



Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Community Governance Review

Review of the unparished areas of Tunbridge Wells

FINAL Recommendations

Published May 2026

tunbridgewells.gov.uk/cgr

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Council agreed to undertake a Community Governance Review at an extraordinary Full Council meeting on Wednesday 21 May 2025 of the six unparished wards of Tunbridge Wells. A review area map which shows these six areas has been published on our website.
- 1.2. At all stages of the review, the Council has been guided by:
 - [Part 4, Chapter 3 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007](#)
 - [Guidance on Community Governance Reviews](#) issued by the Government and The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE)
 - Its own [Terms of Reference](#)
- 1.3. The Government has also invited areas to submit proposals for Local Government Reorganisation under Section 2 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Kent is one of those areas, therefore the Council must also have regard to the [letter to areas invited to submit final proposals](#), and any subsequent decisions.

2. The Review

- 2.1. The Council took the decision to undertake the Review because:
 - It has a duty to carry out periodic reviews of the parished and unparished areas within the Borough of Tunbridge Wells.
 - There were increased calls locally to undertake a review of the unparished areas.
 - It is likely that local government in Kent will be reorganised, which would see the Council subsumed into a much larger West Kent unitary authority from April 2028.
- 2.2. The aim of the review was to bring about improved and stronger community engagement, more cohesive communities, better local democracy, and more effective and convenient delivery of local services; ensuring electors across the whole area are treated equitably and fairly.
- 2.3. The review relates to the six currently unparished areas (the review area) of Tunbridge Wells. The unparished areas are the borough wards of:
 - Culverden
 - Sherwood
 - Pantiles
 - St James'
 - Park
 - St John's
- 2.4. An unparished area is one that is not represented by a parish or town council. Instead, all council services are delivered directly by the Council and/or Kent County Council (KCC).

- 2.5. The review considered the creation of one (or more) parish or town council(s) for the review area and its/their electoral arrangements.
- 2.6. The Review was led by the Council's Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Working Group (the Working Group). This was a cross-party working group setup specifically to oversee the Council's response to LGR and lead the Review.

Phase One

- 2.7. The Review commenced on Monday 2 June 2025 when the Council published its [Terms of Reference](#) and invited initial submissions from individuals and organisations who have an interest in the Review Area. The Terms of Reference include a [timetable for the Review](#).
- 2.8. The first phase of public consultation commenced on Monday 2 June 2025 and closed at midnight on Sunday 3 August 2025 (9 weeks). A survey was made available for completion online via the Council's website or by completing and returning a paper copy.
- 2.9. The public consultation survey asked if a new parish and/or town council(s) should be created to represent the six unparished areas. Where a respondent indicated that a new council(s) should be created, they were asked how many councils there should be.
- 2.10. Information about the Review and how to complete the public consultation survey was published on the Council's website and social media channels. More targeted engagement was carried out by:
 - Providing information in the Council's weekly update email sent to over 22,000 subscribers.
 - Delivering a leaflet to all households in the Review Area.
 - Featuring the Review in the summer edition of the Council's Local magazine, delivered to all households in the Review Area.
 - Holding in-person engagement events at the Calverley Road Market on Sunday 29 June and Sunday 27 July, attended by local councillors.
 - Delivering and asking for posters to be displayed in GP surgeries, dentists, and libraries in the Review Area.
 - Featuring the Review in the Local Lifestyle Tunbridge Wells magazine, delivered to over 12,000 households in the Review Area.

Responses to the first phase of public consultation

- 2.11 A total of **1,044** survey responses were received (1,024 online and 20 paper) during the first phase of public consultation. Of those who responded, **94% (984)** said that they live in one of the unparished areas.
- 2.12 When asked if new parish and/or town councils should be created for the unparished areas of Tunbridge Wells, the responses were as follows:
 - Yes: **626 (60%)**

- No: **300 (29%)**
- Uncertain: **116 (11%)**
- Blank (paper forms): **2**

2.13 Of those who said new parish and/or town councils should be created:

- **418 (67%)** said there should be one town council.
- **208 (33%)** said there should be more than one parish or town council.

Phase Two

2.14 The second phase of consultation ran from 29 September to 30 November 2025. Whilst all respondents to the first phase of the consultation were directly invited to respond to the second phase via an email and link to the consultation, and the consultation was again publicised widely using the Council’s social media accounts and through the Council newsletter, the response rate to the consultation remained low.

2.15 A total of 341 responses were received for phase two; 318 online responses, and 23 paper responses. This represents a response rate of 0.9 percent when measured against the electorate of the unparished area.

2.16 Of the respondents, 310 said they lived in the unparished area, 21 respondents said they worked in the unparished area, and 27 respondents said they were representing an organisation.

2.17 Whilst the second stage of the consultation did not repeat the question of whether a town council should be established, it did seek views on more detailed aspects of the review, such as council size and warding arrangements.

