

HOW & WHY TO CREATE A NEW LOCAL COUNCIL IN YOUR URBAN AREA

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1. SOME FACTS ABOUT PARISHES (and they don't have to be called that!)

- Parish and town councils are the backbone of our democracy and the closest tier of government to local people
- There are 10,000 parish and town councils and many parish meetings in England (urban and rural) (NALC represents them)
- England's 80,000 councillors invest around eight million volunteer hours a year in our communities, working hard to improve quality of life for local people
- Our councils contribute in excess of £2 billion of community investment to supporting and improving local communities and delivering neighbourhood level services
- Over 250 new local councils have been established over the last decade through a bottom-up and resident-led process



2. WHAT CAN THEY DO?

- Through a range of powers, parish councils provide and maintain a variety of important and visible local services including;
 - Maintaining allotments, bridleways, burial grounds, bus shelters, car parks, commons
 - Managing community transport schemes, crime reduction measures, footpaths, leisure facilities, local youth projects, open spaces, public lavatories
 - Co-ordinating planning, street cleaning, street lighting, tourism activities
 - Powers to calm traffic, manage village greens and maintain litter bins (and much more)
 - Neighbourhood planning (and housing)
- Raise a precept (a small share of council tax) to fund the above. Nationally around £500m, average is about £50 P.A for a band D CT payer
- Borrow capital from Public Works Loan Board and access other revenue streams



3. WHAT LOCAL COUNCILS DO

- *“In the last couple of months we have opened a new Town Hall, launched our own Crowdfunder Frome site (and helped 5/6 schemes to fund successfully), launched Volunteer Frome (a dating site effectively), launched Frome Volunteer Car Club, helped our sister organisation Fair Frome start a furniture reclamation scheme with van and staff, appointed a wellbeing manager and assisted in drawing down a £33k lottery fund for one of the buildings we own.” Cllr. Mel Usher, Frome Town Council, Somerset*



4. WHAT LOCAL COUNCILS DO

- Economic Development: Sevenoaks (theatre, cinema/orbital bus service); Cockermouth (supporting High Street after flooding); Helston (working with Job Centre Plus to support unemployed)
- Health and wellbeing: Feock (transport for older people); Forest Row (community Café); Newland (OS refs for remote housing); Campbell Park (building social capital)
- Housing and neighbourhood planning: St Ives (second homes); Newport Pagnall (additional 30% housing); Uppingham (housing allocation to post 2026).



5. “PARISH COUNCILS: AN UNLIKELY URBAN SAFETY NET” – GUARDIAN OPINION PIECE BY SUSANNA RUSTIN - Chair Queen’s Park 13/4/2017

- “Precept income has also provided additional funds for our neighbourhood park, where a wildlife area locked for years is now open. We have held on to our summer festival and November fireworks, and are working with partners on a jobs advice project. Our parish council can’t fill all the holes created by cuts to frontline services since 2010. But it is better than nothing.”
- <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/apr/13/parish-councils-unlikely-urban-safety-net>



6. WHY YOU SHOULD SET UP A LOCAL COUNCIL

- A funded governance structure to continue your work after the Big Local grant has finished – building long-term sustainability
- A local council has statutory powers which, if exercised, benefit its area or residents
- Their councillors have a local connection to the area
- Money raised is spent locally to address the priorities of the local council's area and residents
- A local council may provide support to voluntary bodies
- Local councils may have access to grants / loans to support the work they do
- The work of the local council is driven by committed councillors and delivered or supported by its staff.



7. HOW TO SET UP A LOCAL COUNCIL

- To establish a local council, you need to trigger a Community Governance Review
- A Community Governance Review can be triggered by either the principal authority themselves or by the community, through the submission of a petition
- The number of minimum signatures required varies according to the size of the population
- The local authority will launch a local consultation and has 12 months to decide on the creation of a new parish council
- If the authority creates the council, it sets the election date.



