



South Tyneside Council

Community Governance Review – Whitburn

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**John Rumney – Head of Legal & Governance
Constitution Committee – Monday 19th October 2026**

Report to Constitution Committee

Cabinet Portfolio/Lead Member: Cllr Paul Mackings Leader of the Council

Report of John Rumney – Head of Legal & Governance

Subject: Report regarding Community Governance Review – Whitburn

Date: 19th October 2026

Wards affected: Whitburn & Marsden

Council ambitions: This will help us achieve all five of our Ambitions in all we do.

Does the report and any appendices contain information which has been identified as confidential or exempt?

- No, this report does not contain information identified as confidential or exempt.

Purpose of Report

1. To present the results of the first stage consultation undertaken as part of the Community Governance Review ("CGR") for the Whitburn Neighbourhood Area.
2. To invite Constitution Committee to consider the consultation responses and determine draft recommendations for publication as part of the second stage consultation process.

Background Information

3. At its meeting on 30 July 2026, Council resolved to commence a Community Governance Review following receipt of a valid application from the Whitburn Neighbourhood Forum seeking consideration of the establishment of a parish council for Whitburn.

4. The review is being undertaken in accordance with Part 4 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and associated statutory guidance.
5. The purpose of the review is to determine whether community governance arrangements in the Whitburn area:
 - reflect the identities and interests of the community; and
 - are effective and convenient.

Update on Stage 1 Consultation

6. The first consultation stage was undertaken during September 2026. Residents living in the area, businesses operating within it, MPs, Ward Councillors, the Tyne & Wear Fire & Rescue Service and Northumbria Police were invited to respond to the consultation, along with Sunderland City Council.
7. The consultation produced 352 unique responses following verification and removal of duplicates. This equates to approximately 8% of the electorate in the area.
8. Of those respondents expressing a view on the principal question which was whether or not they were in favour of a parish council being established:

246 69.89% supported the creation of a parish council.

106 30.11% opposed the creation of a parish council.

9. Consultation responses demonstrated several recurring themes.

Supporters identified:

- Desire for stronger local representation.
- Protection of Whitburn's village identity and character.
- Greater influence over planning and development matters.
- Increased ability to secure grants and external funding.
- Enhanced local accountability.

Whilst opponents identified:

- Concern regarding the introduction of a parish precept (an additional charge applied to Council Tax bills).
- Concern regarding an additional tier of local government.
- Uncertainty regarding the practical powers and responsibilities of a parish council.
- Concern about duplication of existing Council functions.

Officer Assessment

10. Having considered the consultation responses, and whilst noting that the response rate was low, officers are of the view that there is sufficient evidence of community identity, local distinctiveness and public support to justify progression of draft proposals for the establishment of a parish council.
11. Whitburn possesses a distinctive identity recognised through:
 - Its historic village character;
 - Its geographical location and natural boundaries;
 - Its adopted Neighbourhood Plan;
 - The existence of an established Neighbourhood Forum; and
 - The consistent consultation feedback emphasising local identity and community cohesion.
12. Officers are satisfied that the establishment of a parish council is in principle, capable of satisfying the statutory requirements relating to community identity and effective and convenient local governance, subject to detailed consultation on governance arrangements. The recommendations set out below are for consideration by Constitution Committee with a view to publishing those considered appropriate for the purposes of further, more focussed consultation.

Draft Recommendations

13. Constitution Committee is invited to approve the publication of the following draft recommendations for the second stage consultation.

Recommendation 1 - Creation of a Parish

That a new civil parish be established covering the existing Whitburn Neighbourhood Area. This reflects the generally positive response to the initial consultation.

Recommendation 2 - Establishment of a Parish Council

If recommendation 1 is approved, then the law requires any parish which is created to be supported by a Parish Council given the number of electors in the proposed area.

That the parish be served by the establishment of a parish council to be known as: "Whitburn Parish Council".

