

ROTHER ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS (RALC)

Quarterly Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on 14th April 2026, 13:00 in the Chambers at RDC Offices, Bexhill Town Hall

Attendees: Keith Robertson (Catsfield & RALC Chair), Martin Griffiths (Brede and Guestling and RALC Vice Chair), Margaret Howell (Battle), David Todd (Salehurst & Robertsbridge), Karen Ripley (Salehurst & Robertsbridge), Jenner Sands (Icklesham), Tracy Dixon (Brede and Whatlington), David Penfold (Pett), Al Evans (Pett), Linda Roller (Crowhurst), Geoffrey Smith (Fairlight), Nigel Jacklin (Bexhill), Memish Huseyin (Bexhill), Jonathan Vine-Hall (Sedlescombe), Sue Prochak (Rother District Council), Lorna Ford (RDC), Dale Wheeler (Battle), Greta Anderson (Sedlescombe) and Vicki Rutt (Catsfield Clerk and RALC Secretary).

Agenda Item	Action
1 Welcome The Chair welcomed attendees.	
2 Apologies for absence Apologies noted from Emma Neil (Burwash), Geoff Thomas (Crowhurst) and Richard Farhall (Rye).	
3 Accuracy of Minutes of the meeting held on 14th January 2026 RESOLVED: To approve the draft minutes of the meeting held on 14 th January 2026 as an accurate record.	
4 Matters arising or reports from Members from previous meetings and Chairmans report No matters were arising. The Chairmans report was circulated to all.	
5 Update from NALC Keith attended a NALC meeting in London, key points raised were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At the National Assembly held in March, it was updated that NALC are waiting for legislation to be tightened regarding Councillor conduct. We await an update. - NALC are doing a review on what they want to do in the future. There may be a consultation on this in due course. 	
6 Use of AI in local Councils Keith reported that the use of AI was recently discussed at the eSALC Board and the Clerks conference. Some Councils are using AI to reduce their workloads, but it was agreed there should be best practice set by eSALC. Examples were given by members when they have used AI in both professional and personal capacity and whilst it is a great tool, it is not perfect and the content still needs to be checked. The data can't be trusted and sometimes it is advised to use a few different AI tools to ensure the information is accurate. Lorna explained they are using IT within RDC, they are using co-pilot and are looking at a policy for use. Lorna reported that they have someone within RDC who is leading on this and would be happy for them to give a short presentation at a RALC meeting on how they are using it and the pitfalls. Keith thanked Lorna and Vicki will arrange this. Action 1. Keith reported that eSALC will set up a working group to look at this further, Greta asked could the working party look at the environmental impact and the ethics of using AI.	
7 To consider RALC responses to Consultations KR raised this at eSALC as it has come up a few times about whether RALC should be responding to consultations such as NPPF and the Rother Local Plan. RALC would not	

	<p>respond on local issues, it would be from a strategic point of view. A discussion took place on how RALC could obtain the views from across the district in order to form a collective response. Whilst further work is needed on how it would be done, members agreed it is a good idea. Concern was raised that would it reduce the impact on a consultation if just one response and not all the Parish and Town Councils. It was agreed it would only be for strategic consultations so that should not be an issue. Sue stated it was a good idea and worth trying, but as there are so many consultations, RALC would need to pick and choose which ones to respond to. It was agreed that the RALC Exec group would explore this further. Action 2.</p>	
8	<p>Faster / effective communications - Member surveys Keith raised the slow communication between meetings, we can't always wait for the next response in order to obtain feedback. It was agreed that Vicki would trial Google forms to obtain views, one will come out in due course about the RALC meeting set up and the website. A discussion took place on how to ensure the list of Clerks and reps is kept up to date, Karen shared a historic form which will be coming out from Vicki in the coming weeks. Action 3.</p>	
9	<p>Update on RALC website Vicki reported that she has been updating the RALC website with all the meetings that have been held, not just the quarterly ones so members can see what is being discussed. There is also going to be a 'news' tab. If all members could review and as raised above, a survey will be out in due course to obtain feedback on the current content and if there is anything further that RALC members would like to see on the website.</p>	
10	<p>LGR Update Update from RDC Martin updated that when concerns were raised on what it would look like when the Unitary comes into place for Parish and Town Councils, they started looking at options. A working group was set up which had a broad membership who have been discussing the options and have liaised with both Tandridge District Council and Somerset Council to learn what path they have gone from and obtain feedback. Keith and Martin have produced a paper (<i>draft copy was circulated prior to the meeting and is available on the RALC website</i>) which are committees set up based on the existing local and district associations. Further work is needed to look at the terms of reference for the group and look at how it would link in with the Scrutiny Committee. Martin then passed to Keith to give the information on the draft proposal document. To consider a proposal from the RALC LGR working group Keith updated that the strategic authority is meeting on Wednesday 15th April to appoint 6 members, which will be 2 from each area: East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton. They will be in post until the 7th May. Following that there be an additional 6 more appointments to that board who will be associate members. No committee have ever given a post on that board to a representative of Parish or Town Councils before, but their voice is needed so eSALC are putting forward a bid to be on the board. No unitary boundary has been agreed as the Gov has delayed the decision for further consultation. It is clear that when the Unitary comes into play, Districts Council will go so RALC's constitution will need to change. Lorna updated that as Keith mentioned, the Government has not made their decision yet, a consultation will commence after the elections in May, and it is likely to be a short consultation. The Government liked the One East Sussex proposal in principle; they just</p>	

