

Community Governance Review - Response to Second Consultation

In the draft recommendations following the first consultation of the CGR to divide WPC into separate Parish/Village Councils, MSDC requested that "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."

Before the initial Consultation, attempts to engage with the petitioners regarding agreeing precept budget proposals in the event of a separation, or agreeing the potential costs of a split within the Council Governance Framework, had been unsuccessful. WPC took the decision therefore to appoint an independent body to perform a review agreeing that we would accept the findings of said review regardless of the outcome. Mulberry & Co have acted as auditor for WPC, as well as a number of other local authorities, for many years and Andy Beams of Mulberry was an ideal candidate to perform the review with the appropriate skills and reference knowledge the petitioners wanted.

As detailed in the report, "Andy [Beams] has over 30 years' experience in the financial sector, specialising in the local government sector since 2010. During this time, Andy has worked as a Clerk/RFO at councils of various sizes, and now works as an internal auditor, local authority consultant and trainer of local authority officers and councillors, as well as providing locum Clerk/RFO services and mentoring and support for new Clerks across the south-east of England." His independence and professional capability is beyond challenge.

The report (which can be found under "Independent Report" on this page) is the output of his work and WPC submit this report to MSDC as independent evidence of the one-off costs of £50-60K to separate the Council, and an on-going, additional £51,750 per annum increase in overall precept to residents as a result of duplicated operating costs. We would also like to make some observations regarding the content of the report that we feel are pertinent to MSDC within the determination process.

1. We agree with Mr Beams that likening a potential CDVC to Turners Hill is not a fair comparison as Turners Hill is a much smaller Ward than CDVC would be (approx. ¼ the tax base). Therefore, we also conclude that the staffing costs projected in the proposed CDVC precept budget are inappropriate and should be at least in line with Copthorne – which would mean a further minimum £15,000 increase in the overall precept.
2. The cost of the Youth Worker will still be across both villages so we suggest the cost for the CDVC precept budget should also be £7,500 – again, a further increase in the overall precept. This is to ensure like for like comparisons, alternatively both £7,500 allocations should be deleted.
3. We have to conclude that the figure for the new office rent is too low. Research confirms CDVC would struggle to find offices at all in Crawley Down, let alone for that price, we consider this to be a considerable risk to the proposed CDVC budget and overall proposal assumptions' reliability.
4. As stated in section D. STAFFING in the report, any costs related to TUPE or potential redundancies have not been included in any estimates

So in summary we conclude that this independent report confirms our original, well-based, objective and balanced concerns that the overall cost of splitting WPC would reasonably be £50-60K of one-off costs plus an ongoing annual increase in overall precept between the two villages of at least £74,250 and we therefore endorse the Mulberry findings which clearly evidence such.

We would also like it noted that the petitioners were given visibility of this report once produced which was then discussed at a meeting of the WPC CGR Working Party on Tue 19th July. The Working Party is made up of the Chairs and Vice Chairs of all WPC committees. Councillor John Hitchcock is one of the members and is also one of the 3 petitioning Councillors, but he did not attend the meeting or give any apologies for not attending.

We also should point out that following the draft recommendations, apart for accusing WPC and MSDC of holding Crawley Down "prisoners", the petitioners have shown nothing new that would lead us to change our stance that splitting WPC at this time would be nothing but an extremely costly exercise with little gain to either village, and we therefore fully support the draft recommendations from MSDC and urge that the final outcome of the CGR reflect these recommendations.