

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING	Council	
MEETING	11 September 2014	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
TITLE:	Options to strengthen community representation and civic governance within Bath	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: Appendix 1: Cross-Party working group to consider options to strengthen community representation and civic governance within Bath- Interim Report for Comment - July 2014 Appendix 2: Comments received		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 This report invites the Council to consider the outcomes of the work undertaken by the cross-party member working group on options to strengthen community representation and civic governance within Bath, and resolve accordingly.

2 RECOMMENDATION

Council is requested to:

- 2.1 Note the interim report of the working group to strengthen community representation and civic governance within Bath and thank its members for their work so far
- 2.2 Agree that the working group continue its work, based on the next steps set out in paragraph 5.8 of this report, to provide an evidence base for the newly-elected Council in May 2015 to determine this issue

- 2.3 Agree to extend the life of the working group, as currently comprised, to deliver the remit set out in 2.2.

3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 3.1 Secretariat and related support for the working group has been provided so far by the Strategy and Performance team, with other specialist advice provided from service areas as required. This will continue, and can be met within existing resources.
- 3.2 The working group will continue to develop its evidence base on this issue, and this will involve further community engagement. A report containing detailed proposals for this will be brought to the working group. Again, these proposals will be delivered from within existing Council resources.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS AND BASIS FOR PROPOSAL

4.1 The key issues Council requested the working group to consider were strengthening community representation and civic governance within Bath. Throughout the work of the working group a number of more detailed considerations were highlighted, including:

- The scope the various models had to make a real difference in local communities in Bath
- Timing and implementation issues, notably whether a scheme could be put in place before the new Council is elected in May 2015
- Emerging impacts such as the local spend element of the new Community Infrastructure Levy
- Cost and resource implications
- Impacts on existing arrangements such as the Charter Trustees for Bath and in particular the Mayoralty

4.1 The working group also requested public comments on its interim report and considered these at its meeting of 28th August. Following consideration of these, the group agreed that a more detailed evidence base was required before a preferred option could be drawn up, hence the recommendations in this report.

4.2 The working group also considered the potential equality impacts of the options under consideration. The proposal for further development of the evidence base will allow for further equality analysis so that impacts can be properly assessed in line with Council policy and the Public Sector Equality Duty.

5 THE REPORT

5.1 Council on 8th May resolved that a cross-party working group (with a membership proportionate to the make-up of the Council) be established to consider, with officer support, options to strengthen community representation and civic governance within Bath, and to report back on these options, including a preferred option (with proposed Terms of Reference) to the July Council meeting, or if this was not possible then no later than the September Council meeting, for consideration.

5.2 The working group was subsequently established with the following membership:

Conservative Group-
Councillor Brian Webber
Councillor Paul Myers
Councillor Francine Haerberling
Councillor Patrick Anketell-Jones
Councillor Anthony Clarke
Councillor Tim Warren (reserve)

Liberal Democrat Group-
Councillor Douglas Nicol
Councillor Paul Crossley
Councillor Ben Stevens
Councillor Cherry Beath
Councillor Ian Gilchrist
Councillor Manda Rigby (reserve)

Labour Group-
Councillor John Bull
Councillor Robin Moss (reserve)

Independent Group -
Councillor Malcolm Lees
Councillor Dave Laming (reserve)

5.3 The working group has met 8 times to consider in depth how best to address the issues identified by the Council. It started by identifying a wide range of options. Through its discussions, the group then identified the advantages and disadvantages of each of these options, receiving information and reports from officers as appropriate. There was an initial request for comments from a large number of groups (including parish councils) and minutes of working group meetings were also made available online.