	<p>want to make some boundary changes. There is change coming and we need to ensure that RALC remains relevant. NALC is also reviewing what they do.</p> <p>Members were asked if they agreed with the draft in principle, approval was shared so next steps is for members to share the draft document with their Full Councils to obtain their views. Action 4. Sue wished to compliment and applaud Keith and Martin on all their hard work on this. It was agreed that further works need to look at the terms of reference, the committee structure etc, the staffing and resources etc but Lorna explained that whilst these items do need looking at, there is no immediate rush and she shared a slide with the updated timeline, information copied below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 2026 – Start of Sussex and Brighton Strategic Authority • May 2026 – Election of ESCC • May/June 2026 – Additional Government Consultation • May 2027 – Expected election of Cllrs to ESCC in preparation of unitary. • April 2028 – Start of new unitary authority (vesting day) • May 2028 – Election of Mayor <p>David Todd explained that it will be very important to look at the transition and getting the balance right is important. Noted that we could begin to invite other stakeholders to RALC meetings to test how future meetings could best work.</p>	
<p>11</p>	<p>To consider a draft proposed RALC complaints handling procedure</p> <p>Martin explained that RDC have been looking at the complaints they receive and the volume of which are Cllr v Cllr. In the last six months, there has been 11. It was agreed to seek the views of RALC members on whether they would support forming a panel with Chairs of other councils would sit on, to see if they can help with an informal process to try to reduce the number of complaints going to the formal process. Initial conversations with RDC have been positive and they have supported the brief proposal that has been put forward. Concerns were raised that it could feel the members were being judged by a peer, however Martin confirmed it would be a conversation rather than a judgement. This process would only be dealing with Cllr v Cllr complaints and not member of public complaints in the initial stage. Lorna explained that it would need to be shown in a flowchart as a pre-complaint stage to RDC’s pre triage process. Lorna also explained that RDC do not have a Monitoring Officer at the moment, but that Mark Watkins is joining as a Locum interim Monitoring Officer whilst they discuss and recruit. Sue suggested that standards training should be encouraged for all Cllrs and Clerks to attend to try and stop the issue progressing to a complaint. Members agreed with the draft proposal.</p> <p>To appoint a new RALC member to the Standards Committee</p> <p>It was agreed that David Penfold would replace Keith on the Standards Committee.</p>	
<p>12</p>	<p>Update from a meeting with Highways and Balfour Beaty at ESALC board meeting</p> <p>Keith recently attended an eSALC board meeting which was held at the Highways depot in Ringmer. He stated it was a similar presentation from previous, but they confirmed that the £27m budget for 2026-27 will not be sufficient to make significant progress on improving the state of our roads. Members were asked is this something that RALC want to push back on, in support with other Town and Parish Councils. It was agreed this could be the first strategic item that views could be sought on. Keith will ask David Todd to lead on reinvigorating the issue of the state of the roads, as he leads on transport for RALC.</p> <p>Action 4.</p>	

13	Future business - Members to suggest specific items for July 2026 meeting and agree venue Wednesday 8 th July 2026, 13:00 – 15:00 in Chambers at RDC Office, Bexhill Town Hall. <i>This is subject to change pending the views from the upcoming members survey.</i>	
-----------	--	--

Meeting ended at 14:50