

**UPDATE ON THE COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW  
(from the local group that initiated the petition)**

First of all, thank you to the 119 people who signed the petition – together we have been successful in getting Teignbridge District Council (TDC) to undertake a statutory review of the governance arrangements in Dunchideock, and to give local people a real say in what they want – which was one of the main aims of the petition!

You will have received the recent letter from TDC outlining the procedure for carrying out the review. The letter gives a balanced and “official” view of the issues involved, which should give us confidence that TDC will carry out the review in a proper, fair and unprejudiced way.

A key stage is the first consultation period which runs from Thursday 18 October to Friday 15 December. During this period it’s really important that as many people as possible make their views known to TDC, either by emailing [electoralservices@teignbridge.gov.uk](mailto:electoralservices@teignbridge.gov.uk) or writing to **Electoral Services (CGR), Ford House, Brunel Road, Newton Abbot, TQ12 4XX**.

TDC have given some guidance on the consultation at [www.teignbridge.gov.uk/parishofdunchideockcgr](http://www.teignbridge.gov.uk/parishofdunchideockcgr)

Those of us who initiated the petition believe the best route forward is to abolish the Parish Council and replace it with another arrangement.

**IN BRIEF**

**HOW WOULD AN INFORMAL COMMUNITY FORUM AND A PARISH MEETING WORK?**

The preferred option in the petition was an informal Community Forum – something open to everyone, very light on structure, informal and focussed on building and improving our community through social events and projects such as putting up a bus shelter, repairing benches and footpaths etc. In other words *direct democracy* – everyone in the village would be entitled to attend, take part and vote – not just elected councillors.

TDC have made it clear that there also has to be some form of *formal* governance in place as well, and the best option seems to be a Parish Meeting. This is *very different* from a Parish Council.

	<b>Parish Council</b>	<b>Parish Meeting</b>
Elected Councillors	Yes – 7	None
Who makes decisions?	Councillors	Everyone
Chairman elected each year	Yes	Yes
Required meetings each year	At least 4 (currently 12)	At least 2
Will add costs to our Council Tax	Yes	No
Must employ a clerk	Yes	No
Cost	In excess of £11k	Tiny – hiring a hall twice?

We could have the minimum number of formal Parish Meetings, and instead use the informal Community Forum to raise issues of concern, decide on what the village wants, work together on improvements – to the benefit of our community!

For those of you who share this view, please write expressing your views. You may find the following guidance helpful:

### **General**

- Keep what you write *positive* – focus on the benefits of the alternative rather than complaining about the past
- Write an *individual* letter – this flier contains some guidance, but it is important your letter is your own!

## **IN MORE DETAIL**

### **A. A small community such as Dunchideock does not need the infrastructure and cost of a full parish council**

- the cost of the clerk (in excess of £5,000)
- 7 councillors elected on 4 yearly terms, with the potential cost of £800-£1,400 for each contested election
- monthly meetings (including the cost of the clerk's preparation, the hire of the Village Hall, and the time for councillors and residents to attend)
- other costs, such as subscriptions to e.g. the Devon Association of Local Councils, required training costs for councillors and the clerk, the costs of "official" email addresses and maintaining a website
- other incidental costs
- all adding up to a likely annual addition to our Council Tax in excess of £11,000.

### **B. The limited benefits of a parish council can be achieved more effectively and at significantly lower cost**

- "Local democracy" is about building up the community, representing and meeting its needs – we have shown very effectively over the last few years how well the community works together without a parish council e.g. raising money for the defibrillator maintenance, organising village events, raising funds for the repair/replacement of benches, repairing noticeboards...
- It could be argued that the negative experiences relating to the council prior to February 2021 were detrimental to real democracy.
- Although each parish council meeting includes 10 minutes for "public discussion", there is limited evidence of wide participation in this – or of significant attendance at parish council meetings.
- A significant proportion of council "business" is involved in compliance – meeting the large number of legal requirements, which may help to ensure "proper governance" but bring little direct benefit to the community in terms of e.g. events, facilities, wider community involvement etc
- Any limited benefits come with a high price tag, whereas the experience of the last few years demonstrates a level of informal community involvement and financial support which far exceeds the cost/benefit ratio of the parish council

