

**Notes of Questions and responses – Wilmslow Community Governance
Review Public Meeting, held at Wilmsow Leisure Centre at 7pm on
Monday, 26 April**

Present:-

Councillors:-

Jim Crockatt - Cheshire East Council, in the chair
Paul Whiteley - Cheshire East Council
Don Stockton - Cheshire East Council
Gary Barton - Cheshire East Council
Rod Menlove - Cheshire East Council

Officers:-

Brian Reed – Democratic Services Manager
Lindsey Parton – Elections and Registration Team Manager
Julie North – Senior Democratic Services Officer

Public/Residents:-

Sarah Flannery – Independent candidate (Tatton)
Liz Jones – Wilmslow Resident
Adrian Bradley – Wilmslow Resident
Christopher and Jill Dobson – Wilmslow Residents
Steven Cah Wilmslow Resident
Claire Basil – Wilmslow Resident
D Roberts - Wilmslow Resident
Ronnie Dykstra - Wilmslow Resident
Mike Harping - Wilmslow Resident
B and J Pownall – Friends of Meriton Road Park
J Crompton - Wilmslow Resident
M Golding - Wilmslow Resident
Sally-Anne Hu – Pownall Park Residents' Association
Susan A Williams - Wilmslow Resident
Desmond J Williams – Resident/Parkwatch, Wilmslow Park
JF Gordon – Knutsford Road, Wilmslow
D Cash - Wilmslow Resident
Chris Murr – Resident of Handforth
Stuart Gould - Wilmslow Resident
Howard Ebdon - Wilmslow Resident
Pauline Hendley - Wilmslow Resident
Graham Beech - Wilmslow Resident
Helen Richardson - Wilmslow Resident

Questions and responses

1. It was queried what the wording on the postal voting paper would say.

Lindsey Parton – Outlined the wording on each of the three voting papers. She explained that this was a form of consultation, along with the representations which were expected to be received, and was not a

binding ballot. The feedback would have to be measured and there would be a summary of the voting papers received.

2. It was suggested that the voting paper for Wilmslow was “slightly skewed” and it was considered that the wording on each of the three voting papers should be the same.
3. Reference was made to the previous year’s reorganisation of Local Government and the formation of the new Cheshire East Council. It was stated that, when the Council was formed, residents had been told that one Council would cost less. It was considered that any proposal to create another tier of local government would increase costs.

Cllr Whiteley responded and agreed that it had been said that costs would reduce. Costs had, indeed, dramatically reduced and the process was still ongoing. The vast majority of the Cheshire East Borough already had Town and Parish Councils and the people had asked for this review.

4. It was commented that only 10% of the voting population had asked for the review.

Cllr Barton responded that the Council was obliged, by law, to conduct the review and during the Local Government Review, it had been said that there would be options. The Council had a legal duty to respond to the petitions, but would not force anything on the residents.

5. Reference was made to Alderley Edge Parish Council, which it was stated, had spent £2,500 on the renewal of signs and had increased its precept by 70%.
6. It was queried what a Town Council for Wilmslow and Handforth would do that Cheshire East Council was doing now and what would it do better. It was not fully understood how a Town Council would work.

Cllr Barton responded that it was not possible to say exactly how a Town council would work, as it would be up to those elected to it to decide. The Town Council would have money allocated to it and could use the precept money to focus on particular areas e.g Dog wardens. It would mean creating a body which focused on the Wilmslow area specifically.

7. Reference was made to the number of Cheshire East Councillors already representing the Wilmslow area. Were they not capable of looking after the area?
8. A comment was made that any Town Council would be able to decide the amount of its precept and how much it would pay for its services. Concern was expressed that this might lead to “double charging”.

Cllr Barton gave assurance that there would not be “double charging” for any services.

9. A comment was made that it was essential that it be made clear on the voting paper and any information relating to the Community Governance Review, what services were already provided by Cheshire East Council and what services could be carried out by a Town Council. It was suggested that this could be set out in a table format.

Cllr Whiteley referred to Poynton Town Council as an example of a Council which had raised funding for a particular service to be provided, through a precept. The Town Council had requested that Community Police Officers be provided, in Poynton and funding had not been available from Cheshire East Council for this. The Town Council had, therefore, raised the funding through a precept. This had not, therefore, lead to double taxation. Cheshire East Council was not pushing for a Town Council and the review was being carried out in response to the petition. If it was not what residents wanted, then they should vote against it.

