

Rother District Council

Report to	-	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date	-	20 July 2020
Report of the	-	Executive Director
Subject	-	Community Governance Review of Bexhill-on-Sea – Draft Final Recommendations

Recommendation: It be **RESOLVED:** That Cabinet be requested to endorse and recommend to Council that:

- 1) a Parish Council be created for the whole of Bexhill-on-Sea, to be styled a Town Council based on the existing Bexhill Ward External Boundary;
- 2) the Town Council to contain nine Wards, based on the 2019 District Ward Boundaries and that two Town Councillors be elected to each Ward, making a total of 18 Bexhill Town Councillors;
- 3) the first elections be held in May 2021;

Subject to the approval of 1), 2) and 3) above,

- 4) the dissolution of the Bexhill Charter Trustees following the election of Bexhill Town Council be noted; and
 - 5) the consultation results be taken into account when the transfer of services / powers to Bexhill Town Council are discussed.
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Introduction and Background

1. In 2017, under the former administration, the Council undertook a Community Governance Review of Bexhill-on-Sea, and whilst there was overwhelming support shown for the creation of a Town Council (93% of some 9,000+ responses) it was decided at that time not to proceed with the establishment of a Town Council.
2. Following the local elections in May 2019, and the change in political control, the Council approved the following Motion:

“In the light of the outcome of the Local Election results and the overwhelming support for candidates that support a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea this Council requests officers to report as to the required procedure with a view to the establishment of a Town Council for Bexhill by 2021.”
3. The Council has since provided further direction in the form of a set of 10 strategic objectives within the draft Corporate Plan, which includes A Town Council for Bexhill.
4. In order to change the governance arrangements for Bexhill-on-Sea and for the Council to fulfil its objective of creating a Town Council for Bexhill, the Council

was required to conduct a further Community Governance Review (CGR) of Bexhill-on-Sea.

5. Full Council agreed the process by which this Council would undertake the CGR of Bexhill-on-Sea at its meeting on 16 September 2019 and appointed the Community Governance Review Steering Group (CGRSG) to lead on the process (Minute C19/41 refers). As a reminder, attached at Appendices 1 and 2 are the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the review itself and the CGRSG respectively.
6. Rother District Council has conducted the review of community governance arrangements in Bexhill-on-Sea in accordance with Part 4 Chapter 3 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (the 2007 Act). The Council has also had regard to the Statutory Guidance on Community Governance Reviews issued by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and undertook research with like authorities who had undertaken reviews.

Community Governance Review Steering Group

7. The CGRSG met on four occasions between October 2019 and May 2020 in order to progress its ToR and comprised of the following Members:

Councillors J. Barnes, C.A. Bayliss, T.J.C. Byrne, J.J. Carroll, P.J. Gray, L.M. Langlands, P.N. Osborne, R. Thomas and H.L. Timpe.
8. Councillor Bayliss was appointed Chairman and all meetings of the CGRSG were held in the public domain and all agendas and reports were published on the Council's website. The last meeting held on 29 May 2020 was held remotely, on the MS Teams platform with public access via a live YouTube broadcast.
9. The CGRSG took a lead role in drafting the consultation literature (household leaflet) and on-line consultation questionnaire.

Consultation Response

10. At its last meeting held on 29 May, the CGRSG considered the outcome of the public consultation exercise; attached at Appendix 3 is the report and the full consultation response. Attached at Appendix 4 are the Minutes of the meeting. In coming to its recommendations, the Council must consider any representations that it receives in connection with the review.
11. In summary the key points from the 2020 consultation are as follows:
 - 2,193 responses were received from the public – 1,564 on-line and 629 response slips;
 - in total the Council received 2,208 responses – (4.6% of the population);
 - 78% of all responders support the creation of a town council (22% do not);
 - the younger the age group the less likely to support a town council;
 - the older the age group the more likely to support a town council;
 - there is support for the services already funded by Bexhill special expenses to be devolved to a town council;

- the majority of responders in each RDC Ward are in favour of a town council.
12. In 2017, the Council received 9,227 responses, 93% of which were in favour of a Town Council being established. The sizable response rate at that time was due to a number of factors including, consultation events held across various locations in Bexhill, social media and other press coverage and a concerted effort by the pressure group Democracy 4 Bexhill (D4B) to help promote the consultation and encourage support for the creation of a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea.

Considerations

13. When developing proposals, the Council must also ensure that any proposal reflects the identities and interests of the community and are “effective” and “convenient”. Effective and convenient means that if a local council is to be recommended as a result of a community governance review, it will need to be “viable in terms of providing at least some local services” and be “easy to reach and accessible to local people”.
14. Proposals to create a parish or parish council covering all or part of a charter trustee area, as in Bexhill-on-Sea need to be judged in particular against the following considerations:
- a) the effect on the historic cohesiveness of the area
 - b) what are the other community interests in the area? Is there a demonstrable sense of community identity encompassing the charter trustee area? Are there smaller areas within it which have a demonstrable community identity and which would be viable as administrative units?
15. These considerations were considered by the CGRSG in October 2019 when the consultation was being formulated. This report is attached at Appendix 5 and sets the context for the consultation.

Draft Final Recommendations

16. In light of the public support for the creation of a Town Council, demonstrated through both the 2017 and 2020 consultation and in line with the Council’s stated objective of delivering a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea, the CGRSG recommend that the Council does establish a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea. The Town Council would be based on the current District Council external boundary of Bexhill, with nine wards, each appointing two Members and with the first elections taking place in May 2021.
17. It is noted that with this recommendation comes the demise of the Bexhill Charter Trustees who will become defunct, once the Town Council is established.
18. Whilst some Members of the CGRSG were concerned at the timing, due to the current impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of Members supported the recommendation.
19. It is noted that officers will need access to various sources of expertise, including external legal advice in respect of the drafting of the Community

Governance Order and procedural matters in terms of establishing the Town Council. There will be a cost to some of this which is currently unknown, however an approximation of costs will be made available at the meeting.

Conclusions and Recommendations

20. Members are invited to consider the recommendations of the CGRSG and recommend on as appropriate to Cabinet and Council.

Malcolm Johnston
Executive Director

Risk Assessment Statement

Failure to refer this matter to Cabinet will jeopardize the Council's ability to complete the Community Governance Review within the statutory 12 months time scale.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Terms of Reference for the CGR

Appendix 2 – Terms of Reference for the CGRSG

Appendix 3 – Report to the CGRSG – Outcome of Stage 2 Consultation and Final Recommendations

Appendix 4 – Minute extract from CGRSG Meeting

Appendix 5 – Consultation Report to Community Governance Review Steering Group 30 October 2019

Community Governance Review – Terms of Reference

A community governance review will be carried out by Rother District Council under the provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (“the 2007 Act”). The review shall comply with the legislative requirements, have regard for the associated statutory guidance and will be conducted in accordance with these terms of reference.

The review will consider the establishment of a Parish Council for Bexhill-on-Sea encompassing all nine District Electoral Wards within the local authority area of Rother District Council.

It shall have particular regard for the need to secure that community governance within the area under review:

- reflects the identities and interests of the communities in that area; and
- is effective and convenient.

When carrying out the Community Governance Review, the District Council must also take into account other existing or potential community governance arrangements.

Following the review the Community Governance Review Steering Group shall make recommendations as to:

- whether or not to establish a new parish of Bexhill-on-Sea, the name of any new parish and the styling (i.e. parish, town, community, neighbourhood or village) of any new parish;
- whether or not any new parish should have a parish / town council (subject to the particular restrictions on recommendations in this area set out in Section 94 of the 2007 Act) and the electoral arrangements of any new parish council – including the ordinary year of election, warding and number of councillors;

The review shall invite and take account of submissions from all interested parties.

Agreed by full Council on Monday 16 September 2019.

**Terms of Reference for the
Community Governance Review Steering Group**

Aims and Origins	<p>To manage the Community Governance Review (CGR) process, under the terms of reference set by full Council.</p> <p>A CGR is required following the motion passed by Full Council on 22 May 2019.</p>
Scope	<p>To determine a detailed timetable and consultation programme for the CGR;</p> <p>To progress the review in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the Guidance on CGRs issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government and The Local Government Boundary Commission for England in March 2010;</p> <p>To recommend appropriate electoral arrangements for a parish / town council created within Bexhill-on-Sea, where necessary (including the name of any newly created parish; the number, name and boundaries of any parish wards; the number of councillors to be elected within each ward; and the ordinary year of elections); and</p> <p>To consider and make recommendations on any consequential matters arising from the review which are required to give effect to any subsequent Community Governance Order (CGO), e.g. the transfer and management or custody of property, the setting of precepts for new parishes, provision for the transfer of any functions, rights, liabilities, staff, etc.</p>
Outcomes	<p>To recommend to Cabinet, via the OSC to create a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea and if so what types of functions it would seek to undertake.</p>

Rother District Council

Report to	-	Community Governance Review Steering Group
Date	-	29 May 2020
Report of the	-	Executive Director
Subject	-	Bexhill Community Governance Review - Outcome of Consultation

Introduction

1. The Council is currently conducting a Community Governance Review (CGR) of Bexhill-on-Sea and has now completed the consultation stage as part of the process.
2. This report brings together the results of the consultation for the Community Governance Review Steering Group (CGRSG) to consider in forming its recommendation(s) to Council, via the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) and Cabinet.
3. The headline results are that the Council received a total of 2,193 responses (1564 completed on-line questionnaires and 629 response slips) – 78% of which support the creation of a Town Council. The detailed analysis is found at Appendix A. A supplementary report detailing all website text and emailed responses from the public, website text and emailed responses from organisations, the leaflet and questionnaire text and website text at the close of the consultation, has also been circulated separately to all Members.

