

ROTHER ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS (RALC)

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

Present David Young (Ewhurst & RALC Chair), Keith Robertson (Catsfield & RALC Vice-Chair), Philip Allard (Iden), Jonathan Vine-Hall (Sedlescombe), Sam Dugan (Brightling), Margaret Howell (Battle), Lynda Roller (Crowhurst), Martin Griffiths (Brede and Guestling), Jaqui Stanford (Icklesham), Jenner Sands (Icklesham), Karen Ripley (Salehurst & Robertsbridge), Tracy Dixon (Brede and Whatlington), Jacqui Harding (Northiam), Graham Peters (Bodiam), Nigel Jacklin (Bexhill-on-Sea), Michelle Webber (Bexhill-on-Sea), Julie Ramus (Rye Foreign), David Penfold (Pett), John Barnes (Etchingham), Mary Philo (Beckley, Iden, Pett), Butta Singh (RDC), Alice Nolan (RALC Clerk & RDC)

	Agenda Item	Action
1	Welcome The Chair welcomed attendees.	
2	Apologies for absence Apologies were noted from Geoff Thomas (Crowhurst), Robert Franklin (Burwash), Paulette Barton (Etchingham), David Todd (Salehurst & Robertsbridge), Richard Farhall (Rye and Ewhurst), Memish Hussein (Bexhill-on-Sea)	
3	Accuracy of Minutes of the meeting held on 23 July *attached AGREED To approve the Draft Minutes of the meeting held on 23 April 2025 as an accurate record.	
4	Matters arising or reports from Members from previous meetings RALC Vice-Chair: The transactions for this year's accounts are due to be confirmed soon. The accounts will be published online as soon as possible. Finances – Rother Association of Local Councils RALC Chair: Proposals regarding RALC priorities were discussed under item six. It was noted that there are ongoing concerns about the availability of information for town and parish councils. Brede/Guestling: At the last meeting, Trevor Leggo (ESALC) offered to facilitate a meeting on Local Government Reorganisation however an update on this has not been received by RALC members. Bexhill-on-Sea: An informal meeting hosted by Bexhill-on-Sea TC took place on 23 June, however no new information was shared, and this was not a formal RALC meeting. It was agreed that the RALC representatives on ESALC will follow this up. There are ongoing concerns about the transfer of assets by Rother District Council (RDC) and a meeting would be welcomed to discuss a way forward on this. It was noted by the representative for Etchingham	RALC representatives on ESALC will follow up on a potential meeting to discuss LGR.

	that the neighbouring authority in Wealden is placing higher value on community benefit.	
5	Update from Rother District Council (RDC)	
5a	Update on Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution Butta Singh (RDC, Director of Governance and Community Services, Monitoring Officer) presented an update, and the following points were noted: • The consultation on the Mayoral Strategic Authority has concluded and elections for Mayor are due to take place in May next year. • The business case for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) is under development and is due to be submitted in September. Following this, Ministers will consider the final proposal and provide feedback. The unitary council(s) will come into effect from April 2028. Butta has previously worked at a unitary council and noted how the area covered is much greater- this will inevitably impact on town and parish councils. • Several engagement activities have been carried out, including a public survey that ran for six weeks and received over 5,500 responses. A focus group session was also run in each district/borough and members of this were recruited via the public survey. • The final business case will be reported to Overview and Scrutiny, Council, and Cabinet in September. Cabinet members will make the final decision as per the government legislation. The business case itself puts forward a proposal for a single council for East Sussex. It is being developed by all six councils in East Sussex. • The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill was introduced earlier this month. The Bill provides further information on the Mayoral Strategic Authority, its remit, and how elections will take place. The authority will be known as the SBCCA- Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority. Bexhill-on-Sea: When will the public be able to vote on who represents them? RDC: They will vote for the shadow unitary council in April 2027. At this stage, it is uncertain how the process of LGR will affect town and parish council elections. It is unlikely that there will be district council elections. Sedlescombe: How will the mayor make decisions if they are elected before their constituent members from unitary authorities? <i>Post-meeting note: It is likely that two councillors from each of the existing upper tier authorities (i.e. East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council, and Brighton & Hove City Council) will be constituent members until 1 April 2027.</i> Etchingam: The potential for different boundary options in Brighton & Hove City Council is noted. The impact of a smaller population on the	

	delivery of services should be highlighted in the business case.	
5b	Possible methods of community engagement Alice Nolan (RDC, Policy Officer) presented an update, and the following points were noted: • There has been a clear steer from the government on what is expected in terms of community engagement. It believes that Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) should facilitate better engagement, and the favoured model is Neighbourhood Area Committees. These may include other local stakeholders but ultimately powers are exercised by the unitary authority councillors. The Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill also introduces a new duty on local authorities to make appropriate arrangements for effective governance of any neighbourhood area. • Neighbourhood Area Committees, or similar equivalents, are already in place in some areas, notably Cornwall, Wiltshire, Somerset, and Buckinghamshire. All these areas have partnership models that include unitary and town/parish councillors, emergency services, strategic partners etc. and their structure is comparable to existing Local Strategic Partnership models. The groups meet in public, and most have oversight of small grants. All groups identify local priorities and form action plans. It is believed that the groups have strengthened relations with town and parish councils and communication with residents. However, it is essential to consider funding and resourcing of the boards, as well as who is involved in their development (to ensure there are no unequal partners). Chair: This presents an opportunity to look at where we want to be and how that fits in with plans for LGR. Etchingham: It may be worthwhile to consider co-funding arrangements to support resourcing and strengthen the commitment of those involved. Sedlescombe: Is there a risk that this could disempower ward councillors? Should we issue a survey on whether we think area boards are the best practice? Bexhill-on-Sea: It would be good to consider funding for those who represent localities. RDC: Area boards encompass multiple stakeholders, so while town and parish councils would likely be involved, it will also include other groups who should be considered equal partners. There may be merit in coming together as RALC members to determine priorities however the set up and arrangements for community engagement will ultimately be determined by the unitary council.	
6	Rural Parishes Forum Brightling Parish Council proposed that a formal Rural Parishes Forum	RALC Clerk to add Brightling's note in full

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