

Council

28 October 2025

Part 1 - Public

Matters for Decision



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Tonbridge Community Governance Review

1 Summary and Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report sets out the results of the recent Community Governance Review consultation and seeks approval for the next steps in the process.

2 Corporate Strategy Priority Area

- 2.1 Efficient services for all our residents, maintaining an effective council.
- 2.2 This report sets out proposals that could contribute to or impact the efficient and effective delivery of local council services to the residents of Tonbridge.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 That the Community Governance Review process **BE CONTINUED**.
- 3.2 That the proposed next steps (as described in section 6) **BE APPROVED**

4 Introduction and Background

- 4.1 At a Council meeting on 18 February 2025, it was agreed that a Community Governance Review should be undertaken to consider the creation of a new town council for the unparished area of Tonbridge. This was shortly followed by receipt of a petition, which was validated on 12 March 2025.
- 4.2 Following consideration of a report by Council on 13 May 2025, Terms of Reference for a cross-party Member working group (including timetable and consultation plan) were adopted and a one-off budget agreed in order to conduct the review.

- 4.3 A key part of any Community Governance Review is the delivery of community consultation to ascertain the level of support or otherwise for the proposals. In the consultation plan, a six-week consultation (from 02 June-14 July 2025) was programmed and promoted by the Council through direct leafleting to the address, emails and social media messaging. In addition to this, other groups in the community also produced their own publicity material about the consultation independently of the council.
- 4.4 This consultation sought views on the following question: “Should Tonbridge have a town council?”, along with associated questioning relating to the reasons behind the views of responders. This report sets out the main findings of this consultation exercise.

5 Consultation Outcome

- 5.1 The full results of the consultation exercise are provided in Annex 1. In total **3,236** people responded to the consultation, representing approximately a **12%** response rate. This compares very favourably to other areas that have recently undertaken Community Governance Review consultations, for example Tunbridge Wells received a 2% response rate and Maidstone a 0.5% response rate.
- 5.2 The overall profile of responders was as follows:
- **96%** were residents of Tonbridge, with a further **2%** working in Tonbridge.
 - **8%** were under 35 years of age and **34%** were 65 years of age and over. **3%** preferred not to say.
 - **7%** considered themselves disabled, with a further **6%** preferring not to say.
- 5.3 In response to the question, “Should Tonbridge have a town council?” a sizeable majority were in favour. **72%** responded that they think Tonbridge should have a town council, **23%** responded that Tonbridge shouldn’t and **5%** were unsure.
- 5.4 For responders that answered that Tonbridge should have a town council, **47%** stated that it would give the residents of Tonbridge a stronger voice in local decisions, **31%** stated it would offer better facilities and support for the town and a further **19%** said it would enhance the status of Tonbridge.
- 5.5 For responders that answered that Tonbridge shouldn’t have a town council, **41%** stated that they don’t want the additional costs added to their tax bill, **27%** stated that the borough council (and any future unitary council) already provides the services that a town council would and a further **27%** felt it would add to local bureaucracy.
- 5.6 Just over three-quarters of people responding to the consultation found out about it directly from the borough council:

- Direct email (**39%**)
- Leaflet to the premises (**25%**)
- Social media (**9%**)
- Council website (**2%**)

5.7 In conclusion, the main outcome of this Community Governance Review consultation is that the majority of responders were in favour of a town council being established for Tonbridge.

6 Next Steps

6.1 It is proposed that a second consultation is undertaken (as per the consultation plan) to seek views on more detailed aspects of a future Tonbridge town council, including whether the town council should be warded, the potential number of town councillors, and whether it should have a mayor. Please see attached Annex 2 with a draft of the consultation questionnaire.

6.2 Given the more technical nature of this consultation it is proposed that this second consultation will be more 'light touch' than the first, with a focus on an online questionnaire promoted via social media and direct emails to responders from the previous consultation.

6.3 In addition, hard copy forms will still be made available for people to complete should they not have access to the online form.

6.4 Given the requirement to complete the process by February 2026, the need to leave time to properly analyse the consultation responses and the desire to minimise any overlap with the Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation later on in the year, it is proposed that the consultation will take place for a 6-week period from **31 October – 12 December 2025**.

7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

7.1 The proposed next steps in this report will result in less funding being required from the General Revenue Reserve to carry out the second stage consultation.

8 Risk Assessment

8.1 Whilst very good progress has been made, the timescales for the completion of the Community Governance Review continue to be quite tight. The Member Working Group is aware of this and are proactively supporting and overseeing the process to ensure the necessary milestones are achieved.

9 Legal Implications

- 9.1 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (Part 4) devolved power from the Secretary of State to principal councils to carry out community governance reviews and put in place or make changes to local community governance arrangements. This Community Governance Review is being undertaken in accordance with this Act and supplementary guidance.
- 9.2 The council is obliged to undertake a review which has been requisitioned following the submission of a valid petition or requests.
- 9.3 The Community Governance Review must be completed within one year of receipt of a valid petition. In this case this means that the review must be completed by 20 February 2026.

10 Consultation and Communications

- 10.1 The Media and Communications team lead the consultation part of the review process. This work will be overseen by the council's Member Working Group and the results reported back to Full Council in February 2026

11 Implementation

- 11.1 The focus of this report is on the implementation of a community governance review within the required timeframe.

12 Cross Cutting Issues

12.1 Climate Change and Biodiversity

- 12.1.1 Limited or low impact on emissions and environment.
- 12.1.2 Climate change advice has not been sought in the preparation of the options and recommendations in this report.
- 12.1.3 For this second stage consultation, care is being taken to focus on electronic options to facilitate engagement in the consultation process and only use paper-based methods where required.

12.2 Equalities and Diversity

- 12.2.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

12.3 Other If Relevant

- None

Background Papers	None
Annexes	Annex 1 – Community Governance Review Consultation – Results Overview Annex 2 – Proposed Stage 2 Consultation questionnaire