Recommendation 3 - Parish Boundary

That the parish boundary should follow the existing designated Whitburn Neighbourhood Area boundary, as shown on the plan attached at **Appendix 1**.

This is in accordance with the request for a Community Governance Review, and reflects the geographical footprint of the area known as “Whitburn”.

Recommendation 4 - Parish Warding

That, at this stage, the parish should not be divided into parish wards. The consultation responses do not identify distinct internal communities which would justify separate parish wards.

Recommendation 5 - Number of Parish Councillors

That Whitburn Parish Council should initially comprise between nine and twelve elected parish councillors. This number is considered proportionate to:

- The size of the electorate (including anticipated population growth);
- The geographic area;
- The anticipated functions of the Council; and
- Practice amongst comparable parish councils.

Recommendation 6 - Electoral Arrangements

That parish council elections should be held every four years, to coincide with ordinary local government elections wherever practicable.

Recommendation 7 - First Election

Subject to final Council approval and the making of a Reorganisation Order, the first parish council election should be held on a date determined by the Council's Returning Officer in accordance with statutory requirements. It is anticipated that the first election may take place in May 2028, at the same time as pre-planned local elections and those for the North East Strategic Mayoral Authority.

Implications

Financial and Resources

14. A parish council would have the power to raise a parish precept through council tax. This is an additional charge added to the Council Tax bills for households living within the proposed parish boundaries, for the purposes of funding the operation of the parish Council. Consultation responses demonstrate that cost is the principal concern amongst those opposing the proposal.
15. There have been costs incurred by the Council in connection with producing and distributing consultation materials. There is no Council budget allocation to fund such a review and central government financial support for conducting Community Governance Reviews ended in 2017. Resources have been utilised from several departments across the Council to manage this project to date including from Democratic Services, Communications, Planning, Legal and

Governance and Elections. Those resources will continue to be drawn upon as the consultation continues.

16. Digital communications have been used during the first stage of the consultation and will be used as much as possible during stage two, but some leafleting may still be required for harder to reach residents. Election Team members have been deployed to deliver leaflets to reduce postage costs.
17. There may be additional costs depending upon the outcome of the review, such as those associated with the placing of statutory notices.
18. More generally, a new parish/town council which is established as an outcome of a Community Governance Review would incur initial set up costs such as: office/building hire, recruitment and staffing costs, setting up IT systems and conducting the first parish/town council elections. The Council would be initially responsible for paying these costs and setting the first parish/town council budget and precept. The cost for conducting the first parish/town council elections can be reclaimed from the new parish/town council under Section 36(5) of the Representation of the People Act 1983.
19. There is provision in Sections 98 and 99 of the 2007 Act (and associated regulations) for a Reorganisation Order published at the end of a Community Governance Review to address consequential and incidental matters such as the transfer of property, staff, functions and liabilities. Prior to establishing a new parish/town council, agreements may be made locally in relation to remuneration or compensation of costs. The operating costs of any new Parish Council will depend at least in part, upon what assets are transferred.
20. It is not possible at the present time, to publish illustrative precept levels, or annual operating costs. It is intended to publish indicative examples (if available) of the amounts charged by comparable parish councils to operate, but it should be borne in mind that no two areas are the same, and examples will be indicative only. The amount of any precept which may be charged to residents in Whitburn if a Parish Council is established will depend upon what the Parish Council intends to do.

Legal and Governance

21. Under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, the Council is legally obliged to undertake a CGR, on receipt of a valid community governance application by a designated neighbourhood forum. The consultation presently underway is being undertaken in accordance with the applicable law and guidance.
22. Should the review recommend the creation of a parish and Council subsequently approve those recommendations, a Reorganisation Order would specify the effective date of the new arrangements and any transitional governance arrangements considered necessary.

