



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Community Governance Review - Upper Rissington Parish Council

Information Sheet

Formal Considerations

In undertaking a Community Governance Review (CGR), Cotswold District Council (CDC) is required to take account of the following two key criteria:-

- the identities and interests of the community in the area - parishes (and parish wards) should reflect distinctive and recognisable communities of interest and place, with their own sense of identity;
- the effective and convenient governance of the area - i.e. do local arrangements (including wards) provide for good local democracy and community engagement?

Other considerations and factors include:-

- the impact of community governance arrangements on community cohesion;
- the size, population and boundaries (including wards) of a local community or parish/town, ensuring that these make sense 'on the ground'.

The specific issues of Council size and warding are looked at in more detail below:-

(i) Council Size

The Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) specifies that each parish council must have at least five councillors; but there is no maximum number.

There are no rules relating to the allocation of councillors between parish wards, other than each parish ward must have at least one parish councillor.

The Government is of the view that, in all types of authority, 'it is an important demographic principle that each person's vote should be of equal weight so far as possible, having regard to other legitimated competing factors, when it comes to the elections of councillors'.

However, whilst consistency across councils is important, local circumstances are key in any decision - each area should be considered on its own merits, having regard to its population, geography and the pattern of communities. CDC will therefore 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. Other factors to take into account will be the existing number of local government electors for a parish and any change in that number which is likely to occur in the period of five years from the start of the Review.

A number of years ago, CDC adopted the following scale as 'guidance' in determining the number of councillors for a parish:-

Electorate	Number of Councillors
not exceeding 200	5
201 - 500	7
501 - 1,000	9
1,001 - 2,000	11
2,001 - 4,000	13
over 4,000	15

This scale will be used to guide this Review, as it would appear to have proved robust for many years. However, the scale is not absolutely prescriptive, and it is acknowledged that other scales are operated across the country.

In the case of any potential increase in councillor numbers, CDC will have regard to whether previous elections and by-elections have been contested or whether there have been difficulties in attracting sufficient candidates to stand for election, leading to uncontested elections and/or a need to co-opt members in order to fill vacancies. Additionally, should a particular issue or temporary set of circumstances arise, this is not likely to support a permanent change in numbers.

(ii) Parish Warding

Parish warding is the division of a parish into wards for the purpose of electing councillors.

There should be a clear rationale behind any warding proposals, which reflects the identities and interests of the community of the area, and is effective and convenient. Regard should also be had to the size, population and boundaries of any ward, together with the number of councillors to be elected for each ward and the number of electors they will represent.

Consideration will also be given to whether the number, or distribution, of local government electors for the parish would make a single election of councillors impracticable or inconvenient; and/or whether it is desirable that any area or areas of the parish should be represented separately.

The Local Context

In terms of **councillor numbers**, it is clear that the advisory 'scale' would provide for 11 councillors for a parish with an electorate the size of Upper Rissington.

However, since the creation of the Parish Council in 2000, there have only been two contested elections (arising out of casual vacancies); and at the subsequent four-yearly all-out elections no more than five candidates have ever come forward. That said, in the past year, requests have been received from residents for vacancies to be filled by election (even if a contest has not proved necessary).

In addition, in 2015, this Council had to appoint a temporary councillor to ensure that the Parish Council remained quorate and could continue to operate.

Significant development has occurred in recent years, leading to an increased electorate. A greater level of community interest is very apparent, and there is evidence of significant support from residents for an increased number of councillors on the Parish Council. Indeed, if the Parish Council had not asked for an increase in numbers, it is clear that we would have received a request via a public petition containing a minimum of 250 signatures.

The key issue is that any increase should be sustainable, so that any review does not end up creating a situation where there are simply more seats that are not filled. It is also important for any increase in numbers to address longer-term issues rather than a one-off or temporary set of circumstances.

There has also been some discussion as to whether a 'jump' from seven to eleven councillors 'in one go' is realistic, or whether an initial increase to nine would be more prudent - particularly as this would not increase the quorum figure of the council - and then, if successful, to seek a further increase to eleven from 2023. Both options are therefore subject to consultation.

Insofar as **warding** is concerned, there are competing considerations. Whilst wards are sometimes introduced to address 'divides' between old and new areas of a parish, especially if pressures are distinct in each area, the creation of wards could easily reinforce/harden those divisions, and potentially undermine the desire for a village/parish to come together as one community. Also, once elected, all councillors would be expected to work in the best interests of the parish as a whole (albeit with a special affinity to their wards).

The creation of wards will not guarantee representation from within those wards at the levels prescribed - because the qualification criteria will effectively allow for people to come forward for any of the wards from within the parish or from within three miles of the boundary (a candidate's proposer and seconder would need to reside within the ward, but the candidate him/herself need not).

An over-arching consideration is the principle of each elector's vote carrying the same weight, which means that each councillor should represent as near as possible the same number of electors (on a parish and parish ward basis).

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