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Community Governance Review

Electoral & Democratic Services

Shute End

Wokingham RG40 8EY

7th August 2025

Submission on the Consultation on the Recommendations on the Whole Council Community Governance Review.

General Comments.

I note that such reviews have to take due note of "Guidance on community governance reviews" dated March 2010 issued by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) which recommends, at para 27, whole council CGRs.

Para 15 talks of boundaries becoming anomalous following housing development which may be addressed in a CGR. A glance at the parish map of WBC illustrates various anomalies with perhaps the most obvious one being the Whitegates ward of Earley parish extending across the A3290, the A4, the Great Western Main Line as far as the River Thames. I note that this very obvious anomaly is being allowed to continue under these recommendations which sets a precedent for other apparent anomalies.

I also note that the CGR does not recommend the setting up of a single parish or town council for the major development comprising Arborfield Green and Arborfield Cross. This fails to follow the example set by Wokingham, Ealey and Woodley which all have town councils to provide a unified approach within these settlements. I consider that if parish councils have a role in developing communities then a single parish covering Arborfield Green and Arborfield Cross would have been the logical approach.

Para 16 tells us that a CGR 'offers the opportunity to put in place strong, clearly defined boundaries tied to firm ground features' which suggests features that are barriers to movement such as motorways, railways and rivers. I appreciate that neither geography nor historical parish boundaries offer many opportunities for strong boundaries. Therefore the wording in the Guidance, 'offers the opportunity', must mean that strong boundaries are only desirable but are not essential.

Wokingham Without.

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As I live in the Wokingham Without ward, I will confine my detailed comments to this ward and the effects of the proposed transfer of what is termed in the report as 'the Crowthorne Triangle'.

I fully endorse the recommendation to leave the boundary between Wokingham Without and the Wescott ward unchanged. The railway and the short stretch of the Emmbrook are then retained as 'strong boundaries'.

The eastern and southern boundaries of the ward and parish are the principal boundary between Wokingham Borough and Bracknell Forest and therefore not subject to any change. It should be noted that the southern boundary allegedly follows the line of The Devil's Highway as a Roman Road but runs through residential gardens and is nothing more than a line on the map. But everyone in 'Greater' Crowthorne is used to this line on the map.

I note that Finchampstead Parish Council suggested the transfer of the Crowthorne Triangle to Wokingham Without Parish Council (who did not request that transfer). I also note, on page 64 of the report, that "Finchampstead Parish Council undertook consultation with affected residents". I have corresponded with a number of affected residents who cannot recall any such consultation.

I fully accept that the Wokingham to Guildford railway offers a strong boundary and that this projection east of the railway is an anomaly which the CGR aims to address. But the Guidance only suggests actions and with the precedents elsewhere in the Borough, there is a 'do nothing' option that should be both considered and followed. The affected residents see no advantages to the move and that the only effect will be to make them subject to the Wokingham Without parish precept from April 2026 and the report tells them that the precept is some 2.5 times more in Wokingham Without compared with Finchampstead. The annual precept increase over the last 8 years in Wokingham Without has averaged 6.66% which is, of course, on top of the continually increasing Council Tax, expected to be 5% every year, imposed by Wokingham Borough. As the affected residents are being expected to pay a significantly higher precept for no obvious benefit it is highly unlikely to get any support from those affected. Therefore, the 'do nothing' option should be taken with the triangle remaining in Finchampstead Parish.

Level of Representation. The guidance states at para 166 that "it is an important democratic principle that each person's vote should be of equal weight so far as possible" which follows the principle of the Great Reform Act of 1832. The Guidance notes that "it is not in the interest of effective .... local government to have significant differences in levels of representation between different parish wards." The LBGCE then states in para 167 that it offers no specific guidance as to what might constitute significant differences but the proposal in the Report to shrink the Lower Wokingham ward of Finchampstead Parish Council to 303 against a parish average of 530

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electors/parish councillor, or only 57% of the average, would appear to fail to meet the requirement of equal weight.

Conclusions.

- An opportunity to provide a single parish council across the Arborfield development appears to have been missed.
- The recommendation to make no change in the boundary between Wokingham Without and the Wescott ward is endorsed.
- The significantly higher level of parish precept imposed by Wokingham Without is unlikely to gain support from the affected residents for the transfer of the 'Crowthorne Triangle' from Finchampstead to Wokingham Without.
- There are no compelling reasons why the recommended change need be implemented.
- The proposed representation of the proposed 'Lower Wokingham ward' would appear to have a significant difference to the Finchampstead average.
- The 'do nothing' option should be taken making no changes to the parish boundary between Finchampstead and Wokingham Without.

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