

Notice; This written transcript of Item 8 of the Rother District Council (RDC) Full Council meeting on 18th December 2018 has been produced from the audio recording made available on the council's website.

The transcription has been produced as accurately as possible, given that some parts of the audio are indistinct. Some audio passages have been clarified using contemporaneous notes made by persons attending the council meetings.

However, no warrantee is given as to complete accuracy. If this text is to be used in a legal setting additional checks should be made using both the video recording soundtrack that was also made and the RDC's audio soundtrack.

Transcription

ROTHER DISTRICT FULL COUNCIL MEETING, 18th DECEMBER 2017

CHAIR, COUNCILLOR MRS MARY BARNES (In script, written as Madam Chairman.)

Madam Chairman Now, we are on Item Eight, to receive the Reference Report and Minority Report on the Community Governance Review for Bexhill-on-Sea and determine the final recommendation. It's quite clear from the debates that have been held by the Community Governance Review Group, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet that members want a full and thorough debate on all four options before coming to final recommendation. Therefore, before I ask the Leader of the Council to move the report of Cabinet and to initiate the debate on the Community Governance Review of Bexhill-on-Sea, I would like to advise all Members that in order for a full and thorough debate to be had, I will not be accepting any motions in support of any one option until all four options have been thoroughly debated and could I just, at this point, remind Members of the public, that we, this is such an important debate, it would help considerably if you didn't add too much vocal pressure to those who may find it difficult to speak in public, and I would crave your indulgence on this. I'm afraid I'm going to be pretty fierce about this because it is such an important debate. I crave your indulgence; I hope we all get through this in a very civilised sort of manner but I would now like to call Councillor Maynard.

Councillor Carl Maynard Thank you very much indeed Madam Chairman and in order to, to get the debate up and running, let me first move that the Minority Report and indeed the Governance Report be received and initiate that Council procedure rule 14.4, so that's the content and length of speeches, and 14.5 when a member may speak again be way for the discussion of this item and let's be absolutely clear that so that Members get an opportunity not to speak once but also if they want to speak again, they get an opportunity to do so, so that we have their fulsome debate that you've alluded to.

Madam Chairman Thank you. A seconder for that? Thank you, Councillor Kenward. All those in favour? Anybody against that? No. Thank you. Four, four of you.

Cllr Susan Prochak Before the debate starts, could I move that we have a recorded vote; I need three other members to stand with me. Could we have recorded vote?

Madam Chairman Yes, of course. And three of you are; that's absolutely fine. Thank you very much.

Councillor Carl Maynard I believe, on a point of order, it's actually four, so there we go.

Madam Chairman Thank you very much. Right, who would like to speak first. Oh, OK. Cllr. HHollidge.

Councillor Ian Hollidge Thank your Madam Chair, thank you very much. Before I start the debate, I would just like to congratulate all Rother Officers for the professional way they've conducted this review for their hard work and sometimes difficult in conducting this review; they've done it extremely well. One of the questions that I've been asking those that have been calling for a vote is that what can a town council do that isn't already being done or can't be done without one. I've read every report, especially the Minority Report that has recently come through and I refer to clause 35 where in clause 35 it says 'we are sure the residents of Bexhill wish to enhance all the services offered to tax payers and I truly believe that we all agree with that. Every one who lives, works and visits Bexhill from communities in Normans Bay, Ravenside, Pebsham, Glyne Gap, town centre, De La Warr pavilion, over the Worsham, or Worsham, we all want enhanced services, yes we all want a better Bexhill and we are all in it together. The other phrase that's been quoted a lot is "no taxation without representation". Well, there is already taxation, there's Government taxes, there's East Sussex County Council taxes, Rother District taxes, numerous other direct and indirect taxes.

I think there's too much taxation already. The representation, Bexhill residents are always, already represented with an MEP, an MP, a county councillors, Rother Councillors. I think we already have more than enough representation. The Conservative policy is one of low taxation, free choice and competition. Tax raising measures are not welcome if they can be avoided and provide the same or enhance services, that's the way forward – the future that I want to be part of. Keeping taxes low is helping those who are just about managing. The reasons why a petition for an area committee and a governance review was first brought forward, with thousands opting for a town council. Those reasons must be understood, dissected and addressed. Those reasons must be respected. The excellent Town Hall Forum has been discussing governance for over seven years, requesting that Rother District Councils involve people of Bexhill in all its plans. Well, there's 26 thousand residents on My Alerts who are asked to comment on the DASA (the Development and Site Allocation Plan). It was an excellent presentation by Rother Officers at the Town Forum. Every councillor had a document. I directed many people to comment on that document and other communication methods which were used as well. Despite all the efforts to make comments and views known on policies BX 12, 13 and 14 which were Bexhill Town Centre, the primary shopping area and the cultural area, only five people commented on the town centre, three on the primary shopping centre and four on the cultural area. Why is it that given the opportunity to play a part on the future the town, there are so few real suggestions. Completely and utterly bizarre. They ask for a chance to get involved and then people don't. However, there was some very sensible comments out of those few that made ideas and they will be noted and I am sure brought forward into plans. So although their opportunity to have a say wasn't taken, I understand after being at most of Bexhill's Forums over the last eight years that many people are unhappy about the services and decisions that Rother make. They're not happy about the parking enforcement, they're not happy about the litter, potholes, etc. However, there have been tones, sometimes, at those Forum meetings that have been anti-Rother, something that I found totally unnecessary and an obstruction to progress. Whatever the decision tonight is made, democratically, by the Council, I think that there are three important things

that need to happen. One is we need to address the concerns of those who want a town council by continuing to be open about the decision making process not treating the public as though they're from Jenny Joseph's 'When I'm old' poem. Keep everything good, keep everything good what we have in place for those who, after seven years of campaigning for a community governance review, chose to not take part. We do need to reform and improve the services by developing partnerships, working with community groups to serve their aims, invest in projects similar to what we were talking about earlier and use statutory powers where there is a log-jam in that process. We both want to get to the top of the mountain, we are both choosing different routes. I'll miss the next bit out, Joy, right. When given the opportunity for a governance review, I thought 'wow, this is fantastic'. Of the Bexhill nine wards, Sackville ward covers Ravenside Retail Park, Bexhill Swimming Pool, Cafe on the Beach, Galley Hill Play Area, Bexhill Sea-Angling Angling Club, Bexhill Amateur Boxing Club, Bexhill Sailing Club, Old Station, Manor Barn, East Parade with four grade-two listed shelters, five places of worship (St Barnabus and St Mary's – also grade two listed), eight hotels and pubs and a new 41 luxury apartments at South Beach, near the station, where high speed rail will soon – hopefully, possibly – be arriving and we've got five thousand residents there who live near ancient woodland. This is about the same population as Rye and just under Battle, so why can't Sackville ward just have a parish, or even a town council? Then we could raise a precept, we could res, preserve the shelters, create a new building for the angling club, boxing club, improve East Parade toilet facilities and the landscaping. I estimate about a million pounds; well, that would work. So, just travelling around, I haven't been asking the people in Bexhill, I've been asking random people, and in Bexhill, what about they think about a town council. I was in a bar last week, not always but I was last week, casually asked the barmaid what does she think of a town council. Her reply came back 'Is that a new pub?' . I said 'No, it's another tax raising body that will make decisions for Bexhill'. Her reply, and I quote, 'What do we need that for?' However, considering all the four options to improve Bexhill, I think none of them are ideal, they could all improve Bexhill but they have potential risks. The no change option – there already are residents', community groups, sports, social clubs, as well as the De La Warr and businesses that work together to create Bexhill as a unique place to live, work and visit. They raise funds in their own right, through numerous sources collated by the, the excellent Rother Bexhill Voluntary Action, or with Rother District Council's assistance through their Community Grant Scheme. Politicians, I believe, haven't explained that we are in a post-growth economy. Austerity is the wrong word, it should be living within our means, catering for need and not greed. However, I believe we can work smarter, we can work harder, and we can make improvements to be achieved through economies of scale, joint working and partnerships. So, Bexhill can and will improve, even if we vote for no change. The town council, this I could see bring many advantages to the different geographical areas and diverse communities. Although the area is large – 10 kilometres of coastline, urban, village and rural, all in one town, as well as a major trunk road, new housing and development and employment sites, it could be a good time to rebrand, create a new identity for the old – I wasn't pointing, 'cos you are Old Town – for the old and new and our expanding town.

This depends entirely if a town council's division is for progress, and working with the district, county, Westminster, European rules and guidance, and not be a barrier to improvements; not taken over by people against progress. I can see that a new body could work to improve road safety, driver behaviour, stop littering, stop fly posting, even better parks, improve verge maintenance, public realm and restore our built environment, it could make toilets an enjoyable place to visit, reducing trips and falls on our pavements.

Although, there are already community groups that carry out this work: Heart of Sidley, Bexhill Alliance, do good work, Bexhill in Bloom, Bexhill Environment Group. We congratulate you all; you've done excellent work and we will continue to work with you because Bexhill does need to improve and it would improve even if we had a town council, it would work. The area committee option: this was the original petition and really it replicates the aspirations of a town council. One of the quotes on the petition was about allowing people to express their concerns. That, if you read the letters page, or go onto Facebook of Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex, Rother Councillors, the MP, fly posting, even walking around town with a sandwich board, with a board on you; there're already ways to express your concerns. The area committee could work with local employers and businesses to create opportunities, that was another part of the petition. The Bexhill Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses, the De La Warr Pavilion's jobs fair, The Bexhill College Hive, Bexhill Town Team, Bexhill Coastal community Teams, etc.: they already engage with the businesses; that work is being carried on as we speak. The, er, could make decisions on local issues, well, you can, however, only if they align with what Rother District Council's core strategies, aims are, their aspirations; the same as they've got to align with what East Sussex do, what the Government does, what the EU rules are. It must align with everybody's needs in order to be successful and work. It's no good having a piece of a jigsaw over here, if it doesn't fit into the picture over on that side. The other question that I do raise and concerned about, was part of that petition, it stated, and I quote: "decisions to stop projects that do not deliver direct advantages". Now, this was part of the problem or how it all started. The Next Wave has regenerated the De La Warr Pavilion, together with the Combe Valley Way, which was called the Link Road, it's made Bexhill a better place to live, visit and set up a business. These are the reason why businesses are moving here, because of that progress that's been made and Rother Officers deserve congratulations for the work that they've done there. The area committee petition was partly because organised, question Marina Gardens - they questioned the seafront pedestrian improvements but these projects have been successful; they've delivered exactly what Tim Gale set out in 2002 proposals. Fifteen years, and we're not entirely there yet – that's how long it's it's taken to get as far as we have but there's still been – I'm going off script here – so, yes, there are advantages in the public and elected councillors talking, however, these mechanisms are already in place. So, not so sure about the area committee. Four parishes: now splitting Bexhill into four parishes for more local governance with elected councillors to give advantages by residents and raising precept, that, I thought, was quite a good idea and the distinct advantage of this structure is that it replicates the East Sussex County Council boundaries, meaning their county councillor could be more accountable to their residents. Most of the complaints that I have received, and I have only had ten people emailing me about the Governance Review, but I probably get ten a day on parking, planing and other issues; most of the issues that concern residents are grass cutting, potholes, parking, verges, road signs, obstructions, poor pavement qualities, traffic congestion, pollution, and most of those fall with East Sussex County Council. So, is very little that a town council can over-do to relieve those problems. Also, contrary to the question – I know it does sub-divide – but this is - you have got to put a line somewhere: Bexhill North could include Sidley West, Glenleigh Park and Bexhill North; Bexhill South would be the town centre, Old Town, Ravenside and the Seafront; Bexhill East, with Sidley, East Pebsham, Worsham, Combe Valley Countryside Park and Bexhill West: Norman's Bay, Pevensey Marsh, Barnhorn, Cooden, Collington and Little Common. So that could work. I'll leave out the next bit, Joy. Another thing that happened to me when I was just trying to enjoy myself over Christmas, was, I went to Polegate with the family and a campaigning lady approached me

