

**RYE TOWN COUNCIL
RESPONSE TO STAGE 2 OF THE BEXHILL COMMUNITY
GOVERNANCE REVIEW CONSULTATION**

Whilst acknowledging that the decision on whether to create a town council lies properly with Bexhillians, Rye Town Council has, for many years, supported the parishing of Bexhill (Option 2) – and this remains the case.

Options 1, 3 and 4

These are unsatisfactory for the reasons following:

Option 1 (No change)

Largely as a result of the involvement of local organisations seeking to increase participation in the consultations and/or encouraging residents to support a local council for the town, the Governance Review has been well publicised. By the time this consultation has concluded a much higher proportion of Bexhillians will be aware that, unlike all the other villages and towns in Rother (save for East Guldeford), they do not have their own local council – that is, they currently have no dedicated corporate body to identify, meet or champion their particular interests. What is so special about Bexhill that it does not merit its own council?

Some may argue that there is presently no democratic deficit in Bexhill because its Ward Members represent the interests of Bexhillians. This may be so but, ultimately, Bexhill Members have to take into account what is in the best interests of their authority and the district – and this may not always coincide with the interests of their own Ward constituents.

Currently, the Bexhill Special Expense (cost of local services that would normally be provided by a town/parish council) - and Bexhill Charter Trustee costs – are approved by a council (RDC) with a majority of Members representing wards *outside* Bexhill.

‘No change’ will do nothing to address the suspicions/assertions heard in Bexhill that Rural Rother benefits disproportionately from RDC’s resources because it has more Ward Members – as well as the view conveyed by some in Rural Rother that they should not be compelled to fund ‘Bexhill’s Pavilion and seafront’.

It is likely that the vast majority of those responding to Stage 2 of the consultation are supporting Option 2 (a Town Council for Bexhill) and that expectations have been – and are being - raised. There is clearly a demand from a significant number of Bexhillians for some form of *meaningful* change and if their desires are thwarted it is unlikely that they will abandon their efforts to secure greater local autonomy.

Option 3 (Bexhill Area Committee)

This option was rendered pointless after Rother District Council (RDC) decided that any such committee would have no delegated powers. The option will receive minimal public support because the area committee would be nothing more than a mechanism for raising concerns and exchanging information. Such a vehicle exists already in the guise of the Bexhill Town Forum.

Option 4 (Four Parish Councils)

The original option - the creation of three parish councils subdivided as Bexhill, Little Common and Sidley - has also been fatally undermined by RDC's decision to arbitrarily replace it with parishes based on the Bexhill County Divisions – styling them as North, South, East and West Bexhill. Parish councils are more likely to flourish if their boundaries are based not on 'administrative convenience' but 'natural communities' that residents identify with.

Option 2 (Town Council for Bexhill)

The introduction of 'first tier democracy' in Bexhill is likely to stimulate community engagement, strengthen local identity and improve responsiveness to local need.

A number of organisations have attempted to estimate the cost of a Bexhill Town Council.

In the first instance, a town council could be established relatively cheaply – perhaps by employing a part-time Town Clerk, part-time Assistant/Mayor's Secretary, renting an office, insurance, admin expenses, election costs, subscriptions, hiring meeting rooms etc. This could cost a Bexhill Band D Tax Payer as little as £7-£8pa.

Costs would obviously increase if services were transferred from RDC (not guaranteed) and/or the Town Council identified unmet needs and – with the backing of its parishioners – introduced new/supplementary services or facilities.

Some of the services/facilities that a Bexhill Town Council could provide/fund without relying on them being transferred from another authority include:

- Tourist information services
- Street furniture
- Social housing (*assuming it has the General Power of Competence*)
- Town Stewards/Wardens
- A youth council
- Adoption of red telephone kiosks
- A Town Crier
- Adverse weather response
- Joint highways improvement schemes
- Business and employment support
- Community transport
- Crime prevention

Any serving Bexhill Ward member concerned that a town council could diminish the value of their District Council role should note that they would be free to stand for election to the new statutory body – and it is not unusual for District Councillors to sit also on their own local parish/town council.

Serving a population of 41,000, a Bexhill Town Council would be well-placed to identify unmet needs and ascertain where existing services might be falling short – and then to address these deficiencies creatively and appropriately.

Rye Town Council commends the adoption of Option 2.

**Richard Farhall
Rye Town Clerk
on behalf of Rye Town Council**