

Report to: **Council**

Date: **3 October 2023**

Title: **OKEHAMPTON & SYDENHAM DAMEREL
COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEWS –
INITIAL SUBMISSIONS**

Portfolio Area: **Strategy & Governance**

Lead Member: **Cllr Bridgewater – Communities and
Chairman of the People & Community Hub
Advisory Group**

Wards Affected: **Milton Ford, Okehampton South and
Okehampton North**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken:
(e.g. referral on of recommendation or
implementation of substantive decision) **Immediately
following this
meeting**

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

**That the People & Community Hub Advisory Group RECOMMEND
to Council that:**

- 1. the initial submissions received on the Community
Governance Reviews for Okehampton and Sydenham
Damerel be noted;**
- 2. a second public consultation exercise be undertaken on the
following proposals:**

Okehampton

**Option 1 – that the existing parish boundaries of
Okehampton Town Council and Okehampton Hamlets
Parish Council be amended in line with Appendix A; and**

Option 2 – that the status quo be retained in relation to the parish boundaries of Okehampton Town Council and Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council.

Sydenham Damerel

That the Parish Council be abolished and replaced by a 'Parish Meeting' form of governance; and

- 3. in line with the adopted Terms of Reference (Appendix B refers), the final Review recommendations be considered by the People & Community Hub Advisory Group and presented back to the Full Council meeting to be held on 20 February 2024.**

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 In accordance with the timelines set out in the adopted Community Governance Review Terms of Reference, the People & Community Hub Advisory Group has met on three separate occasions (8 August; 29 August and 12 September 2023) to consider the initial submissions that were received during the Introductory Stage (Stage 2) of the Review;
- 1.2 Following detailed consideration, the Advisory Group has concluded that the following proposals should be subject to a second round of public consultation:

Okehampton:

Option 1 – that the existing parish boundaries of Okehampton Town Council and Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council be amended in line with Appendix A; and

Option 2 – that the status quo be retained in relation to the parish boundaries of Okehampton Town Council and Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council.

Sydenham Damerel

That the Parish Council be abolished and replaced by a 'Parish Meeting' form of governance.

2. Background

- 2.1 As the 'Principal Authority', West Devon Borough Council has ultimate responsibility for considering this Review and undertaking the statutory consultative requirements which include:

- Consulting local government electors for the area under review;
- Consulting any other person or body (including a local authority) which appears to the Borough Council to have an interest in the Review;
- Notifying and consulting Devon County Council; and
- Taking into account any representations received in connection with the Review;

2.2 At its meeting held on 27 June 2023, Full Council appointed the following Members to serve on the People & Community Hub Advisory Group (Minute CM 25/23 refers):

Cllrs A Bridgewater (Hub lead and Group Chair); K Ball; A Cunningham; J Elliott; P Kimber; A Johnson; J Moody; P Squire; and Cllr C West.

2.3 The three Advisory Group meetings focused on:

8 August 2023 – initial consideration and thoughts around the issues raised during the public consultation exercise;

29 August 2023 – representatives from Okehampton Town Council and the petition organiser from Sydenham Damerel attended provided presentations to the Group and responded to Member questions; and

12 September 2023 – a representative from Okehampton Parish Council attended and provided a presentation to the Group before responding to Member questions. Upon the conclusion of the questions, Members provided their final thoughts on this stage of the Review for inclusion in this Council report.

2.4 The local Ward Members for Okehampton South, Okehampton North and Milton Ford were invited to attend each of the three Group meetings.

Consultation Responses - Okehampton

2.5 The full list of comments received for both Reviews during the consultation period are set out on the Council website and can be accessed via the following weblink:

<https://www.westdevon.gov.uk/community-governance-review>

2.6 For Okehampton, 124 comments were received during the consultation exercise that were broadly broken down as:

- 78 in favour of the amendments to the boundaries (as set out at Appendix A);
- 33 comments were against the proposed revisions; and
- 13 submissions gave either a mixed or no definitive opinion.

2.7 Further, of the 124 comments received, 38 had assumed (or suggested) a single Council to replace the existing Okehampton Town Council and Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council.

Advisory Group Deliberations - Okehampton

2.8 Throughout its deliberations, the Advisory Group has cross referenced the Local Government Boundary Commission for England guidance on Community Governance Reviews and, in particular, the emphasis to be given to 'community cohesion'.

