

Case Study - Complex Community Governance Review

Client: Northampton Borough Council

Keith has been leading a Big Society programme to establish the public's requirements for parish, neighbourhood or community councils – empowering local communities to design and deliver public services tailored to the needs of local people.

The Conservative administration, as part of their manifesto, initiated this Community Governance Review (CGR) early in 2012 and asked Keith to lead the programme. The administration is committed to strengthening neighbourhoods and promoting active communities to take decisions and shape the places they live in. They recognise that Northampton is made up of many unique communities and neighbourhoods and that their views should be sought widely to understand local requirements for new forms of local community governance.

Our Role

Keith has been responsible for all aspects of the CGR programme:

- planning the whole review including programme governance; this involves three stages – initial petitions; detailed public consultation via surveys; local advisory poll (referendums)
- developing public information documents
- developing consultative survey, available in paper and online
- promoting the CGR through media, online, public displays, public briefings
- planning and running public briefings and drop-in sessions to inform the public about the CGR process and to encourage participation
- maintaining regular dialogue with all campaigners during the preparation of their detailed proposals
- providing ad-hoc coaching, support and guidance
- liaising with advisory bodies such as the Association of Local Councils
- stakeholder management including senior councillors, senior officers, legal advisers, democratic services, council tax, consultations team, planning, proposal campaigners.

The politicians and senior management have been kept informed every step of the way through regular reports, programme plans, risk registers, Programme Team and Steering Group meetings.

Proposals to set-up seven new parish councils and to change the boundaries on five existing parish councils, including a split of one parish into two smaller parishes, have been received and are now under detailed public consultation. Arrangements for the local advisory polls are being made which require new polling stations and specific communications to each household affected.

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This is a complex, political and legally sensitive initiative requiring careful planning and management. This is the first time in the country that so many proposals are being taken forward at the same time – normally it is only one or two changes to governance arrangements that happen all at once.

Outcome

The Community Governance Review provides an opportunity for all areas of the town to have their say on the running of Northampton and help create a vision for the future of the town.

Parish, neighbourhood or community councils will give people more say in what local public services are available and how they are delivered – local services designed by local people.

The large number of proposals received demonstrates the appetite of people to take a leading role in designing and delivering local public services. It is a tangible example of how power and responsibility can be shifted so that individuals and communities have more power and capacity to take local decisions – localism in action.