Process

4. The CGR consultation was launched on Friday 21 February and run for 6 weeks, closing at 4.30pm on Friday 3 April 2020. Despite weeks 5 and 6 of the consultation falling within the Government's Covid-19 lockdown period, responses were still made during this time, both on-line and by the return of response slips.
5. The consultation was primarily conducted by way of an on-line questionnaire and publicised via the delivery of a leaflet to all residential households in Bexhill-on-Sea. A sub-set of the CGRSG (Councillors Mrs Bayliss, Thomas and Timpe) worked with officers to agree the wording of the consultation leaflet and finalise the content and layout of the on-line questionnaire.
6. The Post Office was contracted to deliver the Council's leaflet to all Bexhill residential addresses during the week commencing Monday 24 February with all leaflets being delivered by Saturday 29 February 2020. This was via the Post Office's leafleting Door to Door Service which cost £1,512.30. Residents who have opted out of the leaflet delivery service provided by the Post Office would have been excluded from the household drop.
7. The Council was made aware through several sources (direct email, Members, social media) that not all households had received the leaflet. Officers living in Bexhill reported that whilst the leaflet was received during the delivery week, it

was delivered with several other leaflets (take-away menus / Factory Shop etc.) and residents could have thrown the leaflet away with “junk mail” in error. Whilst it was initially thought that the leaflet would be delivered in isolation, the Post Office operate a 'non-competing item' policy whereby they do not deliver more than one item from any one industry sector at any one time.

8. Press releases and social media messages advised that the Council's preferred response route was via the on-line consultation portal and the leaflet response slip was primarily aimed at those residents who were not on-line. The on-line response method enables the Council to capture demographic data, which is not captured with the response slip.
9. Spare copies of the leaflet were made available at the Town Hall and provided to Members on request. A few weeks into the consultation it was confirmed via a press release, social media and MyAlerts messages that responders could put more than one name on the response slip and these would be counted as individual returns, if using the leaflet to respond to the consultation. Any response slips that were received with two names on, e.g. Mr and Mrs X, these were counted as two responses in any event.
10. The Consultation Officer provided several updates through the consultation period providing information on the number of responses received, together with some demographic profiling for those who had responded on-line and an indication of the Wards that had the least responders. However, towards the end of the consultation exercise the ability to provide weekly updates was compromised due to the Covid-19 emergency and other Covid-19 related priorities.
11. In order to spread the workload, the leaflet response slips were processed by the Democratic Services Team and the on-line portal managed by the consultation officer, as like any other on-line Council consultation. Response slips received were added to the database daily in order to keep on top of the workload and sent to the consultation officer at the end of each week.

Consultation Results

12. Appendix A sets out the detailed analysis, the key points to note are as follows:
 - 2,193 responses were received from the public – 1,564 on-line and 629 response slips;
 - 15 responses from local organisations and businesses - most support the creation of a town council and are prepared to work with one in the future;
 - in total the Council received 2,208 responses – (4.6% of the population);
 - 78% of all responders support the creation of a town council (22% do not);
 - the younger the age group the less likely to support a town council;
 - the older the age group the more likely to support a town council;
 - responders in each age group (on-line only) as follows:
 - 0 to 24 – 45 (3%)
 - 25 to 34 – 42 (3%)
 - 35 to 44 – 94 (6%)
 - 45 to 54 – 135 (9%)
 - 55 to 64 – 279 (19%)
 - 65 to 74 – 597 (40%)
 - 75 to 84 – 273 (18%)

85+ - 33 (2%)

- there is support for the services already funded by Bexhill special expenses to be devolved to a town council;
 - the majority of responders in each RDC Ward are in favour of a town council.
13. Responses were also received from the following 15 organisations: Bexhill Chamber of Commerce; Bexhill & Battle Labour Party; Sussex Police (Bexhill); Hastings and Rother Interfaith Forum; Active Sussex; Bexhill Youth Service; Icklesham Parish Council; Age UK East Sussex; Bexhill in Bloom; Little Common Dental Practice; Treat your Feet; John Bignell Ltd.; Ed's Kitchen; Amberley Nursery & Forest School; Buenos Aires Guest House and Discover Bexhill. The responses received can be read in full in the supplementary document circulated separately.
14. There were a few response slips received after the deadline (5) up until the publication of this report but these have not been accepted nor included in the final figures above.
15. From the results of this consultation and the consultation exercise undertaken in 2017, it is clear that the majority of residents who have responded that there is support for the creation of a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea.

Communications

16. In accordance with the Communications Plan, the following activities were undertaken to promote the consultation:
- all Bexhill Members were initially supplied with 50 A5 flyers promoting the consultation for distribution as they saw fit within their Wards;
 - dedicated section on the website – on-line response portal;
 - regular press releases / social media tweets / MyAlerts messages;
 - direct contact / mail shots / email; citizens' panel;
 - pop-up banners in CHP reception / Bexhill Library and various locations across Bexhill co-ordinated by the Bexhill Members;
 - information packs / materials / spare leaflets at the Community Help Point at the Town Hall;
 - attendance and participation at the Bexhill Town Forum meetings held on Friday 21 February and 6 March.
17. The Community Governance Review has featured regularly in the Bexhill Observer since February including an online article on 5 February, and two further online articles that also featured in the print editions as lead articles on 7 February and 3 March 2020.
18. During the period from 21 February to 3 April 2020, the review was promoted a total of 43 times via the Rother Facebook account with 1,600 reactions, 2,100 comments and 967 shares. The review was also promoted to local Members for sharing on their own social media feeds and into local Facebook groups for increased coverage and engagement.
19. The review was also promoted on Twitter, although engagement on this channel is much lower than on Facebook the sentiment was generally neutral or positive. Full details can be provided on request. The Council's Marketing

and Communications Account Manager will be present at the meeting to answer any questions.

Next Steps

20. The Steering Group are invited to consider the outcome of the consultation and agree what draft recommendations they wish to make to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Officers will then compile a comprehensive report, setting out the rationale for the recommendations and addressing the various criteria in accordance with the legislation.
21. Due to the time constraints and other work priorities that have resulted from the Covid-19 emergency, the recommendations will be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting scheduled for July and on to full Council in September 2020. A revised timetable for the remainder of the review is at Appendix B.
22. In light of the public support for the creation of a Town Council, demonstrated through both the 2017 and 2020 consultation and in line with the Council's stated objective of delivering a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea, it is proposed that the Steering Group consider making the following draft recommendations:
 - That a Parish Council be created for the whole of Bexhill-on-Sea, to be styled as Bexhill Town Council based on the existing Bexhill Ward External Boundary;
 - The Town Council 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 Bexhill Town Councillors; and
 - The first elections to be in May 2021.
23. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will consider the draft recommendations and present these to Cabinet for approval by full Council. Once a decision has been taken by full Council, should the recommendation that a Town Council is created for Bexhill-on-Sea is agreed, work will commence on the Community Governance Order (CGO) which will need to be agreed by full Council in December 2020 to enable the first elections to take place in May 2021.
24. Legal advice and assistance will be procured to assist with drafting the CGO and how the new Town Council's first years' precept will be agreed and set; the scope of devolvement will be agreed with the new Town Council once established.
25. Further meetings of this Steering Group to consider and make recommendations on the consequential matters arising from the review which are required to give effect to any subsequent Community Governance Order (CGO), e.g. the transfer and management or custody of property, the setting of precepts for new parishes, provision for the transfer of any functions, rights, liabilities, staff, etc. will be arranged following full Council approval.

Conclusion

26. This report provides the outcome of the consultation and the Steering Group are invited to consider and agree the draft recommendations to put before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and full Council.

