

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW STEERING GROUP

30 October 2019



Minutes of the Community Governance Review Steering Group held in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Bexhill-on-Sea on Wednesday 30 October 2019 at 9:30am.

Members of the Steering Group Present:

Councillors J. Barnes, Mrs C.A. Bayliss, T.J.C. Byrne, J.J. Carroll (in part), P.J. Gray, L.M. Langlands, P.N. Osborne, R. Thomas and H.L. Timpe.

Other Members Present:

Councillors P.C. Courtel, C.A. Madeley and D.B. Oliver.

Officers Present:

Malcolm Johnston – Executive Director
Lisa Cooper – Democratic Services Manager and Monitoring Officer
Joanne Wright – Consultation Officer
Julie Hollands – Democratic Services Officer

CGR19/01. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

(1)

RESOLVED: Councillor Mrs C.A. Bayliss was appointed as Chairman of the Community Governance Review Steering Group.

CGR19/02. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

(2)

An apology for absence was received from Hollie Farley – Marketing and Communications Account Manager.

CGR19/03. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

(3)

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

Mrs Bayliss Personal Interest in so far as she was a former member of the Democracy4Bexhill and supporter of a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea.

Byrne Personal Interest in so far as he was a former member of the Democracy4Bexhill and supporter of a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea.

Gray Personal Interest in so far as she was a former member of the Democracy4Bexhill and supporter

of a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea.

Langlands	Personal Interest in so far as she was a former member of the Democracy4Bexhill and supporter of a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea.
Thomas	Personal Interest in so far as he was a former member of the Democracy4Bexhill and supporter of a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea.
Timpe	Personal Interest in so far as she was a former member of the Democracy4Bexhill and supporter of a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea.

CGR19/04. **COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW PROCESS**
(4)

Consideration was given to the Community Governance Review (CGR) Process, Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Review, as well as the ToR for the Community Governance Review Steering Group (CGRSG) including the timetable to be followed. From its formal launch in January 2020, the CGR would need to be completed within 12 months and final recommendations published on 7 May 2020.

The timetable for the procedure was noted as follows:

- October – November 2019: CGRSG meet to review ToR, understand process, agree consultation period and communication plan.
- Consultation (six weeks – 6 January to 14 February 2020): Formal publication of the ToR for the review and launch consultation period. Invite submissions on the proposal to establish a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea.
- Consideration of submissions – March 2020: CGRSG to consider submissions received and develop draft final recommendations.
- 7 May 2020: Council would formally publish the final proposals and recommendations.
- 18 May 2020: Full Council would consider the final recommendations and subject to the outcome consider the creation of a Community Governance Order (CGO) in relation to the establishment of a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea.
- CGO: The CGRSG would need to consider recommendations on the CGO e.g. transfer and management or custody of property, the setting of precepts, provision for the transfer of functions, rights, liabilities, staff etc. Or alternatively, delegate and establish a Shadow Bexhill Town Council Committee, consisting of the 18 Bexhill-on-Sea Councillors to complete this work. This work would be progressed during 2020 with a further detailed CGO presented to Full Council in February 2021. The CGRSG felt it was not appropriate to decide at this stage and that the decision should be made after the consultation exercise.

In order not to prolong the process and the fact that the review would be focused solely on the creation of a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea,

it was noted that reporting to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and Full Council in December was no longer a requirement. Therefore these meetings were removed from the timetable. It was also noted that the date of the Cabinet meeting in May had changed from 11 May to 4 May as the 2020 May Bank Holiday was moved to mark the 75th Anniversary of VE Day.

Consideration was given to whether the CGRSG's meetings should be held in public. It was unanimously agreed that all meetings be held in public and that all minutes and reports of the meetings be published on the Council's website.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) the Timetable of the Community Governance Review and process, as at Appendices B and C to the report be approved;
- 2) all meetings be held in public; and
- 3) all minutes and reports of the meetings be published on the Council's website.

CGR19/05. **CONSULTATION**
(5)

The Community Governance Review Steering Group (CGRSG) gave consideration to the two options proposed for the consultation process, as follows:

Option 1 – the creation of one Parish Council for the whole of Bexhill-on-Sea (to be styled a Town Council)

A Parish Council be created for the whole of Bexhill-on-Sea, to be styled as Bexhill Town Council (BTC) based on the existing Bexhill Ward External Boundary. BTC to contain nine Wards, based on the 2019 District Wards and that two Town Councillors be elected to each ward, making a total of 18 BTC with the first elections to be in May 2021.