2.9 During its deliberations, the Group considered the following options:

Option	Advisory Group Conclusions
Implementation of the proposed revisions to the boundaries as set out in the Town Council submission (Appendix A refers).	Given the number of comments received in support of the revisions and, in recognition of the additional strain being placed on the services of the Town Council as a result of the extensive additional development in the area, the Advisory Group was minded to put forward this option for the second part of the public consultation exercise.
Retention of the Status Quo	The Advisory Group recognised that just over a quarter of submissions received during the first phase of the consultation process had expressed a wish to retain the status quo. Therefore, Group Members felt it appropriate for this option to also be included as part of the second part of the public consultation exercise.
Merging the Town Council and Parish Council	<p>Whilst some comments received during the previous consultation had expressed the view that the two councils should be merged, the majority of Advisory Group Members were not supportive of this view.</p> <p>Irrespective of the ability to implement warding arrangements on a merged Council, these Members remained strongly of the view that the combination of an urban</p>

	<p>town council and a rural parish council would not be conducive to community cohesion.</p> <p>The Group acknowledged that, during his presentation, the Chairman of Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council had stated that the Parish Council would not be opposed to exploratory works being undertaken to merge the two councils. However, this had been caveated by the Chairman stating that this should only be part of (and in the context of) a West Devon Borough wide review. Whilst noting these comments, the Advisory Group concluded that a boundary review of the entire West Devon Borough area was outside of the scope of this Review.</p> <p>In conclusion, the Advisory Group was not minded to include this option as part of the second phase of the public consultation exercise.</p>
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Consultation Responses – Sydenham Damerel

2.10 20 comments were received during the consultation exercise on the Sydenham Damerel proposals that were broadly broken down as:

- 14 in favour of the Parish Council being abolished and replaced by a 'Parish Meeting';
- 6 in opposition to the proposal, with one formal alternative option submitted.

Advisory Group Deliberations – Sydenham Damerel

2.11 The Advisory Group received compelling presentations from both the local Ward Member and the original petition organiser in support of the Parish Council being abolished and replaced by a 'Parish Meeting' form of governance;

2.12 Having received assurances that a 'Parish Meeting' would not result in any ongoing costs being incurred by the Borough Council, the Advisory Group concluded that the proposal to abolish the Parish

Council and replace it with a 'Parish Meeting' form of governance should be the only option consulted upon as part of the second phase of the public consultation exercise.

3. Options Available and Consideration of Risk

- 3.1 The Review continues to progress in line with its adopted Terms of Reference, with the final recommendations to be considered by Full Council at its meeting to be held on 20 February 2024. This will ensure that the Review is completed within the required twelve month period;
- 3.2 Once the Council has approved a recommendation on the draft proposals at this meeting, a second consultation exercise will be undertaken with affected residents and stakeholders contacted with their further comments and/or further proposals invited. This exercise will commence on 5 October 2023 and will conclude on 1 December 2023;
- 3.3 Upon the conclusion of the public consultation exercise, meetings of the Advisory Group will again be convened to enable the Group to make its final recommendations to the Council meeting on 20 February 2024.

4. Implications

Legal/Governance		<p>The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 requires the Council to 'consult the local government electors for the area under review and any other person or body who appears to have an interest in the review and to take the representations that are received into account by judging them against the statutory criteria (as below):</p> <p>'That Community governance within the area under review reflects the identities and interests of the community in that area and is effective and convenient.'</p> <p>The Council is required to complete the Community Governance Review within 12 months from the day on which it publishes the Terms of Reference. A Community Governance Review is concluded on the day on which the Council publishes the recommendations made by the Community Governance Review.</p>
Financial		There are no additional financial implications directly related to this report
Risk		The risk implications are set out at Section 3 above.

Supporting Corporate Strategy		Council Theme – <i>Strengthening Communities</i>
Consultation & Engagement Strategy		The requirements to consult and engage at each stage are set out in the Terms of Reference and are in line with the requirements of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity		There are no equality and diversity implications directly related to this report.
Safeguarding		There are no safeguarding implications directly related to this report.
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		There are no community safety or crime and disorder implications directly related to this report.
Climate Change & Biodiversity		There are no Climate Change & Biodiversity implications directly related to this report.
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		There are no health, safety and wellbeing implications directly related to this report.
Other implications		N/A

Supporting Information

Appendices:

- A. Map setting out proposed amendments to the existing parish boundaries of Okehampton Town Council and Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council; and
- B. Community Governance Review – Adopted Terms of Reference

Background Papers:

- The petitions received at the Council Meeting on 22 September 2022;
- Central Government Guidance on Community Governance Reviews; and
- The representations received during Stage 2 of the Community Governance Review: <https://www.westdevon.gov.uk/community-governance-review>