Malcolm Johnston
Executive Director

Appendices

Appendix A – Detailed Analysis

Appendix B – Revised Timetable

Consultation on Bexhill Community Governance Review: Summary Report

Executive Summary

1. The consultation was open from Friday, 21 February to Friday, 3 April 2020 or eight weeks. We received 2193 responses from the public. This is made up of 1564 on-line completed questionnaires and 629 leaflet response forms. There were responses from 15 local organisations and businesses. This level of response is sufficient to be representative of the wider population.
2. For all respondents, 78% wanted a town council. However, it was clear the younger the age group the less likely the respondent was to support a new town council. The older the age group the more likely they were to support a town council.
3. Main reasons given for supporting a Town Council were, in no particular order:
 - a. Residents would have more say in running their community.
 - b. Local government should be available at the most local level.
 - c. Having more councillors to vote for means more democracy.
 - d. Other places have town councils so only fair Bexhill has one.
 - e. Non-Bexhill ward councillors are majority in Rother District Council, do not have Bexhill interests and so won't make good decisions.
 - f. Bexhill Council Tax is used elsewhere in Rother.
 - g. Town council could provide more services.
 - h. To protect or improve existing services.
 - i. Protesting past decisions of RDC or ESCC.
 - j. Town council can act as a monitor of other public services.
 - k. Rother too big a district, a town council gives more focus on Bexhill.
 - l. RDC is biased to the rural areas.
 - m. Previous community governance review and election results show continuous support.
 - n. Good for business.
 - o. Voice for the town speaking elected body to elected body.
 - p. Potential to attract money and resources.
 - q. Independence from RDC.
 - r. Community infrastructure levy.
 - s. Size of Bexhill.
4. For all respondents, 22% of respondents did not want a town council. Those that disagreed argued:
 - a. More bureaucracy that is not wanted.
 - b. Cost and the bad timing of increasing costs for older people and young families.
 - c. Not needed. Won't improve anything.
 - d. Current local authority arrangements could solve all these problems, fulfil roles, provide all these services if they wanted to do so.
 - e. Recent election results were about having independent councillors and anti-Conservative voting and not supporting a town council.
 - f. Personnel, staffing, duplication, jobs for the boys.
 - g. A referendum would be true democracy.

- h. Previous experience of a town council suggests just their existence does not guarantee being effective or an improvement.
 - i. Difficult to get rid of if prove not wanted or working in the future.
 - j. Not going to improve democracy because historically local elections always have a low turnout.
 - k. Diverting attention from the big issues and greater problems faced by RDC and ESCC.
 - l. Prefer a different model of local government – unitary authorities.
 - m. A town council won't have the powers, all devolved services are only minor.
5. Most organisations and businesses that expressed a preference supported the creation of a town council and were prepared to work with one in the future.
6. Respondents were asked which services they would be interested to see taken up by a new town council. The focus was on existing Rother District Council services in order to give the Council some insight into the initial level of support in the event of the Council being prepared for devolvement of services. There were two questions. The first question asked about services funded by the Bexhill special expenses. The second question included a list of other Rother District Council services that also had potential for devolvement, and in addition there were some services provided by other public bodies and examples from other existing town councils that the BCGR Steering Group found innovative when researching other Town Councils.
7. In response to the first question there was overall support for all the services to be devolved to a town council. In response to the second question there was overall support for all the suggested services. It should be noted that almost all of those who did not support a town council either did not answer these questions or selected 'none of above'.
8. We would like to thank all participants for taking the time and effort to respond to the consultation.

Bexhill Community Governance Review: Consultation 2020

Main Report

Background and Introduction

1. Rother District Council previously consulted on the governance review for Bexhill-on-Sea in 2017.
2. The Council established a steering group to manage the governance review process under the terms and conditions set by the full Council. The scope of the steering group can be found [here on the Council's website](#). The first meeting was held on 30 October 2019. At the meeting on 27 January 2020 the steering group, it was agreed that a small sub-group of Members edit, re-write and approve all consultation materials (leaflet, webpage, questionnaire, etc.). Meeting agendas and minutes can be found on [the Council's website](#).
3. The steering group made the following decisions about the scope of the consultation:
 - The option was for a town council that would cover all of Bexhill and, more specifically, the nine district wards of Bexhill-on-Sea.
 - The proposal was for a total of 18 town councillors, two to be elected in each of the nine wards.
 - The Steering Group had an interest in what support there might be from the public regarding services that could be devolved from Rother District Council either on establishment or in the near future. The main focus was those functions, locations and services currently funded in part or in full by Bexhill special expenses on the Council Tax but other district council services were listed.

Who We Invited to Consult and Why They Were Invited

4. We identified the following groups might be affected, positively or negatively, by the creation of a town council. They are:
 - Council tax-payers and other residents in Bexhill-on-Sea who would be directly affected by a change in governance. However, we allowed responses from any members of the public who had an interest in Bexhill and might be affected, for example those working, visiting or owning property in Bexhill.
 - Stakeholder organisations operating in and around Bexhill who might be affected by a change in governance or who might provide insight into any potential impact:
 - i. Businesses, organisations representing groups of businesses
 - ii. Charities and voluntary sector
 - iii. Other groups, clubs and organisations
 - iv. Public and statutory organisations and authorities.
5. We made general invitation to consult to users, residents and visitors via –
 - A leaflet delivered to all Bexhill households in the week beginning 24 February 2020. The leaflet included a small response slip that could be posted to the Council.

- My Alerts email to 17,420 Rother residents (approximately just over a third of all Rother households) on week commencing 17 February 2020 and reminder My Alerts notices on weeks commencing 2 March and 16 March 2020. A dedicated email was sent to all Bexhill residents on My Alerts for the week commencing 26 February 2020. Therefore, all Bexhill residents using My Alerts received four My Alerts notifications.
 - Media release on launch.
 - Social media notifications on the Council's Facebook account and Twitter accounts for Rother District Council @RotherDC and Rother's consultation Twitter account @RDCconsult. As an example, the 15 tweets from the consultation account were read 8,605 times (impressions) with 125 engagements (likes, re-tweets, etc.). As requested, some councillors with social media accounts also reminded residents of the opportunity to consult.
 - Website article on the consultation on the Council's website, which received 3,918 unique views and 5,612 views in total.
6. We gave personal invitations to consult by emailing the following 119 groups, charities, organisations and businesses.

1. All parish and town councils in Rother
2. MP for Bexhill and Battle
3. Sussex Business Board
4. Bexhill Town Team/Bexhill Forward
5. Little Common and Cooden Business Association
6. Battle and District Chamber of Commerce
7. Bexhill Chamber of Commerce & Tourism
8. Rye Chamber of Commerce
9. Rye Partnership
10. Association of Carers
11. Bexhill Caring Community
12. Bexhill Charter Centre
13. Bexhill Dementia Action Alliance
14. Bexhill Foodbank
15. Bexhill Homelessness Unity Group (HUG)
16. Bexhill Street Pastors
17. Care for the Carers
18. Christians Against Poverty
19. East Sussex Association of the Blind & Partially Sighted People
20. Friends, Families, Travellers
21. Hastings & Rother Disability Forum
22. Hastings & Rother Voluntary Association for the Blind
23. Hastings Advice & Representation Centre
24. HomeWorks
25. NHS Hastings & Rother CCG
26. Optivo (housing association)
27. Rother District Citizens Advice Bureau
28. Rother Race Action Forum
29. Rother Seniors Forum
30. Sidley Community Association
31. Sussex Police
32. The Bexhill Hive
33. The Pelham Trust
34. Bexhill Talking Newspaper
35. Rother Neighbourhood Watch
36. Rother Environmental Group
37. Action in Rural Sussex
38. Bexhill Old Town Preservation Society
39. Bexhill Heritage
40. Rye Conservation Society
41. Beautiful Battle
42. Battle Area Community Transport
43. Bexhill Community Bus
44. Bexhill Environmental Group
45. Bexhill Caring Community
46. Bexhill 100
47. Bexhill Leisure Centre
48. Freedom Leisure (leisure centre contractor for RDC)
49. de la Warr Pavilion
50. Hastings Direct
51. Hastoe Group (housing association)
52. Homecall Rother
53. Orbit Living (housing association)

54. Network Rail
55. Stagecoach Bus
56. Age UK (East Sussex)
57. Alzheimer's Society (East Sussex)
58. Bexhill Diabetic Group
59. Bexhill Hive
60. Bexhill Islamic Association
61. Bexhill Lions
62. Churches Together in Bexhill
63. East Sussex Better Together
64. East Sussex Hearing Resource Centre
65. East Sussex Recovery Alliance
66. Egerton House (local social landlord)
67. Energise Sussex Coast - Hastings
68. Hastings & Bexhill Mencap Society
69. Hastings & District Interfaith Forum
70. Hastings & Rother Furniture Service
71. Hastings & Rother Mediation Service (HARC)
72. Hastings & Rother Rainbow Alliance (LGBTQ+)
73. Hastings & Rother Samaritans
74. Hastings & Rother Transport Action Group
75. Rother Ramblers
76. Rother Voluntary Action
77. Sompriti (support minorities)
78. SSAFA Forces Help
79. Poles in Hastings
80. 1066 Cycle Club
81. Active Sussex
82. Bexhill Runners & Triathletes
83. Bexhill Sea Angling Club
84. Bexhill Sailing Club
85. Bexhill Ramblers Association
86. Hastings, Bexhill & District Freshwater Angling Association
87. Hastings & District Table Tennis Association
88. East Sussex Cyclists Touring Club - Hastings & Rother
89. East Sussex Health Walks
90. East Sussex Fire and Rescue
91. East Sussex Fuel Poverty Co-ordinator (HBC)
92. Jobcentre Plus, Bexhill (Department of Work and Pensions)
93. IFH Hastings GP Federation (NHS)
94. One You East Sussex
95. St Richards Catholic College
96. Bexhill Youth Council
97. East Sussex Strategic Partnership
98. Battle Abbey Advisory Group
99. Battle Area Sports Centre
100. Bexhill Museum Ltd
101. Groundwork South: Combe Valley CIC
102. Rother Local Strategic Partnership
103. Rye Harbour Nature Reserve
104. Safer Rother Partnership
105. Little Common and Old Town GP Surgeries
106. Christians Against Poverty

