

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

Community Governance Review – Parishes of Balsall and Berkswell

Balsall Parish Council has asked Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council to conduct a Community Governance Review. The review is now under way asking the residents of Balsall Common, Berkswell and Chadwick End for their views on various aspects of how their lives are governed at a local level. So what does it all mean?

What is a Community Governance Review (CGR)?

A Community Governance Review (CGR) is a legal process whereby Councils can create parish councils, review and change parish boundaries and in extreme cases, abolish parishes.

The Council must ensure that community governance in the area under review reflects the identities and interests of the community in that area, and is effective and convenient.

It is important that recommendations made through a CGR should bring about improved community engagement, more cohesive communities, better local democracy and result in more effective and convenient delivery of local services.

What does a Parish Council do?

Parish Councils are the most local form of government. They collect money from Council tax payers known as a “precept” and this is used to invest in the area to improve services or facilities. Parish Councils can take different forms but usually are made up of local people who stand for election as Parish Councillors to represent their area. They can be the voice of the local community and work with other tiers of government and external organisations to co-ordinate and deliver services and work to improve the quality of life in the area.

Who will undertake the CGR?

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council is responsible for undertaking a CGR within its electoral area.

The Council’s Governance Committee is responsible for overseeing this process and has appointed a small Steering Group of Councillors to work with the Head of Democratic Services and produce draft and final recommendations for consideration before a Community Governance Order is made.

Why is Solihull Council undertaking the review?

Solihull Council received a request from Balsall Parish Council in 2011, for ‘*a review of the whole of the area which falls within the settlement known as Balsall Common (which encompasses part of the area within Balsall and Berkswell Parish Councils) and also the areas within the rest of the East and West Wards within Balsall Parish Council’s boundaries.*’

(See map showing the boundaries between the two parishes)

Balsall Parish Council has asked SMBC to consider:

- a. Whether the settlement known as Balsall Common, which is currently split between 2 parish councils, should form one parish council.
- b. The needs of Fen End, Oakley, Meer End and Chadwick End differ significantly from the urban area, Balsall Common. Rural issues need to be addressed and this may be best addressed by splitting the rural area from the urban area.

- c. Balsall Parish Council would hope to retain Temple Balsall within its boundaries as it is the historical root of Balsall Common and also has a cemetery which has always served the community.
- d. The current boundary which splits Balsall Common could be extended to the railway line in the east and then Berkswell Parish Council would be rural.
- e. Considerations: (1) Lincoln Farm to Meriden Island could transfer to Hampton/Barston and (2) Riddings Hill may not want to be merged but has a Balsall Common address.
- f. The merging of Balsall and Berkswell parishes has been suggested but this would result in an enormous parish.
- g. Could the rural settlements currently within the Balsall Parish Council's boundaries be merged to form a new parish? There may be options for Chadwick End to merge with Knowle to form a completely new parish council.

Consultation

The Borough Council wants to know what local people think about the community governance arrangements for Balsall and Berkswell and you are invited to send your views in writing to Deborah Merry, Head of Democratic Services, Solihull MBC, Council House, Solihull B91 9QS, or by email to dmerry@solihull.gov.uk

The review will not automatically mean there will be changes but it will see if there is a case for change. Solihull Council is not seeking a particular solution at this stage. It wishes to see what your views are and what solutions you feel are right.

The deadline for sending your views at this stage of the review is **2nd April 2012**.

The Council will consider all the representations and then publish **draft proposals** and the reasons behind them. There will then be a further period of time for people to comment on the draft proposals before the final proposals are agreed.

Before making any final proposals, the Borough Council will take full account of the views of local people. The Borough Council will:

- Consult local government electors for the areas under review by distributing information to households;
- publish a notice in the local press informing residents of the review and inviting responses;
- Publish information on the Council's website;
- consult any other person or body which appears to the Borough Council to have an interest in the review
- inform Balsall and Berkswell Parish Councils and the relevant Borough Councillors;
- Take into account any representations received in connection with the review.

There will then be a further period of time for people to comment on the draft proposals before the final proposals are agreed.

Timetable for the Review

A CGR must, by law, be concluded within a twelve month period. The twelve months starts when the Borough Council publishes its Terms of Reference and the review concludes when the Borough Council makes its final decision on the proposals in the CGR.

Action	Relevant Date
Terms of Reference published and consultation period starts	8 th February 2012
Last date for submissions	2 nd April 2012
Draft Proposals are prepared	Governance Committee 19 th April 2012
Draft Proposals are published for consultation	1 st May 2012
Last date for submissions	31 st July 2012
Final Proposals are prepared	Governance Committee 25 th September 2012
Final Proposals are published	1 st October 2012
Governance Committee makes final decision on the review	To Governance Committee 14 th November 2012
Council publishes the Reorganisation Order	4 th December 2012

Terms of Reference

The full formal Terms of Reference document is published on the Solihull MBC website www.solihull.gov.uk/

A number of questions are included in the document, but comments need not be limited to these questions. Solihull MBC is interested to hear views on any aspects of the community governance arrangements for Balsall and Berkswell parishes and all views submitted will be taken into consideration.

Question 1

Do Balsall Common and the other settlements within the parishes of Balsall and Berkswell have a separate and recognisable community of identity of their own? *Please explain your response*

Question 2

Are the communities of identity so distinctive as to justify separate parish governance for their area?

Question 3

The settlement of Balsall Common clearly has an adequate infrastructure of meeting points, community halls, local schools, neighbourhood stores, community organisations, voluntary groups, etc., to support a distinct community of identity that would justify separate parish governance.

Do you think the remaining settlements in Balsall and Berkswell parishes would have the viability to stand alone, or in other groupings? *Please explain your response*

Question 4

Do you feel that the existing parish/ward boundaries should be kept or should alternative boundaries be considered? *Please explain your response*

If easier, a plan is available to download from (web link to follow) please mark on the plan where you think the boundaries should be and send it to SMBC.

Question 5

If you are proposing that a new parish or parishes should be formed, what names would you suggest for any new parishes and why? *Please explain your response*

Question 6

If you are proposing that a new parish should be formed, do you have a view about warding arrangements for the new parish? *Please explain your response*

Other Comments

If you wish to comment on any other aspects of the community governance arrangements for Balsall and Berkswell parishes, please do so in writing or email or by using the on-line questionnaire on the SMBC website.