

# ROTHER ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS (RALC)

## Quarterly Meeting

**Minutes of meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2026, 2.30pm  
Staplecross Village Hall, TN32 5QG**

**Attendees:** Keith Robertson (Catsfield & RALC Chair), Martin Griffiths (Brede and Guestling and RALC Vice Chair), Philip Allard (Iden), Geoff Thomas (Crowhurst), Margaret Howell (Battle), David Young (Ewhurst), Jenny Exley (Battle), David Todd (Salehurst & Robertsbridge), Karen Ripley (Salehurst & Robertsbridge), Jenner Sands (Icklesham), Jacqui Stanford (Icklesham), John Barnes (Etchingham), Tracy Dixon (Brede and Whatlington), Julie Ramus (Rye Foreign), David Penfold (Pett), Caroline Croft (Brightling), Sarah Whiteman (Fairlight), Geoff Smith (Fairlight), Jonathan Vine-Hall (Sedlescombe), Sue Prochak (Rother District Council), Vicki Rutt (Catsfield and RALC Clerk).

	<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Action</b>
1	<b>Welcome</b> The Chair welcomed attendees.	
2	<b>Apologies for absence</b> Apologies were noted from Gill Colquhoun (Salehurst & Robertsbridge), Michelle Webber (Bexhill), Paulette Barton (Etchingham) and Lynda Roller (Crowhurst).	
3	<b>Accuracy of Minutes of the meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2025</b> RESOLVED: To approve the draft minutes of the meeting held on 22 <sup>nd</sup> October 2025 as an accurate record.	
4	<b>Matters arising or reports from Members from previous meetings</b> Keith Robertson updated on the below items: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A new treasurer needs to be appointed as Keith should not be Chair and Treasurer. David Todd was proposed and all agreed. He will commence this new role from April 2026.</li><li>• A new rep needs to be appointed to Standards Committee; this will be covered in agenda item 8a as RDC could not accept the member put forward from the AGM.</li><li>• The financial accounts have been audited and signed off. The accounts are on the RALC website.</li><li>• Chairman's report is now a new quarterly item that will be circulated. Any questions, liaise to the Chair.</li><li>• It was agreed that we will review our constitution if needed, if change is required to align with eSALC and the new Unitary authority.</li></ul>	
5	<b>To present and review items discussed at the RALC executive meeting 4<sup>th</sup> Dec 2025</b> The minutes from this meeting were circulated previously and are available on the RALC website. <b>Admin</b> - It was agreed that more resources need to be put into the RALC administration, to enable the secretary to manage additional meetings and keep the website up to date. We will review this in the first quarter of 2025-26 to assess if the secretary has the capacity (time) to do this. <b>Communications</b> - The Chair noted that RALC could improve transparency with third parties, eSALC and NALC to ensure we keep track of issues raised and responses received. Keith Robertson is now the Chair of eSALC and this should help. <b>Attendance</b> – Meeting attendance was raised and it was noted that attendance is lower than ideal. It was agreed to trial moving the quarterly meeting to the RDC office at Bexhill	

	<p>where the hybrid option is used for those who are unable to attend, to see if this encourages more members to attend. This will be trialled for the April 2026 meeting and reassessed after that meeting. We will also contact members who rarely attend to establish why that is. To further assist in communications each member on the Exec Group has been assigned 5 Councils to liaise with to speed up communications with them and provide ongoing feedback to RALC.</p>	
6	<p><b>Update on RDC key topics and on LGR from District &amp; Government viewpoint, including impact on the delay of the Mayor elections</b></p> <p><b>Unitary Boundaries.</b> Lorna Ford reported on the timeline for LGR. The biggest phase was the consultation that commenced on the 19<sup>th</sup> November 2025 and closed on the 11<sup>th</sup> January 2026. There are 2 proposals for unitary boundaries: 'One East Sussex' agreed by the majority of districts and '5 Councils across Sussex' proposed by Brighton. It is believed that 'One East Sussex' makes the most sense, but the decision on these unitary boundaries is for the UK Govt to make. A decision is expected by 26<sup>th</sup> March.</p> <p><b>LGR transition planning.</b> A lot of work is taking place within the Districts, Boroughs and County Councils to manage the transition of services, including assets, finance, HR, IT etc. This is the discovery phase. The next phase is planning for change. Legal changes are also needed to facilitate the changes to a new authority. This is a structural change order, which is secondary legislation. This will define for example what the new authorities will be called, how many Cllrs will sit on each etc. Any modifications required to the proposal will also be decided. By Summer 2026 the order will be laid in Parliament and will come in force in Autumn 2026. There is a proposal to postpone County Council elections from May 2026 to 2027, the consultation for this ends this week. If accepted, elections for the new Unitary members to the new Authority will take place in May 2027 to commence as an authority on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2028. County, District, and Parish elections will also be in May 2027. There is still a lot of uncertainty around dates. If these dates are correct County and Districts Councils will remain in place until 2028 with limited powers for County and Districts within the control umbrella of the new Unitary Council. No changes are expected for Parish Councils.</p> <p>The Mayoral Authority will sit above, and their elections have been delayed to May 2028. Views are being shared that Mayoral elections should also be held in May 2027 to align with Unitary changes. Again, dates are still TBA.</p> <p>Sedlescombe asked how will the new Unitary agree a precept. Lorna explained that it is likely that to align precept levels it will require the highest-level of Council Tax increase. In terms of funding from UK Govt, a multi-year settlement has been received which is good and enables RDC to know what the next 3 years will look like, and they will not need to dip into reserves as much as previously expected. There are gains and losses in funding for other districts. ESCC are in a tougher position, and they are getting additional financial support from UK Gov.</p> <p>Salehurst and Robertsbridge asked who the returning officer will be for the elections in May 2027. It is not yet known who the returning officer will be for the Unitary elections but for the District and Parish Council elections, this will remain as Rother's returning officer.</p>	
7	<p><b>Update on LGR from RALC and RDC view</b></p> <p>Martin Griffiths updated that RALC formed a working group to understand how Parish and Town Councils can engage with the Unitary Authority structure. There is a duty on the new authority to work with Parish Councils. It is expected that the focus for the Unitary after May 2027 will be the transition of services and not on any integration with Parish or Town Councils. Rather than wait until 2027-28 for any proposals from the</p>	