with a clipboard asking my wife and I to sign a petition to stop their library closing. Well, there we are with the grandchildren and enjoying everything, quite happy going on a steam train at Polegate which I thought was exciting, um, a polite, she politely asked why I haven't commented. So, then I replied 'would she prefer tax payers' money to be spent looking after the elderly, especially who need specialist care, the children who need support, improved schools, potholes filled, improved roads and pavements, grass cut; or would she prefer it spent on a library?', and she just asked: 'are you a councillor?', didn't uh reply, but the point about this is, this is the point, that Polegate has a town council, it has councillors who are town councillors, Wealdon District Councillors, East Sussex County Councillors and they're still having to rely on the public to solve the problems in their community. The question the lady, I think, should have been asking me was: 'can you help keep our library open by volunteering in some way?'

Madam Chairman Councillor Hollidge, can I just say, quietly, you've taken quite a long time.

Councillor Ian Hollidge Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair By all means, come back but I think we really now need to give someone else a time, a turn, and that's Councillor Lord Amphill, is next.

Councillor Lord Amphill Thank you, Madam Chairman, I think it's important that I reaffirm my personal interest in this, in this matter as President of the East Sussex Association of Local Councils and say something about it. This is a support body or towns and parishes in the county; it links with NALC, the national body and with RALC, the Rother body. Officers of East SALC, as many know have been engaged all this year, and earlier, in supplying information to anybody who wants it on what towns and parishes can do, if they put their minds to it. The scope is wide and can be particularly effective, if local councillors will work in partnership with county and district councils, complementing, adding to what the principle authorities are getting up to, and dreaming up initiatives for the betterment of their neighbourhoods. East SALC Officers training for councillors and clerks, employment and legal advice and guidance and encouragement on all aspects of local council life. They're very busy indeed. The county council spends hundreds of millions every year on a range of strategic services, for instance, Adult Social Care - a large part of their budget - and Rother will spend 48 million in the current year on about 60 different services. As members know, these include planning, waste collection and recycling, environmental health licensing, distribution of housing benefit, collecting taxes, running elections, etc., etc. Many of these cannot be devolved. More likely, Rother will work closely with other authorities, such as Wealdon and Hastings, in order to achieve economies of scale. This is going across a number of our services but it is possible that services which are cut by some authorities, or can no longer be provided for some reason or another, could be undertaken by parishes. For much of this year's meetings have discussed process in the build-up to a council decision which will happen this evening on the future governance of Bexhill. There has been little deliberation on the merits of an area committee which was called for in the petition last year. Actually, our Overview and Scrutiny Committee looked at this option in great detail in 2005 and left the matter open. There were very few successful examples to draw on, and it was never determined who would provide a budget for such a committee which would have tax raising powers, because that's what councillors do; area

committees would not. Nor has there been, much examination of the advantages arising from creating a number of parishes for Bexhill. Could the town be split into natural neighbourhoods? Who has explained what those might be? The North, South, East, West option was designed not necessarily to take place but to stimulate discussion and that never really happened.

There are more than nine thousand parishes and town councils in England, serving around 16 million people; only a fraction of them hold contested elections which does not detract from their value. In East Sussex there are 102 and in our own district, 31. In Rother, in 2015, six parishes held contested elections; there are 20 rural members attend all 31 of them so that there is a flow of information and mutual commitment. Some councils will be busier and more enterprising than others. Examination of existing parish precepts will reveal to what extent our residents in the villages, from a tiny tax base, have to put their hands in their pockets in order to raise some tens of thousands of pounds, so that their parishes have a budget with which to do something and make a difference. We've been looking into exactly what it might cost a Band D Bexhill resident in order to set up a town council for Bexhill.

Let us say, it might cost a 100 thousand pounds to set up a town clerk, an assistant and rent offices, and so forth. That would cost six pounds on a Band D bill. For every extra half a million, and there's no point in having a council which does nothing, that would add thirty pounds to a band D bill. A disappointment to me of this year's prolonged debate is that I've heard so little about the aspirations of those seeking a town council. Again, it's all been about process. The conversation through out the year has been on the edge side, with the repeated assertion that the majority group here has long since decided, or been told what to do. You've heard this evening that this is not the case. I have long been minded to support a town council for Bexhill; I've been a member of both Rye Town Council and of East Grinstead Council and know what such organisations can do. It is important to keep politics out of parish affairs. I dare say next to impossible but we should all try. We all know that the hot lights of Momentum are set on defenestrating the member of parliament of Hastings and Rye at the next general election but, to me, it's a disappointment that Labour activists have been so prominent in this business. I do not quibble at much in the magic yellow leaflet that went round but it is disingenuous to state that the Democracy for Bexhill is a non-political group of Bexhill residents; it goes beyond that. In the great Brexit referendum, which I believe should never have taken place, 17.5 million people voted to leave the European Union and 16.1 million voted to remain, on a turn-out of 72% . Actually, in Rother, on a 79% turnout, the figures were 34,000 to leave and 24,000 to remain. What has been taking place in Bexhill is not a formal vote; it's an inclination of public opinion. I told myself at the beginning that, if that indication got close to 10,000 signatures or written expressions of opinion, that would be sufficient to start the process with the establishment of a town council. That being the case, I am minded to vote for a town council when Madam Chairman is ready to take a motion.

Madam Chairman Thank you very much, Lord Ampthill. Councillor Earl.

Councillor Stuart Earl Thank you, Madam Chairman, I've made no secret at all since the beginning of this campaign, when the late John Lee, who was so passionate about Bexhill in its self governance. I just read something that was in the document of the earlier discussion about neighbourhood planning and one of the little comments, under 20, was to give communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and deliver sustainable development they may need.

Well, I feel very strongly about what we could do. Instead of being so divisive an issue, I genuinely feel that this is an opportunity for the whole of Rother to benefit from the opportunity of having, Bexhill having a town council. Some of the constraints that have been put upon Rother by funding issues, generally; our inability to actually be able to raise taxes many years ago, and being capped all that time, has always put pressure on the ability of our council to, to spend. We have been extremely fortunate with the level of expertise within our Finance Department in Rother and I hold everybody on this council in great respect because they have got the courage to stand for election to actually stand up and say what they believe. We may have our spats and our arguments and disagreements but we all, I believe, genuinely care for where we live.

My belief has never been that this is something to be taken away from Rother, but something to add to Rother. If we had the opportunity to have a town council that could take over certain responsibilities from the District Council, it could free up funds within Rother to spend on other issues. Many people who are not in paying council tax, it will not affect but the quality of what we can deliver by having our own precept, and may be improve where Rother stuck for cash to improve certain items, we could do it; but it needs to be honestly delivered and honestly spoken about, not in a poisonous way that somebody has a different opinion and I say it's rubbish, but in a positive way. If we went, as Bexhill Councillors, on a Bexhill town council to the public of Bexhill and were honest from the day one, that the precept we were going to set, was going to cover a certain plan, and certain objectives over the four year period, we would raise that money, have a programme and spend. That would not affect the ability or the constraints that Rother currently face; it wouldn't affect that at all but it would restore some civic pride and involvement within the community. We heard this evening about the wonderful work that has been done in Sidley with the introduction of the new sports facilities - hopefully, and we also know that Rother are really planning and working hard to deliver a new leisure centre in Bexhill. Wouldn't it be better if they had a little more cash to do that with and couldn't we all be proud of where we live and what we are achieving for those we represent? I have never ever believed it's anything more than a privilege when we stand for election and the community put their trust in each and everyone of us, that we will do our best, for them - and I don't want to spark a riot - but not on a political, party political basis but as people in our community, how we are respected, but the fact that we do try to work together for the benefit of everyone of our residents. Now, there will always be disagreements, there will always be different routes of achievement and some of the things that Councillor Hollidge has mentioned this evening, and Lord Amptill, all the things are positives.

So, instead of turning this debate into a negative, where we have a choice of yes or no to a town council, the people of Bexhill, those that bothered, those are people who do care, overwhelmingly said they wanted a town council. We should have the courage and the respect for them to make it work for the benefit of everybody. Every resident of Rother would benefit if Bexhill had its own self determination. I'd like, obviously, to join the debate later on and not go on and on and on. I don't want people to fall asleep, but I do feel passionately about Bexhill. I do feel passionately about the services we offer and where we can improve and where we can help one another to improve. So, in, rather than us being divided by making it four parishes, which would definitely not be affordable – long term, and it would set one side of the road against the other if work was done. Instead of going down that route, let us think collectively what we can do for the benefit of the residents. Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman Thank you very much indeed, Councillor Earl.

Who have we got next? Councillor Clark.

Councillor Charles Clark Thank you, Chairman. Well, anybody doesn't know me, I'm Councillor Charles Clark. I'm Independent so no one's telling me how to vote.

Madam Chairman Oh, sorry. Sorry, would you mind addressing the Chair. Sorry, I'm probably not much to look at but, on the other hand, that's how it goes.

Councillor Charles Clark (*Script in italics indicates poor quality/volume of recording.*)
Em, I'm quite surprised at Councillor Hollidge's ramble 'cos he, he basically said ' don't need a town council 'cos Rother does all that anyway'. So if that's the case, we can disband Rye Town Council, we can disband Battle Town Council 'cos we can do it all for 'em. He's in, actually, in conflict with the comments of Lord Ampthill. There are nine thousand town and parish councils in England, representing sixteen million residents and it is estimated one billion pounds is invested in our communities every year and that is a fact. First of all, the council made a massive mistake when they refused to spend ten thousand pounds so that every home in Bexhill would receive a voting card and I believe they actually know that and it would be honest to admit that. We would not have received nine thousand replies if it had not been for the efforts of Democracy for Bexhill – like them or not ; you have to set that as a fact.

