

Community Governance Review – Draft Recommendations for Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common Parish Council.

REPORT OF: Head of Regulatory Services
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Wards Affected: Hurstpierpoint & Downs
Key Decision: No
Report to: Scrutiny Committee for Customer Services & Service Delivery
25 May 2022

Purpose of Report

1. Following completion of the first of two public consultations, to summarise for the committee the findings of the consultation.
2. To consult the Committee regarding our draft recommendations.

Recommendations

3. **The Committee is recommended to:**
 - (i) Note the findings of the first public consultation.
 - (ii) To provide advice upon, and further to that advice, to agree the principal electoral authority's draft recommendations for Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common Parish Council, upon which a second public consultation would be conducted.
 - (iii) To note that following the second public consultation, further findings and the final recommendations of the principal electoral authority will be presented to this committee on 14 September 2022.
 - (iv) To note the final decision will be taken by Council in the light of the consultation responses received through the Community Governance Review

Background

4. The committee will recall that this Community Governance Review (CGR) was initiated following a valid petition submitted by the requisite number of local registered electors, pursuant to the provisions of Section 80 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The petition called upon this Council to constitute a new Parish Council for the existing Sayers Common parish ward, to be styled as Sayers Common Parish Council.
5. At its meeting of 2 February 2022, the Committee advised upon and agreed the Terms of Reference and Guidance for Respondents relating to the CGR. The first public consultation opened on 14 February 2022 and closed on 15 April 2022.
6. Members will recall from our Guidance for Respondents, that CGRs require consultees to make qualitative submissions that should address the themes explained within the Terms of Reference and/or other matters that we are able consider. We cannot consider submissions that merely express support or opposition for a particular proposition, or that provide nothing for us to consider.

7. Your Officers have evaluated the qualitative submissions that were received, and we present the findings below:

Public Engagement

8. Each eligible elector was sent a letter giving Public Notice of the CGR, signposting to the consultation material published at the Council's website. This letter explained how to contribute to the Review. The letter also provided electors with their unique Elector Number, to be quoted with their submission to enable our electoral services team to verify that all individual responses came from registered local government electors of the Hurstpierpoint and Sayers Common Parish Council area.
9. Although a qualitative Review, for the Committee's contextual information, we received 59 submissions that were acceptable. A further 14 responses were rejected for undue brevity and providing nothing for us to consider. This represents a response rate of nearly 1.5% of the current electorate. Of these, 59% of responses were from Hurstpierpoint and 41% from Sayers Common.
10. Of the 59 accepted submissions 54% of respondents were broadly supportive of the proposal for a separate parish council for Sayers Common, and 46% were opposed to it.
11. Of the responses from Hurstpierpoint, 54% were in support of the proposal, and 46% were opposed to it. Of the responses from Sayers Common, 54% were in support of the proposal and 46% were opposed to it.
12. As the response rate is low, the numerical differences are negligible, and therefore it is important for a CGR to be a qualitative Review of the matters raised.

Public Consultation Findings

13. The full set of accepted submissions is published and represents a background paper, for committee members to peruse. A link is provided at the end of this report.
14. Of the 46% of respondents who were opposed to the proposal, 50% were very concerned with the cost of any separation, the additional running costs and the effect this might have on their Council Tax bills. Many referred to the present 'cost of living crisis' to be the wrong time to create additional costs, which in their view, taxpayers would inevitably have to bear.
15. Some residents questioned the financial viability of a new Sayers Common Parish Council for the current Sayers Common parish ward, given the significant overheads involved and the ability to raise sufficient precept from such a small population. One resident provided costings for revenue and expenditure that suggested a new parish council might not be able to maintain current services, suggesting a possible dilution of service delivery at greater cost to taxpayers.
16. The Sayers Common Village Society (SCVS) provided a detailed and engaging submission which presented: key facts, background, localism aspirations, the petition process, benefits of de-grouping, community identity, counterbalance, and a reaction to rejection. It referred also to the LGBCEs creation of the Downlands Villages district ward, which groups several smaller parish areas together in a single district ward that does not include Hurstpierpoint.