23. The Council is likely to arrange the first meeting of the new parish council. The first agenda should include the adoption of a code of conduct, elections of a chairman and vice-chairman, the appointment of a parish clerk, and the appointments of a bank, cheque signatories and an auditor.
24. In view of the responses to the consultation at stage one, and notwithstanding that the response rate was small, the fact that almost 70% of responses were in favour of a Parish Council being established must be acknowledged. A second, more detailed consultation may produce a higher response rate, or more detailed submissions, but terminating the review after stage one would expose the Council to a significant risk of legal challenge.

Risk

25. Having commenced the review in order to discharge the Council's legal obligations arising from the receipt of a valid request, the Council would be failing to adhere to its statutory duties if, against the background of the responses received to date, it did not proceed to the next consultation stage.
26. As mentioned in paragraph 24 above, failing to complete the review would represent a significant risk of legal challenge, and the associated costs.

Equality and Diversity and Community

27. An Equality Impact Assessment screening assessment was undertaken prior to the review being launched. In accordance with the Council's duties, consultation arrangements have been designed to ensure all sections of the community have an opportunity to participate.
28. Tailored communication methods and content will be used throughout the review to ensure that all audiences are able to engage meaningfully during the two public consultation periods.

Environmental and Sustainability

29. The decisions recommended in this report do not give rise to any environmental or sustainability implications.

Council Ambitions, Policies, Strategies and Plans

- 30. Our Vision is based on five 'Ambitions'. We want all residents in South Tyneside to be financially secure; be healthy and well throughout their lives; be connected to jobs, skills, and learning; be part of strong communities and we want to support our residents by targeting support to make things fairer.
- 31. This report should be considered with the Council's Vision and Values in mind and demonstrate alignment to our agreed 'Council Values' that define what we stand for.

Consultation and Engagement

- 32. The initial consultation period of 4 weeks took place between 1 and 28 September 2026.
- 33. All households within the neighbourhood forum area were contacted, together with ward members, members of Parliament, the Police, the Fire & Rescue Service, local businesses and local businesses. Sunderland City Council were also consulted given the boundary between the proposed parish area and Sunderland.
- 34. Leaflets were delivered to every household in the area in question, and details of the review were published on the Council's website, and in social media releases. A drop-in session is scheduled to take place at Whitburn Library during November, and the review has been referenced at two meetings of the East Shields & Whitburn CAF.
- 35. The second consultation stage is intended to run from 27th October until 23rd November (subject to any extensions which may be necessary). The consultation is being undertaken in accordance with the legal requirements, and with a view to ensuring that any final decision taken is based upon an accurate reflection of the views of the residents in the proposed parish area.

Next Steps

- 36. If agreed, the draft recommendations will be published for a second stage consultation.
- 37. Responses received during the second consultation stage will be considered by Constitution Committee before final recommendations are submitted to Full

Council. It is intended to publish final recommendations (which would represent the conclusion of the review) in January 2027.

38. Should Council ultimately approve the creation of a parish council, the Council may make a Reorganisation Order giving effect to the new governance arrangements.

Recommendations

39. Constitution Committee is requested to:
- (1) Note the results of the first consultation stage;
 - (2) Agree the draft recommendations set out in Paragraph 13 of this report;
 - (3) Authorise the Head of Legal and Governance to publish the draft recommendations and commence the second consultation stage; and
 - (4) Receive a further report following completion of the second consultation.

Reasons for Recommendations

40. In undertaking the Review, the Council will comply with the requirements of Part 4 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and other relevant legislation and have regard to Guidance on Community Governance Reviews issued in accordance with section 100(4) of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 by the Department of Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England in March 2010.

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – Whitburn Neighbourhood Plan

The following is a list of the background papers (excluding exempt papers) relied upon in the preparation of the above report:

Background Paper	File Ref:	File Location
Neighbourhood Plan	 Appendix 1 Whitburn Neighbourhood Plan.	
Spreadsheet showing redacted consultation responses	 Stage 1 responses_ALL_29092	