Every ward in Bexhill received over ninety percent in favour of a town council. If we are to carry out the wishes of these residents, we have to have a town council. It is very rare for a town of forty thousand residents not to have a town council. The Government is encouraging councils to devolve democracy to local level with *services and building* and I believe politicians are about as popular as tax man, estate agents and cold callers and the reason for that is they don't think we listen to 'em.

We talk down to them and we don't tell them, we always tell them we know best, we're not listening to you. Until that changes, two thirds of local residents will continue and not to bother to vote in local elections. When we look at the options, I was amazed that more people didn't opt for Option One. If as Councillor Hollidge says, they're happy with the way things are, there should be a massive vote for Option One. 'Oh, yeah, we don't want to change, we don't want to pay no more money, Option One, keep things as they are, straight and narrow, safely, safely'; it got nothing – one percent. Many of us thought it, that was a safe option. An area committee received no support. Well, I know of talking to Officers that the cost of an area committee would be something like a quarter of a million over four years 'cos of the cost of having a chief officer and if it didn't give it funding, we'd have no powers. And Option Four, four parishes for Bexhill, in my ward, it got 14 votes. And if you look at the cost of that, with four clerks, and 72 councillors – if you had 18 per ward, whatever you are going to have – you know, it was very, very expensive. As an independent, I am free to vote for a town council, I have every remembrance Council feels the same way and will vote in the best interests of our residents. This is a time to deliver democracy; it's not a time for party politics.

Madam Chairman Thank you Councillor Clark
Councillor Dixon

Councillor Kevin Dixon Thank you, chairman. Liberal Democrats have campaigned for a town council for many years and, indeed, these two ladies to my left were part of the momentum that started it; when momentum only had one meaning and, and our Bexhill

members have campaigned tirelessly for this and I'm glad that others have joined the Liberal Democrats in our campaign. For me, the argument is why not why should Bexhill not have a town council? Why should Bexhill be the only place in East Sussex without a town council? Lewes, Newhaven, Uckfield, even Folkstone - as one of the new town councils. All have got thriving and popular town councils. Rother should be a strategic authority, it shouldn't be dealing, trying to be two people: Bexhill's local authority and Rother's whole authority. As a rural member one of the most depressing things I have to do is to deal with Bexhill's affairs because I represent Battle and the strategic area of Rother. I don't really want to be doing all of Bexhill's small work that a town council would do; something that you don't do for Battle because Battle has its own town council. Something that has been, not been mentioned is that council tax under a single Bexhill town council could be lower. There is currently special expenses paid by Bexhill residents and the challenge for a town council will be to take 'em, over some of those services and do 'em for less. Local can be cheaper when you're doing services locally. A comment on the four parish councils. Now, I am actually in favour of community, communities, and I do believe that communities should be represented by their own council, so I have no problem with Little Common having its own council, Sidley having its own council but that isn't on the table. What is on the table is a four, is an arbitrary, Boundary Commission decided carve-up of Bexhill, if you like, and the question is, what happens when the Boundary Commission then change the four boundaries of the county council wards. Will the town coun, will the parish councils change? I don't think so. The boundaries are in and that's it. So, it's a very arbitrary figure that really doesn't warrant much consideration. Areas committees are much more suited to vast rural areas where communication is difficult, travel is difficult to a central location, and area committees work well there. Rother really isn't big enough for an area committee. So, really, I commend that, really, the only possible option on this paper that is worthy of support is a single town council for Bexhill.

Madam Chairman Thank you very much, indeed, Councillor Dixon. Councillor Hart.

Councillor Sally-Ann Hart Thank you, Chair. I've heard quite a lot tonight and it's been absolutely fascinating listening to everyone and everyone's got really some good points. What I thought I would talk about tonight is a bit about localism because that's been highlighted quite a lot, about localism as being the primary factor for wanting a smaller governance, or separate governance for Bexhill. What is localism? Localism is less interference from central government and empowering individuals, communities and local councils into their spending priorities. A town council for Bexhill would represent around 44,000 residents and this is not an unusually high number of people for a town council but you can't compare this, as has been done, with 4,300 residents for Rye Town Council and 6,700 for Battle Town Council. Some of the reasons I've looked at very closely, the reasons for town councils, including better representation, responsiveness and responsiveness to local needs and interests and the promotion of community spirit and inclusiveness; and I'm a strong advocate for localism and wholly take on board the benefits of local councils, town councils and parish councils for communities. I've also been reminded in communication from residents and letters and other communication from Democracy for Bexhill that as a Conservative councillor, I may or may not be aware that the Conservative Party supports the formation of town councils. Well, the Conservative Government supports the empowerment of local councils, so they can focus on spending on their local priorities. We must also consider Bexhill's unique character and needs, and need is a very specific point. Bexhill has different needs within the town. Sidley is

somewhat deprived and has different needs to, for example, Little Common which again is different to the town centre and I want to quote the Sussex Police response to consultation which said it may be challenging to have one town council when the needs are so different, and I do take that on board. So, I have to ask then, what can a town council for Bexhill that Rother doesn't already do? Rother responds to local needs, so I'm looking at the reasons why you would want a town council. Rother responds to local needs, interests and community through its hard-working and dedicated councillors from all the political parties. These are elected, these people are elected by the people of Bexhill to represent them. These councillors make a huge commitment in volunteering their skills and efforts and adequately represent the views of the people in Bexhill, along other civic groups, such as the Town Forum, as Councillor Hollidge has mentioned, and the Town Centre Steering Group, which is chaired by Councillor Ian Hollidge. We've had examples highlighted tonight about amazing initiatives that have been undertaken, undertaken in terms of £27,500 by the steering group for a poster campaign and for looking at the town centre, public realm maintenance and doing up, and councillors Watson and Carroll on the £300,000 for the skate park in Sidley. It's a fantastic initiative and this something we should all support. I am a rural councillor but, and I do focus on my ward, but it's absolutely vital that we are all passionate about Rye, Battle, Bexhill, about the whole of Rother District.

As councillors, you are all aware that Rother has spent considerable time in developing a new public realm strategy and is currently working on a new tourism strategy, amongst other initiatives which will benefit Bexhill and the district as whole. This is all aimed at giving a greater sense of place to Bexhill, to Rye, to Battle and to the rural aspects of Rother. Rother makes a good job balancing the needs and interests of all the communities in Bexhill, across the district, but if localism is the real reason behind the review, then I can absolutely see the benefits of parishing some parts of Bexhill into smaller governance structures for communities, such as Sidley, or Cooden, Little common, perhaps even Pebsham, as I think these smaller parishes would create more of a community feel and greater localism in these areas; but this is not an option available to us. Rother itself is a great example of localism at work, and I, and would a town council's strengthen from the local representative of democracy of Bexhill? The aim is to have 18 new councillors on a town council. We have 18 representatives of Bexhill on the District Council. A concern would be that new councillors will be needed, and there is always a difficulty, as we know, in attracting high quality and committed volunteers, who would be in charge of expenditure in the precept. I myself have had to be a parish councillor in a couple of my villages because of the lack, the dearth of volunteers of people coming forward and this is the difficulty in engaging people in many roles. I also wanted to have a look at cost. At a time when there is financial uncertainty as to the future, particularly regarding Brexit, and there remains a necessity to pull our belts in. I would question whether the costs associated with an additional layer of government, additional elections, and the potential to raise an additional tax raising body is appropriate now or in the near future. We must think about our residents in all that we do. That is what the peer challenged told us to do, and this includes having a mind to any additional tax imposed upon them. The precept for parish and town council is not capped. The council tax is capped, and I just wanted to highlight that Battle Town Council, for example, has increased its precept by 81% in five years, from £188,000 in 2012 to £384,056 in 2017. That is 81% in five years. My role as an elected representative, is not just to listen to the people who voted for us but also to listen to every single person who lives in Bexhill. It's to listen the people who haven't voted for us. We are all working hard for the voters, providing leadership, being an advocate for the people I represent and exercising my judgement. Having listened to the arguments, and

understanding the issues, set against a wider context, I just want to quote something to everyone tonight “Your representative owes you not his industry only but his judgement and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.” - and that is from Edmond Burke in his speech to the electors of Bristol in 1774.

Madam Chairman thank you, very much, Councillor. Hart.
Councillor Jenkins.

Cllr. Ian Jenkins Thank you very much indeed, Chairman. Members and Residents of Bexhill, I have received a number of letters in respect of the possible town council for Bexhill. I have to say a number of the remarks made in them, such as ‘Bexhill is neglected and uncared for’, or that ‘Bexhill residents are taxed without representation’, is far from reality. The Chair earlier referred to the recent award that I received on behalf of the Council in front of a thousand other nominees and guests who represent the horticultural industry. Whilst we were made aware through our contractor that we were a nominee, to receive the reward, it was a real honour to actually receive it and I know residents and members may well have seen the coverage that the Observer newspaper has given to that. Manor Gardens, here in Bexhill, excelled – all credit to Michael, the main gardener, for his work and our contractor. Well done. Madam Chair, you do not get national awards for horticulture through being uncared for. Maybe the casual visitor referred to in a recent letter, needs to visit Manor Gardens. This Bexhill is loved by all, by all, including myself. I acknowledge that the nine thousand took time out to consider the alternatives and came down in favour of a town council, but Bexhill has population in excess of 40,000, does it not? The recent Minority Party Report Appendix One, gave an illustration of an estimated cost for a town council as £118,850 which works out at £7.43 for a Band D but no mention, no mention, of what services are planned to take on. If I was a Bexhill resident, my first reference point would be the services that are provided and paid for now. Example, ground maintenance, the cost of which £540, 000 plus; the total cost now for parks and open spaces £750, 000 plus.

If I extend these costs, allowing for the figures mentioned by the Minority Report, the total costs are near a million. That produces an estimated council tax increase on Band D property nearer to £23, not anyway near the £7.43 mentioned. It follows, the only way of getting down to the, a charge £7.43, is to reduce services. So, what may they be? Surely, I need to have some clue. It may be that the open-ended situation that many Bexhill residents did not voice their preference, at least, it’s a suggestion; it may have something to do with it. As a Bexhill resident, my view would be to want to know what I would be getting for an additional level of governance. Why should I accept less, or accept as reality, suggested charges which do not reflect reality? I note that in the responses of some stakeholders, including the Police who comment on how different Little Common is from Sidley, and as a rural member who attends parish councils, that sentiment comes through and is why parish councils work so well. That said, I would still want to know what the actual services they could provide and costs, etc. With these particular points and having considered the options, I am minded to abstain on all the suggestions. Chairman.

Madam Chairman Thank you very much, Councillor Jenkins.
Councillor Elford.

Councillor Simon Elford Thank you, Madam Chairman. I’d just like to start off by saying thank you to the Officers. I was on the Governance Steering Group and thank them very much for their hard work; it was an excellent Steering Group, but I

would also like to acknowledge the efforts of the members of the public and thank so many people were taking part. We have had an overwhelming response response. I think it was important for all the options to come forward. I did propose and second, I seconded these, at the Scrutiny Committee. We are indeed debating on whether to bring in a tax raising body possibly. I've attended many events during the summer and I've met most of the people in the public gallery tonight and I've met many members of the public over that time and spoken to many people and had lots of different, varying views.

