

Community Governance Review – Final Recommendations for Worth Parish Council (WPC).

REPORT OF: Head of Regulatory Services
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Wards Affected: Copthorne & Worth
Key Decision: No
Report to: Council
12 October 2022

Purpose of Report

1. Following completion of two public consultations, and two examinations by the Scrutiny Committee for Community Leisure & Parking (and its predecessor), to present to Council the Final Recommendations of the principal electoral authority.

Recommendations

2. **Council is recommended to:**
 - (i) **To approve the principal electoral authority’s final recommendations for Worth Parish Council as set out at paragraphs 25 – 31 of this report to make no changes to the Governance arrangements for the Worth Parish at this time.**
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Background

3. This Community Governance Review (CGR) was initiated following a valid petition submitted by the requisite number of local registered electors, pursuant to the provisions of Section 80 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.
4. The petition called upon this Council to constitute a new Parish Council for the existing Crawley Down parish ward, to be styled as Crawley Down Village Council. The names of the petition organisers are publicly promoted, and they are: Alex Cruickshank, Ian Gibson, Sally Gibson, John Hitchcock and John Plank.
5. At its meeting of 2 February 2022, the scrutiny committee advised upon the Terms of Reference and Guidance for Respondents relating to the CGR. The first public consultation opened on 14 February 2022 and closed on 15 April 2022.
6. Our Guidance for Respondents required consultees, particularly at the first stage, to make qualitative submissions that should address the themes explained within the Terms of Reference and/or other matters that we are able consider. We did not consider brief submissions that gave no explanation for support or for opposition to a particular proposition, or that provided nothing for us to consider.
7. The scrutiny committee considered the public responses to the first consultation and the resulting draft recommendations at its meeting of 25 May 2022. At this stage the cost of dividing WPC assets, staff, and liabilities together with the ongoing cost of two parish councils instead of one, were of major public concern. The second public consultation opened on 13 June 2022 and closed on 15 August 2022.

8. The original close date for the second public consultation was 1 August. When it became clear that the appointed auditor's financial assessment report would not be published by WPC until 22 July, your officers extended the public consultation to close 15 August to allow a reasonable period for residents to consider it and respond.
9. The second public consultation was specifically regarding our draft recommendations that resulted from the first public consultation, and submissions were mostly confined to those, unless suggesting an entirely different proposition.

Public Engagement relating to the second public consultation

10. At both stages of the Review each eligible elector was sent a letter or an email explaining the considerations of the CGR, and signposting to the consultation material published at the Council's website. This explained how to contribute to the Review. The communication also provided electors with their unique Elector Number, to be quoted with their submission to enable our electoral services team to verify that all individual responses came from registered local government electors of the WPC area.
11. When your officers extended the second public consultation to 15 August as explained at paragraph 8 of this report, each eligible elector was sent a further letter or an email to give notice of the extension, the reason for it and signposting to the auditor's financial assessment report, published at MSDC's and WPC's websites.

Timetable

12. Key stages of the Review were as follows:

Action	Date	Outline of Action
Public Consultation 1 Publication of the Review Terms of Reference	14 February 2022	First two-month public & stakeholder consultation
Public Consultation ends	15 April 2022	All representations are examined & considered
Draft proposals considered by Scrutiny Committee (Customer Services & Service Delivery)	25 May 2022	Any additional recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee are recorded and added to the draft proposals
Public Consultation 2	13 June 2022	Second two-month public & stakeholder consultation
Public Consultation ends	15 August 2022	All representations are examined & considered
Final recommendations considered by Scrutiny Committee (Community, Leisure & Parking)	28 September 2022	Scrutiny Committee will consider the CGR final recommendations and make recommendations to Full Council
Final recommendations (as amended, if applicable) are recommended to Full Council for adoption.	12 October 2022	Council is recommended to approve.

Cost of division and annual ongoing costs

13. Following the first public consultation where the cost of division and the ongoing cost of two separate parish councils were of considerable public concern, our draft recommendations on these matters were as follows:
- (a) At an early stage of the second public consultation WPC and the petitioners should supply to this Review their assessment of these division costs with evidential annotations for each cost, so that MSDC may see how they have been arrived at.
 - (b) The indicative annual budget proposed by 'The Local Councillors and Residents Supporting the Creation of a Crawley Down Village Council' it seems, is disputed by WPC. MSDC wishes to see an adjusted and agreed version as soon as possible.
14. The Petitioners supplied detailed financial analysis on both matters to this Review and by direct emails to the scrutiny committee on 6 June, 19 July, and 22 July 2022.
15. The WPC commissioned and supplied to this Review the financial assessment report of Mulberry & Co, and further information has been published at its website. The Chairman of WPC, Cllr. Dorey wrote directly to the scrutiny committee on 25 July 2022.
16. There is much detail in both submissions and several revisions have occurred so for Council's convenience your officers summarise the latest indications as follows:

	Petitioners	Auditor's Report	WPC
Estimated Cost of Division.	c.£32k	c.£50 – 60k	c.£91k
Combined annual cost of x2 parish councils instead of x1 (Estimates).	c.£40k	c.£51.5	c.£60k
Source:	Petitioner's Submission	Auditors Report	WPC website

17. The Petitioners extended their analysis to include the difference if WPC were to make the same improvements in services that the Petitioners propose (i.e. open an office in Crawley Down and hold meetings there). Based on equivalent level of service, their estimated increased in annual operating costs of two councils over one is £3,252.
18. The above are not absolute figures but are the best estimates that the parties can provide given that there are too many variable outcomes depending on for example whether a division would result in any staff redundancies which at this stage, without the benefit of staff consultation, cannot be known. Most participants and stakeholders agree that this is a key unknown factor, though the petitioners do not consider that redundancies are inevitable. There are also cost details within the proposed budgets that remain disputed but the gap between them has narrowed to the extent that they can be seen as acceptable.

