

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW (CGR) 2025 General Information and FAQ's

Parish, Town and Community Councils of Northumberland County Council



Electoral Services (CGR)
Northumberland County Council
Morpeth
NE61 2EF

Email: CGR@northumberland.gov.uk
Telephone: 01670 624811

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Abbreviations:

CGR – Community Governance Review

LGPIHA 2007 – Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007

LGBCE – Local Government Boundary Commission for England

NCC – Northumberland County Council

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEWS EXPLAINED

What is community governance?

Throughout this document, we refer to ‘**parishes**’ which include Parish, Town and Community Councils.

Community Governance refers to the ways local communities are represented and governed, particularly at the Parish Council level, through community engagement, local participation, and the involvement of various stakeholders.

What is a Community Governance Review?

A Community Governance Review (CGR) is a legal process for Principal Councils to make sure that the governance arrangements for Parish Councils are working as efficiently and effectively as they should be. The process provides an opportunity to review and make changes through consultation with those living in the Review area, and other interested groups, to have a say in how their local communities are represented.

What can a Review consider and change?

A Review can consider whether parish arrangements should be changed in any way.

- Creating a new parish
- Separating an existing parish
- Merging existing parishes
- Altering boundaries of existing parishes/parish wards
- Abolishing parishes
- Naming of parishes/parish wards
- Changing the number of councillors in a parish/parish ward
- Warding or un-warding parishes
- Grouping parishes under a Common Parish Council or un-grouping

The Review must consider any existing electoral arrangements and ensure that future community governance reflects the identities and interests of its community areas and is effective and convenient:

- The impact of community governance arrangements on community cohesion
- The size, population and boundaries of a local community or parish

Any changes will only be made if there is clear evidence to do so. Any proposals should not act against the interests of either the local or surrounding communities, particularly where the effect would be likely to damage community cohesion. Any new arrangements should not upset historic traditions but do reflect changes that have happened over time, such as population shift or additional development, which may lead to a different community identity.

What can the Review not change?

A Review cannot change the following:

- Number of County Councillors
- County electoral division boundaries
- Parliamentary boundaries

Who will conduct the Review?

Northumberland County Council (NCC) is legally responsible for conducting the Review. The Review will be conducted by the Council's Director of Law and Corporate Governance and Monitoring Officer. The County Council will make decisions on the final recommendations arising from the review.

Current community governance in Northumberland

The county of Northumberland is currently divided into 162 parishes (unwarded and warded) and is represented by Parish Councils. There are no areas within the county which are not part of a Parish Council area. All parishes have elections every four years at the same time as the County Council elections, the next being in May 2029.

A small proportion of these parishes are grouped Parish Councils, which collectively represent more than one parish. There is also a pocket of parishes that are currently not represented by a Parish Council.

Electors should be able to identify clearly with the parish in which they are resident. This sense of identity lends strength and legitimacy to the parish structure, creating a common interest in parish affairs and encouraging participation in elections, leading to representative and accountable government.

How can residents and community representatives add to the Review process?

The development of strong, sustainable communities depends on residents' active participation in decision-making with respect to the governance arrangements of local councils. NCC is committed to engaging effectively with the communities it serves and to enabling local people to participate meaningfully in the creation of effective community governance arrangements.

Local briefings with interested parties will be held, followed by a statutory consultation process to take account of the views of the local government electors for the area and any other person or body who appears to have an interest in the Review. This will also include:

- All Parish Councils within the local authority area
- The Northumberland Association of Local Councils
- Northumberland County Councillors
- Members of Parliament covering the constituencies of Northumberland

The Council will:

- Publicise the Review and the Terms of Reference on the Council's website
- Make the Terms of Reference and any associated documents available for public inspection at County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EP and Customer Information Centres
- Make available on request, copies of The Terms of Reference and any associated documents
- Produce and make available a Review questionnaire seeking the views of current local governance arrangements in the community area
- Produce maps for each parish
- Provide general press and comms releases throughout the Review process

How will NCC make and consult on its draft recommendations?