If you go through the four options, the area committee, I have to say, I didn't encounter much support for that. I think originally the petition was signed for the area committee and I think there was possibly an idea back then but I think times have changed and it's become quite aware that they would have no tax raising powers and it would only rely on what money would come from this council to support them and that would be very small. I think that has to be chucked out straight away.

There's been talk of parishes. I can acknowledge that there are some benefits to that. It needs a lot more investigation. I think everyone in Bexhill living here sees himself as a Bexhill person, although, there are distinct communities within Bexhill but I think looking at, looking at it without further investigation; I think it would be too divisive, personally, from people I have spoken to.

On the no change option, I have to say, I think the council has done a very good job over the last few years, especially under great financial pressures. If we look at the last five, six years, the tourism in the town has grown unbelievably; there's been some excellent work gone on and if you look at the investment now coming in from local business men and local business people, pouring money into the, into the town itself, that comes straight off the back of that, but, I think we have to, we do have to acknowledge that there are great financial pressures on the Council, not just this council but on East Sussex County Council.

And so we move to town council. I'm sure there are many services that Rother, and East Sussex, would love to hand over to a town council and I think that there is some advantage to this especially around tourism and I see tourism as the biggest driver of regeneration in Bexhill. We must make sure we keep that up. I also think that we need to look at the public realm in the areas and I think a town council would be excellent in these ideas. There's obviously many disadvantages - there is a cost, always, to whatever we do, but I think we do have to acknowledge the amount of people who've taken part in this process and whatever decision we make tonight whether it's a no change or town council or parishes or area committees, we need to make sure that we engage people more in the future. I would also just like to finish by saying something echoing some words that Councillor Clark said but the slight change.

As a Conservative councillor, I am free to vote for a town council.

Madam Chairman Thank you very much, indeed.
Councillor Elliston

Councillor Robert Elliston Thank you, Chairman. As a rural member which I share a patch with you. We have two villages, two parish councils and they both, the parish councils work very hard, very well indeed. If it wasn't the parish councils, a lot of things would not have happened in Ticehurst and Etchingham and I feel that if town council came to a large area like Battle, and like Bexhill, it would be like a parish on steroids, because it's got so many more people and they could do a lot more with the money, and obviously things like health and roads and things happen elsewhere, but the bits which the parish

councils do for their people is excellent and I'm sure could be done even more so at Bexhill. So I'm in favour of town council.

Madam Chairman Thank you very much indeed, Councillor Elliston
Councillor Barnes

Councillor John Barnes *(Script in italics indicates poor quality/volume of recording.)*
So, I'm not against devolving power. It's that what it says is you can look viable areas and parts of Bexhill. I am a little worried, I confess it, you would actually find a revolt, after a time, in some of the poorer areas, in certain places. With Sidley, there is very little centre. If you go to Old Town, go down around Bexhill. So, it's not a very even place. If we are going to talk really reality, and I really do, want to take issue with this case, the notion somehow actually grant the existing services, which I suspect, there are expenses is involved. At the moment, on my rough calculation, in terms of the special precept services. In fact, all my experience to date, it is two things. It is no good, Madam Chairman, having a council, without the notion without paid consent. OK, I have the leaflet but what it talks about is running costs. Yes, this would actually be relatively affordable, over a hundred thousand, but still it's difficult. I can tell you, out in the rural areas, we are fighting for *money*. So a very interesting challenge. What is this going to, I can tell you. As a chairman of a parish council, and pretty active, on Band D houses this year, a three figure sum, and let's be realistic, that is precisely the precept which a town that is active and vigorous will actually ask its people to come forward to. Fine, I think, for some in Bexhill *but in certain places, the very poorest areas in East Sussex, but then probably very few Band D properties there, but I'm worried, though, more about to a working body that's looking at options. Thereabouts, around ..., they did not have in front of them one proposal, worked out in detail, with, what, a bit like Brexit; a majority voted for Brexit and nobody knows what Brexit actually means. Half the government differs from the other half, the Opposition is split, nobody has actually defined what Brexit is. Nobody has actually defined what people are going to vote for here. I personally was more persuaded by the notion of parish perpetuity; you cannot actually simply take action. I think, if you are going to go for it, you need at least a mandate, preferably, and, I think, a well organised referendum with a well organised presentation, what the option isn't, somebody cares in fact to push, that this becomes the nature of the matter. So, you may have to go for a referendum.*

Madam Chairman Thank you.
Councillor Field

Councillor Kathryn Field Thank you. We've heard, tonight, a lot about the cost of a town council or the potential cost of a town council or the alleged cost of a town council and various figures have been quoted. I really believe that we won't to know what the cost of a town council will be, until councillors have been elected, set their agenda and set their budget. So what we should be talking about t....

[Note At this point a member of the public from the public gallery approached the speaker with a piece of paper and handed it to her.]

Madam Chairman Sorry, please don't look at that paper because it's actually wrong for a member of the public to pass papers around. Councillor Clark, please, do not look; please, turn that paper over.

(Interruption from public gallery: "ignorance is bliss.") Quite. Right, can, sorry, er, could you continue, Councillor Field.

Councillor Kathryn Field Yes, thank you. I wasn't aware that wasn't, was a rule. This is not a, well, anyway, but I can think for myself anyway. Thank you. What we should be talking about is the principle of a town council and why Bexhill residents should not have what rural members have the privilege of having which is a very local tier of government to decide very local matters of their own interest. Now, we've heard a lot, as well, about why the consultation isn't valid. There was a 25.8% turnout for the consultation, 93.5% of those people who responded voted for a town council and only 350 people voted for no change, i.e., they're very satisfied with what is happening at the moment. Now, all the time we don't have compulsory voting in this country, we are faced with the position where people get elected on very small percentages of the vote at all. In a recent by-election for this district council, there was a turnout of 20.5%; the elected member got 43.5% of those votes which equated to 8.9% of the total electorate in that ward. So, you can't say with any justification that 93.5% of people voting have no real validity; it just doesn't work. Now, I've heard a lot from people in this chamber tonight about the Battle from people who don't live in battle. I live in Battle and Councillor Dixon lives in Battle. Battle has, as every community does, poorer sections and richer sections. Battle actually has wards; it has different communities of interest. It is warded into, three, four, four, wards, as indeed, is one of my smaller parish councils and believe me, those councillors are very able to take decisions on behalf of the whole town or both villages, without any problem at all. So, the fact that Bexhill is a mixed community is irrelevant. The principle is do they need local representation and I think they do. We've also heard a lot about Battle putting its precept up. Battle puts its precept up, as indeed any town or parish council does, to pay for work done for the residents, by that council. Yes, there were a few mutterings but there hasn't been revolution on the streets about Battle putting its precept up. People more likely say: 'isn't the town well cared for; we like it here; doesn't the town council do a good job; isn't it great that the council staff come out and grit the roads when they don't have, they grit the pavements, when they don't have to, they mow, they tend street lights, they look after the cemetery' and they do all those things which Rother doesn't have to for them and which, actually, the residents like to have done by local people who they recognise when they're walking down the street and they stop us and say, you know what about this, what about that, so I think it is not right to deny Bexhill residents the right to have the same privileges as the rest of us do.

Madam Chairman Thank you very much, indeed. Councillor Earl.

Councillor Stuart Earl Thank you for giving me the chance to just come back. I was very disappointed in one thing that Councillor Jenkins said. He would want to know if he was going to vote for something, what he was going to get for his money. Very good point but at the stage the consultation went out it couldn't actually know what powers would be devolved, what responsibilities would be taken up by a new authority and so to set a budget or a precept for work that they don't know, very, what they be asked to do, or even be allowed to do, is a very difficult thing. And I agree totally with what Councillor Barnes has just said about we've got it wrong. We should have laid out a very clear question and had that referendum. It would have saved an awful lot of bad feeling, bad, well not consultation, bad comment, un-constituted comment in many, many cases, where people were ill-informed or misinformed. So, you know, it became divisive and I think it's it's a sad situation. We are small authority as Rother, in a small part of a small county. The villages

and parishes enjoy the option of having a say over what happens within their communities and all that we are asking for in Bexhill is the same opportunity. If, if, the precept was wrong or the comments or the promises that were made were not kept, then the public would have had every right and reason to get rid of those who made those promises and expectations but we didn't fall out, we were not divisive when Bexhill was a borough on its own. Sidley was still the poorer area to little common; Pebsham didn't exist to the size it is now; the size of our community is growing at an alarming rate. I'd be the last one who could want to divide that and make that unworkable but please, please give us the opportunity to have that self determination and to do it as well as we can. It can only benefit the whole of Rother. Thank you.

Madam Chairman Thank you very much.
Councillor Prochak. Councillor Prochak, did you wish to speak?

Councillor Susan Prochak Thank you, that's very kind and thank you to a councillor for mentioning the fact that we, we really did this, this on a shoestring and in fact there was a point after the first consultation, that Rother didn't want to spend any more, except some postcards, on, on consulting, and we could have gone to; others, other areas have gone to full blown referendum. We decided not to do it that way. So, I think the arguments about principle are what we're left with, really. As councillor has said, we cannot tell what the budget will be and even if they decided to have millions, it's up to the people of Bexhill to vote them in or vote them out. They would have control over that. What we've got on the table, we can't change. So, I didn't know that, that, that your recommendation for four, of four parish councils, was something that was hijacked. I think you recommended, Councillor Barnes, four parish councils. (*Verbal ad hoc response from Councillor Barnes: not sufficiently audible to transcribe.*) Well, well, that's what's on the table and the point that was made earlier by the question from Mrs Smith was that, actually, we've talked about the Manor Gardens and how wonderful they are and aren't we pleased about them but actually that will be in a different parish from the other side of the road because the way that the lines are drawn for county constit, er county divisions, thank you, for county divisions, go down the middle of roads and the basic, basic fundamental part of a governance review is the communities have to be at the heart of it because this rests on three different aspects. The first one is finance and we've heard tonight how actually they'll be able to raise a precept, do those jobs that, that perhaps can't be done, can't afford to be done and, actually, that the only way, this is the only way to change Rother District's Council's net spend, the only way to reduce its net spend is to devolve to other bodies; not my words, our treasurer's words. So, we haven't got a body to devolve to in 'Bexhill, so this would be an advantage to the finances of Rother. The other thing is services and are the services fit for the future? And, with, as we've heard, with Battle, and I've heard a councillor, Mrs Earl Williams, saying this 'you'd go through Battle and how well looked after it is: the flower beds, the borders, everything is really well looked after'. That's one thing parishes do really, really well: working with the county and in Rother District cou, in my parish, we have actually pay for a steward, he's a steward for us, our own village, and they vote, they voted the precept for that; and he works with the county council, in partnership with the county council. So, the best thing that I saw, was the comments from the clerk to Rye Town Council and he's been a clerk for many, many years, both of Rye and a smaller parish and this was before the result of, of the consultation. And he said, he described how, and those people of you own parishes, they know this, how you can actually improve life for people where you live. And isn't that what we came on the council to do, to improve things? And, so, he lists some of the services

