

**Council**

**24 February 2026**

**Part 1 - Public**

**Matters for Decision**



Cabinet Member

Responsible Officer

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Report Author

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## **Tonbridge Community Governance Review**

### **1 Summary and Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 This report sets out the results of the Community Governance Review process which started in February 2025 and based on the findings of two consultations, recommends that a Town Council for Tonbridge be created.

### **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 The following are the final recommendations of the Community Governance Review Member Working Group. Please note that these recommendations have been circulated to all interested parties in advance of this report being published as legally required.
- 3.2 That the results of the Community Governance Review consultations **BE NOTED.**
- 3.3 That the creation of a new parish within Tonbridge (as set out in Annex 1) **BE APPROVED.**
- 3.4 That the naming of the new parish as 'Tonbridge' **BE APPROVED.**
- 3.5 That the new parish has a parish council called 'Tonbridge Town Council' **BE APPROVED**, comprising:

- a) the division of the Town Council area into 6 wards, that are the same as the existing 6 borough wards: Cage Green and Angel; Higham; Hildenborough (area outside of Hildenborough parish proposed to be named 'Oast'); Judd; Trench; and Vauxhall (as set out in Annex 2).
- b) 18 councillors sitting on the Town Council:
- Cage Green and Angel – 4 Councillors
  - Higham – 3 Councillors
  - Oast – 1 Councillor
  - Judd – 3 Councillors
  - Trench – 3 Councillors
  - Vauxhall – 4 Councillors
- 3.6 That the change taking effect for electoral purposes ahead of the publication of the revised register planned for the 01 December 2026 **BE APPROVED.**
- 3.7 That the parish coming into effect from 01 April 2027 for administration purposes **BE APPROVED.**
- 3.8 That the first election for the Town Council taking place on 06 May 2027, and every four years thereafter, **BE APPROVED.**
- 3.9 That the delegation of authority to undertake the proposed next steps as set out in section 7 being given to the Electoral Registration Officer **BE APPROVED.**
- 3.10 That support for a Mayor that carries out ceremonial duties and chairs meeting **BE NOTED.**

#### **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, an initial six-week consultation (from 02 June-14 July 2025) was programmed and promoted by the Council, with other groups in the community also producing their own publicity material about the consultation independently of the council. 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.

- 4.4 The results of this consultation went to Council on 28 October 2025, where it was agreed to proceed with the Community Governance Review and deliver a further consultation 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.
- 4.5 The results of both consultations are provided in section 5 and 6 of this report, with a detailed overview of the second consultation also provided in **Annex 3**.

## 5 Results of the First Consultation

- 5.1 The first round of consultation focussed on the level of support for whether Tonbridge should have a Town Council. In total **3,236** people responded to this consultation, representing a **12%** response rate. This compared very favourably to other areas that had undertaken Community Governance Review consultations during a similar time, for example Tunbridge Wells received a 2% response rate and Maidstone a 0.5% response rate.
- 5.2 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.

## 6 Results of the Second Consultation

- 6.1 This consultation launched on 31 October 2025 and ran for a 6-week period (closing on 12 December 2025).
- 6.2 In total, **897** responses were received in response to the second consultation. Whilst this is lower than the first consultation, there are a couple of points to note:
- a) The first consultation asked the key questions regarding support or otherwise for the establishment of a Town Council for Tonbridge, whereas the second consultation has been a more detailed and technical exercise.
  - b) The level of response received in the second consultation is still higher than that seen in other areas, for example Horsham received around 700 responses to their second consultation, and Tunbridge Wells just under 350 responses.
  - c) Over **85%** of people that responded to this second consultation had also submitted a response to the first consultation.
- 6.3 Nearly **98%** of respondents were from Tonbridge and Hildenborough, with the remaining **2%** mostly made up of people from the surrounding area (particularly East Peckham, Hadlow and Leigh) who would look to Tonbridge as the nearest town.

