

Rother District Council

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW STEERING GROUP

29 May 2020



Minutes of the Community Governance Review Steering Group held remotely on Friday 29 May 2020 at 9:30am.

Members of the Steering Group Present: Councillors C.A. Bayliss (Chairman), J. Barnes, 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 J.H.F. Brewerton, P.C. Courtel, D.B. Oliver and S.M. Prochak.

Advisory Officers present: Executive Director (MJ), Democratic Services Manager, Marketing and Communications Account Manager, Consultation Officer (in part) and Democratic Services Officer.

Also present: 25 members of the public.

CGR19/22. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

(1)

There were no apologies for absence.

CGR19/23. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

(2)

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

Councillors Bayliss, Byrne, Courtel and Langlands each declared a Personal Interest in so far as they were former members of Democracy4Bexhill and supporters of a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea.

Councillors Prochak and Thomas each declared a Personal Interest in so far as they had previously campaigned on behalf of Democracy4Bexhill.

CGR19/24. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING – 27 JANUARY 2020 – MATTERS ARISING

(3)

Councillor Timpe advised that she had not made a declaration of interest at the last meeting, was not and had never been a member of Democracy4Bexhill and requested that the reference to the declaration be removed from the minutes.

RESOLVED: That the minutes be amended to remove reference to Councillor Timpe's declaration.

CGR19/25. **BEXHILL COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW – OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION**
(4)

Consideration was given to the Executive Director's report which set out the results of the Bexhill Community Governance Review consultation to enable the Steering Group to form its recommendations to Council via the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) and Cabinet.

The consultation was launched on Friday 21 February 2020 and ran for six weeks closing on Friday 3 April 2020. It was primarily conducted using an on-line questionnaire and a leaflet drop. A sub-group of the Community Governance Review Steering Group consisting of Councillors Mrs Bayliss, Thomas and Timpe agreed with officers the wording of both the leaflet and on-line questionnaire.

The leaflets were delivered week commencing Monday 24 February until Saturday 29 February 2020 to all residential households in Bexhill-on-Sea at a cost of £1,512.30. It was noted that residents who had opted-out of the Post Office's leaflet delivery service were excluded from the household drop.

The Council's preferred response route was the on-line consultation portal, rather than the leaflet reply slip which was primarily aimed at those residents who did not have access to technology. A few weeks into the consultation it was confirmed that multiple names could be added to the reply slip which would be counted separately.

During the consultation, updates were posted online that provided information on the number of responses received, together with some demographic profiling for those who responded via the Councils' preferred consultation method, the online portal. Unfortunately, the ability to provide weekly updates was compromised due to the COVID-19 emergency and other priorities. The consultation was promoted regularly through 'MyAlerts' and all social media platforms.

At the close of the consultation, 2,193 valid responses had been received; 1,564 via the Council's on-line consultation portal and 629 via the Council's leaflet. 15 responses were received from local organisations and businesses in the District. In total, the Council received 2,208 responses (4.6% of the population), with 78% supporting the creation of a Town Council.

Both the 2017 and 2020 consultation results showed that there was public support for the creation of a Town Council. Members were asked to consider the draft recommendations highlighted at paragraph 22 of the report. It was noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would consider the draft recommendations, proposals would be forwarded to Cabinet and full Council for formal approval in December 2020. The first elections would be held in May 2021.

In general, Members were pleased with the results, despite the response rate being significantly lower than previously received (over 9,000 in 2017). It was considered important to progress with the proposed timetable however some concern was raised that perhaps some flexibility should be applied to the timing of the election in May 2021, in light of, the Council's focus to deal with the current and aftermath of the national COVID-19 emergency. When considering the powers to be delegated to the Town Council, Members felt it was important that the results of the consultation be taken into consideration. The Chairman reminded Members that the Steering Group was only making recommendations at this stage and that the final decision would be made by full Council in December 2020 when the Council could reconsider whether the election should be delayed or not.

The Executive Director confirmed that once the decision had been formally approved, the process to establish a Town Council for Bexhill would be implemented. Legal advice and assistance would be required to draft the Community Governance Order and set the precept. It was clarified that the devolvement of services would be agreed with the new Town Council once it was established.

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be requested to recommend to Cabinet that:

- 1) 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;
- 2) 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;
- 3) the first elections to be in May 2021; and
- 4) the consultation results be considered when the transfer of powers to a Bexhill Town Council were discussed.

CGR19/26. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(6)

It was acknowledged that information had been received from the Cantelupe Residents Association prior to the meeting.

CGR19/27. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

(7)

Depending on the final recommendation agreed by full Council, the date of the next meeting would be arranged in October/November. Members would be contacted with appropriate dates.

CHAIRMAN

The meeting closed at 10:25am

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