that a Bexhill town council could provide. And actually if you look down the Rye list of services, in their precept, they do wonderful things in Rye. They support tourism, they support the festivals, they support sports, and the list that counts, that Rye Town Clerk gives is: tourist information services. My goodness, Hastings just won an award for that TIC. We haven't got one in Bexhill. Street furniture, social housing and nobody's mentioned the CIL money, Community Infrastructure Levy. If you have a town council here, 15% of that levy will, goes to the town council. So they will have a budget. Town stewards, I've mentioned; a youth council. Rye Town council, actually puts money into youth work, oh, the town crier, that's another suggestion; joint highways improvements; business and employment support. So, it can do a huge range of things, as a town council. I really enjoyed the letter that was from Mr Rhodes. Mr Rhodes wrote to all of us, I think, and Mr Rhodes has been coming to our meetings, I don't know if he's here, but I don't know him, but he wrote a very good letter, and he said that listening to our debate, and this was from, he said he had been a life-long Conservative voter and didn't want to change being a Conservative voter, but he did say at the end 'who knows?' and he said I've yet , quote "I've yet to hear persuasive argument that would justify going against national policy" and this is the debate that he'd been listening to. I can't see an argument to vote for anything except the town council. I think the four option, one four parish council, is actually, should not even be considered because it doesn't, it think it will be legally challenged if we vote for that one, because it doesn't consider community at the heart of it. The area committees, as Councillor Elford has already said, the area committee, is changed, it's a different animal from the one the late Mr Lee voted for because area committees across the country have budgets, have dedicated officers and we would need an area committee, two area committees for the rural areas, as well, so expensive and not very powerful, because the Executive of this council said you can't have any powers. No executive power. So, what's the point of it? The result of the, ref, er, consultation was very, very clearly. And you can't tell nine thousand plus people, they didn't know what they were doing, they didn't understand, they didn't know what they were talking about. You cannot, cannot ignore it. And I think, it, time is the big issue, big issue. Are you going to listen to the people in the consultation or not.

Madam Chairman Thank you, very much, Councillor Prochak.
Councillor Gillian Johnson.

Councillor Gillian Johnson Thank you very much, Chairman. I'll be very brief as so much has already been said, so I'll just made a few notes. Certainly, as a Bexhill Councillor and as an ordinary resident of Bexhill, I've spent many hours, days, nights, as we probably all have, considering all four options of this consultation. Area councils: well, the petition signed by four thousand residents, obviously started this procedure. It seemed like a good idea on the surface but we then understood that it would have to be duplicated across Rother as Councillor Prochak just alluded to. I did initially considered that the options of four parish councils was going to be the best solution but looking at it very carefully, as it was based on county areas, this did indeed seem to split communities within Bexhill, especially in my ward of Old Town, as Diane Smith said very clearly in her earlier question; it would also prove very expensive. I think, on the surface, it might seem strange that Bexhill's got no town council and if the clock was wound back to 1974, we might perhaps arrange things differently. However, that was 43 years ago and Rother and life has moved on. In today's world, we all know how difficult it is for hard-working families to make ends meet and at this time, I do not feel prepared to add more to their outgoings by establishing an additional tax-raising body that

would undoubtedly increase their council tax. In my own own area of Old Town, this consultation failed to ignite any passionate at all. We had the lowest respondents to this consultation. More, more than 85% of the population did not respond and I certainly only received two emails from residents in Bexhill lobbying and asking for a town council. I haven't just relied upon the consultation, I've also been busy taking my own straw polls and opinions across all family, friends and I've got a vast acquaintance of people younger, usually, in Bexhill, who show absolutely no desire for change. Rother does an excellent job for Bexhill, has already been stated by several councillors. We've got a really innovative seafront; we've got an award-winning Egerton Park; we've got many exciting, revamped playgrounds; we have the funding of £300,000 for Sidley BMX, the MUGA and skate park that we just heard about. We have twenty seven and a half thousand for Bexhill town council steering group, who've done some excellent work, and we'll use that on tourism for Bexhill; plus we are working towards, most importantly, a new leisure centre for Bexhill. My conclusions are that I cannot find a persuasive reason to take more money than it's absolutely necessary from our Bexhill residents. This is an extremely difficult decision but I would support no change.

Madam Chairman Thank you very much, indeed, Councillor Johnson.
Councillor Hart.

Councillor Sally-Ann Hart Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to take up a couple of points that have been raised here. Something was mentioned about the number of town councillors for Bex, for Battle and, as I understand it, the town council for Bexhill, the number of councillors proposed is 18 and we already have 18 District Councillors for Bexhill.

So, I'm trying to see where the democratic deficit is there, so if someone can explain that to me, please do. When you're looking at the process, and people are talking about the fact that we didn't leaflet people. Then you have to look at the fact that there were 900 responses at the first stage; and that was after there was a collection of 4,000 signatures for the area committee petition and it was because we didn't want to unduly spend taxpayers money. It was going to be £14,000. *(Public gallery laughter.)* It's true actually. Actually, this is something we really do care about is keeping the money that the payment that taxpayers have to make down. It was £14,000 to deliver leaflet, to deliver to every single home in Bexhill and this is why we pursued the second stage in the consultation the way we did, reaching out to people. I, as a Rother member, went out and stood at Sainsburys and other places because to me it's very important that people were given the opportunity to have the information and the information, the reason why we couldn't persuade people is because we were advised, as a council, not to campaign on this, it's a consultation, and the reason why you have so many people that came from the Democracy for Bexhill is because the leaflet that they sent out, had said they'd looked at all the information and had made the decision for everyone in Bexhill, that "Democracy for Bexhill", a non-political group of Bexhill residents has researched all the options and recommends you to vote for town council." We, as a council, were advised not to campaign and that is why there is the situation you have now. It was a consultation, not an election, not a referendum. *(Public gallery noise.)*

Madam Chairman Please would you not interrupt.

Councillor Sally-Ann Hart One more point, just to pick it up on Battle is that when the Public Realm Working Group was out evidence-gathering, to develop our new public

realm strategy which is for every single village and town in Bexhill, in the district. We were actually quite shocked at the state of the public realm in Battle and that has been highlighted and you can look at that on the public realm report.
Thank you.

Madam Chairman Thank you, very much. Councillor Kirby-Green.

Councillor Eleanor Kirby-Green Thank you, chairman. I'll be very brief because I think everyone's pretty much said what I was going to say. There are just two things, well, two things I'd like to come back to with Councillor Prochak. She said that Battle looks really lovely. It does but Bexhill does, too, and a lot of people in my Darwell ward come to Bexhill, loads of people with families come to Bexhill because they like the seafront, they like the beach, and they like the De La Warr and the events that go on there, so, I don't think we should be knocking Bexhill. I think Bexhill is just as nice as Battle, so I don't see how a town council will make Bexhill to look any better. The other thing is Councillor Prochak makes a reference to voting people out. I think a couple of people have said this, voting people out if they don't like the precept. Well, I could be wrong but I believe across Rother generally, we don't have elections for town and parish councils because we don't get the people to stand for them. So, if you don't get enough people, you won't be having elections; you won't be able to vote people out, I followed this very closely. I've been looking on social media and I'd still like to understand what town council would do which is not already being done by Rother district council. There's been a huge amount of misinformation out there. I can't believe how much misinformation has been out there about what a town council can do. I think a lot of people are confusing a town council with a borough council and it's a very different beast. I've also read comments about being able to determine planning applications. Well, believe me, a town council would be able to turn planning applications no more than Burwash Parish Council can. As Councillor Hollidge said, there are already numerous bodies in Bexhill which carry out important roles and I don't feel that I'd be doing the 36,000 residents at Bexhill any favours by adding another layer of bureaucratic, tax-raising power.

Madam Chairman Thank you very much.

Councillor Eleanor Kirby-Green I'll be voting for no change.

Madam Chairman Councillor Osborne.

Councillor Paul Osborne Thank you, Chairman. Just, just for reference, I'm the idiot who who chaired the Scrutiny Committee meeting for some 90 minutes and the D4B group put a ten second clip on there and I was demeaned as an idiot which is somewhat sort of depressing because I assume that would have been sanctioned by a member behind me who is also a member of this council. So, I find that unnecessary, if you like. Now, I've been a member of this council, on and off, since 1999. I've been a mayor, chairman in Rye, I'm currently a parish councillor in Playden, where I now live – a whole 500 yards inside of Rye. I attend forty odd, at least 40 odd parish council meetings a year, so I know about parish councils and the annoying thing to me is, I am supportive of a town council in Bexhill. I don't have a problem in Bexhill having a town council, so I just wonder why do you think I'm an idiot. You, know, why, why is it you don't know me. Some chap puts on the old Facebook page and your Twitter 'Who is this idiot'. Well, he's here, he's standing here talking, supporting

a town council for Bexhill. And I don't know who this bloke is, and he doesn't know who I am. So, you know, you've done your best to sort of change my view if you like but it's not going to work because I will be voting for a town council for Bexhill because I believe that if Bexhill want a town council, have a town council; it's not going to cost me anything - I live 20 miles away. So, if that's what they want, have it, and if they want to have the sort of democratic deficits as they see it and fill it, fine. No problem at all. So if you want it, have it, and I will support, and vote, in favour of a Bexhill town council. Please, don't make me out to be an idiot.

Madam Chairman Thank you very much.
Councillor Field.

Councillor Kathryn Field Thank you. I did consider, I needed just to come back. In my 25 years as an elected representative, I can assure Councillor Kirby-Green and anybody else that if there is an issue in a community, there is an election and it's a hotly contested election, so they happen. Now, the thing that has really surprised me about this debate about Bexhill and its future and its town council is how much Battle has featured in the discussions because I think you'd come here to talk about Battle but we have. So, the issues itemised in the public realm, considerations in Battle, are not things that the town council does. The town council does many things. The faults that were found if faults they were, were responsibility of either this or authority or the County Council. So, you can't actually use the state of Battle as a reason not to have a town council in Bexhill. And as to campaigning or not to campaign about this issue, and express a view openly about the issue, before the debate tonight, I heard this remark from across the chamber, so I took advice from our chief Executive, and sadly, he can't answer himself because this is a meeting where that doesn't happen; but the advice I was given was by all means that expressive view, by all means campaign because campaigning for people, supporting people who are campaigning, is what we're elected to do.

Madam Chairman Thank you very much. Anybody else? Does anybody else wish to speak? Oh, Councillor Clark.

Councillor Charles Clark I want to make a general point because, quite rightly some councillors said all the good initiatives that have been carried out in Bexhill, which is true but what is also most definitely true, is they're not getting that message across because if that is the case, why is it that option one, no change, didn't get huge vote. I mean, Councillor Johnson talks about 'I spoke to all my friends of my ward and they all didn't want no change'. Well, she's got 23 friends; that's exactly how many people in Old Town who voted for no change, so this council has got a real problem with communication. And whoever is the person who is the portfolio holder for Bexhill Affairs needs to get that message out because the residents obviously don't believe it.

