

Governance Committee

26 November 2018

Part I

Review of Mid Sussex County Local Committees

Report by the Working Group Chairman

Electoral Divisions: All

Summary

This report sets out the conclusions and recommendations of the working group set up in June 2018 by the Governance Committee to:

- Review the impact of changes to the configuration of County Local Committees (CLCs) in Mid Sussex introduced from May 2017; and
- Consider the proposal that the member for Lindfield & High Weald should only sit on one CLC.

The working group has held three meetings, reviewed a range of information and carried out consultation, including with Mid Sussex members and parish councils. It has concluded that it is too soon to make changes to the configuration of CLCs and that there should be a review of all CLCs across the county in approximately one year. In the meantime, it recommends that best practice guidelines be developed for CLCs.

Recommendations

- (1) That the Governance Committee should carry out a full review of all County Local Committees after May 2019, to focus on the points set out at paragraph 2.7;
- (2) That there should be no change at this stage to the current configuration of CLCs in Mid Sussex, including the split of the Lindfield & High Weald division across two CLCs; and
- (3) That the Cabinet Member for Safer, Stronger Communities should develop best practice guidance for CLCs, to include reference to the points set out at paragraph 2.6.

1. Background and Context

- 1.1 In June 2018, this Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Assurance on whether to recommend to the County Council that the Lindfield & High Weald electoral division, currently part of both the Central and South Mid Sussex and the North Mid Sussex CLCs, should be entirely within the North Mid Sussex CLC. This change had been requested by the member for Lindfield & High Weald. However, the Committee was informed that when changes to the configuration of CLCs had been approved in 2016, there had

been a promise to consider whether any adjustment was required to the CLCs in Mid Sussex in the light of experience once the recommendations had been implemented. The Committee agreed that this review should now be undertaken before any proposals for boundary changes were put before the Committee.

- 1.2 The working group was appointed by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman as follows: Mr Paul High (Chairman), Mrs Carol Purnell and Mrs Morwen Millson. It has held three meetings and has reviewed comparative data on all CLCs (as set out in **Appendix A**) and information on the Democratic Services savings programme (2016), which led to the decision by the Governance Committee and the County Council to change the configuration of CLCs (from 14 to 11 and a reduction in the number of meetings per year from four to three), with savings of £23,400. The working group has also considered consultation feedback gathered in 2016 as part of this savings programme, including feedback from Mid Sussex members, Mid Sussex District Council and relevant town/parish councils at the time.
- 1.3 The working group has consulted with members, town and parish councils and the Cabinet Member for Safer, Stronger Communities, as set out in paragraph 4.

2. Conclusions

- 2.1 The working group recognises that:
 - (a) The changes to CLCs introduced from May 2017 have had an impact on the capacity of CLCs;
 - (b) The geography of Mid Sussex makes it difficult to draw boundaries that fit with County Council divisions and local communities;
 - (c) It can be difficult within the current configuration of CLCs to reflect all communities' interests (e.g. rural villages and urban towns);
 - (d) CLCs have busy workloads and it can be difficult to manage this within the constraints of three formal meetings;
 - (e) Having two Council divisions split between two CLCs (Bourne and Lindfield & High Weald), inevitably means additional workload for the members affected, and there can sometimes be perceptions of a conflict of interest where the same issue is discussed at both their CLCs; and
 - (f) Feedback from Mid Sussex members shows that there are concerns with the current configuration of their CLCs.
- 2.2 However, the working group concludes that it is too soon to review the full impact of changes to CLCs introduced from May 2017. It is difficult to assess the capacity issues, the potential for different ways of working and the impact of using crowdfunding for the Community Initiative Fund (CIF), after only just over a year. The working group is also concerned at any disparity in terms of approach to CLCs, given that the changes agreed in 2016 identified a consistent approach in terms of one CLC in urban areas (Worthing, Adur, Crawley) and two in the more rural/urban mix areas (Chichester, Horsham, Arun, Mid Sussex).