Conclusions

19. Wherever on this spectrum of estimates the actual costs would turn out to be, having regard to both public consultations and considering all submissions, your officers consider at this time of cost-of-living crisis, electors in Worth Parish as a whole do not currently support a division of WPC and the creation of a new parish council for Crawley Down and for Copthorne. There are however a significant number of electors in Crawley Down who say the additional costs are value for money to get a separate parish council for Crawley Down.
20. Your officers must have regard to the interests, and priorities of both Copthorne and Crawley Down, and we do not consider that the proposition together with the costs to the public purse, would serve the interests of both communities at this time.
21. This Review, however, does fully acknowledge and respect the strong sense of community identity felt in Crawley Down, together with the aspirations of many for tailored governance arrangements that might provide for a more localised sense of scrutiny, accountability, and potentially enhanced local democracy.
22. The local debate is polarised, and although those in favour make an understandable community identity case, the methods employed have resembled an election campaign rather than a CGR and this has not had a positive impact on community cohesion.
23. Your officers acknowledge that this view will disappoint the petitioners and supporters of a separate parish council for Crawley Down now, but we observe that local government elections in May 2023 might provide an opportunity for those in Crawley Down who strongly support this aim, to seek election to the WPC on such a platform.
24. This Review has evaluated and carefully considered all valid submissions received. Having regard to these it is considered that the final recommendations of the principal electoral authority should be as follows:

Final Recommendations for Worth Parish Council

25. The case made for division of assets and liabilities at reasonable cost is not acceptable. At this time of price inflation and cost-of-living crisis, many electors are not agreeable to this.
26. **Improved Community Engagement** - The WPC governance review working party, area focussed committees and subsequent changes are noted. WPC should carefully consider ongoing elector concerns relating to the accessibility of Council meetings and perhaps consider alternating these between The Parish Hub and the Haven Centre, given that virtual/hybrid meetings legislation is not coming forward at this time.
27. **Better Local Democracy** - The WPC could seek to encourage more local people to stand for election both in Copthorne and in Crawley Down. It may help to produce a 'Becoming a Councillor' brochure that explains the duties and rewarding nature of the role, and to publish this at the Parish Council's website. Councillors, other activists, and stakeholders should also encourage greater levels of candidate nomination in 2023 such that elections are contested in both areas.
28. **Effective and Convenient Delivery of Local Services and Local Government** - The current governance arrangements for the Worth Parish Council should continue, and this authority (MSDC) should consider afresh a CGR in 2025 or 2029 dependent on the progress of any permitted developments affecting Copthorne West and surrounding areas.

29. The existing Parish Council size is 17 comprised of 9 Councillors for the Crawley Down Ward and 8 Councillors for the Copthorne Ward. The current electorate of Crawley Down Parish Ward is 4547 and of Copthorne Parish Ward is 4066. We are therefore not recommending any change to Councillor numbers for either ward.
30. The name of the Parish Council should remain, Worth Parish Council, a) because it is an understandable and established descriptor of the two areas together 2) given public concern about costs, renaming, and rebranding the parish council at this time may seem indulgent, particularly whilst there is the prospect of a future CGR.
31. **Reflecting the Identities and Interests of the Community** – Residents of Crawley Down and their elected representatives could consider setting up a Community Forum as a step towards a longer-term aim. A Community Forum can be set up by the principal council or created by residents to act as a mechanism to give the community a say on principal council matters or local issues. They increase participation and consultation, aiming to influence decision making, rather than having powers to implement services. They vary in size, purpose, and impact, but membership usually consists of people working or living in a specific area. Some forums also include ward councillors, and representatives from the council and relevant stakeholders can attend meetings. If this is of interest to local people, MSDC's Community Engagement team could be approached to assist with this project.

Policy Context

32. The petition process allows for local views to be considered when considering community representation at Parish level.

Other Options Considered

33. Renaming the existing parish council to Crawley Down & Copthorne Parish Council was considered. Some public respondents indicated that this would not be acceptable unless the villages appeared in the name alphabetically i.e: the other way around, whilst others have strongly opposed potential loss of the Worth Parish name.

Financial Implications

34. None.

Risk Management Implications

35. The present parish arrangement has in the main led to sound community governance and there is every reason to expect this should continue, with the existing parish council making further governance improvements wherever these are possible.

Equality and Customer Service Implications

36. All stakeholders and registered electors were consulted in two public consultations.

Other Material Implications

37. At the conclusion of any CGR and following adoption in Council, the Council's Legal Services Division would be required to make Community Governance Orders, if there is to be a change. Considering the final recommendations this will not prove necessary.

Sustainability Implications

38. A key aim of any Community Governance Review is to alight upon suitable Governance and Electoral arrangements that are capable of enduring. There is little or no environmental impact.

Background Papers

[CGR webpage where all reference documents, scrutiny committee reports and the complete set of submissions for both public consultation stages are published.](#)

[Government & Local Government Boundary Commission Guidance on Community Governance Reviews.](#)

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