

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW OF HEADINGTON 2019

Response by Headington Neighbourhood Forum

Headington Neighbourhood Forum has requested the governance review and strongly supports the establishment of a community council for Headington.

The Headington Neighbourhood Plan is the outcome of six years work by a large number of local people. A key policy of the Plan¹ is the provision of a successor body to the Forum to implement the planning policies and community projects of the Plan. A community council was identified as an option and a Forum working group has confirmed that this would be the best option.

The Review

The review must comply with the statutory guidance (“the guidance”) issued by the Government² and with the terms of reference of the review:

1. To improve community engagement and better local democracy and
2. More effective and convenient delivery of local services³

The review must also ensure that community governance within the area under review

- Reflects the identities and interests of the community.
- Takes into account any existing arrangements

Review Objective 1: Improve community engagement

A community council would improve community engagement by:

(i) Encouraging community representatives from a diversity of backgrounds with regard to gender, age, ethnicity.

We are aware of local people’s concern at a potential lack of diversity. If a community council is approved for Headington, the Forum’s intention is to implement measures to encourage a diversity of representation on the new council. These would include providing financial support for candidates’ publicity materials, advertising, running community stalls, working with existing councillors and the City Council’s diversity officers. The ideal is to match the profile of the council with the demographic profile of Headington.

(ii) Offering local people the opportunity to represent their community

A community council based within Headington and having responsibility for only Headington would offer a less demanding role for local people interested in being community representatives than that of a City or County councillor.

(ii) Providing the resources to promote a wide range of community events.

A community council would offer support and resources to encourage local events and would work in partnership with existing community groups.

Review Objective 1: Better local democracy

A community council would improve local democracy by

(i) Bringing representation closer to local people

Currently our District councillors each represent approximately 2200 electors. A community council of 15 members would each represent approximately 750 electors⁴ thereby increasing the level of representation by a factor of 3. As a consequence the council would provide a

¹ Policy FC! Successor Body: The Neighbourhood Forum will plan and implement arrangements to create a successor body to oversee the implantation of the plan throughout the plan period (2017 – 2032)

² Guidance on Community Governance Reviews DCLG March 2010

³ Terms of Reference p147

⁴ Based on figures in ToR p146

strong focus on the needs of Headington. This would strengthen local democracy at all levels of representation and would boost the work of our City and County councillors.

(ii) Providing democratic accountability

While existing community groups⁵ offer community leadership they lack the particular legitimacy which an elected council would confer.

Review Objective 2: More effective and convenient delivery of local services

A community council has the potential to offer more convenient delivery of local services by:

(i) Using its available powers to deliver a wide range of local services⁶ with decisions taken close to the local community.

(ii) Providing the resources to carry out local projects

A community council would have full control over the local portion of Community Infrastructure Levy funds. These could be applied to implement the community projects identified in the Neighbourhood Plan and other projects which would be of benefit to the community. It would also generate finance through the annual precept and have the capacity to access other sources of funding all of which would be used to improve local infrastructure.

Governance must reflect the identities and interests of the community

A community council would:

(i) Strengthen identity

A community council for Headington would of its nature provide a stronger sense of identity for Headington. It would also have the capacity and authority to take measures to strengthen this identity.

(ii) Be a force for the balanced development of Headington in the best interests of the community.

Headington is earmarked as a growth area in the local plan, institutions' master plans and growth board strategic plans. As such it would greatly benefit from the statutory planning role of a community council to represent the interests of local people and provide greater influence on the future development of Headington. It would implement the vision, planning policies and community projects of the Neighbourhood Plan. It would be sustainable over the life of the Plan (to 2032)

Governance must build on and strengthen the existing arrangements

A community council would provide community support and resources to strengthen existing arrangements, including community groups and local City and County councillors. In Headington both Headington Acton and Headington Neighbourhood Forum represent a significant part of the "existing arrangements". Both organisations strongly support the establishment of a community council which would strengthen their role within the community and provide additional resources.

While our existing local councillors work hard to represent the Headington area they also have much wider responsibilities well beyond Headington. A community council would focus solely on Headington and so provide support to our existing councillors as they seek to be a stronger voice for Headington.

⁵ For example Headington Action, Headington Neighbourhood Forum, Headington churches together, local political parties, and more.

⁶ Under the Localism Act 2011 a parish council can be granted a general power of competence to carry out a wide range of services.

Statutory Guidance on the delivery of the review's objectives

The establishment of a community council accords with the Government's statutory guidance⁷ as the best way to deliver the review's objectives.

The guidance describes the beneficial role that a parish council can play in delivering these objectives through community building, community cohesion, community engagement and participation, place shaping and the efficient and convenient delivery of services. Detailed references are set out in Appendix A attached.

Value for Money

We understand that there may be some concern at the additional cost to council tax payers in Headington. We have shown above how a community council would improve the quality of life for all those who live in Headington and this for a cost of around 50p/week per council tax payer.⁸ We consider that this represents good value for money.

Process of the Review

We suggest that in assessing the consultation responses the tick boxes indicating agreement/disagreement should not be given undue weight. The consultation is not a referendum and in many cases measures can be taken to allay respondents concerns – for example about the diversity of the council.

Conclusion

We have demonstrated above that the provision of a community council for Headington would deliver the review's objectives and would provide governance which reflects the identities and interests of the community. It would also take full account of the existing arrangements and of the requirements of the statutory guidance.

In summary a community council for Headington would:

- deliver the terms of reference of the governance review
- improve community engagement
- improve local democracy
- provide more efficient and convenient delivery of local services
- strengthen existing local arrangements (for example Headington Action)
- strengthen the identity of Headington
- encourage community cohesion
- promote community events
- provide support and resources for local community projects
- offer opportunities for local representation
- encourage diversity of representation
- bring the level of representation closer to local people
- provide democratic accountability for local community decisions
- have statutory planning powers to influence the development of Headington
- deliver the Headington Neighbourhood Plan planning and community policies
- provide good value for money to local council tax payers

Patrick Coulter

Chair Headington Neighbourhood Forum

⁸ Based on an estimated initial precept of £23 per annum (Band D)

Statutory Guidance on Community Governance Reviews DCLG March 2010

The benefits of Parish councils:

(a parish council is the same as a community council)

Community Building

“Parish councils have an important part to play in the development of their communities”

(para 55) Parish councils can contribute to the creation of successful communities [and] can be well placed to judge what is needed to build cohesion” (para 56). “Parish councils can perform a central role in community leadership” (para 57).

Community Cohesion, Engagement and Participation

The guidance requires that the governance review takes account of the impact on community cohesion. “The council should consider the impact on community cohesion when deciding whether or not to set up a parish council” (para 67).

The guidance suggests that **“setting up parish councils clearly offers the opportunity to strengthen community engagement and participation and generate a positive impact on community cohesion”**

Place Shaping

The guidance (Para 57) requires that the review takes account of the importance of place - “place matters in considering community governance and is a factor in deciding whether or not to set up a parish.” The guidance emphasises the role of Parish councils in both “place shaping” (para 57) and building neighbourhoods **“Parishes in many cases may be able to meet the concept of neighbourhood in an area”** (para 59).

Efficient and convenient delivery of local services

The guidance recognises that a parish council may be well placed to deliver local services (para 63) The guidance also recognises that some parish councils would have the capacity to take on the delivery of a wide range of services to promote the social economic and well being of their areas (para 64) **“Many larger parishes will be able to offer much more to their local communities”** (para 81). A Headington council would have this capacity as it would cover a substantial area and have sufficient resources to do so.