	<p>Unitary for Parish Town Council engagement, RALC wanted to be ready with proposals that the unitary may consider and adopt.</p> <p>The LGR working group is a strong team working closely with the Lorna Ford and Sue Prochak from RDC. The group is also reaching out to the East Sussex district associations, inviting these to work with us and will be hearing from other authorities in Surrey and Somerset who have completed the unitary process or are in the process to understand what worked well and what not so well in terms of engagement with Parish and Town Councils. Information on the progress of this working group will be shared with members over the coming months.</p> <p>It is unlikely that Parish and Town Councils will be hugely affected by LGR in terms of services directly managed but services that the district currently provide could be devolved to Parish/Town Council. The funding for any additional services needs to be clarified. A member asked that RALC ensure that the environment is still well managed and cared for after the transition. This is within the scope of the review on engagement under review by the working group.</p>	
8	<p><b>Standards Committee</b></p> <p><u>Appoint a new RALC member to the Standards Committee</u></p> <p>The Chair asked if any members want to be considered for appointment to the RDC Standards Committee. Attending meetings is not onerous, but we do want appointees to actively engage in working with the RDC Monitoring officer, other districts in East Sussex and with initiatives currently in place in West Sussex to reduce the number of complaints. (see below). This is likely to be more onerous, require active participation and appointees need to be able to allocate time to lead on this with Martin Griffiths.</p> <p>David Pemberton indicated interest and was noted for consideration. It was also agreed to communicate to all RALC members (not all were present) to invite any interest. The appointment to the STD committee and work to reduce complaints was then deferred to the April meeting when David's and any other interest will be considered. Keith Robertson will remain on the Committee for the time being.</p> <p><u>Update on the Government review of Code of Conduct breaches &amp; sanctions</u></p> <p>A link to a lengthy UK Gov document was circulated the day of the meeting. This is report on the response by UK Gov on a consultation which among other changes will allow Cllrs to be suspended for 6 months for some breaches. We do not have a timeline for this legislative change. Meanwhile RALC, along with the Standards Committee, are assessing how they can help to reduce the number of complaints raised because this is a lengthy and expensive process with limited outcomes. (90% of complaints are not upheld). RDC have been ahead of the curve regarding standards for a while introducing a triage system which is now in place at RDC. This could be a template or start point for actions by Parish Council Chairs in helping to reduce complaints. Work is needed to assess this. The Standards Committee meet every 6 months, and an anonymised report is received on what complaints have been submitted. From the Dec 2025 meeting, 8 complaints were received in total re Parish Councils; 4 were from members of the Public, 3 were Cllr to Cllr and one was a District Cllr to a Parish Cllr.</p>	

	<p>There are Councils in West Sussex also dealing with this via mediation. Martin Griffiths (plus the other RALC appointed rep) is going to look at how this scheme is working and whether it is something we can use in RALC. More training for Cllrs may also be needed. A member stated that New Cllr training should be mandatory.</p>	
9	<p><b>To agree the budget for 2026-27</b></p> <p>The draft budget has been circulated previously. It was proposed that the budget is accepted with the proviso that we are likely to go over budget for costs of the secretary role because the workload has increased due to more meetings (incl LGR) and updating the RALC website. We have sufficient reserves to fund some additional work in 2026-27. All agreed to approve the budget.</p>	
10	<p><b>Future business - Members to suggest specific items for April 2026 meeting and agree venue</b></p> <p>Venue agreed as Bexhill Town Hall on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> April 2026, with a new start time of 13:00.</p> <p>Icklesham raised a time sensitive matter regarding a campaign about saving some land at Rye Harbour. They were advised to write to RALC.</p> <p>Lorna Ford reported that the 8-week consultation on the Local Plan commences on the 26<sup>th</sup> January.</p>	