2.18 The high-level results of the phase two consultation are set out below.

	Yes	No	Unsure
Should the town council be called ‘Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Council’?	84%	11%	5%
Should the town council be split into wards?	86%	11%	3%
Do the proposed wards reflect community identities?	74%	15%	11%
Are the proposed wards named appropriately?	82%	10%	8%
	About right	Too many	Too few
Are 17 councillors the right amount of representation?	65%	30%	5%

Consideration of Consultation Comments

2.19 As part of the phase two consultation, the Community Governance Review Working Group established by the authority has considered the comments and suggestions received as part of the review process. The comments have been grouped into themes, and a response from the Working Group is given below.

Naming of the new town council

- 2.20 Whilst the overwhelming majority of the respondents were in favour of naming the proposed town council 'Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Council' there were other suggestions put forwards. The most popular alternative suggestion (15 responses) was 'Tunbridge Wells Town Council'. Other names that were suggested had very low numbers of respondents in support of them, and the Working Group decided that the best two options were those with the highest levels of public support.
- 2.21 As the consultation outcome was a significantly in favour of 'Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Council' the Working Group have now submitted an application to the Royal Names Team for permission of the use of the prefix 'Royal'. At the time of reporting, no decision on the use of the prefix has been granted by the Royal Names Team. As such, the recommendations have been drafted to ensure legality and represent the next most popular name choice 'Tunbridge Wells Town Council'.

Warding arrangements

- 2.22 A significant majority of respondents agreed the proposed town council should be split into wards. Alternative views were put forward as part of the second phase consultation, which the Working Group considered.
- 2.23 Some respondents commented that Culverden is a unique area, and should have its own parish council. The Working Group considered that the area proposed as part of the current Community Governance Review area formed a recognisable and cohesive overall community, and that warding the Culverden area would provide local representation for this community, and retain its identity within a new town council.
- 2.24 There were some views that creating warding arrangements for the new town council would involve more bureaucracy and expense. The Working Group noted that, in fact, warding the area of the town council would result in more efficient and effective governance. Warding the area would allow for local representation based on locality across a smaller area, and would allow by-elections for casual vacancies to take place in more localised areas, rather than needing the entire electorate to vote each time a by-election occurred. This would reduce the electoral administration costs the new council would need to bare.
- 2.25 As such, the Working Group supported the original recommendation that proposed new town council is split into wards.

Do proposed wards reflect local communities?

- 2.26 Again, there was significant support in the survey to suggest that the proposed warding arrangements do reflect natural communities in the town. The Working Group were also conscious of the very recent (2022-23) Local Government Boundary Commission consultation

on warding arrangements for the Borough Council, and were minded to take into account the results of that extensive consultation, which suggested public support for the proposed warding arrangements, and that they were designed around strong and identifiable communities.

- 2.27 There were some specific suggestions within the consultation responses around small areas that did not fall into the review area. For example, some suggestions were to move roads currently in Rusthall Parish Council or Southborough Town Council into the new town council area. The Working Group noted these comments, and that any proposal that affected other parish council areas, would necessitate a separate Community Governance Review process for those areas. As this was not in the scope or Terms of Reference for the current review, these suggestions could not be accommodated. However, the Working Group noted that this may be an area the proposed new unitary council would come back to at a future date.

Are the proposed wards named appropriately?

- 2.28 Significant support was again shown for the proposed names of the wards for the new town council. Again, the Working Group were mindful of the recent, and large scale consultation of the Local Government Boundary Commission, where ward names had been consulted on and established.
- 2.29 A range of different suggestions were put forward to reflect the identities of very local areas (such as St Mark's, Neville Park, Sherwood, Knight's Park), but none of the suggestions showed significant levels of support, and there was no evidence to suggest that these local areas were more significant to local communities in terms of naming than any others. As such, the Working Group supported the original recommendations for ward names in the draft recommendations report.

Are 17 councillors the right amount of representation?

- 2.30 Whilst this question again received overall support from the respondents that 17 councillors was the right amount of representation, it was less overwhelming than previous questions. In determining the level of representation, the draft recommendations considered the legal requirement of at least five councillors (Local Government Act 1972), and expert advice from the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) which suggested that a practical working minimum should be seven and a practical working maximum should be 25 (for parish councils with over 23,000 electors).
- 2.31 The Working Group considered representations for other sizes of council, with the most popular next suggestion being for twelve councillors (35 representations), two to represent each ward. Some suggestions were for the number to remain unequal to prevent stalemate in decision making.
- 2.32 The number of 17 councillors as proposed in the draft recommendations report was based on the number of existing Borough Councillors for those wards. This number had been derived from the extensive work undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission during the 2022-23 review (linked in the background documents to this report). It was the Working Group's conclusion at the time of the draft recommendations that the analysis undertaken during the 2022-23 review was sound and demonstrated effective governance arrangements.

