

# ROTHER ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS (RALC)

## Minutes of meeting held on 23 April 2025, 2.30pm Staplecross Village Hall TN32 5QG

**Present** Andrew Brown (Battle), Caroline Croft (Brightling), Joey Daeva (Bexhill on Sea), Tracy Dixon (Brede, Whatlington), Richard Farhall (Rye, Mountfield), Bob Franklin (Udimore), Kathryn Field (RDC), Lorna Ford (RDC), Martin Griffiths (Brede, Guestling), Jacqui Harding (Northiam), Nigel Jacklin (Bexhill on Sea), Trevor Leggo (SALC), Keith Lloyd (Burwash), Julie Miller (Bexhill-on-Sea), David Penfold (Pett), Catherine Penney (Beckley), Graham Peters (Bodiam), Julie Ramus (Rye Foreign), Jenner Sands (Icklesham), Jacqui Stanford (Icklesham), Jonathan Vine-Hall (Sedlescombe), David Todd (Salehurst & Robertsbridge), Michelle Webber (Bexhill on Sea), Dave Young – RALC Chairman (Ewhurst)

Item Number	Agenda Item	Action
1	<b>Welcome</b>	
2	<b>Apologies for absence</b> Jenny Exley (Battle), Pauline Glew (Sedlescombe), Alice Nolan (RALC Secretary), Karen Ripley (Salehurst & Robertsbridge), Keith Robertson – RALC Vice-Chairman (Catsfield), Natasha Vadorin (Beckley)	
3	<b>Accuracy of Minutes of the meeting held on 22 January *attached</b> AGREED To approve the Draft Minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2025 as an accurate record.	
4	<b>Matters arising or reports from Members from previous meetings</b> None reported.	
5	<b>Finance</b> A number of representatives could not recall having received the 2024-25 Accounts. These would be sent out again.	RALC Secretary to resend accounts.
6	<b>Highways</b> It was noted that James Kelly was unable to be present.	
7	<b>Rother District Council Update</b> Lorna Ford (LF) spoken to her presentation on local government re-organisation and devolution (attached).  Bexhill-on-Sea TC was concerned that if RDC decides to transfer any of its assets to local community organisations (rather than the relevant parish council) those assets could, at some point, be removed from public/community ownership. This was less likely to occur if the custodian was a local authority/council.  LF advised that, if transfer to a community organisation was being considered, RDC would consult with the appropriate parish council.  Sedlescombe reported that RDC is intending to allow a nail bar to occupy the Sedlescombe public convenience. It was doubtful that the business would be successful.	

	<p>LF advised that the process of identifying sustainable solutions for the District's public conveniences had been challenging. By attracting commercial interest it had been possible to ensure that a level of pc provision would continue.</p> <p>She emphasised that RDC is keen to ensure that the asset transfer process is undertaken in the best possible interests of local communities. She was aware that there may be small parcels of RDC land that have been overlooked. The TUPE Regulations would need to be considered as re-organisation progressed.</p> <p>The deadline for parish councils (and community groups) to formally express interest in taking on RDC assets is 30 September 2025. LF acknowledged that the timetable is short.</p> <p>RDC is in the process of recruiting a dedicated staff member to oversee the transfer process.</p> <p>Salehurst &amp; Robertsbridge observed that its lease with RDC on its public convenience will expire at some point. Given that the pc is not income-generating – and that RDC is being dissolved – could it have the freehold? LF considered this unlikely all the while the lease was ensuring the provision of public conveniences.</p> <p>Icklesham observed that it had been endeavouring to obtain the freeholds of two conveniences from RDC for over 3 years now. Both the Winchelsea and Winchelsea Beach pcs are in poor condition. They were built originally by Icklesham PC and then transferred to RDC. It would be wrong for RDC to profit from them being transferred to another organisation. The Rye Harbour facility (and car park) has demonstrated that Ickleham is capable of providing conveniences. Having the freeholds of the other two in the parish would provide it with the incentive to invest in them. It may be necessary to seek legal advice. Parish councils are best placed to determine what is the best interests of their communities. When public toilet provision is reduced it will be parish councils that end up fielding the complaints.</p> <p>Bexhill-on-Sea reported that it is intending to express interest in all of RDC's assets in Bexhill. Will these be transferred for free and will there be sufficient time to assess viability?</p> <p>LF responded that she is unable to prejudge Expression of Interest assessments – nor decisions of the Property &amp; Services Investment and Disposal Panel (PSIDP). She confirmed that EOIs could be withdrawn if the applicant concluded that it could not afford to maintain/provide an asset/service.</p> <p>Noting RDC's view that it is obliged to transfer revenue-generating assets to the proposed unitary, Bexhill-on-Sea observed that there is no guarantee that parish councils will continue to be exempted from the Excessive Council Tax Regulations.</p>	
--	--	--