Madam Chairman Thank you very much, indeed. Councillor Kentfield

Councillor Brian Kentfield

Thank you Madam Chairman. When this started off, I had thought, yeah, could be an idea. Then, I started to research it like all of us have, and we've learnt through our research, the cost of what might be incurred. It's all guesswork but we've got a fair idea where we're going, where they want to go. My biggest problem is that the

pamphlets and the information that has been pushed out says 15p a week. There's no mention that that will go up when we do more. So, I think, quite honestly, a lot of people looked at this leaflet, they listened to all the words that were being pushed at them, with rose coloured glasses on, and I've got great concern. There are lots of people in this town, although it's perceived to be a wealthy town in some areas, who aren't wealthy. They might be asset rich, they've got no money in their pockets and it'd be surprising, if you, if we were allowed to – which we aren't - to publish how many people on housing benefit in some areas; you'd be horrified. Now, I think, it's totally wrong that people to go around the streets pushing leaflets in people's noses and say sign here, and I've had this come back to me and felt, people felt, I won't say abused, but they felt very uncomfortable and some of the attitudes that were performed were very distasteful. I shall be voting for no change.

Madam Chairman Thank you. Councillor Oliver

Councillor Douglas Oliver Thank you, Madam chairman. I think this is a wonderful opportunity for working together to bring the community of Bexhill totally behind where Rother aspirations for the future are. I listened to the Secretary of State's address to the NALC conference, and you talk about localism; let's embrace localism. Don't let's work against each other. Let's forget about any party political issues that are there. Let's look at embrace localism for the benefit of Bexhill, and I think there's been some excellent debate this evening. I'm encouraged by it.

I think there's some misunderstanding still with regarding some of the numbers, the cost of administration and the cost of a precept. If the people of Bexhill determine what facilities they want to provide, then providing they're provided, I'm sure they will pay for them, but we have to be reasonable about this. There will, there will be a term of office to work alongside the District Council, so this is a wonderful opportunity to take forward.

Restructuring of district and borough councils, is on the agenda, it is happening. Who will then pick up the tea and toilet issues that aren't being covered by the unitary authorities, as and when they come along. Let's work together, let this be an opportunity to represent the people of Bexhill who overwhelmingly responded to this. Consultation, a preferred response; we know it wasn't a vote but people were engaged. As Councillor Barnes said, the process wasn't a particularly well-organised process. At the beginning of the year, the Leader of Rother District Council identified that the Governance Review was an irritant and it was going to get in the way. Well, it shouldn't do. He felt they had more important objectives there, which I agree with, but now we've got it this far and we've actually sparked some enthusiasm for our local, our local community, let's take it up, let's move forward with it. Don't let 's infight. Let's work together; it's a wonderful opportunity of which everybody can take credit for, like the Community Action Group in Sidley, for the skateboard park, the youngsters who got out there, our MP who supported it, with other members of the community. Wonderful opportunity. Let's encourage our tourism, our events organisers, the guys who put their hands in their pockets to organise the Roaring Twenties and the seaside, the Sea Festival. Let's support these people. Come on, this is our chance to show that we can work together and I would really hope that the town council option will receive your support this evening.

Madam Chairman Councillor Azad

Councillor Abul Azad Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's been lovely debate tonight. I would like to begin my express my resident part of the Bexhill, RDC, and if there is anything good, negatively impact on the resident, then I, it should our interest to avoid that.

Having a town council complicate and structure proceeding of this RDC and would therefore increase the council tax bill of the residents. This would clearly have negative effect on the resident. The setting up in running cost local town council would mean as excess to expenditure for our local resident. Additionally, one of the main issue, is that majority of these Bexhill resident have not come to forward the consultation, too, which we have to question why. Do they know this difference between the current RDC and town council? Or they happy to carry on with the current, proceeding with the RDC? And I'm completely against to this town council.

Madam Chairman
Councillor Kenward.

Councillor Martin Kenward Thank you, very much, Madam Chairman. I have to say, when I first started going out and speaking to my residents, they thought the idea of a town council was a wonderful idea, until I mentioned that they'd have to pay for it, it wasn't something that came free; and they soon changed their mind. We get our small income up, my residents get their small income and before they receive it, no matter where it is coming from, the Government is taking a big lump out of it. The government pass of lump of that over to Europe. Once they've got it, the County Council decide they want a big chunk, followed by the Fire Authority, followed by the Police Authority, followed by Rother District council. If they want to watch television, they're taxed. If the want to flush the toilet, they're taxed. They're taxed enough and I cannot even dream of agreeing to another tax-raising body for the poor residents of Bexhill. We've heard what's to come, we've heard what's to come. Councillor Barnes over here has already mentioned it. He'd love to get rid of the De La Warr Pavilion; my colleague here on my right. Rye for donkey's years have been dying to get rid of the De La Warr Pavilion, pass it back over the Bexhill for them to pay for it. Half a million pounds a year we support the De La Warr Pavilion with, and that half million pound raises funds from the Arts Council. If it couldn't paid by any future town council, we would lose the Arts Council funding and the place would probably stand empty and closed. At the moment, at the moment, it's a Rother asset, we've already heard Councillor Barnes, he's already said oh, yes, good opportunity to get rid of it; Lord Amptill'd love to get rid of it. We used to have one sat over there, Shackleton, he would like to blow it, blow it out of the, off of the face of the earth, so we know what the rural members think about the facilities in Bexhill. We've spoken about our sports facilities that we're hoping to build. I would, I would suggest that the moment that we have a town council formed, the first thing that the rural members will be saying is 'not on your nelly, we need to spend that money in the country area', the way they did before when, when the Conservative group lost power. Every time we wanted to do something, we had to barter. We had to put a swimming pool at Rye which cost a fortune to run, purely to get things done in Bexhill. I just could not possibly dream of forming another tax-raising body in this, for, for Bexhill, for the poor residents who, has already been said, they are asset rich, cash poor. I think that's all I want to say at the moment, Madam chairman. I will wait to speak later.

Madam Chairman Thank you. Councillor Hart

Councillor Sally-Ann Hart I'm just going to take up with, umbrage with you, Councillor Kenwards there. As a rural member and as the Portfolio Holder for Tourism and Culture for Rother, I support Rother District Council having the De La Warr Pavilion; it's absolutely vital for our tourism industry. Thank you.

Madam Chairman I suspect that we're probably coming to the end of the debate. Is there anybody else who would really like to speak before I hand over Councillor Maynard who, as Chairman of the Cabinet, is,

Mr Collins(An Officer) Councillor Hughes, Councillor Hughes.

Madam Chairman

Oh, Councillor Hughes. I'm so sorry.
Councillor Hughes.

Councillor Joyce Hughes

(Microphone not on at start; first sentence incomplete.)

... I just want to say ... about the fact that we all say about deprived areas. The area I represent, Madam Chairman, it's extremely deprived. I have been to all the consultations, which we stood on the streets for, other than the Leisure Centre because, unfortunately, I can't walk that far. So, everyone I went to, if you talk to people, just ad-lib not about anything particular; they don't want any change. They may think 'oh, it's all fine as it is, it's okay that's fine'. Now, quite honestly, without any question, I'm not, I'm not going to go on to it too long but I have had some real aggressive people with me and I really sometimes been quite frightened because one, in fact, one of my residents came to me and said he was more or less bullied into filling in the form at the front, and he came to me said what can I do? I said you've filled it in now, that's it, and I felt, in the circumstances, this has been done in a very aggressive manner. Now, as far as I'm concerned, when I started this I was ambivalent. I mean, I can remember the borough council, I was there that long, that long ago, and frankly you're not gonna go backwards. You can't go back to a borough council and frankly, I think a town council would cost us money and my ward, my deprived ward, which I know about, cannot afford it.

Madam Chair Councillor Watson has indicated he'd like to speak.

I really think possibly we are drawing this one to a conclusion.

So, after Councillor Watson, I shall ask Councillor Maynard.

Response by unidentified councillor

OK

Madam Chairman Right.

Councillor Maurice Watson Thank you, Madam Chairman,

I think it's, I am a councillor in a deprived ward. Now, I really mean a deprived ward; there's a lot of families that really, really struggle. To ask them to pay more money is a sin – frankly - to raise more money; there's enough money that they do pay. Yes, they get certain amount of relief on doing that which is quite true, but they're still paying 20% and you don't have much money, you don't have enough money to actually send your children to school. The, have to, school to have to provide breakfasts and also in my ward, they even provide breakfasts for the parents that bring'em. So, there's no way that I could actually, personally, support anything that is going to cost my residents more than what it is now, Chair, and I will definitely not be; I shall probably be abstaining. Thank you.

Madam Chairman Thank you very much, indeed, Councillor Watson.
Councillor Maynard

Councillor Carl Maynard , Thank you very much, indeed, Madam Chairman, and can I thank all the Members that have contributed to the debate tonight, which has been a long and interesting debate, and, hey ho, there is no whip on this side of the chamber, and let's be absolutely clear about that and dispel the biggest bit of misinformation that I have ever had the misfortune to see all over social media, and indeed spread by some of the members of the opposition in this particular chamber, and, indeed, by the Labour Party who are particularly active in Bexhill, at the moment; that, in fact, each individual member has the opportunity to vote as they see fit. Not quite the case the case in the Stalinist Labour Party, is it, Madam Chairman, but let's be absolutely clear that I want to thank very, very much the senior officer team in this authority for the way that they have gone about administering the Governance Review, specifically to the Democratic Services team who have carried out an enormous amount of work on behalf of the members of this council, indeed, the public at large. I also want to start to by also thanking those that, as Members, took part in the Governance Steering Group. I want to particularly thank the chairman of that steering group, who isn't a Councillor, Robin Patton, for the way that they did their business in terms of taking the matter forward, and I think that the interface of members, with the members of the public, that most of the members of this council has undertaken, has been over and above what one would normally expect to see from councillors, has already been alluded to.

