

Forest Heath District Council

(This report is not a key decision. This report has been subject to appropriate notice of publication under the Council's Access to Information Rules)

Report of the Cabinet Member for Resources, Governance and Performance

SPECIAL COUNCIL

25 SEPTEMBER 2013

COU13/639

WANGFORD PARISH - COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE

1. Summary and reasons for recommendation(s)

- 1.1 Wangford Parish has six electors and no Parish Council. A Parish Meeting was called by the District Councillors for the Ward in June 2013 but no electors attended.
- 1.2 It is suggested that a Community Governance review is carried out to consider alternative future arrangements for the Parish, possibly linking it with an adjacent Parish.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 **That the Council undertakes a Community Governance Review in respect of the future arrangements for the governance of the Parish of Wangford.**
- 2.2 **The results of the review are reported back to Council for decision on the matter.**

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3. How will the recommendations help us meet our strategic priorities?

- 3.1 The recommendations will help the authority to be an efficient and effective Council by promoting good governance at local level.

4. Key issues

Background

- 4.1 Wangford, one of the parishes of Forest Heath District, does not have a Parish Council. It has six electors, apparently having declined in numbers as a result of the planting of Thetford Forest after the First World War and the development of the Lakenheath Air Base which commenced during the Second World War.
- 4.2 Each Parish must hold a Parish Meeting between May and June in each year and on other occasions as required. A parish meeting must comply with the Audit Regulations. In the absence of a Chairman for the Parish Meeting the responsibility for the Audit falls upon the responsible officer of the District Council, the Chief Executive.
- 4.3 There has been no Parish Meeting in Wangford, so far as the District Council is aware, for some years.
- 4.4 No precise population figures for the parish are available. This is because where the population of a Parish at the 2011 census is below 100 there are no specific figures available from the Office of National Statistics. All of this points to the need to look at reviewing the set up of the Parish and to consider its future.
- 4.5 A Community Governance Review permits a District Council to exercise the powers relating to the governance of Parishes in its area contained in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The review is a process of consultation and research to identify the best outcome for governance of an area based on community links and ties. The options open to a Council at the conclusion of a review are to merge the Parish with a neighbour, establish a Parish Council reward a Parish Council, change the boundary of a Parish.
- 4.6 Guidance has been published by the Government about the holding of such a review. An extract is attached as an Appendix.

5. Other options considered

- 5.1 The only alternative option to carrying out a Community Governance Review is not to do so. This would mean a continuation of the current unsatisfactory situation in which the parish exists, but does not operate in any way as a properly governed area for the benefit of the inhabitants.

6. Community impact

6.1 Crime and disorder impact *(including Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998)*

- 6.1.1 There is no Crime and Disorder Impact.

6.2 Diversity and equality impact *(including the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment)*

6.2.1 There will be no separate Equality Impact Assessment but issues of Diversity and Equality will be included in the Governance Review.

6.3 Sustainability impact *(including completing a Sustainability Impact Assessment)*

6.3.1 None.

6.4 Other impact *(any other impacts affecting this report)*

6.4.1 The objective of the review is to allow a greater participation in local government for the inhabitants of the Parish.

7. Consultation *(what consultation has been undertaken, and what were the outcomes?)*

7.1 Initial Consultation has consisted of the calling of a Parish Meeting for Wangford by two District Councillors. This was arranged for 26 June 2013. Notice of the meeting was given to all registered electors but none attended. This would tend to indicate that there was no support for the continued operation of the Parish and its governance structures.

8. Financial and resource implications *(including asset management implications)*

8.1 The cost of a Governance Review would fall to the District Council. The cost is difficult to estimate given the unknown factor of what response there will be, but is expected to be contained within existing officer resources. If the review results in the removal of the Parish then there will be some saving to the District Council in making provision for the Parish in documents such as the accounts, and in respect of Audit for the Parish.

9. Risk/opportunity assessment *(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)*

Risk area	Inherent level of risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual risk (after controls)
The review results in a disputed result	Low	Management of the review in line with guidance to involve interested parties	Low

10. Legal and policy implications

10.1 The legal powers are set out in part 4 above.

11. Ward(s) affected

11.1 Brandon West Ward.

12. Background papers

12.1 None.

13. Documents attached

Appendix A – Extract from Guidance on Community Governance Reviews