

Appendix C - Garforth Community Governance Review - Officer assessment against statutory criteria

1. Purpose

This assessment considers:

- The original application submitted by Garforth Neighbourhood Planning Forum (GNPF) and their representation submitted during the initial consultation period.
- Responses received through the public consultation survey.
- Written representations submitted by email.
- Views of Leeds City Councils' political Groups.

A total of 1,091 representations have been considered as part of the review.

The assessment evaluates the evidence listed above against the statutory requirements that community governance arrangements should:

- Reflect the identities and interests of the local community;
- Be effective; and
- Be convenient.

2. Assessment methodology

The review is not a referendum, and the recommendation is not determined solely by levels of support or opposition. Officers have assessed:

- The application and representation made by GNPF;
- The consultation responses received;
- Written representations received by email;
- Views of the Councils' political Groups; and
- Evidence relating to the statutory criteria.

The following assessment ratings have been applied:

Assessment rating	Description
Strong Evidence	The evidence provides a clear and compelling case that the creation of a parish and parish council would satisfy the criterion.
Mixed Evidence	The evidence contains both supporting and opposing views and does not demonstrate a clear or compelling conclusion.
Limited Evidence	The evidence provides limited support that the creation of a parish and parish council would satisfy the criterion.

3. Assessment against statutory criteria

a) Community identity and interests

Assessment rating: **Mixed evidence**

Evidence supporting the criterion	Evidence against the criterion
The application and GNPF representation describe Garforth as a distinct community with a strong local identity and history.	Many respondents considered Garforth already possesses a strong identity regardless of whether a parish council exists.

Many consultation responses described Garforth as a recognisable town with established facilities, organisations and community networks.	Only 30% agreed that a parish council would strengthen local identity and community representation, whilst 59% disagreed.
49% considered the proposed parish area to represent a recognisable community.	Some respondents questioned whether the proposed boundary fully reflected the wider Garforth community.

Officer assessment

The evidence provides strong support that Garforth is a distinct and recognisable community.

However, the wider consultation evidence does not demonstrate a similarly strong case that the establishment of a parish council is necessary in order to reflect that identity or represent community interests, or that will improve what is already in place.

b) Effective local governance

Assessment rating: **Limited evidence**

Evidence supporting the criterion	Evidence against the criterion
The application argues that a parish council would provide an additional democratic voice for Garforth and support delivery of the Neighbourhood Plan.	71% of respondents considered existing arrangements already provide effective and inclusive local representation.
Supporters referred to opportunities for improved communication, local engagement and project delivery.	Existing ward councillors and community organisations received significant support throughout the consultation.
Some respondents identified a need for a more coordinated focal point for local representation.	Only 24% believed a parish council would improve community engagement compared with current arrangements.
	Duplication of existing arrangements was a recurring theme across survey and email responses.

Officer assessment

Whilst the application identifies potential advantages associated with parish governance, the consultation evidence does not identify a clear governance gap or deficiency within existing arrangements.

The prevailing view expressed through consultation was that the arrangements already in place provide effective local representation.

c) Convenient local governance

Assessment rating: **Limited evidence**

Evidence supporting the criterion	Evidence against the criterion
Supporters argued that a parish council would provide regular meetings, increased accessibility and additional opportunities for engagement.	Concerns regarding duplication, bureaucracy and overlapping responsibilities were among the most common themes raised during consultation.
Some respondents considered local decision-making would be improved through a parish council structure.	Many respondents considered that a parish council would add an additional layer of governance without corresponding benefits.

	Concerns were raised regarding confusion between the roles of a parish council, ward councillors and Leeds City Council.
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Officer assessment

The balance of evidence suggests that many respondents regard current arrangements as simpler and better understood than the proposed alternative.

The consultation therefore provides limited evidence that a parish council would improve the convenience of local governance.

d) Community cohesion and existing civic infrastructure

Assessment rating: **Limited evidence**

Evidence supporting the criterion	Evidence against the criterion
Supporters argued that a parish council could provide greater coordination of community activity and support community groups and projects.	Consultation responses demonstrated extensive evidence of existing civic participation, community organisations, local groups and community activity.
Some respondents supported a parish council as a way of supporting local events and community initiatives.	Many respondents highlighted the contribution already made by ward councillors, voluntary organisations, charities and community groups.
	A recurring theme was that strong community cohesion already exists within Garforth.

Officer assessment

The consultation demonstrates that Garforth already exhibits many of the characteristics associated with a strong and active community.

The evidence does not demonstrate that community cohesion is currently lacking or that a parish council is required to achieve it.

e) Financial impact and value for money

Assessment rating: **Limited evidence**

Evidence supporting the criterion	Evidence against the criterion
Some respondents supported a modest precept where funding would be retained and spent on local priorities.	66% of respondents would not support an additional council tax charge.
Supporters cited opportunities to fund local projects, facilities and community initiatives.	65% did not believe the likely benefits would justify the precept.
	Cost and value for money were recurring concerns throughout both survey and email responses.

Officer assessment

The consultation demonstrates significant concern regarding the financial implications of a parish council and limited confidence that any benefits would justify the additional cost to residents.

f) Public support (supplementary consideration)

Assessment rating: **Limited evidence**

Evidence supporting the proposal	Evidence against the proposal
26% supported the creation of a parish and parish council.	65% opposed the creation of a parish.
Detailed supporting submissions identified potential governance and community benefits.	Written representations were predominantly opposed to the proposal.

Officer Assessment

Whilst support exists for the proposal, consultation responses demonstrate a clear majority view against the creation of a parish and parish council.

4. Overall Assessment

Criterion	Assessment
Community identity and interests	Mixed evidence
Effective local governance	Limited evidence
Convenient local governance	Limited evidence
Community cohesion and existing civic infrastructure	Limited evidence
Financial impact and value for money	Limited evidence

5. Conclusion

The original application and supporting representations identify some potential benefits associated with parish governance, including enhanced local representation, support for neighbourhood planning, additional community engagement opportunities and access to locally directed funding.

The consultation also demonstrates strong evidence that Garforth is a distinct and recognisable community with an established local identity and active civic life.

However, when considered as a whole, the evidence does not demonstrate that the creation of a parish and parish council would provide more effective or convenient local governance than existing arrangements. Consultation responses indicate confidence in the current governance arrangements, strong existing community cohesion, significant concerns regarding duplication and additional costs, and limited support for the proposal overall.

Officers therefore conclude that the available evidence does not demonstrate a sufficiently clear and compelling case for the establishment of a parish or parish council for Garforth.