107. East Sussex County Council
108. East Traveller Team, ESCC
109. Sussex County Council (Adult Social Care & Health)
110. East Sussex County Council: Mental Health Services
111. Claverham Community College
112. Bexhill College
113. Bexhill Charter Centre
114. Bexhill in Bloom
115. Bexhill Rail Action Group (BRAG)
116. Campaign for Better Transport East Sussex
117. Dyer & Hobbis
118. Heart of Sidley Project
119. Friends of Combe Valley Countryside Park

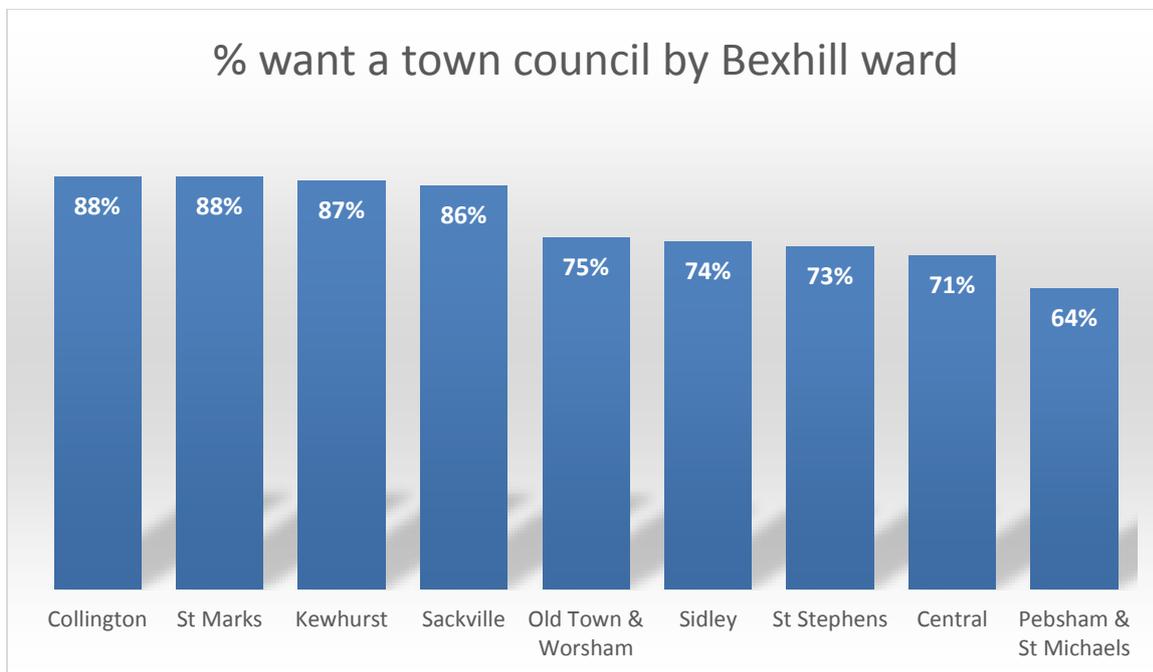
Responders to the Consultation

7. We received 1,553 responses from members of the public through our online survey. There were 633 returned forms from the leaflet. A further six respondents submitted their response by email. We had one returned large print questionnaire by email attachment. Each named individual has been counted separately where responses were made supplying more than one name at the same address. This means we had a total of 2,193 responses from the public. We also received six emails with questions for more information from members of the public. 96% of responses were from Bexhill residents. There is a 2% margin of error for all responses from Bexhill residents.
8. The following 15 organisations made a response – (details can be found in the report supplement, circulated separately):
 - Bexhill Chamber of Commerce
 - Bexhill & Battle Labour Party
 - Sussex Police (Bexhill)
 - Hastings and Rother Interfaith Forum
 - Active Sussex
 - Bexhill Youth Service
 - Icklesham Parish Council
 - Age UK East Sussex
 - Bexhill in Bloom
 - Little Common Dental Practice
 - Treat your Feet
 - John Bignell Ltd.
 - Ed's Kitchen
 - Amberley Nursery & Forest School
 - Buenos Aires Guest House
 - Discover Bexhill
9. In total we received 2,208 responses. We achieved a large enough sample to be representative.

Consultation Results

Want and Do Not Want a Town Council

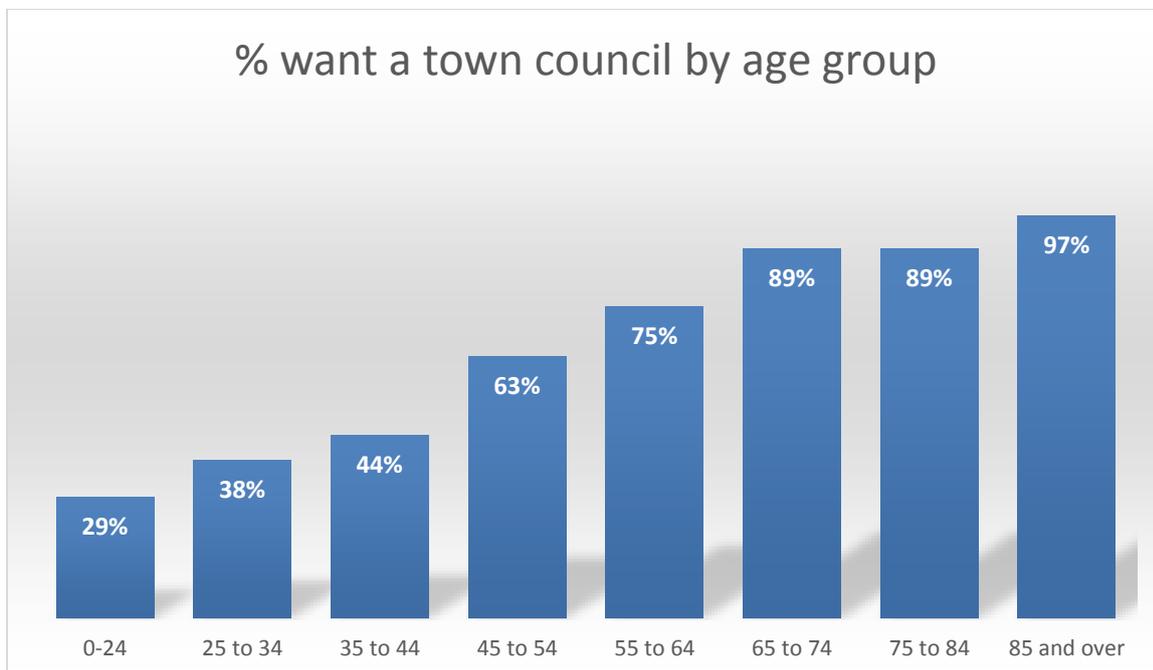
10. We asked respondents if they wanted or did not want a Bexhill Town Council. We found in total for all responders that 78% of responding members of the public wanted a town council and 22% did not.
11. It was clear the youngest age groups did not want a new town council. The older the age group the more likely they were to support a town council. We also had more submissions by respondents from the older age groups. Disabled residents were more likely to support a town council compared to those who are not disabled. These were the main differences between different segments of the population.
12. The following chart shows the breakdown by Bexhill ward for those wards by level of support for a town council. All Bexhill wards had majority support. We have a fair confidence level in these results because not less than 136 responses (Sidley) and up to 374 responses (Collington) were made in each ward. As can be seen, there is stronger support in wards with a larger proportion of older residents and less support in wards with younger residents. For example, 51% of Collington's residents are aged 65 and over whereas 30% of St Michael's residents are aged 65 and over (based on 2018 ward boundaries and 2018 ONS population estimates).
13. The statistical margin of error for each ward has been calculated, where if the survey was run again then 95 times out of 100 the results would be plus or minus the calculated number. As an example, the result in Old Town & Worsham is 75% and the margin of error is 8% therefore we are 95% confident that the result, if all ward residents had taken part, would be between 67% to 83%. Even allowing for the margin of error, all wards have a majority that want a town council. The confidence intervals by ward are:
 - Central – 6%
 - Collington – 5%
 - Kewhurst – 6%
 - Old Town – 8%
 - Sackville – 5%
 - St Marks – 6%
 - Pebsham & St Michaels – 7%
 - St Stephens – 7%
 - Sidley – 8%



