal the appropriate Orders by virtue of the powers contained in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.**

Lesley Bennett, Senior Democratic Services Officer, Northumberland County Council, County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 2EF.

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