All representations that are received from the initial consultation will be taken into account and judged against the criteria in the LGPIHA 2007 and carefully balancing the considerations of changes that have happened over time and have led to a different community identity with historic traditions in its area.

There is no minimum number of responses required to the public consultation, and each case will be considered on its merits, and on the quality of the information and evidence provided during the Review.

Government guidance indicates that a good CGR should assess the options considering:

- Effective engagement with the local community at neighbourhood level
- A sense of civic pride and civic values
- Strong leadership
- A strong, inclusive community and voluntary sector
- A sense of place with a positive feeling for people and local distinctiveness
- The ability of local authorities to deliver quality services economically and efficiently in an area of that size

Any new arrangements should not upset historic traditions but do reflect changes that have happened over time, such as population shift or additional development, which may have led to a different community identity. Any proposals should not act against the interests of either the local community or the surrounding communities, particularly where the effect would be likely to damage community cohesion. Boundaries should recognise natural communities, and where possible, we will use natural and physical features as boundaries, such as rivers, railways and major roads.

NCC will publish its draft recommendations on its website, general press releases and deposit key documents at County Hall. Where contact details are available from consultees, we will ensure that persons who may be affected or interested are informed of the draft recommendations and the reasons behind them, with the opportunity to submit views on these draft recommendations.

How will NCC make and publish its final recommendations?

Before making its final recommendations, any representations that have been received from the draft recommendations will also be considered and further judged against the criteria in the LGPIHA 2007.

NCC will publish its final recommendations on its website, general press releases and deposit key documents at County Hall. Where contact details are available from consultees, we will ensure that persons who may be affected or interested are informed of the final recommendations and the reasons behind them.

Will the ordinary year of elections change?

To enable costs to continue to be shared, Government guidance is for the parish electoral cycle to remain with the cycle for the County Council elections. The electoral arrangements for Parish Councils would remain as planned and come into force at the next ordinary parish elections in May 2029.

However, in relation to any new Parish Council, NCC may consider the following:

1. Making interim arrangements for any new parish to be represented by County Councillors, or
2. Resolve for the first election to be held in an earlier year. Elected Parish Councillors would serve a shortened first term to allow the parish electoral cycle to return to the normal scheduled parish elections in May 2029.

When will any agreed changes take effect?

Any agreed changes will take effect when NCC adopts a Reorganisation of Community Governance Order. The Order will specify when it takes effect for the financial and administrative purposes, and any electoral arrangements for new or existing parishes would come into force for the scheduled local elections in May 2029.

Copies of the Order, the map(s) that show the effects of the Order in details and the documents which set out the reasons for the decisions that the Council has taken (including where it has decided to make no change following a review), will be made available on the County Council's website and at County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF.

If an Order is made, it may be necessary to cover certain consequential matters in that Order. These may include:

- a. The transfer and management or custody of any property.
- b. The setting of a precept (Council Tax levy) for the new Parish Council.
- c. Provision with respect to the transfer of any functions, property, rights, and liabilities.
- d. Provision for the transfer of staff, compensation for loss of office, pensions, and other staffing matters.

For any new parishes, NCC will consider the requirements of the Local Government Finance (New Parishes) Regulations 2008 when calculating the budget requirement when setting the Council Tax levy to be charged.

The financial and administrative provisions of the reorganisation order will come into force on 1 April following the date on which the Order is made. NCC will inform the Audit Commission of any changes emerging from the CGR, as they have a statutory responsibility to appoint external auditors to all local councils in England.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

What is a Parish, Town, or Community Council?

Parish, Town and Community Councils all work within the same legal framework. They are the lowest independent tier of local government, made up of councillors elected every four years who represent their local community. They strive to improve the quality of life and community wellbeing and are often referred to as local councils.

They have regular meetings to discuss issues which affect the area, which members of the public can attend. They are consulted on planning applications and may be responsible for the provision of allotments, litter bins, parks and open spaces, managing cemeteries and village halls, and supporting community projects and local crime initiatives.