5.4 At its meeting of 24th July, the working group agreed that an Interim Report be issued for public comment, prior to preparing a final report to Council. This Interim Report is attached at Appendix One and contains a smaller number of options based on the detailed work undertaken by the group. These options were:

A. No Change

- B. A “Voice for Bath” committee (to include co-opted stakeholders as well as B&NES elected members)
- C. The parishing of Bath - either as a single parish for the City or multiple parishes for different parts of the City. This would require a Community Governance Review
- 5.5 A number of additional documents were also made available as Appendices to the Interim report to help inform comments at this stage, and these are now identified as background documents to the report. These documents reflect the consideration given by the working group and contain information on:
- Voting rights for co-opted members of area committees
 - Powers of parish councils
 - The Charter Trustees for Bath
 - The Community Infrastructure Levy “local spend” element
 - The impact on the Bath Mayoralty of options for parishing in the City
 - An example case study of the Winchester Town Forum
 - Comparisons between the parish council and area committee approaches.
- 5.6 The working group agreed to publish the Interim Report and request comments for the period 28th July – 26th August on the options set out in it. The specific questions asked were:
1. Of the three options set out, which is your preferred option?
 - 2.1 For the “Voice for Bath” committee option, what should be its role and functions?
 - 2.2 Which stakeholders should be co-opted onto the “Voice for Bath” committee option?
 - 2.3 Should the stakeholders have voting rights for the “Voice for Bath” committee option?
 - 2.4 How many of the 32 Bath elected members of Bath and North East Somerset should serve on the ‘Voice for Bath’ committee.
 - 3.1 Should consideration be given to multiple parishes for Bath or a single parish (for Bath as a whole)
 - 3.2 If there were to be multiple parishes, how should Bath be parished?
- 5.7 56 responses were received during the comments period. These comments are attached as Appendix 2.
- 5.8 The comments were considered by the working group at its meeting of 28th August 2014. It recognised the progress that had been made in identifying the issues and opening up conversations on options, but considered that this

process now needed be continued and developed further. It therefore agreed that the following next steps be recommended to Council:

- 1 To continue to build and refine the evidence base through continuing to encourage feedback from parish councils, residents and other interested parties, including arranging new engagement sessions as appropriate
- 2 To continue to meet as a working group (on a 6-weekly basis) to oversee this process and to agree a suitable engagement plan
- 3 Through this process, to provide a robust foundation for the newly-elected Council in May 2015 to determine its approach to this issue

6 RATIONALE

- 6.1 This report has been prepared following the work of the member working group, which was established in response to agreement at Council on 8th May. A “pros and cons” analysis of each of the options was kept updated throughout the life of the working group in order to provide a continuous assessment of the impacts of the options under discussion. The working group has developed its recommendations in the light of this analysis and also comments received during the period from 28th July to 26th August.
- 6.2 In determining its recommendations, the group also took into account the diverse range of comments received and the breadth and complexity of the issues raised. It therefore considered that more time was needed to consider these issues fully, to gather more information, and to ensure that the newly-elected Council in May 2015 can decide how to proceed based on the best available evidence.

7 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 7.1 The working group considered the option of adopting a preferred option to report to Council. However, in the light of the issues set out in this report, it agreed that further work was required to allow the newly-elected Council in May 2015 can determine its approach.

8 CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The Monitoring Officer has provided officer advice, support and briefing to the working group throughout its life and has also been consulted on this report.
- 8.2 The Section 151 Officer has been consulted on this report
- 8.3 For the period from 28th July 2014 to 26th August 2014, the Interim Report of the working group was made available online through the Council’s consultation website and at the Bath City Conference website for comment. This was in the form of:

- An online consultation questionnaire
- A main Interim Report paper which sets out options
- A series of Appendices which together formed responses to a series of questions designed to help clarify options and inform comments

8.4 The availability of this opportunity for comment was also disseminated through

- The Council e-bulletin
- Parish Councils
- A Council press release

8.5 Although the working group recognised that consultation over the summer period was not wholly satisfactory (for example, given that parish councils do not meet at this time), it was considered appropriate to seek comments at that stage. This provided high-quality and detailed feedback.

8.6 However, at its meeting of 28th August it agreed that further engagement was required with local residents, parish councils and others. An engagement plan setting out proposals for this will be prepared and considered by the group.

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

9.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

Contact person	<i>Vernon Hitchman, 01225 395171</i> <i>Andy Thomas, 01225 394322</i>
Background papers	The minutes of the meetings of the Group held on 29 th May 2014, 5 th June 2014, 12 th June 2014, 19 th June 2014, 3 rd July 2014 , 17 th July 2014, 24 th July 2014 and 28 th August Appendices to Interim Report of Working Group
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	