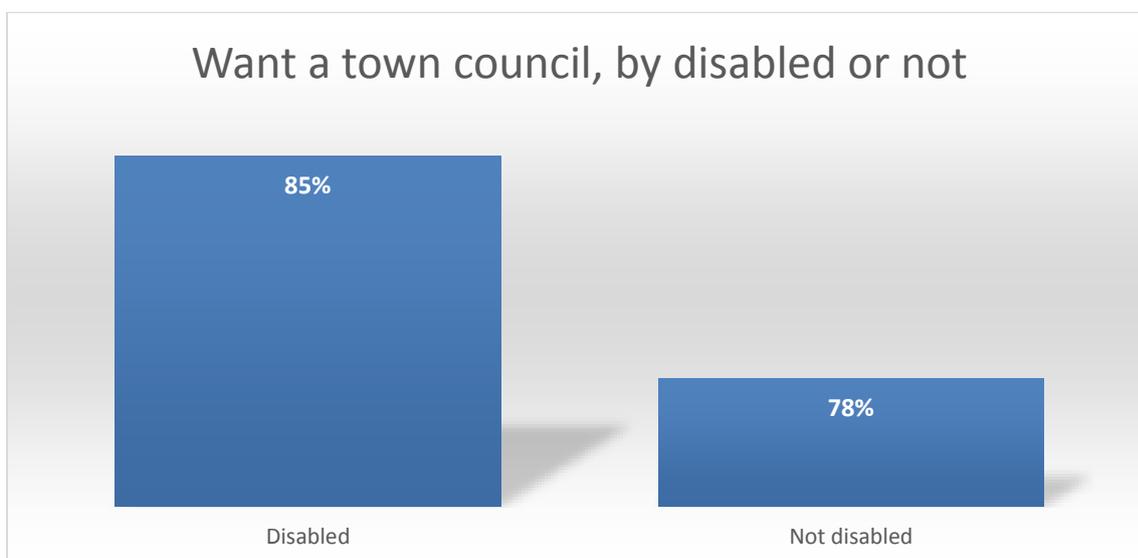
14. The following charts shows the breakdown by age group by level of support for a town council. We only asked for age on the questionnaire, therefore this data is drawn from a sample of 1554 respondents. The under 18 and 18 to 24 age group did not have enough responses for a good confidence level (22% and 19% respectively) and so these age groups have been added together to bring it down to a 15% margin of error. The over 85 age group has a 17% margin of error because only 33 people in this age group responded. (More of this age group is likely to have responded by posting a form.) All the remaining age groups have a margin of error of 10% or less. It should be taken into account that a larger number of responses came from the older age groups. Residents aged 65 and over make up 35% of Bexhill's population but were 60% of all responses (ONS 2018 population estimates).

15. The confidence intervals for age groups are as follows:

- 0 to 24 – 15%
- 25 to 34 – 15%
- 35 to 44 – 10%
- 45 to 54 – 8%
- 55 to 64 – 6%
- 65 to 74 – 4%
- 75 to 84 – 6%
- 85 and over – 17%



16. There is a small variation between disabled residents and not disabled residents. Those disabled are a little more likely to want a town council at 85% compared to those who are not disabled at 78%.



17. Respondents who were not from Bexhill answered as follows: 53% wanted a town council and 47% did not want a town council. There were only 53 respondents, just over half of which lived in Rother and 31% lived in East Sussex (not Rother) and 17% lived elsewhere. Those that lived in Rother and expressed a preference, 30 residents, 60% wanted a town council compared to 40% who did not want a town council. This is not a sufficient sample to draw any conclusions but is included for information.
18. There is no statistically significant difference in the responses between men and women and the overall population.

Why Respondents Wanted a Town Council

19. We asked all respondents to comment on why they selected their preferred option. Most respondents commented in some form. The following reasons

for having a town council are not in any particular order. Each sentence or bullet point is a slightly different explanation but within the same main reason.

- i. Gives more opportunity for local people to have a say in the running of their community because -
 - a. Gives local people more decision-making powers.
 - b. It would consult more with residents than other authorities.
 - c. Gives residents another organisation to talk to, report/complain to, etc.
 - d. Residents have more opportunities for engagement in civic life.
- ii. Local government should be available at the most local level, doing things suitable to that level, and parishes or town councils are the most local level. Making decisions at the most local level means more local knowledge and experience will influence decision making and local interests will be served.
- iii. Being able to vote for more councillors gives more democracy.
- iv. Other towns in Rother and in East Sussex have town councils and this makes Bexhill the same. More fair and equal to be on the same footing as the rest of Rother in being parished.
- v. Residents have no access to spokespeople, representatives, councillors. Bexhill councillors are in the minority on Rother District Council. Bexhill councillors do not represent Bexhill/do not speak up for Bexhill. Non-Bexhill councillors have no interest in maintaining, improving or regenerating Bexhill.
- vi. Bexhill Council Tax is being used to benefit other communities outside Bexhill.
- vii. Town council could provide more services that are only needed in Bexhill. Needed in an urban area. Focus on specific needs of Bexhill.
- viii. Specifically in order to protect, gain or improve a particular service currently provided by other organisations:
 - a. Footpaths
 - b. Potholes
 - c. Parking
 - d. de la Warr Pavilion
 - e. Local events
 - f. Rough sleepers
 - g. On-street maintenance, street furniture
 - h. Public toilets
 - i. Seafront
- ix. Protesting past decisions from Rother District Council and East Sussex County Council.
- x. The town council should act as a monitor of what other local authorities and statutory organisations are doing and also should report errors or requests to them, for example road repairs.

- xi. Rother is a large district and has a lot of communities to cover, so a town council gives more focus to Bexhill.
- xii. Rother District Council is biased towards the other towns, rural areas, rest of Rother. RDC is controlled by rural councillors because they are the majority and they don't care about Bexhill. Rural councillors don't know about Bexhill. Object to non-Bexhill councillors making decisions that affect Bexhill.
- xiii. Already had an overwhelming majority support for a town council in previous governance review and recent local election results proved that support continues and strength of feeling. Ensures a continuation of support for Bexhill if political control changes in RDC.
- xiv. It will be good for businesses.
- xv. Acts as a voice for the town. Can formally speak as an elected body to other elected bodies.
- xvi. Has potential to attract more money and resources to the town.
- xvii. To be independent of Rother District Council, all local decisions made locally (sic).
- xviii. Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) proportion going to town council. Money from developments in Bexhill put under the control of a purely Bexhill organisation.
- xix. The size of Bexhill means it warrants its own council. Bexhill is bigger than towns of Rye or Battle.

Why Respondents Do Not Want a Town Council

- 20. Respondents also said why they did not want a town council and these are their reasons. The same rules apply as above.
 - i. Cannot see a benefit in adding another layer of local government at parish council level. Another layer of bureaucracy. Unnecessary. Don't want to have to speak to another council. Creating more bureaucracy doesn't make real changes. Another talking shop.
 - ii. Cost. Increase in paying Council Tax. Cost of having 18 more councillors. Fears or expectations of significant future tax rises. Expensive. Waste of money. Struggle to pay now. A lot of people in poverty. Hard working families hit hard enough without added costs. Elderly residents and young families will suffer financial hardship that is unnecessary. Uncapped Council Tax – worrying. Unlimited rises. Wrong timing to do this in the current economic climate, perhaps later.
 - iii. There are no current problems that require a solution in the form of a town council. Don't fix what's not broken. System as it is works perfectly fine. No evidence current structure doesn't work for Bexhill. Rother is going a good job now.

- iv. The current provision in local government could solve any current problems if it wishes to do so. Rother District Council already does these services/functions or could do this job without the need for another council. Why can't we get the existing councils, current councillors, to do things that a town council could do?
- v. Did not vote for an independent candidate as a vote for a town council but as a protest to the main political parties. Results were due to a Tory backlash. Already have independent district councillors from Bexhill who claim have best interests of Bexhill at heart, so why another level?
- vi. Don't believe it would be run by suitable people. Another way of creating jobs for the boys. The only benefit will be to the new personnel. Don't see the need to employ more people and costs associated when this role is already being completed.
- vii. There should be a referendum on this decision. A referendum would be true democracy.
- viii. Previous experience of living under a town council was that they made locals lives more difficult and introduced unnecessary or unpopular measures. Not all town councils are good, some places residents pay a lot for very little. The existence of one is not a guarantee.
- ix. Will be difficult and costly to get rid of if not successful or wanted in the future.
- x. Don't believe services will improve.
- xi. Won't be more democratic because most people won't vote, in reference to low turnout at local elections. Would be better off motivating more people to vote in the current system.
- xii. Diverting attention or resources from the existing challenges that district and county are facing. Budget cuts. More burning issues in Bexhill are homelessness, road repairs and street lighting not benches and flowers.
- xiii. Want a different model: Instead there should be a single tier authority, only one council instead of multiple councils (covering wider area than Bexhill) are more efficient and effective. All parish, district and county councils should operate from one office, one management, with 'shops' in each town, selling off existing offices or converting to accommodation.
- xiv. Parish council will do little. The service to be devolved to a town council are not of any great importance and would undoubtedly cost more money. Town council doesn't have the power to change things. Bigger decisions will be made by RDC and ESCC.
- xv. Just spent 40 years to get rid of one layer of bureaucracy, European Union, and now some want to add a town council.
- xvi. We have too many politicians.

