

Community Governance Review 2025

Earley Town Council Submission

Introduction

The Community Governance Review (CGR) is a borough wide exercise across all 17 towns and parishes within the boundaries of Wokingham Borough Council (WBC), to ensure that parish governance arrangements are as effective and appropriate as possible for the next 10-15 years.

Earley Town Council (ETC) considered 3 areas during its deliberations on the CGR consultation:

1. Number of town councillors
2. The internal warding arrangements
3. The external parish boundary

. Number of Town Councillors

ETC currently has 25 councillors, representing an electorate of 24041 residents.

The annual number of formal meetings of the council and its standing committees is currently 27, which equates to a total of 357 councillor attendances, or, on average 14 attendances per councillor.

ETC Recommendations:

ETC recommends that, taking into account the parish population and the workload on members, 25 is the correct number of councillors for Earley Town Council.

. Internal Parish Warding Arrangements

The current arrangement for ETC is 8 parish wards with 25 councillors (seven 3x councillor wards and one 4x councillor ward).

The Wokingham (Electoral Changes) Order 2023 enacted that Earley would have only seven parish wards with 25 councillors (allocated as one 5x councillor ward, three 4x councillor wards, two 3x councillor wards and one 2x councillor ward). Polling districts for the new borough wards were set up, based on this town ward plan.

ETC recognises that this CGR can rewrite this plan so that it better reflects representation on the Town Council.

During their discussions of the CGR, ETC councillors agreed that the wide difference in the number of councillors per ward was not good for fair governance of the parish.

ETC councillors also agreed that the names of the seven new wards were acceptable.

ETC Recommendations

1. There should be seven town wards
2. The ward names should be as set down in the Electoral Changes Order
3. There should be four wards of 4x councillors and three wards of 3x councillors.
4. Radstock ward should be reduced from five to four councillors. St Nicolas ward should be increased from two to three councillors.
5. To achieve No.3 above and to maintain equal representation per ward, the western boundary of St Nicolas ward should remain in its current position, across Laurel Park, and thus St Nicolas ward would keep the dwellings on Sellafeld Way (and roads off) and Markby Way (and roads off)

ETC recognises that this may require an additional polling district to be created.

. External Parish Boundaries

The parish of Earley shares its boundary with 5 neighbouring parishes

1. Sonning
2. Woodley
3. Winnersh
4. Arborfield & Newland
5. Shinfield

To the knowledge of ETC and through formal correspondence, the parishes 1 – 4 above and Earley are content with their mutual parish boundaries.

In the consultation document presented to the Borough Parish Liaison Forum (BPLF) on 14th October 2024 on CGR, in Appendix 5, item 1, it is suggested that the polling district of Shinfield North East (SNE) is an anomaly being in Shinfield and could be moved into the parish of Earley.

Through ETC's informal discussions with members of Shinfield Parish Council (SPC), it has emerged that there is a view that the properties at the bottom end of Ryhill Way, would sit more logically within Shinfield parish. Subsequent conversations indicate that SPC will not be suggesting parts of Earley are moved into Shinfield.

With respect to Shinfield, ETC makes the following comments:

ETC identifies 4 possible scenarios with respect to its boundary with Shinfield –

1. The boundary stays in its current position
2. 25 dwellings in Ryhill Way, Uffcot Close and Woodsend Close are moved from Earley parish to Shinfield, with the boundary drawn somewhere across the public open space to the east
3. The polling district of Shinfield North East (SNE), currently assigned to the cross-parish borough ward of Hillside, is moved into Earley parish
4. Earley acquires part of Shinfield, not fully defined by the SNE polling districts

However, ETC notes that:

- a) To the best of ETC's knowledge and that of its councillors, no residents in this area have expressed a desire to change the parish in which they live
- b) With respect to community coherence, ETC does not exclude residents from the SNE area in its activities, such as the Youth Club. Changing the parish is not required to give these residents more local inclusion
- c) ETC has no desire to increase parish precept charges on residents in neighbouring parishes
- d) Scenario No.2 above represents a financial loss to ETC of a precept base of about £3500 (these 25 dwellings = 39 Band D equivalent dwellings @ £88.06 parish precept per Band D property)
- e) Scenario No.3 above represents a financial loss to Shinfield PC of a precept base of about £13300 (these 101 dwellings = 157 Band D equivalent dwellings @ £84.76 parish precept per Band D property)
- f) The statement in the BPLF document that states "There is no access to Shinfield from these properties" – ETC would suggest that this is a car-centric view and inaccurate, given that there are numerous footpaths linking the properties to both the Shinfield parish areas of Pearman's Copse and the Shinfield Road
- g) The SNE polling district already contains a major anomaly in that the properties at No.12-18 Wilsford Close were not included in the polling district, unlike the rest of the road, and thus remain in Shinfield borough ward
- h) The current parish boundary between Earley and Shinfield follows the historic feature of Pearman's Lane
- i) The SNE polling area was contrived to balance the number of electors across borough wards. It has no historical significance
- j) Creating a boundary that includes SNE plus the No.4 excluded properties in Wilsford Close would result in creating a polling district with just 4 properties. It would look a little odd and draw attention to the original mistake

ETC Recommendations

1. That its mutual boundaries with the parishes of Sonning, Woodley, Winnersh and Arborfield & Newland remain unchanged
2. That its boundary with Shinfield remain unchanged, noting points a), b) and c) above
3. That properties should not be moved from Earley to Shinfield, noting points a), b), c) and d) above
4. That the SNE area or variations should not be moved into Earley parish, noting points a), b), c), e), f), g), h), i) and j) above

4th April 2025