- 6.4 The age profile of respondents was mainly within the older age groups, with over **50%** of respondents aged over 55 years and only around **10%** aged under 35 years. **6%** of people responding stated they considered themselves to be disabled.
- 6.5 By far the most effective way of raising awareness of the consultation was through a direct email to the Electoral Services database, with nearly **85%** of people responding saying that they found out about the consultation via email. The majority of the other **15%** found out about the consultation through social media or word of mouth.
- 6.6 **Warding Arrangements:** **69%** of people that responded to the consultation stated that, if a Town Council for Tonbridge was created, they would like the area to be divided up into wards.
- 6.6.1 The consultation survey proposed the use of the existing borough council arrangement of six wards comprising Cage Green and Angel, Higham, Hildenborough (unparished area), Judd, Trench and Vauxhall, but encouraged responses giving alternative suggestions.
- 6.6.2 Of the 410 people that responded to the section about alternative warding arrangements:
- Over **90%** either agreed with the 6-ward arrangement or didn't have an alternative suggestion.
  - Across the other **10%** of responses, there was no clear pattern of support for a particular approach with small numbers suggesting more wards, fewer wards, reinforcing the point that they didn't want any wards (or a Town Council) or suggesting the inclusion of areas outside the scope of this consultation.
- 6.6.3 It is therefore clear from the responses received, that there is the greatest support for a warding arrangement, and that it should mirror the current 6 wards that exist in the Borough Council arrangement following the last Local Government Boundary Commission Review in 2021/22.
- 6.6.4 It is proposed that most of the wards retain the same name as the borough wards, with the Community Governance Review Working Group recommending that the unparished area of Hildenborough be named 'Oast' in order to avoid confusion with the parished area of Hildenborough and to reflect the identity of the ward – i.e. that it includes the Oast Theatre and Oast Lane.
- 6.7 **Number of Councillors:** In terms of the number of councillors that people would like to sit on a Town Council, the response was less unanimous:
- 13 Councillors – **41%**

- 18 Councillors – **38%**
- 30 Councillors – **9%**
- Other – **12%**

6.8 In the 'other' category, the most common response was '0' or 'as few as possible' with small numbers of people also suggesting 6 councillors (1 per ward) or numbers ranging from 9-20 councillors based on various methodologies.

6.9 Reflecting on this result, the Community Governance Review Member Working Group discussed this matter in detail and unanimously recommended that 18 councillors should serve on the Town Council. The reasons behind this recommendation are:

- A Town Council comprising 13 Councillors would result in the same Councillors having to attend all the meetings, whereas 18 Councillors would allow for a greater diversity of representation.
- 18 councillors creates a better balance of representation across the parished area.
- Other Town and Parish Councils in the local area have a similar level of representation (**Annex 4**)

6.10 An arrangement of 18 Councillors would comprise:

- Cage Green and Angel – 4 Councillors
- Higham – 3 Councillors
- Oast – 1 Councillor
- Judd – 3 Councillors
- Trench – 3 Councillors
- Vauxhall – 4 Councillors

6.11 **Mayor for Tonbridge:** On the question of whether the Town Council should have a Mayor, **62%** were of the opinion that it should, with **38%** thinking that there shouldn't be a Mayor. As such, the majority of people responding to this question were in favour of the Town Council having a Mayor. This decision will be made by the new Town Council, but the Borough Council will make them aware of the residents' views from this consultation.

## 7 Next Steps

7.1 Creation of the Reorganisation Order - the Order officially establishes the Town Council and sets the boundaries, councillor numbers and election cycles. The Order is published and effective from 01 April 2027.

- 7.2 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England will be made aware of the outcome.
- 7.3 Full Council will need to agree a precept and budget in February 2027 ahead of the elections, so that the new Town Council can operate once the elections have taken place. Once the Town Council is established, allotments (which are managed by Tonbridge Garden and Allotments Association) will be passed over to the Town Council as legally required.
- 7.4 The potential transfer of any other assets will be discussed by the new Town Council once it is established and the Borough Council/new Unitary Authority.
- 7.5 All future budgets for the new Town Council will be determined by the Town Council themselves.

## **8 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

- 8.1 This Community Governance Review has been delivered under budget. There is no further financial expense for the Community Governance Review.

## **9 Risk Assessment**

- 9.1 The timeframe for Central Government to ratify the Reorganisation Order could be delayed given the number of councils that are undertaking similar reviews at this time. The mitigation is that by concluding the Community Governance Review in February 2026, we will be able to move forward to prepare the Order to enable as much time as possible ahead of the May 2027 elections.

## **10 Legal Implications**

- 10.1 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 has been undertaken in accordance with this Act and supplementary guidance.
- 10.2 The Community Governance Review must be completed within one year of receipt of a valid petition.

## **11. Consultation and Communications**

- 11.1 The consultation part of the Community Governance Review process has now been concluded.
- 11.2 Subject to the decision of Full council, it will be necessary to undertake further communication of the outcome of the Community Governance Review.

## 12. Implementation

12.1 The implementation of the next steps has been addressed in the body of this report.

## 13. Cross Cutting Issues

### a. Climate Change and Biodiversity

- i. Limited or low impact on emissions and environment.
- ii. Climate change advice has not been sought in the preparation of the options and recommendations in this report.

### b. Equalities and Diversity

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

Background Papers	None
Annexes	<p>Annex 1 – Map of the proposed new parished area of Tonbridge</p> <p>Annex 2 – Map of the wards in the proposed new parish area.</p> <p>Annex 3 – Results of the second consultation</p> <p>Annex 4 – Number of Councillors on Town and Parish Councils</p>