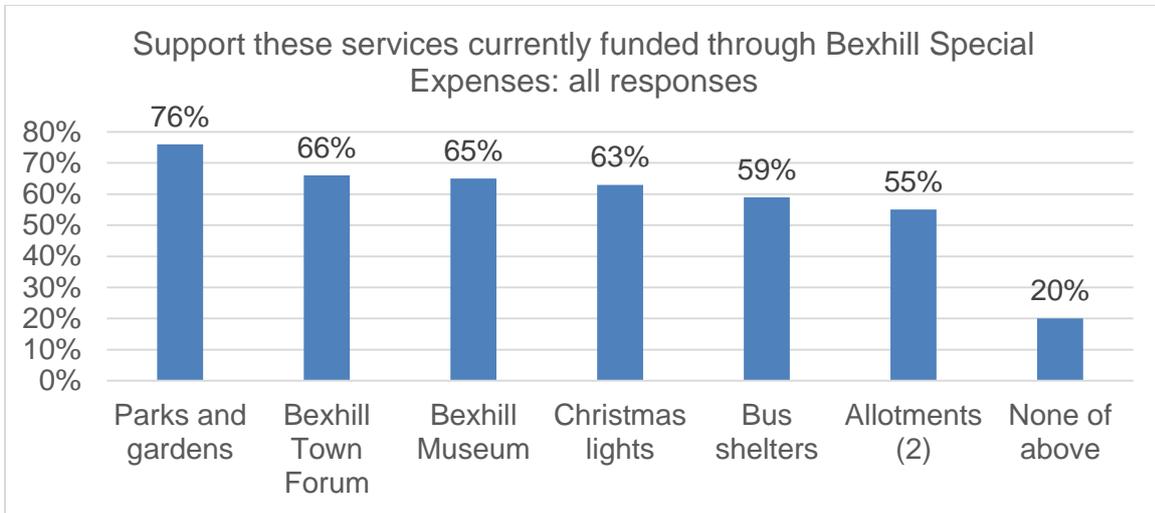
Responses from Local Organisations

21. We offered local organisations an opportunity to give a view on this question but accepted that some would not find it appropriate to take a view. Almost all chose to express a preference and the result was 75% wanted a town council and 25% did not want a town council. This is not radically different from the overall public response. Four members of the public submitted as an organisation in error. Their entries were moved into the responses from the public if they supplied a name and email address.
22. Local organisations and businesses largely did not comment but those that did comment said as follows:
 - **Hastings and Rother Interfaith Forum:** A town council could be directly approached re local Bexhill matters including community cohesion and the promotion of events and activities to support good inter-religious and inter-cultural relations.
 - **Age UK East Sussex:** My organisation currently provides much needed services for mainly older people in Bexhill. As the major population centre in Rother with nearly half the population the needs in this urban area are often greater, and different to the more rural areas of Rother. So a different, more local, Bexhill approach is needed. As well as engendering greater civic pride, a town council will also give a voice to Bexhill residents. These residents felt excluded under the old regime at Rother. Being able to strategically contribute to a neighbourhood plan would also be a great step forward for voluntary sector organisations like Age UK East Sussex.
 - **Icklesham Parish Council:** Icklesham Parish Council supports the formation of a town council in Bexhill to bring it in line with the governance of the rest of the District.
 - **Active Sussex:** I have answered this question stating 'I do not want a town council for Bexhill-on-Sea'. I am provided this response due to the current work with Rother District Council on getting people physically active in the Bexhill and surrounding areas. This work has produced excellent impact and I do not feel able to provide say otherwise due to it feeling like a conflict of interest.
 - **Buenos Aires Guest House:** I think a town if this size should have its own council [corrupted text] should be local people not from other towns
 - **Discover Bexhill:** A town council would bring great opportunity for Bexhill and it's mad that a town with the population with over 40,000 residents doesn't have one. Currently, half of the council that makes the decisions about Bexhill do not live here. And Bexhill has suffered over the years because of it. It's government policy to hand down more control to local authorities. They are in favour of local councils - town councils like the one that Bexhill should have. There are grants that a town council could apply for, to improve the town, which we currently can't. And with a dedicated team of town councillors looking after the smaller issues, it would leave Rother District Councillors time to look after the major, everyday ones.

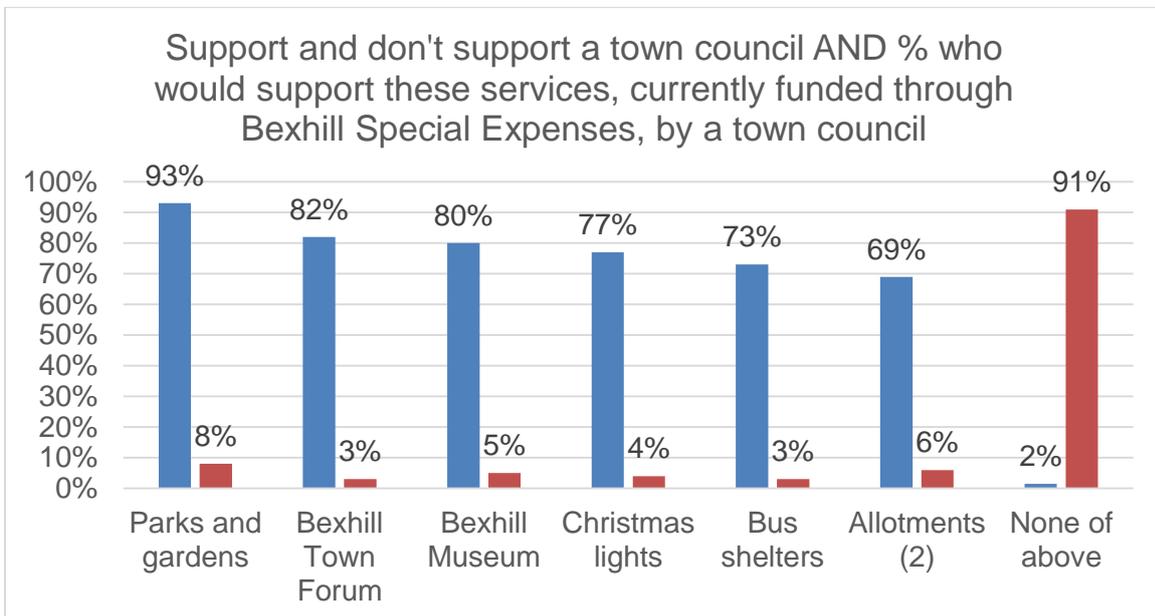
- **Ed's Kitchen:** Still unsure. But my ticks previously are needed I think [Reference to the selection of services that this business would support being provided by a town council.]
23. In addition, we had a lengthy response in support of a town council from the local Labour Party. There was support for a very low-cost town council. The arguments are very similar to those made by the public respondents in support for a town council. There is also support for devolution of services and for two councillors in each ward for a total of 18 councillors. One additional argument was a town council could or should use only local contractors for providing local services and that doing so would reduce costs. It was argued this was preferable than negotiating for a service provided across Rother that generally required working with a larger or national company.
24. The Bexhill Chamber of Commerce and Tourism did not wish to give a preference because it was their policy not to take part or express a preference in any political debates as a politically neutral body. Nor could they find any empirical research that a town council was either the benefits or detriments of town or parish councils to business or to chambers of commerce. There is no research or evidence of a business case being made for a town council as opposed to those against a town council who make a business case against increased taxation. The Chamber has no view. The Chamber would work with all levels of local government in the best interests of its members.

