

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

TO: Mid Suffolk District Council	REPORT NUMBER: XXXX
FROM:	DATE OF MEETING:
OFFICER: Head of Electoral Services and Land Charges	KEY DECISION REF NO.

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW – ONEHOUSE AND STOWMARKET

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Council is asked to either adopt the final recommendations of the Community Governance Review Working Group (CGRWG) and publish the recommendations for final comments of the Onehouse and Stowmarket Community Governance Review (CGR) or decide upon an alternative course of action.

2. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 This is a statutory duty of the Council, as such the Council must bring the review to conclusion.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS	
3.1	To note the final recommendations of the CGRWG, as set out in Appendix A.
3.2	To note the results of the further consultation, as reported in Appendix B.
3.3	To adopt one of the following three options:
1	3.41 To adopt the Final Recommendations of the CGRWG To adopt the CGRWG's final recommendations and reasons of the CGRWG, as set out in Appendix A; and
	3.42 To publish the Council's final recommendations and reasons to allow a period for final comments before a final decision is taken by Council.
2	3.43 To agree Recommendations for the Stowmarket Town boundary to move to include areas A, B, C and Union Road; and
	3.44 To conduct a third consultation with the affected stakeholders before returning to Council to agree Final Recommendations.
3	3.45 To conduct a third consultation without recommendation with the affected stakeholders before returning to Council to agree a Final Recommendation.
REASON FOR DECISION	
To ensure that the community governance reflects the identities and interests of the community and is effective and convenient.	

4. KEY INFORMATION

- 4.1 The Monitoring Officer was authorised by Council, on 26 January 2023, to conduct a part two review to a Community Governance Review with the CGRWG, as the result of a previous request to the District Council by Stowmarket Town Council and owing to the need for further consultation on the matter as a requirement from the LGBCE.
- 4.2 The initial CGRWG met on 19 April 2023 when a timetable for the review and Terms of Reference were agreed.
- 4.3 Following the May 2023 Elections, the Council delegated consideration of the CGR to the cross-party CGRWG which is comprised of Cllr Anders Linder, Cllr Janet Pearson, Cllr Rowland Warboys and Cllr Adrienne Marriott. Councillors were appointed on the basis of having no vested interests in the areas under review and reaffirmed the Terms of Reference on 16 June 2023.
- 4.4 The review commenced on 26 July 2023 and emails were sent to all interested parties, local District and County councillors and Suffolk County Council.
- 4.5 The CGRWG met on 27 September 2023, to consider all the responses.
- 4.6 The CGRWG's draft recommendations were presented to full Council on 26 October 2023, where full Council approved for the CGRWG to undertake further consultation on the basis of their draft recommendations. The recommendations were then published on 10 November 2023, and emailed to all interested parties and businesses. In addition, although not a legislative requirement, an information pack containing the map, questionnaire and explanatory letter was sent to all households in the Onehouse and Stowmarket areas.
- 4.7 The initial consultation was set to end on 22 December 2023. A request from the District Councillor for Onehouse was approved by the CGRWG for an extension to the consultation up until 10 January 2024, to ensure maximum participation from stakeholders.
- 4.8 In response to contact about the quality of the map and clarity of the questionnaire the CGRWG reconvened on 8 January 2024 and concluded that no corrective actions were required for the consultation.
- 4.9 The CGRWG met on 22 January 2024 to consider the responses to the consultation and make their final recommendations. It was agreed that the CGR further consultation report would be published ahead of the report to full Council for purposes of transparency to all interested parties and the respective Town and Parish Council would be invited to make representation at full Council.
- 4.10 Legal advice was sought to ensure that all processes were conducted in alignment to legislation. As Council reserved the decision-making authority, Council's recommendations are subject to a comment period before approval.

5. LINKS TO OUR PLAN FOR MID SUFFOLK PLAN

- 5.1 The Review is linked to the Communities outcomes in the Corporate Plan as an effective Community Governance Structure enables communities to be "engaged in decision making,"

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The costs of conducting a CGR must be borne by the District Council however there are limited financial implications associated with this review. The sole costs of the review are the expenses incurred by undertaking public consultation, i.e. printing and postage.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Principal Councils (which includes District Councils) have a responsibility to undertake Community Governance Reviews and can decide whether to give effect to recommendations made in those reviews save that any consequential recommendations for related alterations to the electoral areas require approval of, and implementation by, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).
- 7.2 In relation to consequential changes to district ward boundaries, the LGBCE will want to see that specific consultation has been undertaken on ward boundaries as well as the Parish boundaries themselves. The LGBCE can only accept or reject all the requested related alterations. Accordingly, if there are changes to ward boundaries which are likely to have a significant impact on the electoral equality of the affected district wards, the LGBCE may not support these.
- 7.3 At this stage there is a legitimate expectation the review will be taken to its natural conclusion. The Council may breach its statutory duties under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 should the review not be carried until completion.
- 7.4 It should be noted that the period of 12 months only applies to Community Governance Reviews undertaken in response to petition or application and thus no fixed timeframe applies to the current district wide CGR.
- 7.5 If, at the conclusion of the review, the Council decides to alter any parish boundary or electoral arrangements a Community Governance Order will need to be made to effect the change. This order will be drafted by the Council's legal team.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 Key risks are set out below:

Key Risk Description	Likelihood 1-4	Impact 1-4	Key Mitigation Measures	Risk Register and Reference*
A challenge to the process may result in judicial review.	2	2	Legal Advice sought to assess the possibility of a successful challenge. Officers to ensure CGR processes align to statutory requirements	SR022

**Name of risk register where risk is currently documented and being actively managed and it's reference number*

9. CONSULTATIONS

- 9.1 The Community Governance Review process was undertaken in accordance with the agreed terms of reference and associated guidance. It included a second further consultation which sought the views of the Public. Links to the responses received during the consultation period can be found within the report in Appendix B.
- 9.2 The parish electoral arrangements of Stowmarket/Onehouse are protected until July 2027 as a consequence of the Suffolk County review. Therefore, any changes to the parish electoral arrangements of either parish before those dates would require LGBCE consent.
- 9.3 Legal advice undertaken in the course of the consultation confirms the questionnaire to have been sufficiently intelligible to allow for a considered response. Legislatively, the Council has full discretion in the form and conduct of the consultation.

10. EQUALITY ANALYSIS

- 10.1 Equality monitoring from the consultation can be found within the Consultation Report in Appendix B.
- 10.2 An Equality Impact Assessment can be found in Appendix C.

11. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no environmental implications.

12. APPENDICES

Title	Location
(a) Final Recommendations of the CGRWG – Onehouse and Stowmarket	Attached
(b) CGR Further Consultation Report for Onehouse and Stowmarket	Attached
(c) EQIA Community Governance Review	Attached

13. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 13.1 No additional documents

14. REPORT AUTHORS

- 14.1 Patrick Richardson-Todd, Governance Support Officer