



## Report

Date: 19<sup>th</sup> December 2023  
Meeting: Town Council – 19<sup>th</sup> December 2023

### Community Governance Review

#### Report and update provided by Councillor D Cooper

##### General Background

1. Parish and Town Councils can be created, dissolved, merged, their boundaries altered, and their ward arrangements and number of councillors defined through a process known as a Community Governance Review (CGR).
2. Following legislation passed in 2007, and coming into effect in February 2008, Community Governance Reviews are carried out by the relevant principal council (district or unitary) which has the statutory power to change parish level governance arrangements. However, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England is required to alter existing parish warding arrangements (but not parish external boundaries) where it makes changes to the boundaries of principal council electoral divisions and those changes would mean that a principal council divisional boundary traverses a parish ward.
3. Community Governance Reviews are governed by guidance issued by the Electoral Commission and the government department responsible for local government (these days DHLUHC). The aim is to establish effective and convenient local government which reflects the identities and interests of local communities. Differences in local Council Tax levels or the range of services provided by parish councils are not considerations which can formally be taken into account in deciding the outcome of a CGR. However, whether a parish can attract sufficient councillors may be.
4. It is recommended that principal councils review community governance in their areas on a regular basis (e.g. every 10 -15 years).
5. CGRs are initiated by resolution of the principal council, which can be as a result of an initiative by the principal council, a request from relevant parish councils, or required by a petition presented and bearing the signatures of 10% of the local government electorate for an area (where the electorate is more than 2,500). Once initiated, reviews must be completed within 12 months and any changes made would then take effect at the next ordinary elections for the parishes concerned. In practice, this is usually interpreted as meaning that reviews should be concluded no later than the Autumn before scheduled elections, so that changes can be reflected when the new electoral register is published (at the start of the calendar year at the latest).
6. Shropshire Council became the principal council for the county of Shropshire in April 2009 and has never undertaken a county-wide CGR. It has, however, carried out reviews of individual local areas, usually as a result of requests from the local parish council.

##### Bridgnorth CGR history.

7. The current boundaries of Bridgnorth Town are understood to date from the 20th Century.



8. The boundaries of Bridgnorth Town have long been considered to be anomalous by Bridgnorth Town Council. The Town Council requested a CGR in 2015 (ahead of the scheduled 2017 elections). The decision by Shropshire Council was *"That the request from Bridgnorth Town Council to carry out a Local Governance Review with regard to its boundary with the Parish of Tasley be refused and that the possibility of undertaking a Community Governance Review in respect of Bridgnorth Town Council be considered again after the ordinary elections of Councillors due to be held in May 2017."*
9. Bridgnorth Town Council again requested a CGR in 2018. This was refused by Shropshire Council at its December 2018 meeting, where the minutes record that *"Local Members thanked Bridgnorth Town Council for raising the issue and urged it to work with its neighbouring Parish Councils. They were unanimous in their opinion that any review should await the outcome of the revised Local Plan and should be county-wide."*
10. Bridgnorth Town Council then organised a petition of electors and a review of BTC's boundaries with Tasley and Worfield parishes commenced in July 2019. Shropshire Council's Community Governance Working Party reported back to the Shropshire Council meeting on 27/2/2020 recommending no change to BTC's boundaries. However, separately Shropshire Council resolved at the same meeting *"That preparatory work is undertaken with a view to submitting draft Terms of Reference for consideration by Council in 2021 for community governance reviews including areas to be transferred from one parish to another and considering wider governance issues including numbers of Councillors and warding/division arrangements."*

#### Latest developments.

11. The intended Terms of Reference for a County-wide CGR after the 2021 local elections have not materialised. There has been little communication from Shropshire Council to the parish sector on the subject, though it is understood that Shropshire Council felt they could not undertake a CGR whilst Shropshire Council divisional boundaries were under review by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).
12. LGBCE's review has now been completed and an agenda item for the Shropshire Council meeting on 14th December proposing a limited CGR has been published. The reviews proposed are in 5 areas only – Bridgnorth isn't one of them. The stated rationale is *"The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has now concluded its review of the Shropshire Council Division Boundaries. This creates the new division pattern for Shropshire Council and will come into effect at the next ordinary elections, in May 2025. Several anomalies have been identified as a consequence of the review where the new division boundaries dissect an existing Parish. The LGBCE does not have the power to change Parish Boundaries but must create a Parish Ward where a division boundary cuts across a parish."*
13. The report for the Shropshire Council meeting on 14th December 2023 is attached (the appendices to the report are available on the Shropshire Council website). There is no reference to the previous suggestion of carrying out a county-wide review nor any indication of an intention to do so in future.
14. It will be noted that the proposal is that a review be initiated at a Shropshire Council meeting in March 2024, with the results to be effective at the May 2025 elections. This timetable appears to be outside the normally accepted parameters.

#### Next steps

The outcome of the decision to be taken at the Shropshire Council meeting on 14/12/2023 will be reported at the Town Council meeting, and the Town Council is invited to consider how it may wish to respond.