



# Northumberland

## County Council

### COUNCIL

2 NOVEMBER 2022

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## COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEWS

Report of Interim Chief Executive

Cabinet Member: Councillor Richard Wearmouth

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### Purpose of report

To consider the outcome of three community governance reviews in the County.

### Recommendations

It is recommended that Council

- (1) notes the outcome of the Community Governance Review for Allendale Parish and agrees that the status quo be retained.
- (2) agrees that Tasset with Greystead Parish is no longer subdivided into wards and resolves to make an Order to this effect.
- (3) agrees that the number of Councillors on Acomb Parish Council be increased from seven to nine.
- (4) authorises the Monitoring Officer to make, sign and seal the appropriate Orders by virtue of the powers contained in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

### Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the “Living’ and ‘How’ priorities included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2021-24

### Key issues

1. Three Community Governance Reviews have recently been conducted.

#### **Allendale Parish**

2. Allendale Parish Council asked that a Community Governance Review be carried out with a view to reducing the number of its Councillors. The Parish Council felt that it had become increasingly difficult to fill vacancies at election time and also that its

number of Councillors was disproportionate for the size of the Parish. Reducing the number of Councillors would bring it in line with other similar Parish Councils, while remaining effective and convenient.

3. The terms of reference of the review were: -

*'To consider the electoral arrangements of Allendale Parish Council with a view to reducing its number of members from 13 to 8.'*

4. In accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government Guidance on Community Governance Reviews, a four-week consultation process was carried out. As part of the consultation, Allendale Parish Council was consulted directly by letter along with the local County Councillor, Councillor C.W. Horncastle. A press release was issued in the local newspaper, notices put up in the Parish, and a notice published on the County Council website along with that of Allendale Parish Council.
5. There were no responses from members of the public or County Councillor Horncastle. On the final day of the consultation period an e-mail and telephone call were received from the Parish Clerk for Allendale Parish Council. The Parish Council had met on 9 June 2022 and was now of the view that the proposed reduction in its members would limit the extent of its work. Although there had only been eight nominations at the 2021 Parish Elections, through co-option, the complement of members was now eleven. The Parish Council stated that its members now represented a wide range of professions, age groups and geographical areas. It now felt that eleven would be a more appropriate number of members.
6. It would now seem that a higher number of Councillors than the eight originally requested would be more appropriate for Allendale Parish and rather than make a change to the number of members, the Council is recommended to retain the status quo in this instance.
7. The recommendation to Council has been advertised on the Council website with any comments to be received by 1 October 2022. No comments have been received.

### **Tarset with Greystead Parish**

8. Tarset with Greystead Parish Council asked that a Community Governance Review be carried out with a view to removing its ward system. At previous elections there had been difficulties in election candidates obtaining signatures on nomination papers from electors eligible to do so. If the Parish was unwarded, then this difficulty would be removed, and all eight Parish Councillors would represent the whole of the Tarset with Greystead Parish.
9. The Parish currently comprises two wards, the Tarset Ward and the Greystead Ward. The current electorates are 62 and 174 respectively. The Parish has a total of eight

Parish Councillors with five representing the Tarset Ward and three representing the Greystead Ward.

10. The terms of reference of the review were: -

*'To consider the electoral arrangements of Tarset with Greystead Parish Council with a view to removing its subdivision into wards.'*

11. In accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government Guidance on Community Governance Reviews, a four-week consultation process was carried out. As part of the consultation, Tarset with Greystead Parish Council was consulted directly by letter along with the local County Councillor, Councillor J. Riddle. A press release was issued in the local newspaper, notices put up in the Parish, and a notice published on the County Council website along with that of Tarset with Greystead Parish Council.
12. There were no responses from members of the public or County Councillor Riddle.
13. The Council is recommended to agree that the subdivision into wards of Tarset with Greystead Parish be removed.
14. The recommendation to Council has been advertised on the Council website with any comments to be received by 1 October 2022. No comments have been received.

### **Acomb Parish**

15. Acomb Parish Council asked that a Community Governance Review be carried out with a view to increasing the number of its Councillors. Acomb Parish Council is concerned that the number of Parish Councillors has been seven for at least 30 years despite the increase in the number of houses in the Parish from approximately 450 to 600. The current electorate is 1,042. The Parish Council feels that an increase in the number of Councillors would allow the workload of existing Councillors to be spread out more evenly.
16. The terms of reference of the review were:-
- 'To consider the electoral arrangements of Acomb Parish Council with a view to increasing the number of Councillors from seven to nine.'*
17. In accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government Guidance on Community Governance Reviews, a four-week consultation process was carried out. As part of the consultation, Acomb Parish Council was consulted directly by letter along with the local County Councillor, Councillor T. Cessford. A press release was issued in the local newspaper, notices put up in the Parish, and a notice published on the County Council website. The Parish Council was also invited to publish the notice on its own website.
18. There were two responses to the consultation process from members of the public and a response from Councillor T. Cessford. The responses are outlined in

**Appendix 1.** One of the respondents and Councillor Cessord supported the request and one respondent neither supported or objected.

19. The Council is recommended to agree that the number of Councillors on Acomb Parish Council increases from seven to nine.
20. The recommendation to Council has been advertised on the Council website with any comments to be received by 1 October 2022. No comments have been received.

## **Background**

1. Councils now have extensive powers delegated to them in relation to the creation of parishes, modification of boundaries and names changes by virtue of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. At the request of parish councils, the public or even on their own initiative they may conduct Community Governance Reviews. The aim of reviews is to improve the local governance in an area. The process is managed by principal councils with outcomes incorporated into formal orders.
2. Delegated powers have been granted to the Head of Democratic and Electoral Services Manager to conduct reviews subject to full council reserving the power to agree any formal orders arising out of reviews.