**C. *What should replace the Parish Council?***

- The petition suggested an informal community forum – light on structure, no costs to run and reflecting how the community has managed to achieve quite a lot during the period when there was no parish council
- TDC have made it clear that the parish must have some form of formal governance in place, and so a good compromise would be a Parish Meeting, open to all residents, which has to meet only twice a year, has no clerk, is very light on structure and cost and does not have to set a precept (the extra money we pay through our rates for a Parish Council). The only “officer” would be an annually elected chairman.
- An informal community forum could then operate e.g. with representatives from local organisations and open to any Dunchideock resident, to drive forward e.g. putting up a bus shelter, repairing footpaths, raising money for projects such as the defibrillators or other improvements. This forum could feed into the Parish Meeting where relevant.

**D. *A Parish Meeting and an informal Community Forum would be much better***

- Provides the cheapest, least onerous and most appropriate formal governance structure for a parish the size of Dunchideock
- Gives a positive and fully open forum for residents to make suggestions about our community, develop and drive forward projects – building on our experience while there has been no council
- It frees up all the time, money and people currently tied up with the parish council to achieve real benefits for our community

**E. *Other questions asked by TDC in their guidance about the consultation***

- Has the current new council been given enough time to establish itself? – the council has to respond to the consultation, and if their decision is that the council should be abolished, then that speaks for itself
- Do I want Dunchideock to continue as a civil parish or should the area be de-parished? – the petition specifically did NOT ask for the civil parish to be abolished. Our local identity and history is strong and we want that to continue.
- Would I be happy if the current parish area was combined with another area or areas, resulting in a possible parish name change to reflect joint parish identities – again, no – our local identity is strong and important.

**F. *Some other issues you may be concerned about***

- What about planning? The parish council is formally consulted about any planning applications but has no power to make decisions. While there has been no council, individual residents have written to TDC about planning applications just as effectively. In future, a special Parish Meeting, or a meeting of the Community Forum could be held if there is a particularly contentious application
- Can we get the parish council back in future? The TDC letter states that a future community governance review petition seeking the re-instatement of the parish council could be refused. This is theoretically true, but as central government’s policy is to encourage parish councils, it is difficult to envisage a situation where TDC could reasonably turn down a request to re-instate the parish council. In fact, it’s likely to be more difficult to abolish it than to re-instate it!

You are welcome to use and adjust the following framework letter to make it your own – if it helps!

Your address:

Date:

Dear Teignbridge District Council

*Introductory paragraph*

I/we are writing to respond to the Community Governance Review for Dunchideock

*Key statement*

I/we believe that the best option is to abolish the parish council and replace it with an informal community forum, with a formal Parish Meeting if necessary.

*Key reasons*

We don't need the cost and organisation of a full parish council

*See some of the details in Sections A and B above.*

The village has managed really well without a parish council. There's been a lot of really positive informal cooperation.

*Give some examples - e.g. raising money for the maintenance of the village defibrillators, repairing benches. People have worked together to repair noticeboard and organise village events.*

An informal Community Forum with a formal Parish Meeting would be better because...

*See Sections C and D above*

*Other issues you might like to cover*

I/we're happy to leave the decision about whether the new parish council has had long enough to prove itself to the Council itself.

I/we want the civil parish of Dunchideock to continue – not to be abolished or combined with a neighbouring parish. Our history and identity is important to us.

Yours faithfully....

**THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO READ THIS  
PLEASE MAKE YOUR VIEWS KNOWN TO  
TEIGNBRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL  
BY FRIDAY 15 DECEMBER**