

Chairman - Councillor R P Cooke

Present (for all or part of the meeting):-

Councillors:

F Beatty

A N Pearce

A P Edgeller

J M Pert

A T A Godfrey

Also present:-

Officers in attendance:-

- I Curran - Head of Law and Governance (IC)
- Legal Services Manager
- Press and Communications Manager
- Consultation and Engagement Officer
- Democratic Services Officer

STC30 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor R Kenney.

STC31 Notes of Previous Meeting

The notes of the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record.

STC32 Community Governance Review of Stafford Town

Received the report of the Head of Law and Governance presenting feedback from the recent public consultation and considering the outcomes of the review.

Councillor R P Cooke introduced the report noting the requirement for the Working Group to make recommendations on the points set out in paragraph 2.

The Working Group considered each recommendation in turn:-

- (a) (i) Whether Stafford Town should be parished;

The Group noted that the majority of respondents (63.6%) were in favour of a Town Council being created for the unparished areas of Stafford.

Recommendation: That the Stafford Town area be parished

(ii) Whether the existing area of Doxey should be included;

The Group noted that the public consultation indicated a close score between those in favour of including Doxey (46.7%) and those against (40.5%). However, when results were isolated only to those provided by respondents from Doxey, it indicated that 88.8% of the Doxey electorate were against the inclusion of Doxey. The Group also noted that Doxey already has a well-established parish council.

Recommendation: That Doxey parish is not included in the boundary of the new parish and that Doxey parish, and its council, remain separate.

(b) Whether the new parish should have a Town Council;

Recommendation: That the new parish should have a Town Council

(c) Whether the area should be warded and if so, how;

The Group noted that the new Council would serve an electorate of over 46,000 and would therefore be a sizeable local council. It was considered that the size of its electorate warranted warding of areas to make elections practical, convenient and more representative of the relevant areas.

It was noted that the majority of respondents were in favour of the parish being warded along the same lines as the 12 existing Borough Council ward boundaries. It was noted that these boundaries were already well recognized by residents and had been endorsed in previous boundary reviews carried out by the Local Boundary Commission for England.

However, with Doxey parish not being included within the new parish, consideration needed to be given to how Castletown would be parished. It was not considered that Castletown had a sufficiently high electorate to constitute forming a separate ward on its own. It was also noted that, when Doxey parish was first established, consideration had already previously been given to combining Castletown within its area. However that proposal was not pursued. The Group looked at size and locations of existing adjoining Borough wards. It was considered that Castletown already had close connections with areas within the existing Rowley ward and that it would be most appropriate to merge Castletown into the existing Rowley ward boundary.

Recommendation: That the parish be warded using the same boundaries as existing Borough Council wards, with the unparished area of the Doxey and Castletown Borough ward being merged into the existing Rowley ward boundary.

(d) How many councillors the Council and each ward should have

The Group noted the current councillor representation for each of the Stafford Town wards. These numbers had been derived following a review by the Local Government Boundary Commission to achieve appropriate representation, and comparable elector to councillor ratios, across each ward. The Group considered the current elector to councillor ratios within all Stafford Town Borough wards.

The Group noted that Council sizes and council numbers varied greatly across the country and there was no set formula. The Group had regard to the number of councillors in other local parish councils, as well as examples of larger town councils across the country.

The Group considered it appropriate to retain a similar elector to councillor ratio within Stafford Town as was currently in place for the Borough Council. It was considered that Rowley ward would require an increase in councillor representation if the electors from Castletown were to be combined with it.

Recommendation: That the new Town Council should be made up of 19 councillors, divided between each ward as follows:

Baswich (2), Common (1), Coton (2), Forebridge (1), Highfields and Western Downs (2), Holmcroft (2), Littleworth (2), Manor (2), Penkside (1), Rowley (including Castletown) (2), Weeping Cross and Wildwood (2).

- (e) What the names of the new parish and parish wards should be

The Group considered that the new parish should be known as “Stafford”

The Group noted that 72.5% of respondents were in favour of retaining the names of the current Borough Council wards. The Group considered that these names were long standing and familiar to electors. The Group considered that the name of “Rowley” ward should be amended to “Rowley and Castletown” to reflect the combining of those areas into the same ward.

Recommendation: That the names of the 11 Town wards should be as follows: Baswich, Common, Coton, Forebridge, Highfields and Western Downs, Holmcroft, Littleworth, Manor, Penkside, Rowley and Castletown, Weeping Cross and Wildwood.

It was agreed that the Working Group’s initial recommendations be published on the Council’s website along with the consultation results

The Head of Law and Governance detailed the next steps of the process, confirming that the final recommendations of the Working Group would be placed before Council in September 2026, following which the Working Group would be disbanded.

Elections to a new Town Council would be held in May 2027 with initial support to be provided by an interim Town Clerk who would deal with operational matters.

STC33 Date of Next Meeting

To be held prior to September 2026 Council meeting, date to be confirmed.

CHAIR