## **Implications**

<b>Policy</b>	N/A
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	None. There were no additional costs incurred in the community governance review other than officer time.
<b>Legal</b>	The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 confirm that the matters within this report are functions reserved to Full Council
<b>Procurement</b>	N/A
<b>Human Resources</b>	All the work can be carried out by existing employees who possess the necessary skill and expertise.
<b>Property</b>	N/A
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	N/A
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	The items raised pose a minimal risk to the organisation.
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	There are no crime and disorder implications.
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	The proposals should improve the governance of the local community.

<b>Health &amp; Wellbeing</b>	N/A
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	N/A
<b>Divisions</b>	Acomb, Bellingham and South Tynedale

**Background papers**

Community Governance File

**Report sign off**

	Full Name of Officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Lynsey Denyer/Neil Masson
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Director	Rick O'Farrell
Interim Chief Executive	Rick O'Farrell
Portfolio Holder(s)	Richard Wearmouth

**Author and Contact Details**

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**ACOMB COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW  
Consultation Responses**

1. *"I would like to support their request for an increase of councillors from 7(seven) to 9(nine). I have been a County Councillor for over five years now, during all of which time I have attended the Acomb Parish Council meetings, and others, as their County Council link person.*

*There is no doubt in my mind that the Parish Council have a very high workload and a limited number of councillors to carry out these tasks. In my time as their elected County Council representative there have been several councillors leave, some of whom because of the high workload and commitment they needed to put into the role. I have also known two people who have had to take a temporary leave of absence for similar reasons.*

*I believe having two extra councillors will help reduce the workload considerably for all, thereby helping to alleviate some of the issues for those who still remain as councillors."*

2. *"Over the years the expectations of residents, as to what their parish council should deliver, has changed. This has placed additional burden on the councillors who are, essentially, volunteers.*

*As the population of the parish has increased it would make sense for the number of councillors to increase so that more emphasis could be placed on the delivery of their statutory duties. It might even enable the delegation of some functions from the county council.*

*I would not want to see the number increased so that the parish council could become embroiled in non-statutory functions that could more appropriately be handled in other ways.*

*I also have a slight concern, that along with many other parish councils, seats on Acomb Parish Council are rarely contested ( I can only recall one election in recent years) and it can be difficult finding people to take on the role of councillor,*

*There is a danger with co-opting members that the council may not fully represent views of residents.*

*However, these concern aside, I am in favour of increasing the number of councillors."*

3. *"I note the Terms of Reference associated with this review.*

*Before detailing my response to this review process, I wish to comment on the very poor arrangements for consultation with the local community on these matters. The Parish Council (PC) has not engaged with this electorate to explain or explore the issues that are of concern to them that have resulted in their request to increase the number of members on the PC.*

*Furthermore, the only information they themselves have publicly produced on this matter was posted on local Facebook pages comprising a link to an article in the local newspaper, the Hexham Courant. This article did not detail the arrangements for consultation.*

*With regard to the notice of the Community Governance Review produced by NCC, I am aware that only a small handful of notices that have been put up on village notice boards. Beyond the local newspaper's article, the PC has not posted anything from themselves on any of the several local social media outlets, including their own website and their own Facebook page. In just the last few days the PC have distributed the latest version of their parish newsletter, and this contains nothing about any of this either. In short, it is the case that very few residents of the parish will be aware of this review process unless they move about the village on foot. In particular, those who do not reside directly within the boundaries of the village itself are unlikely to have accessed the notice boards.*

*I would be interested to hear what would normally be expected to demonstrate adequate consultation with the community and what part the PC itself should play in this.*

*My comments in response to this review are therefore based on what little I do know, basically that "The Parish Council feels that an increase in the number of Councillors would allow the workload of existing Councillors to be spread out more evenly."*

*I have been a regular and frequent observer of the PC for a number of years, and it seems incongruous to read the above statement when the reality is that if the current workload were spread evenly across existing councillors, then perhaps those that do undertake any work might not feel so stretched! In particular, one long-standing member has never, to the best of my knowledge, done any more than turn up to meetings, occasionally depositing their own issues onto the rest of the council (issues that I would reasonably expect councillors to deal with themselves or on behalf of members of the community!) Not only am I not aware of this individual ever actively undertaking any work on behalf of the council or the community, but I am aware that when requested to assist with even simple things, such as distributing leaflets, this has received strong refusal. It appears the rest of the council members are either unable or unwilling to address this situation.*

*One other feature that undoubtedly exacerbates the situation for members of the PC is the high level of turn-over, particularly over the last 3 years. I would suggest a close examination of the reasons behind some of these departures would benefit from close scrutiny and changes in practice and behaviour.*

*I am also concerned about whether or not the council has other reasons for seeking additional members, reasons that are not stated in the public notice of consultation. That is, the fact that Acomb PC is also sole trustee of 3 village charitable trusts. I believe the PC is struggling to achieve a clear differentiation between its' separate roles as statutory body and charitable organisation. I can also see how these circumstances create extra demand on the time of members due to attending additional meetings throughout the course of a year. However, it is not my view this serves as legitimate or appropriate reason for additional councillors.*

*I neither oppose nor support the proposition for increasing the number of seats on Acomb Parish Council, although I am personally not persuaded this will enable them to fulfil their functions any more beneficially than at present unless they re-organise themselves to operate more effectively.*

*I hope my observations are taken into account in deciding this matter."*