I think it's quite right and proper, Madam Chairman, that all four options were considered by members tonight. I think, frankly, it's been quite tawdry for some of the members of the opposition to suggest there is only one option. 'I have my blinkers on, I'm not listening to any other option and that the only option is a town council for Bexhill'. That, clearly, isn't the case and it's clearly right that are all four options that have been consulted on, should be debated by councillors, even as it's been alluded to, that so few people supported an area committee, or indeed, the parishing of Bexhill, and I want to also refer to the ability - and I would like, madam Chairman, to be able to speak without being interrupted by members of the public, so I would just, if you will indulge me as everybody else has been allowed to speak, it would be nice for me to be able to get through this speech without interruption. Shall I wait? Thank you. I think also the ability of members to participate in the debate has been a rather awkward matter, especially for those Conservative members of the group who have been continually barraged by members of D4B and, indeed, the Labour Party on social media, that as you are making the decision, you shall not say which way you want to vote but the reality of the fact is, Madam Chairman, that I know that members on this side of the chamber have been very careful to consider all of the options in front of them and are very keen not to avoid the kind of predetermination that most of the members of the opposition have, clearly, veered into. I think, that some of the methods of D4B during this campaign have been particularly tawdry. I have received, not one, but, I can tell you now, dozens of complaints by email and telephone call, of the methods in which people have been asked to fill in these forms and it is frankly a matter that some of those people should be ashamed. I'm not for a moment going to criticize those that have gone out and engaged with members of public, engaged in a proper debate about whether or not a particular option should be put forward, but I think it is pretty tawdry to start talking to people in doctor's queues, when they're waiting for their 'flu jab. I think it's pretty appalling to harass young mothers waiting for their children outside schools, as in this, in the fact of filling in this particular form, and I have one young lady on the telephone to me in tears over the way that the gentleman in

question had actually pushed the card into her window of her car as she was pulling away, outside the school and she felt quite threatened. That is not the way, Ladies and Gentlemen, to engage with the public at large. It's not an exaggeration, (*Public gallery noise.*)

Madam Chairman Please will you be quiet and listen to the debate.

Councillor Carl Maynard and I, you know. Everybody else has been allowed an opportunity to speak and it's called a democracy, that's why we are councillors representing members of the public and that's why we're allowed the ability to speak. Further more, there's been an awful lot of misinformation, Madam Chairman, peddled on this particular consultation process, particularly by members of the Labour Party, I might add. There has been the suggestion that actually, it, we're actually talking about a borough council. I know that members of the public have been told 'if you vote for a town council, you can get rid of nasty Rother'. Well, that's clearly not the case. We've also been told that 'you can only have a neighbourhood plan, if you have a town council' but that's also not the case. You can have a neighbourhood plan for the whole of Bexhill, you can have a neighbourhood plan or a part of Bexhill, without the need for a town council, so let's dispel that particular myth. 'Ah, but of course if we'd ever had a town council, you wouldn't have those seafront shelters, all that work that was done on the seafront', also not true, (*Public gallery noise.*)

Madam Chairman I will have no alternative, but to clear the chamber, unless there's absolute silence for the rest of this debate.

Councillor Carl Maynard 'You wouldn't have had that unpopular seafront, If you'd have had a town council', also, not true. 'We'd also have the role of planning', as Councillor Mrs Kirby-Green has also referred to. A town council would have a role on planning, that's absolutely right. They would have a role as a consultee, just like any other parish or town council but they would not determine planning applications. That is factually incorrect, once again. I think that there's been an awful lot of, of information that's been out there in the public domain, during this process, that has been factually incorrect. I know it's the fact because I have been engaged on social media, and the gentleman upstairs knows that I've been engaged on social media because on a daily basis, I've had to dispel the misinformation that's out there in the public domain. Now, some of it it is innocent but I can tell you now, most of it wasn't.

I think we need to be really clear on the positive benefits of some of the things that Rother has done over the past, not just last year, over the past decade or so, in terms of working with other organisations, in terms of the way that we spend money with other local organizations, and I am talking specifically about voluntary organisations, I'm talking specifically about partner organisations, that help us do the things we need to do to help the residents of Bexhill. The reality is that things like the Citizen's Advice Bureau: I don't think that many members of the public actually know as to the level of funding that we put into the Citizen's Advice Bureau or the fact we have a service level agreement to make sure that they do, they do, the good that they do within the community on behalf of us. I don't think that many members of the public know that there's a Town Centre Steering Group. I don't think that many members of the public know there's a Town Team that have actually been doing an awful lot of work to smarten up the public realm within Bexhill. I don't think that members of the public know that it was this district council that enabled the Hastings Furniture Service to take up their site in London Road and prosper for those that

are disadvantaged in Bexhill. What I think the general public do know, is the massive investment that this authority has put into Bexhill, that's been at a hitherto unknown level since I became Leader in 2007. Let's be absolutely clear, about 5.4 million, Madam Chairman, for the seafront. Let's talk about a million pounds that went into Bexhill Museum. Let's talk about a million pounds that went into Egerton Park. Let's talk about the massive investment that's gone into Sidley, into the former Sidley goods yard. But you see, members of the opposition would like to water down and not tell you all of the good things that Rother does.

But I would agree with Councillor Clark when he says we need to get smarter about communicating the good things that Rother does. That is absolutely important but I've stood up in the past and I've talked about finance and I've talked about public services and how front line services need to be at the forefront of what we do. Let's put that in a little bit of a context, the amount of, of Government funding, we all know, has been reduced and there's a local government settlement coming tomorrow and we need to look at the bigger picture. I've said before, I've stood here and said, isn't it a bit of a folly to be obsessing over the governance of Bexhill when there is a bigger picture over the amount that central government is giving to local authorities; and let's be brutally honest, about the state of finances where upon the district and borough councils across the country affected.

Indeed, here East Sussex Council is looking at huge challenges around the issues of Adult Social Care and, indeed, Children's Services.

Now, why am I mentioning that. Well, let me be very clear as to why I am mentioning that. It's because the Government knows it's got to respond to this particular issue. So, how is it going to respond? Well, I can tell you know, I don't think there'll be any new money coming from Government because unlike the previous Labour Party, there's no money tree where we can magically get that funding. Let me be absolutely fair as to what the Government might do because it's a little bit crystal ball gazing but we know that the mood music is such that they can do two things. They can either lift the cap, or they can abolish the cap. And let's be honest about the likely levels of increase that could come. We are not talking about one or two percent. To redress the balance in Adult Social Care and Children's Services, we could be looking at huge council tax increases; not miniscule ones, huge ones; year-on-year to redress the lack of money in local government.

So, that's why I really want to take us down to a very basic level about looking at funding. Now, if I went out to a resident in Bexhill and I didn't ask'em about whether they wanted a town council or not, but I said, 'look, we can spend this much on making sure that this adult, Adult Social care is funded or you can spend the money on governance in Bexhill'. It's surely a no-brainer as to where we should be spending that money. We should be spending that money where front line, front line services are under threat; and front line services are under threat, and that's why we shouldn't, and that's why the Conservatives have said, and I choose my words carefully, we won't waste your money on a town council because we won't promote a town council; it doesn't mean we are against a town council as a whole but what it does mean is that we recognise the challenges that are there in public finances, something that the opposition don't like to recognize, but I have to say, I have to say, that it's mostly to do with the Labour Party who thankfully aren't part of this chamber this evening.

I think we've also got to look frankly at the cost of any new body and much has been said this evening much has been said, excuse me, about the fact that we can't possibly fully cost a town council or indeed, any new body but just look over the way in Weald and at the level of council tax that you see there. In Crowborough, for example, similar size to Bexhill, their precept's the same size as Rother, Ladies and Gentlemen. That's the sort of level that it could escalate to. We've heard much from D4B about the low level of administering a

town council, what it costs to set one up but we haven't really heard much about the cost of how it could grow. So, let's put that in context in, terms of the comments I've made earlier. Lifting the cap, raising the cap, huge raise in council tax at county council, rises at the district or borough, rises in the Police precept and, ho, lo and behold, we've got a town council that might have a similar precept to Rother District Council. How about those people on fixed incomes in Bexhill and there's an awful lot of them. Do you think they'll be thanking you for that, do you be think, they'll be thanking you and their council tax is, say two and a half thousand at a Band D? It's not unlikely. Yes, it's at the higher end of where it might be but it's not unlikely and we need to be honest with the electorate, cut out this nonsense that it'll cost him a few pence a week because he won't cost him a few pence a week because the reality is, if you're going to administer service, there is a cost to administer them. It's not just about setting up a town council and having a clerk, we need to be honest, but I think we also need to look at the record of Rother on the issue of devolvement and that issue is hugely important as well because we have got a record of devolvement, and you don't need a town council to devolve. We've devolved to allotment associa, associations, not only in Bexhill but elsewhere, as well; and there are other things, there are other things that you could devolve without the need of any layer of, new layer of governance: public conveniences, parks and gardens, etc, etc; we've done it elsewhere.

You could set up a community interest company, that would do most of what people that want a town council want done, without the cost of an extra layer of governance. I think also there's a specific issue that's been mentioned about civic pride and I, frankly, have had to laugh, laugh, at some of the comments on social media about that. Specifically again from the Labour Party, 'we're gonna have a little shop and we're gonna, we're gonna have it upstairs their little meeting room, it'll all be good'. Surely this is a little better and I have to say, and I'm going to give credit where credit's due, the Conservative Party here has not stopped opportune, opposition members from becoming Mayor or Chairman of Rother District Council. We all take civic pride very seriously and I think it denigrates each and every member of this authority for members of the public to suggest that we don't take civic pride seriously. Maybe it's because, you know, the Labour Party haven't got a member that they think that the Charter Trustees aren't particularly important but I actually know that every single current member of this authority takes the issue of civic pride and, indeed, the Charter Trustees, really seriously. So they should because we're very proud of the history of Bexhill Charter Trustees and also, I have to say, we're very proud of the history of Rother District Council and the fact that the Chairman of Rother District Council and, indeed, the Mayor of Bexhill work very effectively together as civic figure heads.

So, much has been said about area committees. The Liberals have cleverly moved the goal posts in their own, in their own way of doing things in that it was originally something that I know they promoted very very deeply and we've rehearsed this in this chamber many, many times before but members are absolutely right, and I concur but Councillor Mrs Prochak, as things stand, we know that Bexhill would have an area committee; we know is Battle, Rye and the villages would soon have one as well. All that would effectively do, would be to artificially fragment Rother District Council, wouldn't be particularly effective. The parishing issue is one that, I think, is a little be more difficult to talk about effectively because what is on the table, is quite a blunt way of responding to that parishing issue, and much had been said about the artificial boundaries, and I agree with Mrs Diane Smith, a questioner earlier, who talked about natural communities, because she's absolutely right, and, indeed, I've, I've mentioned before, that I thought parishing some parts of Bexhill might be, might be a good idea; but the reality of it is that

would probably be five or six parishes for Bexhill. But, let's be blunt, if I went to to Sidley and joined Councillor Carroll and Councillor Watson and walked around and knocked on doors 'where do you come from?' I bet they wouldn't say Bexhill, I bet you they'd say Sidley. If I went out with Councillor Clark and Councillor Elford in Pebsham and I say 'where do you think you come from?'. I think you know the answer: it wouldn't be Bexhill, it would be Pebsham. If I went out with Councillor Earl in Little Common, I suspect that that would be the same answer because, we know there are clearly defined communities in some parts of Bexhill. The unfortunate factor is that in other parts of Bexhill, there are not clearly defined communities and I think that's always been something that we've all wrestled with because we know if you parish Sidley that would probably work extremely well. Heart of Sidley, other community and organisations, there is a real sense of community there. There's a real sense of community in Pebsham and indeed in Little common and again in other parts of Bexhill. But Bexhill is always struggled with its identity and, in terms of, if you, if you had some, that, parishes that worked and some that didn't parishes worked effectively and some didn't, I think that would be a challenge. So we then come to the issue of a town council and I referred to costs, and I've referred to asking the question properly. You know it's a bit like saying you want to charge, drive that Ferrari? Well, of course, I do. Would you want to drive that Ferrari but I'll charge you a thousand pounds to do so? You'd get a different answer, wouldn't you. So it's all about asking an honest question. I think, but, the other bit about town councils that would concern me, and Councillor Watson did refer to it rather effectively, is whether or not it would be fair to all parts of Bexhill; and the reality is, I suspect, that most of the funding would go into the centre of the town. And this where I, I really get confused with some of the Labour Party policy because *(Public gallery noise.)*

Madam Chairman ah, ah

Councillor Maynard

...because, they always want to campaign very hard in Sidley. The response rate in Sidley has been markedly low. The reality is that if you had a town council, you could see parts of Sidley that really, the areas that would really struggle to pay, underwriting projects in other parts of the town, and I think that's a serious consideration.