There was no evidence presented during the Community Governance Review that a different number of councillors would be more effective.

- 2.33 The ratio of electors per councillor at a level of 17 councillors (based on the forecast electorate to 2030 of 39,527) would be as follows:

Ward	Electorate 2025	Forecast increase	Electorate 2030	Cllr / Elector ratio by 2030
Culverden	6,305	1,015	7,320	2,440
Pantiles	6,775	598	7,373	2,438
Park	6,895	188	7,083	2,361
Sherwood	6,483	383	6,866	2,289
St James'	6,121	372	6,493	2,164
St John's	4,267	125	4,392	2,196
Total	36,846	2,681	39,527	2,325

- 2.34 The average councillor to elector ratio by 2030 will be 2,325. The smallest elector/councillor ratio will be St James', and the largest will be Culverden. Both of these areas, however, remain within 10 percent +/- of the average (between 2,093 and 2,558 electors). This further demonstrates that the number of councillors proposed for the area is the right amount, and will help to secure effective and convenient local government arrangements.

3. Other Matters

- 3.1 At present, the review area is unparished and not represented by a parish or town council. Instead, all local services are delivered by the Council and/or Kent County Council. Residents in the area pay special expenses to the Council via their Council Tax for the provision of services and costs incurred. As an example, the 2025/26 Band D property special expenses charge for Royal Tunbridge Wells is £134.79.
- 3.2 Should the recommended Tunbridge Wells Town Council be established, the special expenses charge paid to the Council would remain but may be reduced. However, any reduction would be dependent upon which services were transferred from the Council to TWTC, which could happen over a long period, possibly many years.
- 3.3 Should the recommended Tunbridge Wells Town Council be established it would be funded by a 'precept' added to residents' Council Tax bills. The precept would be in addition to the special expenses paid to the Council.
- 3.4 The money raised through a precept would be spent on Tunbridge Wells Town Council operational costs (buildings, staffing, elections etc.) and delivery of services.

- 3.5 The precept for a Tunbridge Wells Town Council (TWTC) would be set by its elected councillors and reviewed annually. It is not for the review or the Working Group to determine what a newly established TWTC precept would be.
- 3.6 It is impossible to provide an indication of the anticipated Council Tax precept for the proposed Tunbridge Wells Town Council (TWTC) at this stage. The new town council would need to consider its budget and requirements at its first meetings and decide what level to charge. The Borough Council does not have decision-making powers in this area.
- 3.7 The Government does not limit the amount a parish or town council can increase its precept by each year. Currently, borough councils are limited to a 3% increase each year and county councils 5%.
- 3.8 Businesses in a parish or town council area do not have to pay the precept. Instead, they are subject to business rates which are calculated separately from Council Tax.

4. Final Recommendations

- 4.1. It was the view of the working group, following both stages of the consultation, and using the evidence base established in the draft recommendations report, that the draft recommendations should remain unchanged and be submitted for a decision at Full Council on 15 July 2026.
- 4.2. The final recommendations of the Community Governance Review are therefore:

That the Full Council agrees that:

- A) A parish of Royal Tunbridge Wells be established, as outlined in red at Appendix A, and subject to permission being granted for the use of the 'Royal' prefix from the Cabinet Office Royal Names Team;
- B) In the event that the 'Royal' prefix is not granted by the time the parish is established, that the name of the parish will be Tunbridge Wells;
- C) The boundary of the parish of (Royal)Tunbridge Wells be drawn to include the existing borough wards listed at (h) (in their entirety) and as outlined in red on the map at Appendix B.
- D) The name of the established parish be (Royal) Tunbridge Wells;
- E) The style of the parish of (Royal) Tunbridge Wells be set as a town;
- F) The parish of (Royal) Tunbridge Wells have a parish council in the style of a town council;
- G) The name of the town council should be (Royal) Tunbridge Wells Town Council;
- H) The parish of (Royal) Tunbridge Wells be divided into six parish wards, comprising the area designated on the map at Appendix B, and those parish wards be named respectively as:
 - i. Culverden
 - ii. Pantiles

- iii. Park
 - iv. Sherwood
 - v. St James'
 - vi. St John's
- I) The town council for (Royal) Tunbridge Wells shall consist of 17 Councillors;
- J) The number of councillors elected to each of the respective parish wards be as follows:
- i. Culverden ward – three councillors
 - ii. Pantiles ward – three councillors
 - iii. Park ward – three councillors
 - iv. Sherwood ward – three councillors
 - v. St James' ward – three councillors
 - vi. St John's ward – two councillors

5. Next steps

- 5.1. Now that the Community Governance Review has been completed, the decision will be taken by Full Council on 15 July 2026.
- 5.2. The report and appendices will be considered in advance by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 15 June 2026.