- **Parish Councils** are the most common type of local council, representing villages, smaller towns and suburbs.
- **Town Councils** are essentially Parish Councils that have chosen to adopt the name "Town Council" and may have a mayor. This designation may be chosen for a variety of reasons, such as the size and nature of the settlement or to reflect a greater level of formality or civic pride.
- **Community Councils** are a larger parish that has chosen to adopt the name "Community Council" and have a broader focus on community services and development.

How are Parish Councils funded?

Parish Councils are funded through a sum of money called a '**precept**'. This is a separate charge which is added to your Council Tax bill and collected by NCC on behalf of the Parish. It is essentially the shortfall in funding that results in a parish's estimated annual expenses minus its expected income (e.g., grants), divided by the number of Band D equivalent properties in the parish.

Once the Parish Council has set its budget and calculated its precept, it will submit a '**precept demand**' to NCC, who will calculate the charge per household in the parish and add this to your Council Tax bill. NCC is then obliged to pay the precept to the Parish Council to meet their funding needs.

Parish Councils rely on the precept as their primary source of funding, as they do not receive direct funding from central government. Without the precept, they would be unable to carry out their responsibilities of maintaining local amenities, providing services and representing the community.

Note - NCC does not have any power to set the precept for its Parish Councils. Additionally, the Review does not allow NCC to consider precepts when making any recommendations.

Will the Review alter my Council Tax?

If you live in an area where a **new Parish Council** is proposed, then yes, the changes may make a difference to your Council Tax. The creation of any new Parish Council or a merger with an existing parish area would change the funding requirements through the 'precept'. Where the boundary between parishes alters, this may result in certain properties moving to a different parish. The Council Tax you pay may decrease or increase, depending on the services the parish wants to provide.

Will the Review change the current school catchment area?

No, these will remain the same and are set by NCC.

How much will the Review cost?

The costs will not be known until after the Review has been completed. NCC has approved this work, and there will be no cost to residents or Parish Councils.

Can the Review change the number of Councillors?

NCC will need to consider the number of councillors representing existing, altered or new parishes.

- Every Parish Council is allowed a minimum of five councillors
- There is no maximum number
- There are no rules relating to the allocation of councillors between parish wards
- Parishes grouped under a **Common Parish Council** must have at least one councillor representing each separate parish area.

There is no right scale for a Parish Council, but the general rule is that it should be based on an area which reflects community identity and interest, and which is of a size which is viable as an administrative unit. Each area should be considered on its own merits, having regard to its population, geography and the patterns of communities.

NCC will pay particular attention to existing levels of representation, the broad pattern of council sizes which have stood the test of time, and take-up of seats at elections. Some of the smaller Parish Councils in Northumberland have found difficulty in attracting sufficient candidates to stand for election, and this has led to uncontested elections and/or a need to co-opt members to fill vacancies.

When considering the electoral arrangements for a parish (whether it is warded or not), NCC must also consider any change in the number or distribution of the electors which is likely to occur in the next five years. Parish Councils wishing to increase numbers must give strong reasons for doing so.

Research by The Aston Business School Parish and Town Councils in England (HMSO 1992) found that the following are typical Parish Council representations to the good running of a council. The LGBCE has no reason to believe that this pattern of council size to population has altered significantly since the research was conducted.

Electors	Number of Councillors
Less than 500	5-8
501-2,500	6-12
2,501-10,000	9-16
10,001-20,000	13-27
More than 20,000	13-31

How will boundaries be considered?

Boundaries between communities represented by areas of low population will normally be readily identifiable and have pronounced natural or manufactured physical barriers. They might include coastal features, rivers, moorland, or manufactured features such as parks, railways, and major roads.