Option 2 – no change and retain the status quo

This would see the continuation with the current governance arrangements for Bexhill-on-Sea and the decision making arrangements.

Both options were approved for the consultation process.

During discussion, consideration was given to the examples of other town councils across the country of a comparable size to Bexhill which had been appended to the report for information. It was noted that some indicative costings had already been completed however, it was impossible to assess the exact financial implications for the residents of Bexhill-on-Sea, as it would depend upon the nature and extent of functions transferred to the new BTC from Rother District Council (RDC). The Council's Financial Services Team would be tasked with supporting the development of the initial precept anticipated to be

levied in 2021/22 by the new BTC. It was agreed that this information should feature in the consultation documentation.

In order to ensure full participation / engagement and understanding of the process, it was important that the consultation documentation was informative and enhanced awareness of what a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea could actually do. Therefore, it was also suggested that the following information be included:

- town council boundaries;
- potential devolved functions and services;
- location of BTC (at Town Hall, Bexhill or elsewhere);
- staff resources (shared with RDC or standalone);
- potential to set an allowance or payment for BTC Members; and
- election cycle (to coincide with future RDC elections etc.).

The CGRSG was advised that current RDC Members could stand as BTC Members. Concerns were raised that it could be potentially difficult to fill all 18 BTC seats. The population of Bexhill-on-Sea was considered sufficient to find enough interest.

A discussion ensued on whether open-ended questions should be used. The Consultation Officer advised that these types of questions were challenging, time consuming and difficult to analyse. It would be simpler to ask residents / organisations to answer tick box questions. However additional information could be forwarded in writing or by email.

Members agreed that officers be tasked with developing clear and concise consultation documentation using plain English, including tick box questions, flowchart and financial implications. The CGRSG was encouraged to forward additional questions / information as soon as possible to officers for inclusion within the documentation. The draft consultation documents would be presented at the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) Options 1 and 2 be approved for the consultation process;
- 2) draft consultation documentation using plain English, including tick box questions, flowchart and financial implications be developed and presented at the next meeting; and
- 3) additional questions / information be forwarded as soon as possible to officers for inclusion within the documentation.

CGR19/06. **COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**
(6)

Members considered a report that set out the Communications Plan for the Community Governance Review (CGR); this was essentially an officer's guide. The Plan set out the key dates, audiences and methods for communications throughout the life of the CGR. It was noted that the Council's Marketing and Communications Account

Manager would be supporting all communication activities highlighted within the Plan. Information regarding how the Communications Team could promote the consultation was tabled at the meeting. Promotional methods included: press releases; social media platforms; and My Alerts etc.

In light of the extensive consultation and communications already undertaken for the 2017 CCR, in order to contain costs, it was noted that a light-touch process would be conducted this time.

Attached at Appendix 2 to the report was a list of the outside organisations that would be targeted to respond to the consultation. It was suggested that Bexhill Churches and Conservation / Heritage organisations be added to the list. Members were encouraged to provide additional suggested organisations / groups to the Consultation Officer for addition to the list to receive a direct invitation to the consultation.

The Community Governance Review Steering Group was advised that the results of the 2017 consultation process would be taken into consideration. However the population of Bexhill-on-Sea would have changed since then, through people moving on and new residents arriving. Therefore it was important that the current residents were consulted on the establishment of a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea. To ensure full participation, especially those residents that were not online, it was suggested that a leaflet drop to all Bexhill households be undertaken. No financial data for a leaflet drop was available at the meeting. It was agreed that costs would be sought and reported at the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) the Communications Plan at Appendix 1 to the report be approved;
- 2) Members provide additional suggested organisations / groups to the Consultation Officer for addition to the list to receive a direct invitation to the consultation; and
- 3) costings of a leaflet drop to all Bexhill households be sought and reported at the next meeting.

CGR19/07. ANY OTHER BUSINESS
(7)

There were no any other business items proposed.

CGR19/08. DATE OF NEXT MEETING
(8)

The date of the next meeting was arranged for Thursday 21 November 2019 at 9:30am to be held in the Council Chamber.

CHAIRMAN

The meeting closed at 11:27am.

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