

# **Review of Community Governance in the Parish of Greencroft by Durham County Council**

## **Final Recommendations**

A review of Community Governance in Greencroft Parish commenced in January 2014, following a request from Greencroft Parish Council to reduce their council size from 11 to 8 Councillors.

### **Background**

In July 2013, Greencroft Parish Council expressed an interest in reducing their council size from 11 Councillors to 8 for the following reasons:

- only five residents stood for election at the last elections held in May 2013 and the Council has experienced difficulties in filling vacant seats by co-option;
- the number of vacant seats can make it difficult for the Council to be quorate at its meetings;
- the current arrangement does not promote effective or efficient local governance;
- the Council is concerned about its future sustainability.

### **Consultation**

The County Council published a statutory notice advertising the proposed reduction was published on the County Council's website from 21 January 2014 for a month, and individual letters were sent to local county councillors, the County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC), Member of Parliament for the North Durham Constituency, and the Mid Durham Area Action Partnership.

In addition to this, the Parish Council displayed relevant notices on their notice board. Copies were also delivered to most of the houses in the parish, in particular those in the main vicinity of Lanchester Road. An item was also placed on the agenda of the Parish Council for any members of the public who wished to comment on the proposals.

### **Analysis of Responses**

A total of 2 responses were received. No objections to the request were received during the consultation period by either the County Council or the Parish Council.

The County Durham Association of Local Council's (CDALC) expressed their support for the Parish Council to reduce its council to what it considered to be *an appropriate number of eight councillors*. In their response they wished to draw to the County Council's attention that the reduction in council size makes it easier for an election to be called at normal elections and they were disheartened to hear that local democracy in the area was not as vibrant as it could be.

CDALC also commented that Greencroft Parish Council had an electorate of around 159 (at the time of the consultation) and 11 councillors, which represented nearly 7 % of their electorate being required to fill their full complement of councillors which was quite a high proportion of the electorate. Other examples from around the County have 7 councillors and their electorates range between 520 (Castle Eden) and 101 (Muggleswick) therefore the proposal from Greencroft appeared reasonable.

Mid Durham Area Action Partnership supported the request by the reasons submitted by the Parish Council which were included within the statutory notice.

### **The Law, Duties and Guidance**

Under section 93 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, a Principal Council must comply various duties when undertaking a community governance review, including:

- i. It must have regard to the need to secure that community governance within the area under review:
  - a. reflects the identities and interests of the community in that area
  - b. is effective and convenient.
- ii. In deciding what recommendations to make, the Council must take into account any other arrangements, apart from those relating to parishes and their institutions:
  - a. that have already been made, or
  - b. that could be madefor the purposes of community representation or community engagement in respect of the area under review.
- iii. The Council must take in to account any representations received in connection with the review.

Under Section 100 of the Act, the Council must have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State. In March 2010 Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England Community Governance Reviews, published guidance on community governance reviews.

The guidance refers to a desire to help people create cohesive and economically vibrant local communities and states that an important aspect of this is allowing local people a say in the way their neighbourhoods are managed. The guidance does stress that parish councils are an established and valued form of neighbourhood democracy and management in rural areas that increasingly have a role to play in urban areas and generally have an important role to play in the development of their communities. The need for community cohesion is also stressed along with the Government's aim for communities to be capable of fulfilling their own potential and overcoming their own difficulties. The value which is placed upon these councils is

also highlighted in the fact that the guidance states that the Government expects to see the creation of parishes and that the abolition of parishes should not be undertaken unless clearly justified and with clear and sustained local support for such action.

The guidance also states that the Council must have regard to the need to secure community governance within the area under review reflects the identities of the community in the area and is effective and convenient.

On the size of parish council's section 16 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972 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.

Research conducted by Aston Business School in 1992, indicates that councils servicing parishes with less than 500 electors had between 5 to 8 councillors. Greencroft Parish Council had 159 registered electors (May 2013).

### **Final Recommendation**

Taking into account the guidance, the statutory obligations and the results of the consultation exercise, the County Council's final recommendation is that a reorganisation order be made after a period of four weeks from the date of these recommendations to reduce Council size of Greencroft Parish Council from 11 to 8 Councillors, with effect from the Parish Council elections in 2017.

For enquiries for further information on these final recommendations please contact [democraticservices@durham.gov.uk](mailto:democraticservices@durham.gov.uk) or telephone, 03000 269 714