

## Community Governance Review – Draft Recommendations for Worth Parish Council.

REPORT OF: Head of Regulatory Services  
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Wards Affected: Copthorne & Worth  
Key Decision: No  
Report to: Scrutiny Committee for Customer Services & Service Delivery  
25 May 2022

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### Purpose of Report

1. Following completion of the first of two public consultations, to summarise for the committee the findings of the first consultation.
2. To consult the Committee regarding our draft recommendations.

### Recommendations

3. **The Committee is recommended to:**
    - (i) **Note the findings of the first public consultation.**
    - (ii) **To provide advice upon, and further to that advice, to agree the principal electoral authority's draft recommendations for Worth Parish Council, upon which a second public consultation would be conducted.**
    - (iii) **To note that following the second public consultation, further findings and the final recommendations of the principal electoral authority will be presented to this committee on 14 September 2022.**
    - (iv) **To note the final decision will be taken by Council in the light of the consultation responses received through the Community Governance Review**
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### Background

4. The committee will recall that 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. 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.
5. At its meeting of 2 February 2022, the Committee advised upon and agreed 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. Members will recall from our Guidance for Respondents, that CGRs require consultees 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 cannot consider submissions that merely express support or opposition for a particular proposition, or that provide nothing for us to consider.
7. Your Officers have evaluated the qualitative submissions that were received, and we present the findings below:

**Public Engagement**

- 8. Each eligible elector was sent a letter giving Public Notice of the CGR, signposting to the consultation material published at the Council’s website. This letter explained how to contribute to the Review. The letter 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 Worth Parish Council area.
- 9. Although a qualitative Review, for the Committee’s contextual information, we received 250 submissions that were acceptable. A further 34 responses were rejected for undue brevity and providing nothing for us to consider. This represents a response rate of nearly 3.3% of the current electorate. Of these, 61% of responses were from Crawley Down and 39% from Copthorne.
- 10. Of the 250 accepted submissions 50% of respondents were broadly supportive of the proposal for a parish council for Crawley Down, and 50% were opposed to it.
- 11. Of the responses from Crawley Down, 77% were in support of the proposal, and 23% were opposed to it. Of the responses from Copthorne, 2% were in support of the proposal and 98% were opposed to it.
- 12. As there were 125 responses in support of the proposal and 125 against, it is especially important for the CGR to be a qualitative Review of the matters raised.

**Public Consultation Findings**

- 13. The full set of accepted submissions is published and represents a background paper, for committee members to peruse. A link is provided at the end of this report.
- 14. Analysis of the responses supporting the proposal showed that mainly they represented four key strands of opinion. These were that:

Main themes from those in favour	No. of respondents who wrote on these themes
a separate Crawley Down Village Council would focus on local issues	119
the two villages have separate community identities	63
the A264 represents a clear boundary	7
Worth PC is too big	24

Note: Some submissions contained several viewpoints, hence the numbers exceed 125.

- 15. Relating to the first two themes mentioned by most supporters, many of them believed that a new village council could focus on resisting unmitigated over-development, traffic congestion and speeding, provide a larger supermarket and resolve the issue of the dilapidated Royal Oak pub. Several thought that the two villages were different in character, and highlighted the distinct neighbourhood plans, whilst some believed that Copthorne and Crawley Down had similar community concerns and priorities.

16. The Royal Oak pub was a notable concern to many residents. Those for the proposal thought a new Parish Council might be able to resolve it, whilst those against did not believe campaign suggestions that MSDC might accept a role in solving an 'eyesore' that is privately owned.
17. Relating to the last two themes, clearly the A264 represents a boundary. On Worth PC being too big, several respondents felt that Crawley Down's planning and amenity priorities are not being well served by the current arrangements.
18. Analysis of the responses opposing the proposal showed that mainly they represented four key strands of opinion. These related to:

Main themes from those against	No. of respondents who wrote on these themes
the cost of the decoupling and the ongoing cost to taxpayers	114
the existing arrangements work well for both villages	61
there is insufficient evidence of the benefits of decoupling	38
the size and appreciable influence of WPC	48

Note: Some submissions contained several viewpoints, hence the numbers exceed 125.

19. Relating to the first two themes mentioned by most opposers, many of them strongly felt that decoupling would incur considerable, unnecessary costs, and many did not believe that the public has had a sufficiently evidenced estimate of the decoupling costs from either campaign entity. The complexity of asset division is also mentioned several times. Many believe that two sets of running costs for two councils, must create an additional local taxation burden, which they strongly reject at a time of a cost-of-living crisis. An appreciable number of residents pointed to the distinct neighbourhood plans, WPC's committees and village distinct working parties as evidence that WPC does deliver effective local government for each village.
20. Relating to the last two themes, some respondents refer to public information in the form of leaflets, public meetings, and social media, and they consider there is insufficient evidence of the benefits of decoupling, given the likely significant costs. Several respondents believed that two smaller parish councils would have less influence upon tier 1 and tier 2 local authorities, than WPC has now. They also noted that the problems the new Parish Council sought to solve were not Parish matters.
21. Several respondents also referred to the proposal being supported by a minority of Crawley Down Councillors, and some who opposed the division recommended that the name of Worth Parish Council be changed to reflect the two distinct villages. A few were concerned that the parish of Worth has existed for over a hundred years and said that Worth as a place still exists, despite perceived efforts to expunge it.

