

## **Open letter to all Chairs and Councillors of Parishes in West Sussex WSALC Value for Money Review**

The Value for Money review currently being undertaken by the board of WSALC Ltd. is a mirror of exactly what one would expect from a body responsible for spending taxpayers' money. In essence your Parish does exactly the same every year when setting budgets and precepts. You must look at what you can deliver for your residents and how this can be achieved at the best possible price, without a drop in quality.

WSALC is no different. Six years ago, WSALC was part of AiRS (Action in Rural Sussex) and contracted, for an annual fee, all required services, including staff costs, from them. The break from AiRS came when it was proposed that forming four companies would be more tax- efficient and so, WSALC would benefit from economies of scale.

SSALC Ltd has been in existence for 6 years and its Board decided, on the advice from the three County chairs (West Sussex, East Sussex and Surrey) to undertake a complete review of the company's operations. That review was brought to a halt by the resignation of two of the chairs. WSALC Ltd decided, after careful consideration and discussions with other CALCs, that its approach would be to undertake a Value for Money project to ascertain options that could achieve a better financial outcome for the Member Councils of WSALC. The Covid-19 pandemic may have been a delaying issue, but the Board of WSALC was convinced that it should not be a barrier to the plan, as much of the review would be to look at procedures and expenditure. None of this should be impossible when working remotely and using web-based discussion groups.

Consequently, the Board has been looking at costs bases and efficacy of procedures at SSALC Ltd. The Board believes that the proposed increase of 4.5% in the budgeted member Councils' contributions is unnecessary and, in fact, that there will be an opportunity to deliver the same or better service across the whole County for a reduction in the subscription demanded. The Board, as you will know, has promised a report to accompany an independent review by Prof. Colin Copus. You will have the opportunity to judge the Board's actions when all Parishes are invited to vote to accept or reject the Board's proposals. The report will include details of how all services currently provided by SSALC Ltd, including legal services, training and governance advice, will be accessed. From the Parishes' perspective, there should be nothing that would cause a break in the delivery of the appropriate support to Parishes in West Sussex. The voice at the end of the phone and the phone number may be different, but the service will still be there as and when required.

One of the main benefits if West Sussex Parishes were to decide to have a single County-based organisation, would be the closeness of Parishes to the principal Authority as one step in the ladder will have been removed. The Board will be closer to the Parishes as it will be directly in contact with them and not via an intermediary, SSALC Ltd, over which Parishes have no control. The WSALC Ltd board will

continue to be elected directly from your local Associations and will be directly responsible to you and not under the umbrella of SSALC Ltd which has no direct accountability to individual parishes. The Chair of WSALC has discussed with the Leader of West Sussex County Council, the possibility of a 'remote' meeting to discuss how the liaison could look and the benefits that might be achievable from the Parishes' point of view.

We, as a Board, made up of Parish Councillors from across the County, understand that there is always concern when change is proposed. However, we do believe that it may be time for a change; and that a move to re-position the West Sussex Association would be timely.

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Mike Beal Chichester DALC  
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