

COUNCIL MEETING – 14 JUNE 2012

Recommendation to Council from the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 7 June 2012 – Item 10(a)

GPC/12/7

Community Governance Review - Stotfold Parish (Area of Fairfield)

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services regarding the Community Governance Review currently being undertaken for the area of Fairfield within Stotfold parish.

Mindful that the membership of the Committee had recently increased, and to ensure that new Members were fully aware of the background to the Committee's previous discussions on 8 December 2011, copies of all documents considered by the Committee at that meeting were attached as appendices to the report. A copy of the relevant minute from the Committee's meeting on 8 December was also attached. In addition the Committee had before it the results of a secondary consultation carried out at the request of the Committee on 8 December together with an analysis of the comments received and representations from Stotfold Town Council. The Committee was also provided with the following general background information relating to the Review process:

- Criteria for undertaking a review
- Initial/secondary consultation
- Timing
- Recommendations and decisions
- Reorganisation Order
- Alternative styles for parishes
- Electoral arrangements
- Publicising draft proposals.

The officer's report reminded Members that the Committee had originally resolved to carry out a Community Governance Review in accordance with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 at its meeting on 4 August 2011. Members were aware that this decision followed the submission of a petition to Central Bedfordshire Council by the Fairfield Community Action Group. The petition had called upon the Council to undertake a Governance Review and create a new community council for the representation of the residents of Fairfield.

The petition had been considered by the Committee and accepted as a valid petition under the Act. To comply with the terms of the Governance Review the Council was required to consider representations made by local people and interested parties. The Committee had, therefore, undertaken a consultation with the Stotfold parish electorate and interested parties under which all respondents were invited to agree or disagree with the proposal to create a new Fairfield Community Council. The results, together with an analysis of the comments received, representations from Stotfold Town Council and a further submission by the Action Group had been considered at

the Committee's meeting on 8 December 2011. The Committee had noted that 73% of those responding had supported the creation of a new community council for the area of Fairfield. Nonetheless, as an alternative to the creation of a separate community council, the Committee had also considered the possibility of creating a separate Fairfield ward within Stotfold parish and it had been resolved that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services explore the concept warding of the parish and report his findings.

A second consultation exercise had therefore been carried out with the Stotfold parish electorate and all interested parties to establish whether they agreed or disagreed with the concept of warding the whole parish using the existing polling districts as the basis. The results of the second consultation revealed that 60% of those responding did not support the concept of warding.

In view of the level of local support for the creation of a separate community council for Fairfield, rather than the warding of the existing Stotfold parish, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services recommended to the Committee in his report that a new parish council be formed. The meeting noted that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services had recommended that the new body be a parish rather than community council, as had been requested by the Action Group, as the existing 71 local councils within Central Bedfordshire were parishes or towns and the use of the term 'community', whilst permitted under the Local Government Act 1972, would cause confusion.

Members sought clarification on a number of points. With regard to the arrangements under which the new parish council would be clerked and operated the Democratic Services Manager explained that the new parish council would be established with effect from 1 April 2013 with the first election of parish councillors being held on 2 May 2013. During this short interim period responsibility for the administration of the parish council would rest with Central Bedfordshire Council as the principle council and, specifically, the following persons:

- The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources
- The Chairman of the General Purposes Committee
- The three Central Bedfordshire Council ward Members representing Stotfold and Langford.

Central Bedfordshire Council would also provide and bear the cost of a temporary clerk to the parish and prepare an advertisement for a permanent clerk. The temporary clerk would be sourced from within the Council's Committee Services team and provide his or her services until the operation of the parish council was transferred to the new councillors on 9 May 2013. A locum clerk could be appointed by the parish if necessary until such time as a permanent holder could be found, possibly within three months of the transfer of responsibilities. He advised that Members of the new Parish Council would sit on the interviewing panel for the appointment of the clerk.

The financial cost of operating a new parish council was raised and clarification sought on the level of precept proposed. In response the Democratic Services Manager stated that the sum was estimated to be approximately £90k pa, similar to the amount currently raised from Fairfield within the current Stotfold Town Council precept. The money raised would cover the cost of employing a parish clerk, the cost of forthcoming local elections, the appointment of a community youth worker and the creation of reserves. The proposed precept would go before Central Bedfordshire Council for consideration in February 2013 as part of the normal budget process.

With regard to the administrative area of the new parish the Democratic Services Manager stated that the map illustrating the proposed boundary of the new parish council was as originally submitted by the Action Group and had not been amended. Both consultation exercises had been carried out based on the boundary shown on the map. Stotfold Town Council had circulated three maps displaying its own preferred options.

With regard to access to the facilities provided on the Fairfield Estate the meeting was advised that the creation of a new parish council would not alter their status and such facilities would be available to the public at large as they were at present.

Given the clear local support for the creation of a Fairfield Parish Council, and in recognition of local determination and democracy, the Committee expressed its own support in favour of the creation a parish council for the area of Fairfield.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

- 1 that the Council makes a Reorganisation Order under Section 86 of the Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007; which creates a parish in the Fairfield Park area of the current Stotfold parish and establishes a parish council in that area to be named Fairfield Parish Council;**
- 2 that the Reorganisation Order referred to in 1 above be based on the following key principles:**
 - a) the boundaries of the parish are as shown on the map attached at Appendix A to these minutes and the parish is named the Parish of Fairfield;**
 - b) the parish council is called 'Fairfield Parish Council';**
 - c) the establishment of the parish council to take effect from 1 April 2013 with the first election to be held on 2 May 2013;**

- d) the first term of office of elected councillors be for 2 years and the following elections be held on the ordinary day for elections in 2015 and every fourth year thereafter i.e. 2019, 2023 etc.;**
- e) the size of the Council relating to the number of councillors to be elected to the parish is set at 7, providing a ratio of 270 electors to each parish councillor;**
- f) the parish council is not split into separate wards;**
- g) the amount of the initial precept of the new parish council for the 2013/14 financial year is £92,525;**
- h) until the councillors elected to the new parish council come into office, the new parish is administered by the persons holding the offices listed below who are in post immediately on 1 April 2013:**
 - CBC Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources**
 - CBC Chairman of the General Purpose Committee**
 - The existing 3 CBC ward members representing Stotfold and Langford;**

3 that the present size of Stotfold Town Council remains unchanged at 15 members pending a Community Governance Review across the whole of the Central Bedfordshire Council area in 2013.