22. The proposers, 'The Local Councillors and Residents Supporting the Creation of a Crawley Down Village Council' provided a detailed and engaging submission, which is recommended reading for the committee. This set out the case for the proposal and presented the following themes: Identity: Geography and community, equal status within its peer group, a better fit within the local government hierarchy, Better Local Democracy: Accessibility for all residents, elected Councillors and quality controls, More Effective and Convenient Delivery of Local Services: a streamlined administration, indicative annual budget, a 'can-do' Council - tackling the key issues, rat runs and speeding traffic, 3G football pitch, the village pond, the Royal Oak and the Crawley Down village centre, and investment in community facilities. It then considered the approaches to the CGR of the two main campaign entities.
23. Of note at page 6 of this submission is the section relating to 'Better Local Democracy: Accessibility for all residents.' As with some of the public dissatisfaction conveyed to this Review, this section describes the history of council meetings being moved from Crawley Down to Copthorne and being held there ever since. Though it is a short seven-minute journey by car to Copthorne from Crawley Down, the journey is not straight forward by other means, and some argue impossible. Some public respondents have identified that a solution to this accessibility issue might be to rotate the location of Council meetings between the two villages.
24. Also of note is the section 'Better Local Democracy: Elected Councillors and Quality Controls at pages 6 and 7.' This refers to a nationally recognised electoral issue of only the requisite number of candidates being nominated at scheduled local government elections. The proposers suggest that this, the location of meetings and a preference for co-option has resulted in Copthorne residents being co-opted to represent Crawley Down Ward, altering the 'political' balance of the Council.
25. Appendix B of this submission appears to show a level of continuing disagreement between the campaign entities relating to the indicative annual budget for a newly constituted Crawley Down Village Council.
26. The Worth Parish Council provided a detailed and engaging submission, which is also recommended reading for the committee. This set out the case against the proposal in presenting the following themes: Better local democracy, improved community engagement, more effective and convenient delivery of local service and local government, the identity and interests of the community, enhanced community cohesion and economic considerations.
27. This submission at page 2 disagrees with the accessibility to meetings issue noting a 'very advantageous lease agreement' for its premise in Copthorne, the lack of office space in Crawley Down and the representations being made to HM Government to allow virtual or hybrid decision-making meetings
28. This submission at page 1 states 'there has never been an issue with co-opting Councillors onto either ward'. It also explains at pages 2 and 3 the governance improvements that have been made in recent years; the two-village distinct working parties, the governance review working party, reductions to committee meeting durations and WPC's Vision document – a five year rolling business plan.
29. WPC Councillor Graham Casella wrote to oppose the division highlighting the parish council's governance review work, which he says would deliver much of what the petitioners want, without needless expense. He supported renaming the parish council to better reflect a joint and shared community identity.

30. WPC Councillor Trevor Hodsdon wrote thoughtfully and in detail to oppose the division, highlighting a lack of evidence relating to benefits and costs of the proposals which has also been communicated to us by residents. He also pointed to key risks which he felt the campaigns have not adequately communicated to electors. He supported renaming the parish council to better reflect a joint and shared community identity and believed a further CGR in 2025/26 might provide an opportunity for Copthorne West developments to have been built and could perhaps foresee an easing of the cost-of-living crisis.
31. WPC Councillor Chris Mayor wrote to oppose the division and highlighted several practical difficulties with any division, expressing cost concerns and future impacts.
32. Ward Member, Cllr. Chris Phillips wrote to oppose the division highlighting WPC's work to deliver village distinct working parties that serving Councillors and residents engage with on priorities and projects before they are presented to full council. He also raised significant financial and service delivery concerns which included the remaining term of a Public Sector Loan Board commitment, which was taken out to deliver the Parish Hub. He concluded that division benefits would be marginal at very considerable cost financially, for economies of scale and in terms of service delivery.
33. Ward Member, Cllr. Ian Gibson wrote in support of the division saying that WPC is not failing. The quality of its bureaucracy is not the problem, it is the extent. He believed it to be spending more time on administration than service delivery, citing 60 formal meetings per year. He believed the reluctance of the Local Planning Authority to resisting unnecessary Government housing targets presents a threat to both geographical and community aspects of Crawley Down's separate identity. He said, the green gap between Crawley Down and East Grinstead faces significant erosion because of the preference of developers to build expensive three and four detached properties, rather than the smaller properties needed. He suggested that a Crawley Down Village Council would be better placed to understand and address these challenges.

#### **Draft Recommendations for Worth Parish Council**

34. Your officers evaluated and carefully considered all valid submissions received. Having regard to these it is considered that the draft recommendations of the principal electoral authority should be as follows:
35. This local debate is polarised, and although those in favour make an understandable community identity case this has not had a positive impact on community cohesion.
36. The case for division of assets and liabilities at reasonable cost is not sufficiently made. At this time of cost-of-living crisis, many electors are not agreeable to this.
37. 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.
38. 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.
39. The WPC governance review working party 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 yet in view.

40. 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 and other activists too should encourage greater levels of candidate nomination in 2023 such that elections are contested in both areas.
41. 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 build out of any permitted developments affecting Copthorne West and surrounding areas.
42. 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 change to Councillor numbers for either ward at this stage of the Review.
43. The name of the Parish Council should be changed to Crawley Down and Copthorne Parish Council, to better reflect the joint and shared community identity.

#### **Policy Context**

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

#### **Other Options Considered**

45. None

#### **Financial Implications**

46. None.

#### **Risk Management Implications**

47. 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**

48. All stakeholders and registered electors will now be consulted on the draft recommendations of this Review.

#### **Other Material Implications**

49. 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.

#### **Sustainability Implications**

50. 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**

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

[Link to public consultation responses](#)

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