



## **Democratic Renewal Panel**

### **12 February 2009**

#### **Community Governance Review: Hepworth Parish Council**

#### **1. Background**

- 1.1 On 17 November 2008 the Panel considered Report Z352 containing a request from Hepworth Parish Council for an increase in size by one councillor. The report outlined the process to be followed and the Panel made recommendations to Council which resulted in a Community Governance Review of the size of Hepworth Parish Council being instigated to ascertain the views of local people and interested parties on the request for an increase.
- 1.2 This report brings to the Panel the outcome of the consultation undertaken in carrying out the review so that the Panel can form a recommendation to Council.

#### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Panel recommend to Council:- That
- (1) having conducted a Community Governance Review of the size of Hepworth Parish Council in accordance with the terms of reference agreed by Council on 9 December 2008, the size of Hepworth Parish Council be increased by one to comprise eight parish councillors; and
  - (2) this increase to come into effect at the next ordinary elections of the parish council.

#### **3. Consultation**

- 3.1 As recommended by the Panel, consultation was undertaken with:-
- (a) each household in Hepworth Parish;
  - (b) Parish, Borough and County Councillors;
  - (c) Suffolk County Council;
  - (d) Suffolk Association of Local Councils (SALC); and
  - (e) the local constituency offices of political parties.
- 3.2 A copy of the letter and briefing sheet circulated to householders explaining the review process and the options being consulted on are attached at Appendix 1.

- 3.3 In response to the consultation three consultees acknowledged receipt of the consultation documentation but passed no comment on the options outlined. Two other responses were received, both in favour of the increase in Council size (one from SALC and the other from a householder in the parish).
- 3.4 As the case for an increase has been made by the Parish Council and none of the respondents have opposed it the Panel are invited to recommend to Council that the increase be made.

#### **4. Timing of the increase in size**

- 4.1 Whilst Council can approve the increase in size at its next meeting on 24 February 2009 such a change does not immediately come into effect. It would normally wait until the next "ordinary" parish elections (not at by-elections), which would be those scheduled for May 2011. Provision is made for transitional arrangements involving the offices of sitting parish councillors being cut so that earlier parish elections may be held for terms of office which would take the parish councillors through to the next scheduled elections. Officers suggest that this provision has been included in the legislation to cover those instances when substantial changes to electoral arrangements are being made as the result of a major shift in population which needs to be reflected in amended community governance arrangements being put in place at the earliest opportunity. However, officers will consult Hepworth Parish Council to see if it wishes to put a case to Council for early elections, the costs of which would be recharged to the Parish Council.

For further information and background papers contact Cathy Manning, Head of Strategy and Performance, telephone (01284) 757002 or email [cathy.manning@stedsbcc.gov.uk](mailto:cathy.manning@stedsbcc.gov.uk)

12 December

Dear Householder

**Request by Hepworth Parish Council to increase the number of councillors**

Your Parish Council has asked St Edmundsbury Borough Council to increase the size of the Parish Council by one councillor from seven to eight councillors. To consider this request St Edmundsbury has to conduct a Community Governance Review. This letter is to inform you that a review of the council size is taking place and to invite you to contribute your views on whether you think it is appropriate for the number of councillors to be increased.

On the reverse of this letter is a briefing sheet outlining the reasons given by the Parish Council for making the request. The responses to this consultation will be considered at a meeting of the Council's Democratic Renewal Panel to be held on 12 February. The Panel will then make a recommendation on whether or not to increase the number of councillors to the full meeting of St Edmundsbury Borough Council on 24 February. If you wish to express a view then please send your comments to the Electoral Services section by letter or by e-mail to [elections@stedsbc.gov.uk](mailto:elections@stedsbc.gov.uk). To be reflected in the summary of responses in the report to the 12 February meeting your comments will need to be received by Monday, 2 February. However at the meeting a verbal summary of any comments received between 2 February and the 12 February will be given.

The County Council, your local Borough and County Councillors, local political parties and the Suffolk Association of Local Councils have all been made aware that this review is taking place and have also been invited to submit comments. If you have any queries about the review please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Manning  
Head of Strategy and Performance

## Community Governance Review of Hepworth Parish Council

At its meeting on 4 September Hepworth Parish Council unanimously agreed a motion to request an increase in the number of councillors on the Parish Council from seven to eight (minute number 2192). The following reasons for the request were given:

1. "because many of the Parish Councillors are involved with other voluntary bodies within the village, the meeting can often be rendered inquorate if one or two parish councillors are absent;
2. that, when a vacancy was advertised earlier this year, four good applications were received, and only one person could be appointed; and
3. as Hepworth is noticeably larger than neighbouring villages with seven parish councillors (eg Thelnetham and Market Weston), eight would provide better representation within the village."
4. In reviewing the request of the Parish Council, St Edmundsbury Borough Council will take into consideration:
  - 4.1. whether the increase in size is sustainable in the medium to long term;
  - 4.2. any recognised good practice on council size; and
  - 4.3. the other options open to it.
5. On the issue of sustainability the Parish Council has indicated that, although there were only six nominations received for the May 2003 and May 2007 elections in both instances there was a reason for the vacancy and it was filled quickly through co-option.
6. 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 the minimum size. The only research available, conducted by the Aston Business School in 1992, indicates that councils serving parishes of less than 500 people (Hepworth has 417 registered electors) typically ranged in size from five to eight councillors.
7. As this review is focussed 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. In view of the advice from NALC a decrease in size is not being actively considered. Your comments are welcome on whether you believe the parish council should stay at the current size of seven, or be permanently increased to eight.

Please send comments to The Electoral Services Section, St Edmundsbury Borough Council, Borough Offices, Angel Hill, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP22 1XB or by e-mail to [elections@stedsb.gov.uk](mailto:elections@stedsb.gov.uk) by 2 February if possible, or by 12 February at the latest.

For details of the legislative background to Community Governance Reviews and the terms of reference agreed for this review please contact Electoral Services on 01284 757131 and ask to be sent a copy of report Z352, or view a copy of the report online by using the following link  
<http://www.stedmundsbury.gov.uk/sebc/live/documentsearch/reports.cfm?report=4589>