

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF COUNCIL
25 JULY 2022

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW – SWANSCOMBE TOWN WARD

Ebbsfleet and Swanscombe

1. Summary

- 1.1 To note that a Community Governance Review and consultation is being conducted for the Swanscombe Ward, Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town Council; and to consider if the boundaries of Swanscombe and Ebbsfleet borough wards should be amended so they are coterminous and if is endorsed, that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England be asked to make an Order confirming the amendment.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That, to ensure the governance arrangements continue to reflect the identities and interests of the community and are effective and convenient, the commencement of the Community Governance Review for the Swanscombe Ward of Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town Council, in accordance with the Terms of Reference, at Appendix C to the report, be noted.
- 2.2 That it be noted that the Community Governance Review cannot make any changes to the Swanscombe Town Ward or Swanscombe and Ebbsfleet borough ward boundaries, without the consent of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.
- 2.3 That, to ensure the boundaries are coterminous, subject to the outcome of the Community Governance Review and consultation, the amendment to the boundaries of Swanscombe and Ebbsfleet borough wards, as shown in Appendix B to the report, be approved, and the Chief Officer and Director of Corporate Services be granted delegated authority to ask the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to make an Order, confirming the amendment.

3. Background and Discussion

- 3.1. A Community Governance Review (CGR) is the process that can be used by the Borough Council (the 'principal council' under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007) to consider whether existing parish arrangements are robust, representative and provide efficient delivery of local services.
- 3.2. The Borough Council has responsibility for undertaking CGRs and is able to decide whether to give effect to recommendations made in those reviews. In making that decision, the Borough Council will need to take account of the views of local people before completing a Reorganisation of Community Governance Order to make the change(s).

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- 3.3. The last CGR was conducted across all the parish arrangements for the borough in 2018, coinciding with a review of the Borough ward boundaries by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).
- 3.4. Although a CGR can be conducted at any time, it is good practice for the Borough Council to consider conducting a review every 10-15 years. It can be helpful to undertake CGRs in circumstances such as where there have been changes in population, or in reaction to specific or local new issues e.g. over time, communities may expand with new housing developments, leading to existing parish boundaries becoming anomalous as new houses are built across the boundaries, resulting in people being in different parishes from their neighbours.
- 3.5. Appendix B to the report shows planned development which has been granted planning permission and which straddles both the Ebbsfleet and Swanscombe borough wards. This development is expected to be completed by 2025.

As shown on the map at Appendix B, the planned development is divided by the borough ward (black line). Once this development is completed, neighbouring properties on the same road would be in different borough wards with different elected representatives, with both wards falling within the Kent County Council Division of Swanscombe and Greenhithe.

- 3.6. The area of the development which falls within the Swanscombe borough ward (Appendix A) would also be parished and form part of Swanscombe ward area of Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town Council. The Ebbsfleet borough ward is unparished, following the last CGR conducted in the area in 2018.
- 3.7. In the circumstances, the Borough Council can implement the CGR process to consider whether the existing Swanscombe Ward parish arrangements are robust, representative and provide efficient delivery of local services. The process includes consulting electors, the Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town Council and interested parties before completing a Reorganisation of Community Governance Order to make the change(s).
- 3.8. When conducting the CGR, the Borough Council should take into account community identity and interests in the area, and consider whether any particular ties or linkages might be broken by changing boundaries.
- 3.9. In the interests of effective and convenient local government, it would be sensible to consider conducting a CGR of the Swanscombe Ward area now whilst there are no electors living in the area of planned development and avoid confusion in the future and try to get the changes implemented before the next scheduled local election in May 2023.
- 3.10. When the previous CGR was conducted in 2018, the option for parish arrangements to remain unchanged was the preferred option of

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residents in Swanscombe and Greenhithe, but the situation within Ebbsfleet was very different. In Ebbsfleet, residents favoured the proposal that they be separated from Swanscombe and Greenhithe, and of those who expressed a view that one or more of the areas should be unparished, by far the greatest number emanated from Ebbsfleet. The Borough Council therefore felt at that time it was appropriate to consider new arrangements for the Ebbsfleet community and that the Ebbsfleet borough ward area be unparished.

- 3.11. In the 2018 CGR, it was identified that functions that might usually be undertaken by a parish council were being discharged by management and maintenance regimes funded by contributions from residents and it was agreed that it was difficult to see a current remit for a parish council in the Ebbsfleet area at that time.
- 3.12. Although there are historic origins in the Swanscombe area, the Ebbsfleet area is now a garden city, which has developed its own identity and character, which is distinct from its neighbouring communities, with its own borough ward representation.
- 3.13. The whole of the planned development falls within the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation area (purple area on Appendix B) and fixing this boundary to one that is easily identifiable with Swanscombe should be considered to resolve splitting the planned development across two borough wards.
- 3.14. As a review has been conducted by the LGBCE within the previous five years, the arrangements for the parish councils in Dartford are protected and consent is required from the Chief Executive of the LGBCE before any changes are made.
- 3.15. The request to the LGBCE for related alterations to boundaries can only be made once the CGR for the Swanscombe Ward area has been completed and consultation has been held with electors, interested parties and Swanscombe and Greenhithe Parish Council.
- 3.16. The CGR cannot make any changes to borough wards. LGBCE has advised that any requests for related alterations to boundaries of Swanscombe and Ebbsfleet borough wards so they are coterminous will have to be made by the 1 October 2022, and that there can be no guarantee that any Order will be made in time for implementation for the elections scheduled for May 2023.
- 3.17. The Electoral Provision Sub-committee, at its meeting held on the 30 June 2022 [Min.No.8] endorsed the commencement of a CGR and that relevant parties be consulted.

Subject to the outcome of the CGR, the Sub-committee supported the recommendation that the boundaries of Swanscombe and Ebbsfleet borough wards should be amended so they are coterminous and recommended the General Assembly of the Council approve the amendment and that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England be asked to make an Order confirming the amendment.

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4. Relationship to the Corporate Plan

Theme: A council performing strongly:
Objective 2. Inform and consult residents and stakeholders about Council services.

5. Financial, legal, staffing and other implications and risk assessments*

Financial Implications	The costs of the consultation exercise will be met from within existing budgets.
Legal Implications	The Borough Council will need to resolve to make a Reorganisation Order by December 2022 for these changes to come into effect for the local government elections in May 2023.
Public Sector Equality Duty	None
Climate Impact Assessment	None
Staffing Implications	None
Administrative Implications	<p>The Electoral Management system will need to be amended and the Register of Electors republished to reflect the changes in time for the nomination registers for the May 2023 elections.</p> <p>The new parish boundaries and wards would be taken into account in the polling district and polling place review and changes made where necessary.</p> <p>The Council Tax system will also need to be updated so that the correct precept is calculated for each parish area. All other Council databases will also need to be updated to ensure that they hold the correct information, which will include planning, and property related information.</p>
Risk Assessment	No uncertainties and/or constraints

6. Details of Exempt Information Category

Not applicable

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7. Appendices

Appendix A – Map of current boundaries

Appendix B - Map of proposed changes boundaries

Appendix C – CGR Terms of Reference

BACKGROUND PAPERS

<u>Documents consulted</u>	<u>Date / File Ref</u>	<u>Report Author</u>	<u>Section and Directorate</u>	<u>Exempt Information Category</u>
		Jeanette Pegler (01322) 343424	Electoral Services /Chief Officer and Director of Corporate Services	N/A