

Brockhampton Group Parish Council – Community Governance Review

Phase 1 Consultation Response

From 13 February to the 6 April, Herefordshire Council conducted a parish wide consultation with the community of Brockhampton group parish in connection with their community governance review. The community were asked to provide their views on whether the number of seats within the group should be reviewed so as to better reflect the number of electors to strengthen the democratic process. This initial stage of the review is to find out local views prior to a full consultation.

The consultation was made available for anybody to respond to on-line via Herefordshire Council website. Hard copies were made available on request. The consultation was also promoted using social media, local newsletters and the parish council web-site.

Consultation response. No responses to the consultation were received.

While this does not indicate positive support for this proposal, it also indicates that there is not strong opposition to the proposals. It is important to note that the parish council firmly supports the proposed change to reduce the current number of Parish Council seats from 15 to 10, to better reflect the number of electors.

National government guidance notes that ‘Council size is the term used to describe the number of councillors to be elected to the whole council. The 1972 Act, as amended, specifies that each parish council must have at least five councillors; there is no maximum number. There are no rules relating to the allocation of those councillors between parish wards but each parish ward, and each parish grouped under a common parish council, must have at least one parish councillor.

The Government’s guidance also states that ‘each area should be considered on its own merits, having regard to its population, geography and the pattern of communities’ and therefore the Council is prepared to pay particular attention to existing levels of representation, the broad pattern of existing council sizes which have stood the test of time and the take-up of seats at elections in its consideration of this matter.

Recommendation: The balance of evidence indicates that there are sufficient grounds to progress to formally proposing to reduce the current number of Parish Council seats from 15 to 10, to better reflect the number of electors within the Brockhampton Group Parish.

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Phase 2 Consultation Response

From 11 May to 29 June, Herefordshire Council conducted a parish wide consultation with the community in the Brockhampton group parish on their community governance review proposals. This followed a first wave of consultation where the community were asked to provide their views on whether the number of seats within the group should be reviewed so as to better reflect the number of electors to strengthen the democratic process.

Following the first phase of consultation consultees were supportive of this proposal and the following recommendation was made:

Recommendation: The balance of evidence indicates that there are sufficient grounds to progress to formally proposing to reduce the current number of Parish Council seats from 15 to 10, to better reflect the number of electors within the Brockhampton Group Parish.

Based upon the above recommendation, a phase 2 consultation was undertaken to test levels of community support or opposition for making the proposed changes to reducing the number of parish seats.

The consultation was open to anyone to respond to on-line via Herefordshire Council website. Hard copies were made available on request. The consultation was also targeted and promoted using social media, local newsletters and the parish council web-site. Fact sheets and maps were made available alongside the consultation so that those responding to the consultation could review further information on the changes being proposed. In addition, the fact sheets provided local information on local population figures and projected growth and information on the local neighbourhood plan.

The metrics from the social media campaigns indicate that 3,505 people received details of the Brockhampton community governance review consultations and fact sheets. This generated 82 'clicked links' through to the consultation pages.

Consultation response.

Two responses were received in support of the proposed changes to reduce the number of parish seats from 15 to 10. One response was from an individual living or working in the Brockhampton group parish area, one response was from an organisation within the Brockhampton group parish area. No responses were received in objection to the proposed changes. Support was offered on the basis that it was felt by respondents to be an 'obvious' and logical step to take, given the difficulty that the group parish has in filling all of the current 15 seats. Further support was given on the basis that:

- It was '*pointless trying to fill seats that people are not willing to fill*'. However, in offering that support, by noting that '*as long as accountability and effectiveness (of the group parish council) is maintained a reduction in numbers should be fine*'.

(Individual from Brockhampton Community)

While this low level of responses does not generate strong public opinion on this matter, positive support for this proposal has been indicated. It is also important to note that the parish council firmly supports the proposed change as it believes this will better reflect the number of electors.

Triangulation:

Parishes wishing to increase or decrease numbers must give strong reasons for doing so. The number of parish/town councillors for each council must be not less than five but can be greater. However, each parish grouped under a common parish council must have at least one parish councillor. The Aston Business School found the following levels of representation to the good running of a council:

Electors	Councillors
Less than 500	5-8
501-2,500	6-12
2,501-10,000	9-16
10,001-20,000	13-27
More than 20,000	13-31

The population of the electorate (those of voting age and above) within the Brockhampton¹ group is currently 610. On this basis decreasing the number of seats from 15 to 10 means that the parish council falls within acceptable levels of representation for a group parish of this population size.

The Brockhampton group parish council have indicated that proportional representation should be applied to the revised number of seats. A breakdown of the population of the electorate is as follows: Linton group member has 324 electorates (equating to 53% of the total number of electorate), Norton group member has 225 electorate (equating to 36% of the total number of electorate) and Brockhampton has 61 electorates (equating to 10% of the total number of electorate). It is therefore recommended that the Linton group member should be allocated 5 seats, the Norton group member be allocated 4 seats and the Brockhampton group member be allocated 1 seat.

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The balance of evidence, from both phase 1 and 2 consultations, indicates that there are sufficient grounds to progress to formally proposing to reduce the current number of Parish Council seats.

Recommendation: *The number of seats on Brockhampton group parish be reduced from 15 to 10 to better reflect the number of electors; the ratio of parish council seats will be 5 for the Linton Parish group member (a reduction of 1 seat); 4 for the Norton parish group member (a reduction of 2 seats) and 1 for the Brockhampton parish group member (a reduction of 2 seats), and that the electoral arrangements will remain unchanged in all other respects*

Resource Implications: There is likely to be a reduction election costs for the Brockhampton group parish as a result of decreasing its parish council seats from 15 to 10. Parish elections take place every four years, the costs of which are re-charged back to Herefordshire Council by the parishes. A small amount of staff time will be required to update the electoral register to record this change.

Brockhampton Group parish map.

¹ Source: ONS © Crown copyright 2017