Over time, communities may expand with new housing developments. These can often lead to existing parish boundaries becoming unfamiliar as new houses are built across the boundaries, resulting in people being in different parishes from their neighbours. Any changes should not upset historic traditions but do reflect changes that have happened over time. In many cases, making changes to the boundaries of existing parishes, rather than creating an entirely new parish, will be sufficient to ensure that community governance arrangements continue to reflect local identities and facilitate effective and convenient local government.

What is parish warding?

Parish warding is the division of a parish into wards for the purpose of electing councillors. This includes the number and boundaries of any wards, the number of councillors to be elected for any ward and the names of wards.

In considering whether or not a parish should be divided into wards, the LGPIHA 2007 requires that consideration be given to the number and distribution of local government electors for the parish where it would make a single election of councillors impracticable or inconvenient, and any area or areas of the parish should be separately represented.

The LGBCE offers no specific guidelines on warding representation. However, it believes it is not in the interests of effective and convenient local government either for voters or councillors to have significant differences in levels of representation between different parish wards. Such variations could make it difficult, in workload terms, for councillors to adequately represent the interests of residents. There is also the risk that where councillors over-represent one or more wards, the residents and councillors could be perceived as having more influence than others on the council.

Each case will be considered on its own merits, and on the basis of the information and evidence provided during the course of the review. Warding arrangements and the allocations of councillors should be appropriate, equitable and readily understood by their electorate. The Council will take account of community identity and interests in the area and consider whether any particular ties or linkages might be broken by the drawing of particular ward boundaries.

What are grouped parishes?

Parishes with less than 150 electors do not tend to be represented by a separate Parish Council and would have an agreed working alliance which groups them with a neighbouring parish or parishes to form a **Common Parish Council**. Each parish area continues to elect its own designated number of councillors. This allows each parish to retain their own identity, but decisions about precepts and spending priorities are made by all councillors on the Common Parish Council. It can be an effective way of ensuring small parishes continue to have a community voice that might otherwise have limited capacity to facilitate service provision and effective local government.

The Review can offer the opportunity to consider the future of what may have become redundant, declining parishes, often the result of an insufficient number of local electors within the area who are willing to serve on a council. However, the grouping of parishes needs to be compatible with the retention of community interests, and government guidance is that “it would be inappropriate for it to be used to build artificially large units under single Parish Councils”.

Note: Every parish (including those grouped under a Common Parish Council) is required by law to have an **Annual Parish Meeting**. This meeting is held between 1 March and 1 June and serves as a forum for parishioners to discuss local issues.

Can parishes be ungrouped?

Un-grouping may offer the reverse possibilities, perhaps where local communities have expanded within their separate areas or where the expansion no longer reflects separate identities. Individual Parish Councils could be reinstated, or separate parishes could merge into one Parish Council. This may avoid the need for substantive changes to parish boundaries or the creation of new parishes.

Unless they already exist as functioning Parish Councils, smaller new parishes of less than 150 electors will be unable to establish their own Parish Council under the LGPIHA 2007.

Naming of parishes and parish wards

In considering any proposed new names of parishes/parish wards, NCC will be mindful of existing local or historic place names so that, where appropriate, these are reflected.

What if there is no support to have a parish or a Parish Council?

It is the Government's view that the abolition of parishes should not be undertaken unless clearly justified, as this removes a tier of local government. Any proposals would need to consider the opinions of those Parish Councillors and local electors. Any evidence would need to find that the abolition of a parish and its Parish Council was justified and that there was clear and sustained local support for such action over a period of at least two terms of office of any Parish Councillors, and that such support was sufficiently informed.

NCC is anxious to ensure that Parish Councils are viable and should possess a precept that enables them to promote the well-being of their residents actively and effectively, and to contribute to the real provision of services in their areas economically and efficiently. However, there may be circumstances where the provision of effective and convenient local government and/or the reflection of community identity and interests could be met by abolishing a parish and merging it with another to create one or several new parishes or grouping them under a Common Parish Council.

If you require any further information regarding the Review, please contact us at:

Email: CGR@northumberland.gov.uk

Telephone: 01670 624811 (Annie Howliston)