	<p>Trevor Leggo (TL) reported that he and the NALC Chairman had, yesterday, attended a Ministerial meeting with Jim McMahon. He had advised that the Government has no intention of 'capping' parishes.</p> <p>Bexhill-on-Sea suggested that it is unrealistic to proceed on the basis that 'the precept' can be the sole source of funding for all the assets that could be transferred from RDC.</p> <p>LF advised that the Shadow Authority will have a veto on transfers.</p> <p>Sedlescombe reported it has been trying to acquire the freehold of RDC's conveniences there since 2015. It has no wish to commercialise them. Parishes are better placed to manage local assets. It would be a relatively simple process to transfer conveniences to parishes, along with some CIL funding.</p> <p>Bexhill-on-Sea observed that RDC maintains that it cannot transfer revenue-generating assets because it is bound by 'best consideration' – however, other principal authorities have not felt so constrained. LF observed that, unlike RDC, they were probably not running a deficit budget.</p> <p><i>LF left the meeting</i></p>	
8	<p><b>ESALC Update</b></p> <p>TL observed that there is a long history of local government re-organisation – it is not something to be feared.</p> <p>Until the situation becomes clearer, he suggested parishes should start to consider what RDC/ESCC assets/services were on their patch – and whether they be interested in taking them on. Town Councils in West Sussex have considered whether they could act as 'gateways' to the proposed West Sussex Unitary. For example, they could regularly host a planning officer and invite surrounding parishes.</p> <p>In Surrey, there is some competition – amongst those drafting possible unitary boundaries – to incorporate Gatwick and Crawley (which would bring financial benefits).</p> <p>Re-organisation provides parishes with an opportunity to take on assets/services.</p> <p>One of Bexhill-on-Sea's concerns is that RDC is discussing asset transfers with trusts and CICs – which would mean no local authority 'backstop'.</p> <p>TL flagged up Eastleigh Borough Council's Asset Transfer policy – which sees assets transferred for £1.</p> <p>Beckley expressed concern about how the proposed unitary would manage planning.</p> <p>Kathryn Field observed that some principal authorities have area planning committees.</p> <p>TL reported that the Home Secretary has instructed Chief Constables to prepare, by July, plans to have named officers the public could approach to report ASB. The officers would be expected to respond within 72 hours.</p> <p>The Sussex Rural Crime Team is to start village surgeries. It could take the Team a long time to work its way through 240 parishes!</p> <p>Brightling advised that it used to have regular Teams meetings with its PCSO – but the Police ended these on cost grounds.</p>	

9	<p><b>Climate Change</b></p> <p>Kathryn Field (KF) spoke to her presentation (APPENDIX)</p> <p>Battle observed that there is, as yet, no evidence of a footpath being provided from the Blackfriars development to the Railway Station. Without one, the new residents are likely to make the journey by car. Will RDC compulsory purchase the land required?</p> <p>KF advised that this is a matter for the Rother Housing Company.</p> <p>Sedlescombe observed that most parishes are trying to do something to support the green agenda – even if it is just creating wild flower verges. In Sedlescombe, RDC provided grant funding to decarbonise the playing field, pavilion and village hall. Consequently their energy cost is now zero.</p> <p>Icklesham advised that Elize Manning (RDC) is an excellent source of advice.</p>	
10	<p><b>Local Government Re-organisation &amp; Devolution – working group</b></p> <p>The Chairman asked if this was of interest.</p> <p>Sedlescombe recalled the meeting that was held between those parishes with RDC conveniences and their Ward Members. Nothing appears to have come of it.</p> <p>KF had raised the concerns identified at the next RDC Cabinet Away Day.</p> <p>Icklesham has the impression that many District and County Members support conveniences being transferred to parishes.</p> <p>Sedlescombe asked if KF could make representations to the PSIPD. KF indicated that she could try.</p> <p>Sedlescombe observed that most PSIPD members represent Bexhill wards.</p> <p>TL reported that WSCC had employed a project co-ordinator to oversee LGR &amp; devolution. ESCC does not appear to have done the same. The RDC LGR process appears to lack an appeal mechanism.</p> <p>Bexhill-on-Sea was concerned that parishes have just 4 months to assess what RDC assets/services they are interested in.</p> <p>TL offered to facilitate a meeting, provisionally in June, between Rother parishes and the Leaders of ESCC and RDC. Parishes would be invited to submit questions for them to consider in advance.</p> <p>Sedlescombe suggested that RDC Ward Members should be invited.</p>	
	<p><b>Confirm date of next meeting: 23 July 2025.</b></p>	