Support for Services from a New Town Council

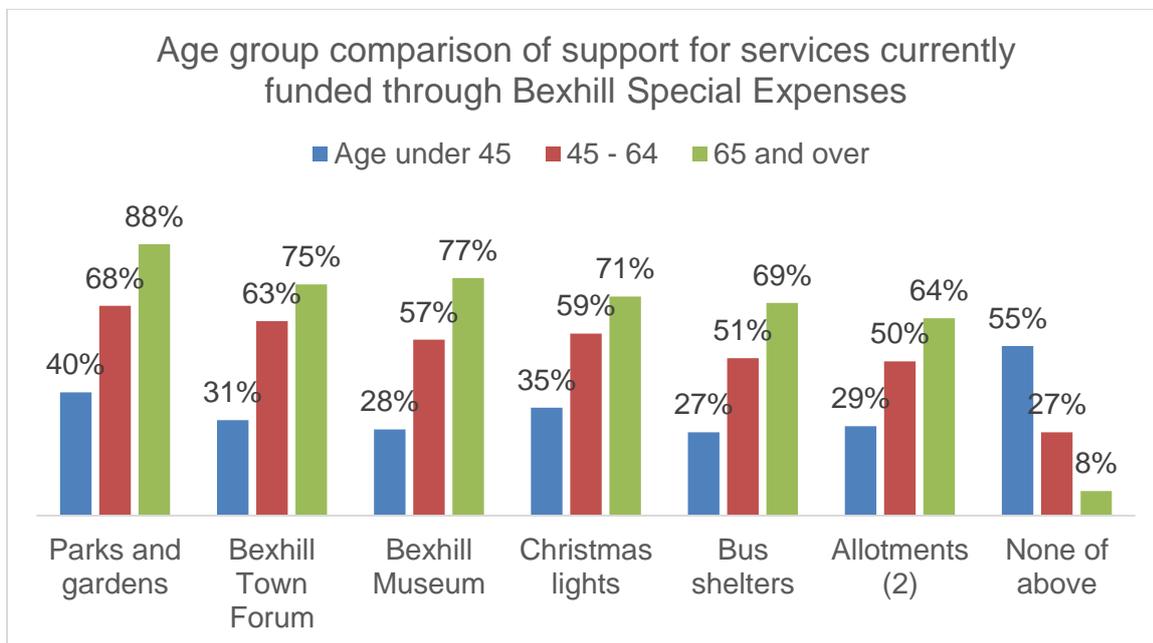
25. We asked respondents about those services funded through the Bexhill special expenses and if they supported a town council taking over supplying such services. This was to inform respondents about the Bexhill special expenses and the services they supported. The purpose of the question was to give the district council members an insight into which of these services had support from the public to be supplied by a town council instead of RDC. Only respondents who gave an answer online or using a printed questionnaire were asked this question.
26. Respondents who did not support a town council did not support the transfer of any services because 91% of non-supporters who answered this question selected 'none of above' (269 of 297). This explains why 20% of respondents selected 'none of above'. However, it should also be taken into account that many respondents who did not support a town council have skipped this question and the following question on other services.
27. The most supported option was the transfer of parks and gardens selected by 76% of respondents. Bexhill Town Forum (66%) and Bexhill Museum (65%) were next in popularity and then Christmas lights at 63%. Responsibility for bus shelters was next to last but still a majority support at 59%. Also, inside the majority was the two remaining Bexhill allotments at 55% but it was the least popular answer.



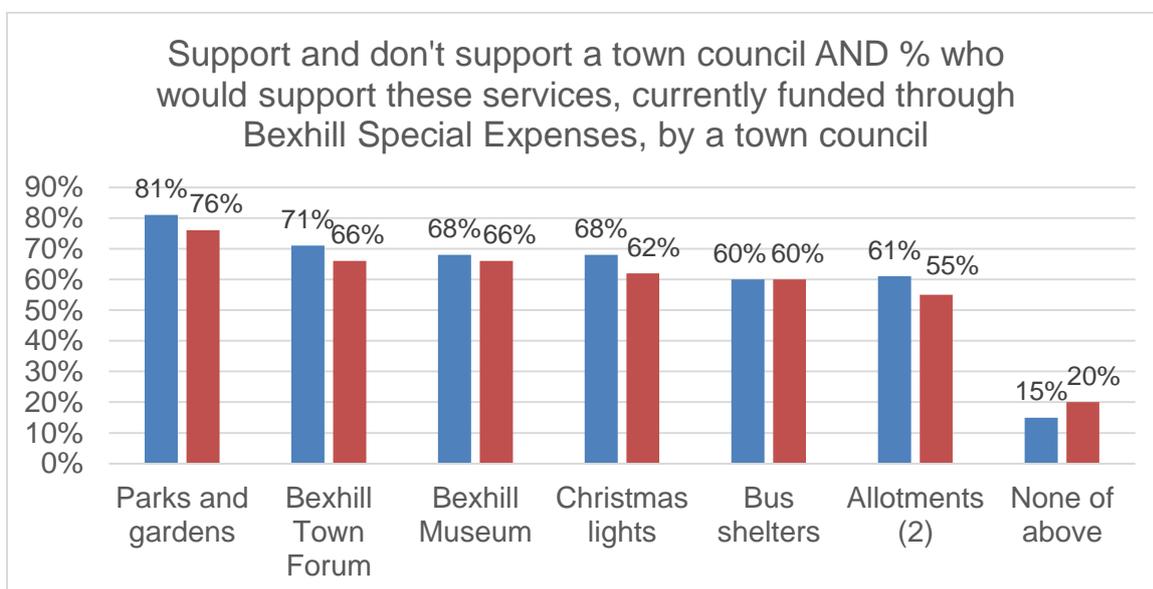
28. The chart below compares the response between those that wanted a town council and those that do not want a town council. For those that want a town council parks and gardens is most supported at 93%. Bexhill Town Forum and Bexhill Museum are next popular at 82% and 80% respectively. For those that do not support a town council the most popular option was parks and gardens at 8% followed by the two allotment sites at 6%. Worth noting is the support for continuation of Bexhill Town Forum, originally established as a place to discuss local issues in lieu of a parish council.



29. There is no difference in the responses between men and women. There were differences between age groups. In the interests of clarity the age groups in the following chart have been grouped into age 44 and under (confidence interval 7%), age 45 to 64 (confidence interval 5%) and aged 65 and over (margin of error 3%).



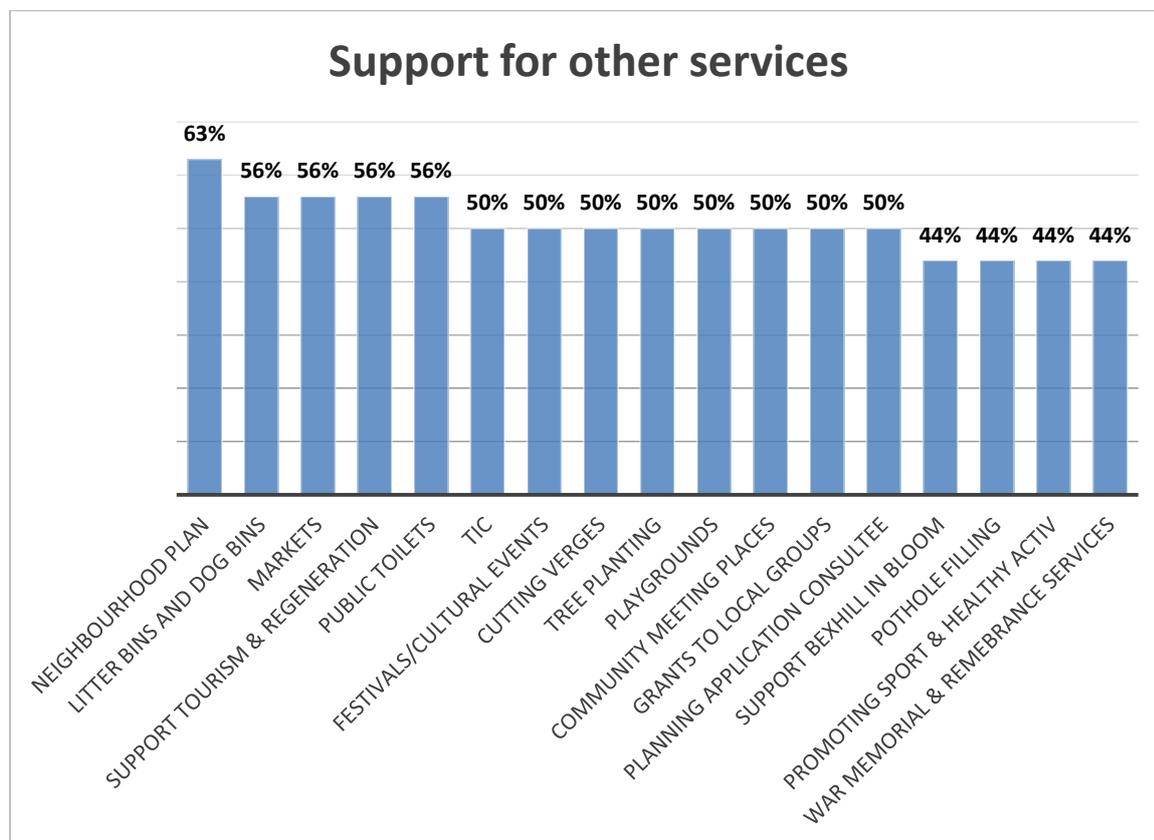
30. The difference in responses between disabled residents and those who are not disabled are as follows. Disabled residents are more likely to support all services except Bexhill Museum and bus shelters where there is no significant difference with those who are not disabled. The largest difference in opinion is support for providing the two remaining allotment sites under RDC control.