I think the other serious consideration is whether or not there is a silent majority that haven't voted because they're happy with the status quo, and I think there is a genuine case for making, that that might be the case. I think that had we not taken legal advice that said that you can't go out and actively take part in the campaign, I think that we would have seen a somewhat different result but I think the reality is we do need to talk about the last election. And the last election was fought on this particular issue, and it was a landslide for the Conservative Party. And I do return to the issue that Councillor Oliver brought up, at the Scrutiny committee, which is the issue about executive power, because it is clear that there are more than one, there's more than one issue here, and it's been said on social media. We may as well be open about this. It's not just about the issue of town council, it's about the issue of executive power for non-Conservatives in Bexhill. We need to be honest about that because..

Madam Chairman Councillor Maynard.

Councillor Carl Maynard I'm gonna wind up, I'm going to wind up.

Madam Chairman Thank you.

Councillor Maynard We need to be honest about that because our record of working with the opposition, actually, has been quite effective. We've had opposition chairmen of working groups, we have opposition vice-chairmen, we've had a very good record of actually making sure that the civic roles are properly divided up, and I think that, you know, we all strive to make Bexhill a better place. We've got a regeneration agenda that we've seen that's been very, very proactive over the years, and we've seen that seafront towns can stagnate but this regeneration agenda versus no change agenda is something that on this side, at least, we've been very aggressive in putting forward. But I would welcome, genuinely, sensible suggestions from members of the public, from organizations, on how we can improve things in Bexhill. That is a genuine offer. I made that offer a while back but I make it again this evening; and this anti-Rother view that is perpetuated by misinformation in the town is something that we need to change and Councillor Clark is quite right when he says, as I said earlier, that we need to improve that communication and talk about some of the good things we do. But I will look very carefully at the issue of executive power, as we go forward, and I will consider whether or not it would be appropriate to bring an opposition member into the cabinet next year and I will do that on a trial basis because we have got a good record of working with members of the opposition and I think there is an opportunity there, and it goes back to the comment that Councillor Oliver made, about being seen to work together, because I think there is a bit over them and us and it's come out a little bit more during this Governance Review; and I'm very keen that we all work together to make Bexhill better place but we also work together and continue to work together, in making Rother a better place. Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman Thank you very much, Councillor Maynard.
Could I have a proposal, please?

Councillor ? (Name not given.) I defer to Lord Ampthill

Madam Chairman Oh, thank you.

Councillor Lord Ampthill Thank you, Madam Chairman. May I put forward a motion calling for the creation of one parish council for the whole of Bexhill, to be termed a town council. In other words, propose a vote for a town council.

Madam Chairman Have you a seconder? Thank you.

Councillor Simon Elford Thank you, Madam Chairman, I am happy to second that motion.

Madam Chairman Thank you very much, indeed.
Now, I believe we've been asked to call, a recorded vote.
So, could we. Mr Collins will read out the names, and then will you apply appropriately, please.

Mr Collins Thank you, Councillor. Yeah, ha, ha, technology. If we're ready, Councillors.
(Councillors called out their responses; individual microphones off.)

Councillor Lord Ampthill.

Councillor Lord Ampthill For.

Mr Collins Councillor Azad.
Councillor Abul Azad Against.

Mr Collins Councillor Barnes, J.
Councillor John Barnes Against.

Mr Collins Councillor Mrs Barnes, M.
Councillor Mary Barnes Against.

Mr Collins Councillor Bird.
Councillor Roger Bird Abstain

Mr Collins Councillor Browne.
Councillor Graham Browne Against.

Mr Collins Councillor Carroll, J.
Councillor Jim Carroll (*inaudible*)

Mr Collins Councillor Carroll, R.
Councillor Richard Carroll (*inaudible*)

Mr Collins Councillor Clark.
Councillor Charles Clark For.

Mr Collins Councillor Curtis.
Councillor Gary Curtis Against.

Mr Collins Councillor Dixon.
Councillor Kevin Dixon For.

Mr Collins Councillor Earl.
Councillor Stuart Earl For.

Mr Collins Councillor Earl-Williams.
Councillor Deirdre Earl-Williams For.

Mr Collins Councillor Elford.
Councillor Simon Elford For.

Mr Collins Councillor Elliston.
Councillor Robert Elliston For.

Mr Collins Councillor Field.
Councillor Kathryn Field (*inaudible*)

Mr Collins Councillor Ganley.
Councillor Tony Ganley Against.

Mr Collins Councillor Hart.
Councillor Sally-Ann Hart Against.

Mr Collins Councillor Hollidge.
Councillor Ian Hollidge Against.

Mr Collins Councillor Hughes.
Councillor Joyce Hughes Against.

Mr Collins Councillor Jenkins.
Councillor Ian Jenkins Abstain

Mr Collins Councillor Johnson, G.
Councillor Gillian Johnson Against.

Mr Collins Councillor Johnson, J.
Councillor Jonathon Johnson Against.

Mr Collins Councillor Kentfield.
Councillor Brian Kentfield Against.

Mr Collins Councillor Kenward.
Councillor Martin Kenward Against.

Mr Collins Councillor Kirby-Green.
Councillor Eleanor Kirby-Green (*inaudible*)

Mr Collins Councillor Maynard.
Councillor Carl Maynard Against.

Mr Collins Councillor Mooney.
Councillor Martin Mooney For.

Mr Collins Councillor Oliver.
Councillor Oliver For.

Mr Collins Councillor Osborne.
Councillor Paul Osborne For.

Mr Collins Councillor Potts.
Councillor Jacqueline Potts (*inaudible*)

Mr Collins Councillor Prochak.
Councillor Susan Prochak For.

Mr Collins Councillor Saint.
Councillor Chris Saint Abstain.

Mr Collins Councillor Stevens.
Councillor Gennette Stevens For.

Mr Collins Councillor Watson.
Councillor Maurice Watson Abstain.

Madam Chairman Right, the result of that counted vote was: 13 for the motion; 18 against; with four abstentions. So, that means that the motion is lost. Please can I have another proposal.

Councillor Martin Kenward Thank you, Madam Chairman,
I proposed no change.

Madam Chairman Do you have a seconder?

Councillor ? Yes, I'll ... *(Remainder of sentence inaudible.)*

Madam Chairman Thank you.
Again, we're are having a counted vote, I suppose.

Mr Collins Yes, a recorded vote. Please.
Madam Chairman A recorded vote.

Mr Collins Councillors, if we're ready.
Councillor Lord Ampthill.

Councillor Lord Ampthill Against.

Mr Collins Councillor Azad.
Councillor Abul Azad For.

Mr Collins Councillor Barnes, J.
Councillor John Barnes For.

Mr Collins Councillor Barnes, M.
Councillor Mary Barnes For.

Mr Collins Councillor Bird.
Councillor Roger Bird Abstain

Mr Collins Councillor Browne.
Councillor Graham Browne For.

Mr Collins Councillor Carroll, J.
Councillor Jim Carroll For.

Mr Collins Councillor Carroll, R.
Councillor Richard Carroll For.

Mr Collins Councillor Clark.
Councillor Charles Clark Against.

Mr Collins Councillor Curtis.
Councillor Gary Curtis For.

Mr Collins Councillor Dixon.
Councillor Kevin Dixon (*First utterance inaudible*)

Mr Collins Councillor Earl.
Councillor Stuart Earl (*inaudible*)

Mr Collins Councillor Earl-Williams.
Councillor Deirdre Earl-Williams Against.

Mr Collins Councillor Elford.
Councillor Simon Elford Abstain.

Mr Collins Councillor Elliston.
Councillor Robert Elliston Against.

Mr Collins Councillor Field.
Councillor Kathryn Field Against.

Mr Collins Councillor Ganley.
Councillor Tony Ganley For.

Mr Collins Councillor Hart.
Councillor Sally-Ann Hart For.

Mr Collins Councillor Hollidge.
Councillor Ian Hollidge For.

Mr Collins Councillor Hughes.
Councillor Joyce Hughes For.

Mr Collins Councillor Jenkins.
Councillor Ian Jenkins Abstain.

Mr Collins Councillor Johnson, G.
Councillor Gillian Johnson For.

Mr Collins Councillor Johnson, J.
Councillor Jonathon Johnson For.

Mr Collins Councillor Kentfield.
Councillor Brian Kentfield For.

Mr Collins Councillor Kenward.
Councillor Martin Kenward For.

Mr Collins Councillor Kirby-Green.
Councillor Eleanor Kirby-Green (*inaudible*)

Mr Collins Councillor Maynard.
Councillor Carl Maynard For.

Mr Collins Councillor Mooney.
Councillor Martin Mooney Against.

Mr Collins Councillor Oliver.
Councillor Oliver Against.

Mr Collins Councillor Osborne.
Councillor Paul Osborne Against.

Mr Collins Councillor Potts.
Councillor Jacqueline Potts For.

Mr Collins Councillor Prochak.
Councillor Susan Prochak (*inaudible*)

Mr Collins Councillor Saint.
Councillor Chris Saint Abstain.

Mr Collins Councillor Stevens.
Councillor Gennette Stevens (*inaudible*)

Mr Collins Councillor Watson.
Councillor Maurice Watson Abstain.

Madam Chairman The result of the motion is that 18 for; 11 against; with five abstentions. The motion is carried. And that is the end of the debate. If, Ladies and Gentlemen of the public would like to seize this opportunity to leave the chamber, please do so; we'll have a break of a couple of minutes for you to do so.

[End of the Transcription]

Notes:

The Minutes of the meeting are available on the RDC's website
Web Link: <http://www.rother.gov.uk/article/12970/Monday-18-December>

The audio recording of the whole Council meeting is available on YouTube
Web Link: <https://youtu.be/sZPkml9HKol>

The Video of Items 1 to 8 of the RDC meeting on 18th December is available on the D4B Facebook page
Web Link:

Transcription Version 1 dated 22 January 2018