10. A comment was made that there was a general expectation in the country that there should be Town and Parish Councils, as one level of Local Government. What had happened in Alderley Edge might not happen in Wilmslow. If residents wanted to influence Local Government, they should get involved in it.
11. It was queried how much weight a Town Council would have when commenting on large development schemes.

Cllr Crockatt responded that Town and Parish Councils did comment on planning applications and that their views were taken into account. Submitting a local view was a very important function of Town and Parish Councils.

12. It was queried why Wilmslow had not been separated for the purpose of the review.

Cllr Stockton responded that a petition had not been received for Wilmslow alone. The petition was for the whole area.

13. A comment was made that the voting paper was poorly worded and that it should be reworded to refer to the whole area and then each of the individual towns/villages.

Lindsey Parton responded that residents could make their views known today and that the Committee would then consider and reflect on the comments made.

14. Reference was made to one of the key considerations of the review, “the degree to which the proposals offer a sense of place and identity to residents”. It was felt that Wilmslow currently lacked community spirit and it was difficult to define the area. It did not operate as a village and groups did not work together, but existed in a fragmented manner.

Cllr Crockatt referred to the former Wilmslow Urban District Council, which functioned very effectively as a District Council and suggested that the community spirit needed to be brought back Wilmslow.

15. It was queried how long the decision would last, if it was decided not to have a Town Council for Wilmslow and Handforth.

Lindsey Parton responded that, under the legislation, the Council was not under a duty to conduct a further review in response to a petition for a period of two years.

16. It was queried whether there was a legal restriction to prevent the Council asking residents whether they wanted a Town Council for Wilmslow alone. Could the Council be lenient in its interpretation?

Brian Reed responded that there was a timescale constraint, in that the review must be completed by September 2010. The Council was responsible for conducting the review and had to decide whatever it felt appropriate, taking the residents’ views into account.

17. A comment was made that Local Government would be hit with a reduction in funding and that Cheshire East Council was likely to have to reduce its level of service, as it would be getting less funding from Central Government. It was queried whether this was a risk.

Brian Reed responded it was impossible to predict the future, but no doubt, there would need to be some reductions.

Cllr Whitley responded that, if there were cuts to be made, this would be across the Council area. It would differ from area to area. It was very likely that some areas would accept it, but there would be others who would take the views of local residents into account and this was the benefit of Town/Parish Councils.

Cllr Barton responded that it could not be said for certain whether a Town Council would reduce services, or increase its precept.

18. It was suggested that, if it came down to costs, would it not be better to have an option relating to Area Committees, as there would be no cost associated with introducing them.

19. It was queried whether the precept would be a “flat rate” charge.

Cllr Crockatt responded that it would be based on the Council Tax Band D charge. He stated that there were many businesses in the centre of Wilmslow, which put a strain on services and he understood the concerns of local residents that charges should not be passed on to them.

Brian Reed stated that Cheshire East Council would continue to provide a certain level of service and any Town Council would have to decide whether it wanted to provide more.

20. Cllr Barton stated that Wilmslow already paid for the tidying up of Wilmslow. He was not against a Town Council for Wilmslow, but could foresee difficulties in that residents would have to pay for this. In addition, the Travelling Community visited Wilmslow on two occasions per year and he queried who would fund the clean up operation.

Cllr Crockatt confirmed that Cheshire East Council would continue to fund this.

Cllr Whiteley clarified that the Cheshire East Councillors would still be Cheshire East Councillors and not Town Councillors. Any Town Councillors would be elected and decisions would be based on what the residents asked for. Rather than comparing Wilmslow with smaller areas, like Poynton, it might be helpful to compare it with, for example, Congleton or Holmes Chapel to see how they operated. In addition, he stated that the precept also depended on the area. For example, Knutsford Town Council owned some properties, in Knutsford and the income from them subsidised the precept.

21. A comment was made, by a local resident, that when he first lived in Wilmslow he felt that he could approach his Ward Member regarding services which needed to be carried out (e.g grass cutting) and the work would be done. However, he no longer felt that this was the case.

The public meeting commence at 7pm and terminated at 8.30pm.