

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW STEERING GROUP

21 January 2021

Minutes of the Community Governance Review Steering Group meeting held remotely on Thursday 21 January 2021 at 10:00am.

Steering Group Members present: Councillors C.A. Bayliss (Chairman), T.J.C. Byrne, P.J. Gray, L.M. Langlands, P.N. Osborne, R.B. Thomas and H.L. Timpe

Other Members present: Councillors S.J. Coleman, Mrs V. Cook, P.C. Courtel, K.P. Dixon (in part), K.M. Harmer, C.A. Madeley, A.S. Mier, D.B. Oliver, S.M. Prochak, G.F. Stevens and J. Vine-Hall.

Advisory Officers in attendance: Chief Executive, Assistant Director Resources and Democratic Services Manager.

Also Present: Linda Butcher, Interim Parish Council Administrator, Ian Davison, Partner, Surrey Hills Solicitors and 25 members of the public via the YouTube live broadcast.

CGR20/8. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor J. Barnes.

CGR20/9. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Declarations of interest were made by Councillors in the Minutes as indicated below:

Councillors Bayliss, Byrne, Coleman, Courtel, Gray, Langlands and Thomas each declared a Personal Interest in so far as they were supporters of Democracy4Bexhill.

CGR20/10. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

There were no matters arising.

RESOLVED: That the minutes from the last meeting were accepted as a correct record of the proceedings.

CGR20/11. THE PARISH (TOWN) COUNCIL FOR BEXHILL-ON-SEA - BUDGET REQUIREMENT 2021/22

At the full Council meeting held on 21 December 2020 delegated authority was granted to the Chief Executive and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Regeneration (Transition Bexhill Town Council) to agree the Community Governance Order (CGO) required to create the new Parish Council (PC) for Bexhill-on-Sea, including the identification of the budget requirement. The CGO

could not be completed without the Budget Requirement and the Council Tax liability for 2021/22 being included.

The Chairman welcomed the recently appointed Interim Parish Council Administrator (IPCA), Linda Butcher, who would be undertaking all the necessary preparatory work to establish the new PC for Bexhill-on-Sea and Ian Davison, Lead Solicitor from Surrey Hills Solicitors, undertaking the necessary legal work required.

As agreed at the last meeting, representations from organisations and individuals who wished to express a view regarding the budget had been sought and a number had been included within the papers for the meeting and circulated separately. On behalf of the Community Governance Review Steering Group (CGRSG), the Chairman thanked all the organisations and individuals who had submitted representations, all of which had been considered.

The Assistant Director Resources had prepared a proposed precept in consultation with the IPCA as set out at Appendix B to the report. This showed that the proposed first year precept was estimated at £276,765; since publication of the Agenda the estimates had been further updated by the inclusion of a general reserve fund of £75,000 bringing the total to £351,765 with a Band D Council Tax of £22.38.

In recognition of the consultation responses and other soundings that had been taken by Members, it was proposed to add an additional £10,000 to the Grants and Community Support Budget to total £30,000 and an additional £10,000 for a COVID recovery fund. This resulted in a total budget of £371,765 with a Band D Council Tax of £22.59. Members were keen to ensure that the new PC would have enough funds in its first year to make an impact and help the community from the outset, particularly with regard to post-COVID recovery.

Members considered the proposed budget, together with the suggested additions and the following points were noted:

- the employee costs included interim staff employed after 1 April 2021, the new permanent town clerk and included pension and other on-costs;
- premises costs had been estimated at £12,000 per annum based on an estimated rent for office space and a shop front within the town centre; it was not always recommended to be co-located with the District Council, at least initially – this would enable the PC to forge its own identity; even if the PC was located within the Town Hall, there would be a cost – no other town or parishes across the district was subsidised by Rother District Council (RDC) in this way;
- the general reserve account was expected to cover 3-6 months operating costs for the PC and was essentially to cover unexpected costs – £75,000 represented the recommended norm for councils with this size precept;
- unlike RDC, the PC could reduce its precept in future years if the reserves were sufficient, without the fear of not being able to

- increase in future years due to the fact that Parish/Town Councils were not subject to a precept cap;
- the figure provided for the election costs included many assumptions; the true cost would not be known until after the elections dependent on factors such as whether separate poll cards would be issued, and whether all Wards would go to poll etc.; the costs had, however, already been calculated on the basis of shared costs for other elections taking place on the same day;
 - at the current time, the Government had no intention to cancel the elections due to take place in May, but this would be kept under review; it was noted that it was standard practice that election costs were reclaimed from the body that the election was carried out on behalf of;
 - whilst the prospect of a COVID recovery fund was supported, some Members were concerned over the level of new taxation for the community, particularly in light of the COVID pandemic and impact this had on working families on low incomes; and
 - there was an estimated balance in the region of £8,000 to come in from the Charter Trustees.

Following the debate Members thanked fellow Committee Members, officers, Linda Butcher and Ian Davison for their professional advice and input into the identification of the budget requirement. Ian Davison confirmed that this was a major step forward in completing the CGO, although there were still one or two issues to resolve before the CGO could be signed and sealed, which were being addressed. The Chairman would ensure that the signing of the CGO was well publicised to mark the historic event.

RESOLVED: That the Bexhill Parish Council Budget and Precept for 2021/22 be set as attached at Appendix A.

CGR20/12. **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Cabinet had agreed to extend the Community Governance Review Steering Group's (CGRSG) Terms of Reference (ToR) to include working with the newly appointed Interim Parish Council Administrator (IPCA) on the preparation of the job description and person specification and appointment process for the new clerk, the promotion of the elections and pre-election events and information sessions for prospective candidates. A copy of the revised ToR was attached at Appendix A to the report for information.

The IPCA confirmed that she was already working on the job description, person specification and job advert for the new permanent clerk. It was anticipated that the new permanent clerk would be unlikely to take up the position much before September and the IPCA confirmed her availability to support the gap, if required, although this would be a decision for the Parish Council (PC).

It was agreed that the CGRSG would meet again in March to receive an update on the signing and sealing of the CGO, the recruitment process and programme for communications on elections etc. It was

noted that should the elections in May be postponed by the Government, a further meeting may be required to consider the implications.

It was noted that on 1 April 2021, the PC came into existence and the current 18 Rother District Council Bexhill Members became an interim body until the elections, although in practice, it would not be necessary for it to meet, but to keep a watching brief on arrangements. Members would need to determine whether CGRSG was therefore required after 31 March 2021 at its next meeting.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) the revised Terms of Reference be noted; and
- 2) a meeting of the CGRSG be arranged to take place in March.

CGR20/13. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There were no any other business items.

CHAIRMAN

The meeting closed at 11:25am.

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