Support for Other Services from a New Town Council

31. The second question on the survey was about a long list of other services.
32. A chart with the top 16 results is below. Those services currently provided by a local authority are marked in the paragraphs below with the initials of the authority. The most popular option was the creation of a neighbourhood plan, supported by more than half of respondents.
33. In equal second place, supported by 56% of respondents were providing litter bins and dog bins (RDC), markets, supporting tourism and regeneration (RDC) and providing public toilets (RDC).

34. In equal third place, supported by half of respondents (50%), were providing a tourist information centre, festivals and cultural events, cutting grass verges (RDC/ESCC), tree planting and playgrounds and play areas (RDC).
35. All the remaining options were supported by less than half of respondents. In equal fourth place, at 44%, were supporting Bexhill in Bloom, pothole filling and promoting sport and healthy activities (RDC) and the war memorial (RDC) and holding Remembrance services.



36. The options that were selected by less than 40% of respondents were:

Service	% of respondents
Seafront shelters and other heritage projects (RDC)	38%
Supporting youth services (ESCC)	38%
Park and ride scheme	31%
Town fridge scheme	31%
Benches (RDC)	25%
Creating new public spaces	25%
Bexhill Cemetery (RDC)	19%
Encouraging new murals and mosaics	19%
None of above	13%

37. There was an option to add other services. The other suggestions were:

- Creating safe cycle paths and routes, cycle lanes (ESCC)
- Looking after the staff in the town hall is more important (RDC)
- Environmental planning due to climate change and sea level
- Use the town hall as far as practical for weddings and community groups. (RDC)

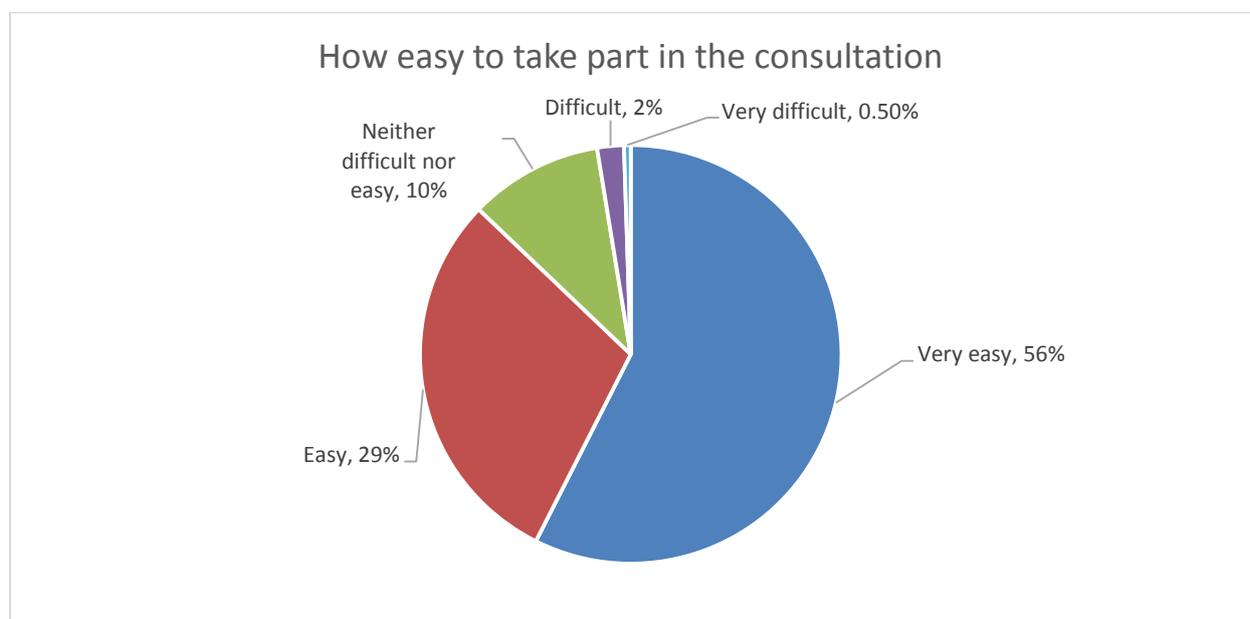
- Do everything we can to raise achievements and aspirations for children.
- Lollipop people at school crossings (ESCC)
- Street cleaning (RDC)
- Car parking. Parking policies. Govern on street parking. Parking enforcement, parking meters. Parking re assessment - better balance between able and disabled (currently too far in favour of disabled). Multi-storey carpark. Traffic wardens. (ESCC & RDC)
- Lighting of streets, car parks and alleyways. (ESCC & RDC)
- Sorting out bad paving. Footpaths. (ESCC)
- Dog muck. (RDC)
- More CPOs. (Sussex Police)
- Support for small business. (RDC/ESCC)
- Creating a compassionate community.
- Homeless support. Homeless/food donation centre. Support for those in need, clothes and foodbanks. Rough sleepers. (RDC)
- Youth activities
- Consultation on public safety in conjunction with Sussex Police and local Magistrates organisations.
- Yellow bus service
- Support to attract business to the area (RDC & ESCC)
- Litter and weed control (RDC)
- Community composting
- I would like to see a close relationship between the town council and museum which has the potential to be much greater community focal and information point than it is at present, however I do not think that a new Town Council would have the resources in terms of skills or staff to provide the support that RDC does at the present time i.e. employing a curator, or centre manager.
- Somewhere visiting motorhomes can park (RDC)
- Beach (tidy of waste and stone clearing from promenades). Sea and beach clean-ups. (RDC)
- In the long term we need a comprehensive town bus service, (ESCC)
- Community cinema/theatre. Cinema for the over 50s especially but other public showings too.
- Town Steward
- Floodlighting of buildings of architectural merit
- Partnerships with RDC and ESCC to renew pavements and the street scene in Bexhill like Uckfield has done
- Provide medical centre (NHS CCG)
- Provision of a street warden who could do minor repairs, cutting back brambles from paths & reporting potholes etc to ESCC
- Solar power for the community scheme.
- Safe tidal sea-swimming pool.
- Surestart equivalent.

Comments on the Consultation

38. We asked on the questionnaire for some feedback on the questionnaire and taking part in the consultation. We asked how easy it was to take part in the consultation and 85% of respondents said that the experience was either very easy or easy. Only 2.5% found the experience difficult or very difficult.

39. We asked, whether or not they found the experience easy or difficult, if there was something that might have improved their experience. There were 378 comments. The majority were comments about the experience being easy or positive. Here are some suggestions for improvement that were made by more than one person:

- More advertising, emails to residents/homes, repeated messages through consultation period, more use of social media
- More information or more detail on the options
- Problems with lack of access to the website on 25 and 26 March, messages of changes, links not working.
- Difficulty finding the correct website.
- Improve the questionnaire. Reverse the order of questions.
- Extend the consultation period due to Covid-19.
- Did not get or neighbours did not get any distributed leaflet.
- Not clear on the website to find the link to the questionnaire, make more prominent.
- Whole questionnaire issued on leaflet.
- Was not clear on the leaflet that people could write on more than one name for people living at that address.



Conclusion

40. This completes the analysis of all questions. It is clear there is majority support for the creation of a Bexhill Town Council although the lack of support by those aged under 45 is noted. There is some in principal support for the devolvement of services, especially those under Bexhill special expenses on the Council Tax. Any such changes would be subject to more detailed costing and information as part of further consultations with stakeholders so that a more informed response can be obtained.

41. We would like to thank all the respondents for taking the time to respond to this consultation. We appreciate their contributions. Everyone's comments and full

responses were made available to the councillors in a supplemental document distributed to all Rother District Councillors.

Programme Office & Policy Team and Democratic Services
Rother District Council 30 April 2020

Proposed Timetable	Outline of Action
20 July 2020	OSC considers draft recommendations and makes recommendation to Cabinet.
7 September 2020	Cabinet considers draft recommendations from OSC and formulates final recommendations to Council.
11 September 2020	Publish final proposals (within Council Agenda).
21 September 2020	Full Council makes final decision and approves the creation of Community Governance Orders (CGO), if any, in relation to any proposed parish / town councils.
Oct / Nov	Meetings of the CGRSG to consider and make recommendations on consequential matters arising from the review which are required to give effect to any subsequent Community Governance Order (CGO), e.g. the transfer and management or custody of property, the setting of precepts for new parishes, provision for the transfer of any functions, rights, liabilities, staff, etc.
21 December 2020	Community Governance Order approved by full Council.