

## Agenda item 4

For decision - To request Somerset Council carries out a Community Governance Review to expand Frome's parish boundary

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### Summary

This report explains the criteria, process and timing of a Community Governance Review (CGR) to adjust Frome's parish boundary and the reasons why this is needed. It recommends that Council formally requests a review to be carried out urgently. Somerset Council (SC) is responsible for carrying out CGRs.

### Why review the parish boundary?

Frome's boundary was put in place 50 years ago in 1974 when Frome Town Council was established. At the time it was probably agreed to set the boundary with room for the town to expand, and that has happened. In 1971 Frome's population was 13,000, it is now about 28,000. Tweaks to the boundary have occurred since as development moved beyond the existing boundary, but not in the past 15 years.

Frome's expansion has now reached the parish boundary and there are very few sites that can be developed within it. The pressure for more housing is sure to be maintained and probably going to increase. The plans for Selwood Garden Community (SGC) are progressing fast and there has recently been a call for development sites from SC and all of them coming forward are beyond our parish boundary. As a result, new development will occur beyond Frome's parish boundary, and it is time for another review of our parish boundary. The process of changing a parish boundary is called a Community Governance Review (CGR).

### What is a CGR and when can it happen?

A CGR would be carried out by SC, not the Boundary Commission. SC's website states:

*The Community Governance reviews will consider whether the existing arrangements are reflective of the identities and interests of the community in that area and are effective and convenient to the local communities. It will also take into account the impact of community governance arrangements on community cohesion, and the size, population and boundaries of the parishes.*

Wiltshire Council's website provides more information, but both are based on the same legislation. It states:

*Community Governance Reviews (CGRs) in England are conducted to ensure that local governance arrangements are effective and efficient, and that they reflect the interests of local communities:*

- *Improve community engagement*

*CGRs can help to bring communities closer together and create better local democracy.*

- *Ensure local governance is effective*

*CGRs can help to ensure that local governance continues to be effective and convenient.*

- *Reflect local interests*

*CGRs can help to ensure that local governance arrangements reflect the identities and interests of local communities.*

*CGRs are conducted in accordance with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. They can be triggered by:*

- *A reasonable request from an individual, group, or parish*
- *A valid petition containing the sufficient number of signatures required to trigger a review*
- *Demographic changes, such as a rise in population*

*The timeframe for a CGR can vary from six months for small reviews to a full year.*

In the context of the above criteria and the imminent and inevitable expansion of the town, there are sufficient reasons to call on SC carry out a CGR of Frome's parish boundary. Indeed, there is a strong argument that the criteria have already been met as Commerce Park, Sainsbury's, McDonalds, and the Sandy's Hill Lane development are all in neighbouring parishes.

The legislation is clear that SC can trigger a CGR following a request made by FTC.

### Timing

A CGR would be carried out by SC and takes time. Wiltshire Council suggest that it can take up to a year but could easily be longer for us given SC's financial situation and limited capacity. However, new development will not wait for SC; for example, it is likely that the first new resident of SGC will be moving in in 2027 while the first residents on the Sandy's Hill Lane development are already in.

Informal discussions with officers at SC have indicated that, if SC agreed to one (and that is not a foregone conclusion), the best time to carry out a CGR would be at the same time as the review of Somerset Cllrs division boundaries. We understand that work has started on that review and SC hopes to complete it in time for the next SC election in 2026.

### Expanding on some of the criteria listed above in the context of Frome

#### *Ensure local governance is effective*

The need for strategic planning has never been more important as new developments rapidly come forward. But achieving the best development in the right places with the best infrastructure is far more difficult for developments in neighbouring parishes where FTC isn't a statutory consultee.

*Demographic changes, such as a rise in population*

To take SGC as an example, we know that once completed there will be about 1700 new homes. If the parish boundary was not adjusted, Selwood Parish Council's population would increase from about 850 to somewhere approaching 5000. The Frome parish's population would not increase but FTC would be expected to provide services for those new residents on their behalf, who will naturally feel they live in Frome.

*Reflect local interests (of Frome community)*

As it stands, those new residents of SGC would pay Council Tax to Selwood Parish Council and not FTC. In effect, the residents of Frome would be subsidising the residents of Selwood Parish for the services they will inevitably use that FTC provides.

To make things fair to Frome's residents and for Frome Town Council to feel able to provide services in Frome for residents within the SGC development envelope, it seems right to extend the boundary of the Frome Parish to the Frome Bypass; and reduce the size of Selwood Parish.

Given that CGRs seem to be a once in a generation occurrence, a CGR should review the whole of Frome's parish boundary to ensure that room for expansion of the town can happen within a revised parish boundary.

**Recommendation**

That Somerset Council urgently conduct a Community Governance Review of Frome's parish boundary.