8. THE NEW COUNCILS' CAMPAIGN

- Almost 300 local councils set up in England since 1997
- Recent trends to create more community councils in urban areas such as Queen's Park (London), Sutton Coldfield (Birmingham), Kidderminster (Worcestershire) & Lowestoft (Suffolk)
- Read more on our website <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council>
- Top tips, case studies, resources and templates



9. RISKS & CHALLENGES

- Campaigns to gather signatures can be long and technical - but the rewards are worth it
- Party politics can bias the process during the Community Governance Review phase – but we are lobbying to remove this
- You need a sustainable campaign group to see you through the petition phase (a good idea to secure the support of a community group)
- Neighbourhood Forums can now become parish councils if they wish – but get the boundaries agreed first.
- Takes time – prepare now and build into your programme



10. SUTTON COLDFIELD HISTORY

- Neolithic collectivism in Sutton Park – social action still visible in the stones!
- Henry VIII's Royal Charter 1528 – land and Town given to the 'common people'
- Farming and industry, a self-sufficient community
- Victorian Sutton – Arts and Crafts legacy in culture, civic engagement and architecture; economic link to Bham business
- Town Council as a County Borough Council in Warwickshire
- Turmoil in 1974, as Sutton incorporated into Birmingham and West Midlands Metropolitan County Council



11. SUTTON REFERENDUM GROUP

- 1974 to 2012, an uncomfortable (dysfunctional?) relationship for Sutton Coldfield within Birmingham
- Birmingham becomes Europe's largest single local authority (1m population) following WMCC abolition in 1986
- Several failed attempts to establish devolved governance across Birmingham over 25 years (including parishing)
- 2008 Local Gov't Act /2011 Localism Act – new opportunities
- Active citizens in Sutton Coldfield form 'Referendum Group' in summer 2012 to campaign for a Town Council



12. THE SUTTON CAMPAIGN – WE WON!

- Neighbourhood Forums and Residents Groups join in, needed 6,720 signatures (10% at that time, 7.5% now) to trigger CG Review
- Petition 10,200 signatures submitted to BCC in May 2013
- BCC established cross-party Community Governance Review Working Group (2 workstreams – Sutton, and Citywide)
- Informal consultation March 2015 (workshops, online survey)
- Postal ballot July 2015 – 75,000 electors, FAQ sheet (indicated possible precept ave £50 per household)
- Result – 40% turnout, 70% (over 20,000) vote YES!



13. RE-ORGANISATION ORDER

- Full Council Meeting of BCC agrees to formation of Sutton Coldfield Town Council – 13 September 2015
- Legal process undertaken to construct a ‘re-organisation order’
- Informal ‘shadow Council’ created consisting of 4 Referendum Group, 2 civic groups, 8 BCC Councillors as guardians for governance
- 1 March 2016 – transforms legally into an Interim Town Council
- First elections 5 May 2016 – 24 Town Councillors form inaugural Town Council meeting 19 May 2016



14. TOWN COUNCIL - BEDDING IN

- First year has been dominated by challenges of ‘bedding in’
- Two attempts to recruit a Town Clerk – have now appointed an Acting Town Clerk and Strategic Development Director
- Initial annual budget £1.8m but struggled to deliver projects to achieve spend
- Headline proposals – improve Sutton Park, lift florals and lights, environmental upgrades, Town centre plan
- ‘Thorny issues’ – delivery often enmeshed with BCC (eg school road safety crossing, Sutton Park), need to untangle
- ‘Testy issues’ – Town Hall future / capital funding / asset transfer issue, Sutton Library closure, suspicions of ‘double taxation’.



15. FUTURE DEVOLUTION IN BIRMINGHAM

- Another citywide attempt to secure a workable form of devolution
- Cabinet Committee Local Leadership – drawing up a basket of proposals including CDTs & community and neighbourhood councils
- Key is commitment to a ‘Charter Agreement’ to set out ground-rules on asset management/transfer, service agreements including highways maintenance contracted service as well as BCC in-house
- Exploratory workshop in spring 2017 with cross-party Councillors Group (also includes Frankley Parish Council) – Scrutiny Inquiry
- New ‘BCC Neighbourhood FOM’ within Future Council Programme
- Huge, uncharted opportunities for innovative local governance!



16. SOURCES & Q.& A.

- NALC Create A Council web page - <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council>
- NALC Power To The People Pack - <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/publications>
- Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council Web-site – <http://www.suttoncoldfieldtowncouncil.gov.uk/> .

