COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW MEMBER GROUP

Date of meeting: 30 July 2009
Report of: Bill Howie, Democratic Services Officer
Title: Briefing Paper – Initial Options Evaluation

The petition identified three recommendations arising from a Review:

1. That a new parish be constituted under Section 87 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007
2. That the new parish should have a council to be known as Crewe Town Council.
3. That the area to which the review is to relate is the whole of the Electoral Wards of Coppenhall, Delamere, Grosvenor, Maw Green, St Johns, Valley and Waldron; and those parts of the following Electoral Wards which do not already fall into an existing parish: Alexandra, Leighton, St Barnabas, Wistaston Green.

It must be borne in mind in conducting this Review that Cheshire East Council is obliged to respond to the proposal contained in the petition. The petition and the proposal that it contains must be assessed in terms of the criteria and the key considerations set out in the guidance. They are as follows:

Criteria
Community governance in the areas must be
   − Reflective of the identities and interests of the community in that area
   − Effective and convenient

Key considerations
   − The impact of community governance arrangements on community cohesion
   − The size, population and boundaries of a local community or parish
   − Parishes should reflect distinctive and recognisable communities of interest with their own sense of identity
   − The degree to which the proposals offer a sense of place and identity for all residents
   − The ability of the proposed authority to deliver quality services economically and efficiently providing users with a democratic voice
   − The degree to which a parish council would be viable in terms of a unit of local government providing at least some local services that are convenient, easy to reach and accessible to local people

Options

However, the guidance also indicates that as part of the review other viable options should be considered to determine if they represent a better option in terms of addressing the criteria. The table below attempts to make an initial evaluation of what options are best suited for further consideration and consultation.

OPTION	EVALUATION
Area Committees – formed as part of the structure of principal Councils, often including local councillors. They can be involved in a wide range of service provision and fulfil a number of community governance roles. Their primary role is to contribute to the shaping of Council services and improving local service provision	The Local Area Partnerships do provide a coherent and consistent pattern across the whole of Cheshire East. The approach is premised on coordination of partners in relatively small local area. The Crewe LAP is bigger than the area under review and includes a number of parishes that surround the area. To that extent, although the area is represented by Cheshire East members there can be no representation by democratically elected organisations as there is for those surrounding parished areas. At present there is no intention for the LAPs to act as direct service providers but rather to maximise the potential for partnership working. To that extent they do not necessarily provide the means by which at least some local services that are convenient, easy to reach and accessible to local people could be provided.

Neighbourhood Management – generally aimed at service delivery improvement and implementation at the local level. Often facilitated by a neighbourhood manager rather than advising or making decisions at local level.	As indicated, this option is primarily aimed at service delivery issues at the local level and does not seek to provide democratically elected element to ensuring effective and convenient local governance. At present there are no area management arrangements throughout the area under review Does not necessarily provide a strong sense of local identity as the emphasis is on delivery on services or specific aspects of service rather than being reflective of local identity and community structure.
Tenant Management Organisations – usually estate based, largely public/social housing focused.	Parts of the area under review are covered by social housing, provided principally by Wulvern Housing. Tenant representation is a key element for RSLs in particular. However, the principal concerns of such organisations are in respect of housing conditions and tenants representations in terms of the services they receive from their landlords. The area under review is not predominantly made up of social or rented housing and does not therefore provide a democratically elected basis for governance arrangements, nor could it be said to be reflective of the interests or identity of the whole of the area covered by the review.

| Area/Community Forums
 – often established as a mechanism to give communities a say on principal council matters or local issues and to influence decision making. Membership usually consists of people living or working in a specific area. | Although there are some good examples of area/community forums in parts of the area under review the pattern of such organisations is not uniform across the whole of the area. Their focus is, by definition on matters of concern to people within a relatively small geographic area when compared to the area under review. The key emphasis is on influencing decision making rather than providing a more comprehensive set of governance arrangements across a wider area. They are strong in terms of community identity and convenience.
Although this option has some history of operating well in some parts of the area under review; that experience has been not been consistent across the whole of the area. The emphasis has also been on influencing rather than making decision making.
Experience suggests that they require a significant degree of support from the local authority to develop the necessary abilities to operate effectively.
While reflecting a strong sense of identity and being potentially convenient there is little evidence to suggest that they would be able to provide a range of services efficiently and effectively. |

Residents' & Tenants' Associations – usually focused on issues affecting neighbourhood or estate. They may be established with or without direct support from the principal council.	As in the case of tenants management organisations there is no consistent and coherent pattern of residents' and tenants' associations throughout the whole of the area under review. Focus tends to be on highly localised areas and issues rather than broader governance or service provision in an area. There are questions about the ability of such organisations to represent effectively all of the interests of the people in a particular area. There is no uniform or consistent pattern across the area under review. Strong in terms of local identity and recognisable local communities but may not be able to deliver quality services economically and efficiently providing users with a democratic voice
Community Associations – democratic model for local residents and community organisations to work together to work together for the benefit of the neighbourhood. The principal council may be represented on the management committee.	Community Associations can, dependent on their structure represent a democratic means of providing a range of services and facilities. By definition, they have a strong sense of community identity and interest. However, there is no consistent pattern of such organisations across the whole of the area under review. There is a potential that some areas would be better organised and motivated than others. The ability in these circumstances, to provide some quality services economically and efficiently and thus providing all users with a democratic voice is open to question.

<u>Multiple Parish Councils</u> – the review may decide that the area/population involved is too large or lacks the community cohesion that are key criteria. The presence of geographic boundaries, for example, may limit the formation of natural communities.	The review was triggered by the desire to establish a single town council for the whole of the area under review. That option presumes that a single authority would be best able to fulfil the criteria of reflecting the identity and interests of the community throughout the whole of the area under review, in addition to addressing the other key considerations. It may be that the proposed area is considered to be too large to meet these needs or be reflective of the identity and interest of the whole community in the area. An alternative may be to consider if the issues identity and interest operate a smaller level than that proposed by the original petition. Further consideration would need to be given to assess whether there is any strength of feeling that several parish councils could operate more effectively and efficiently than a single authority. A key issue is also an assessment of whether multiple parish councils present more viable units of local government. Both aspects would need to form key elements in the consultation process.