17. The SCVS submission raises concerns relating to effective and convenient local government and describes slow and inefficient governance procedures of the Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common Parish Council, relating to projects and initiatives for Sayers Common. A small number of residents, some from Hurstpierpoint, referred to this also with one correspondent observing that 'if the existing parish council does this, then it should be reminded not to.'
18. A further submission from an SCVS member sought to highlight matters of disagreement with the Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common Parish Council submission. This also suggested that a new Parish Council for Sayers Common would operate "at a much lower percentage of precept than H&SCPC's precept". The Review was invited by this submission to consider the published annual returns for neighbouring like villages' PCs, though we might have preferred to see this evidenced, perhaps through the submission of a draft budget for a new Sayers Common Parish Council.
19. Several residents claimed that a smaller parish council like the one proposed would not have sufficient influence to effectively represent community interests on planning matters, and a few respondents in Sayers Common wished the current governance arrangements to continue for that reason. Some respondents from both areas commented that the proposal under consideration might have an adverse effect upon community cohesion.
20. The Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common Parish Council provided a detailed and engaging submission which advances that residents' interests are best served by a larger Parish Council. This submission presented cost and service provision considerations for any separate Parish Council for Sayers Common.
21. The submission of the Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common Parish Council suggested that future boundaries should be carefully considered given the man-made constructs of the A23 and A2300 carriageways, the northern arc strategic housing development and developments envisaged by the District Plan Review 2038. The Parish Council also believes that the timelines for the MSDC District Plan Review and the development of the northern arc, are key to shaping the area and therefore future governance arrangements.
22. Several residents and the Ward Members, Cllrs. Trumble and Jackson, reported that people north of Hurstpierpoint were surprised and disappointed to find that currently they are in the Sayers Common parish ward, since that village is situated west of the A23. The Ward Members stated that residents of Langton Lane, Mill Lane and the Godard's Green area consider that their sense of community identity lays with Hurstpierpoint, situated on the east side of the A23 and to the south, and that this more urban settlement is where residents look to for services and amenities.
23. Cllrs. Trumble and Jackson each identified the A23 as a natural boundary, suggesting that any new parish council for Sayers Common should not extend east beyond that.
24. Some respondents highlighted properties to the north of the A2300 that are closer to Ansty and some off Twineham Lane, which it was suggested might identify with Twineham.
25. It was suggested by some submissions, and your Officers can confirm, that BHTC wishes to incorporate most of the northern arc, within its administrative area.
26. Cllr. Jackson and others referred to possible future development between Sayers Common and Albourne, suggesting that the identities of both villages may soon alter and therefore believed that governance changes now, could prove premature.

Draft Recommendations for Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common Parish Council

27. Your officers evaluated and carefully considered all valid submissions received. Having regard to these it is considered that the draft recommendations of the principal electoral authority should be as follows:
28. Noting a realistic prospect of developments to the north and between Sayers Common and Albourne a change to governance arrangements for Sayers Common currently, would appear premature.
29. A case for a financially sustainable parish council for so few electors is not sufficiently evidenced at the present time.
30. In recent years it has proved challenging to attract sufficient elected representatives for Sayers Common from within the parish ward as it has at times also in Hurstpierpoint parish ward.
31. An evolving sense of distinct community identity in Sayers Common is evident, and it is believed that this may continue to grow over time.
32. The reasons for dissatisfaction in Sayers Common with the priorities and governance procedures of the Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common Parish Council are noted. We recommend that the existing parish council thoroughly examine these concerns and adopt measures to ameliorate them.
33. The current governance arrangements for the parish of Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common should continue, and this Authority (MSDC) should consider afresh a CGR in 2025 or 2029 dependent on build out of any permitted developments affecting Sayers Common and surrounding areas. On evidence supplied, this future CGR should consider a wider area within the two newly designated adjacent district wards: 'Downlands Villages' and 'Cuckfield, Bolney and Ansty'.
34. The existing Parish Council size is 15 comprised of 13 Councillors for the Hurstpierpoint Ward and 2 Councillors for the Sayers Common Ward. The current electorate of Hurstpierpoint Parish Ward is 4879 and of Sayers Common Parish Ward is 866. We are therefore not recommending change to Councillor numbers for either ward at this stage of the Review.

Policy Context

35. The petition process allows for local views to be considered when considering community representation at Parish Level.

Other Options Considered

36. Your officers considered the proposal of Ward Members that a new parish council for Sayers Common should not extend east beyond the A23, but this option would create a parish council that is even smaller than the one proposed. We do not intend to consider this option further unless the second stage public consultation can evidence financial viability.

Financial Implications

37. None.

Risk Management Implications

38. The present parish arrangement has in the main led to sound community governance and there is every reason to expect this should continue, with the existing parish councils making improvements wherever these are possible.

Equality and Customer Service Implications

39. All stakeholders and registered electors will now be consulted on the draft recommendations of this Review.

Other Material Implications

40. At the conclusion of any CGR and following adoption in Council, the Council's Legal Services Division would be required to make Community Governance Orders, if there is to be a change.

Sustainability Implications

41. A key aim of any Community Governance Review is to alight upon suitable Governance and Electoral arrangements that are capable of enduring. There is little or no environmental impact.

Background Papers

[Government & Local Government Boundary Commission Guidance on Community Governance Reviews.](#)

Link to public consultation responses

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