

## **Item 5: Consideration of Representation at Surrey Heath Borough Council (SHBC) Meeting**

The Chair of Windlesham Parish Council has called this Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) to discuss the report being presented to Surrey Heath Borough Council (SHBC) Councillors at their forthcoming meeting on 19th February 2025 regarding the Community Governance Review (CGR).

The purpose of this meeting is for the Parish Council to consider whether it wishes to make representation at the SHBC meeting in the form of submitting questions.

### Submission of Questions:

To comply with SHBC's public question deadline of Thursday, 13th February 2025, the preliminary questions below have been reviewed by the Chair and Vice Chair of Council and submitted to SHBC on the understanding that they may be withdrawn if the Council resolves not to approve them at the EGM.

Following the publication of SHBC's CGR report, these questions have been carefully drafted based on the reports content and recommendations, as well as key concerns raised with the Clerk. They also take into account the latest developments in local government reorganisation. The aim is to ensure that any proposed changes to governance structures align with broader strategic objectives, avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts or public expenditure, and uphold the principles of transparency and accountability. These questions seek to provide residents with clear justifications for any decisions made while ensuring that governance changes genuinely serve the best interests of the entire community.

### Time Limitation on Questions:

Members are reminded that the time allocated for questions during the meeting is limited. While every effort will be made to address all questions within the meeting, any questions that remain unanswered due to time constraints will be responded to in writing after the meeting. Responses will be provided as soon as practicable and circulated accordingly. Each question will also qualify for one supplementary question.

### Council Consideration:

- 1. The Council is asked to review the questions below and either approve or reject each question.**
  - **If approved**, the question will remain on record and be addressed at the SHBC meeting.
  - **If not approved**, the question will be formally withdrawn before the meeting.
  - **Once the Council has agreed on the questions to be formally submitted, it is recommended that they be prioritised in order of importance to ensure that the most critical issues are addressed first within the available time**
  
- 2. Members will also need to consider if they wish a representative or two to attend the meeting to pose supplementary questions if required.**

### **Question 1: Timing and Justification for a Second CGR**

The last CGR was concluded in October 2020 and implemented in May 2023. The officer's report states that best practice suggests conducting a CGR every 10-15 years unless there has been a significant change (Section 1.3). Given this, has sufficient time been allowed to assess its impact before considering further changes? Furthermore, the report does not indicate any material change (such as major population growth) since the last CGR (Section 1.3). What specific evidence supports the need for another review at this stage?

### **Question 2: Financial Justification**

The officer's report estimates that a CGR could cost around £50,000 (Section 6.4), primarily due to the substantial officer time required across multiple departments, including Democratic Services, Legal, Planning Policy, Revenues, and Finance (Section 6.1). Additionally, SHBC is facing severe financial pressures, with increasing reliance on reserves, staff reductions, and service cuts (Section 3.2 & 7.2). Given these constraints, how can the Council justify this expenditure at a time when other essential services are being reduced? What criteria have been used to determine that this is a necessary and prudent use of public funds?

### **Question 3: WPC's Involvement in Drafting the Terms of Reference**

Under Section 93(3) of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, SHBC must consult any local authority with an interest in the review, including Windlesham Parish Council. Government Guidance on CGRs (2010, Paragraphs 35 and 52) also states that parish councils must be consulted and their views considered.

The report does not confirm how Windlesham Parish Council will be involved in shaping the Terms of Reference or whether it will have a meaningful opportunity to represent its community before decisions are made. How will SHBC demonstrate compliance with its legal duty to consult? Will it commit to ensuring the Terms of Reference reflect the Parish Council's views before proceeding with the CGR?

### **Question 4: Justification for a Windlesham CGR Given Local Government Reorganisation**

The English Devolution White Paper (December 2024) outlines plans for unitarisation and the creation of additional Mayoral Strategic Authorities (Section 3.1). The report also confirms that SHBC is planning a borough-wide CGR as part of its 2025/26 Annual Plan, with work scheduled to begin in June 2025, and the CGR itself commencing in March 2026 (Sections 3.5 & 4.2). Given this, how can SHBC justify the merit of conducting a Windlesham-specific CGR now, knowing that the entire borough may be reviewed again within 12 months? Would it not be more efficient and cost-effective for the public purse, to defer this request and incorporate it into the wider borough-wide review once the government has clarified the next steps?

### **Question 5: Validity of Social Media Survey Data**

The September 2024 survey was used to assess support for a CGR, yet it is our understanding that there were no controls in place to prevent multiple submissions from the same device or to verify that respondents were residents of Windlesham Parish. Without these safeguards, the reliability of the data is questionable, as results may have been influenced by duplicate responses or submissions from non-residents.

Given that this data is being used to justify a potential CGR, how does SHBC ensure its statistical integrity? Will the Council publish details of the methodology, including how duplicate and non-resident responses were identified and excluded from consideration?