- 2.3 The working group feels that a review of the impact of changes to CLCs should not be confined to Mid Sussex. Whilst there did not appear to be concern from members in other areas, any amendments to CLCs in Mid Sussex could lead to requests for similar amendments in other areas. It therefore considers that there should be a full review of all CLCs across the County, to enable an assessment of different options and to include identification of potential areas for saving.
- 2.4 The working group has sympathy for the fact that the member for Lindfield & High Weald sits on two CLCs and therefore has to attend more meetings than others. However, it is not certain that moving the division wholly to North Mid Sussex CLC would meet the needs of the community, and is concerned that this might create a different set of problems. The working group is very mindful of the fact that the bulk of the population of this division is located to the south, in the Lindfield Parishes – and that these parish councils opposed a move to the North Mid Sussex CLC. It cannot identify an easy option to resolve this problem, without creating the potential for negative unintended consequences. It concludes that a full review of all CLCs should also consider the impact of the two split divisions in the County (Lindfield & High Weald and Bourne), both in terms of member capacity and community affiliation.
- 2.5 The working group considers that it is not possible for all issues of significant public interest to be dealt with through CLCs. Whilst they are a good vehicle for engaging with the public on high profile issues, and enabling information to be shared and discussed in a transparent way, CLCs should not replace the potential to arrange special one-off meetings in the community. The relevant service at the Council should be taking the lead on such issues and arranging meetings (e.g. where the Cabinet Member/senior service lead officers can engage directly with the community), rather than attempting to 'funnel' all such matters through CLCs. CLC chairmen should be reminded that, where necessary, an additional meeting can be held to deal with specific/exceptional issues arising.
- 2.6 In advance of a review of all CLCs, the working group suggests that learning and best practice across all CLCs should be shared. There may be some areas where a consistent approach across all CLCs would be helpful and this might also help to address some of the capacity issues that Central and South Mid Sussex CLC is experiencing. Good practice guidelines could be developed, covering the following:
- (a) Making best use of the 'Talk With Us' session and how best to involve the public at meetings
 - (b) Ways of engaging with the public/stakeholders outside of meetings
 - (c) Different ways to manage capacity and workload, including through use of pre-agenda meetings, sub-groups and pre-meetings
 - (d) Different ways of dealing with Traffic Regulation Orders, Community Initiative Fund (CIF) allocations and Governor appointments
 - (e) The opportunity for individual members to lead on certain key issues outside CLC meetings, to help free up the agenda (but keeping the CLC updated through progress reports)
 - (f) Virtual working outside or in-between meetings (e.g. using email to share information in advance of meetings; members meeting informally together, without Democratic Services officers present).

2.7 The working group therefore concludes that a full review of CLCs should be carried out after May 2019 and that areas of focus for this should include:

- The purpose and effectiveness of CLCs, to include their decision-making powers
- To explore opportunities for savings through changes/reductions to CLCs
- The potential to reduce from 11 to seven CLCs, to be coterminous with district and borough councils, which could meet four times per year
- Consideration of the impact of the use of the West Sussex Crowd for allocation of CIF
- The potential for different ways of working, outside of formal CLC meetings, without the need for Democratic Services officer support
- The two divisions which are split across two CLCs (Bourne and Lindfield & High Weald) – and the impacts of this on both members and communities
- The Joint Arun Area Committees
- Potential for drawing in funding from district/borough and town/parish councils to support CLCs
- What other authorities do in terms of community engagement forums
- How CLCs can make an impact on local priorities, through more informed local data and targeted work.

3. Resources

3.1 There are no resource implications arising directly from this report, as the working group is not making any recommendations to change the current configuration of CLCs in Mid Sussex.

3.2 The working group reviewed the possible resource implications of an additional CLC in Mid Sussex, estimated at £8,500 (additional Democratic Services staffing costs). Other costs, such as venue hire and staff travel would not be significant, although there would be implications in terms of other staff attendance (e.g. Highways Managers, Locality Leads). The working group did not accept that there would be no additional costs from the reintroduction of a third CLC in Mid Sussex – and is concerned that any such change could lead to further demands for change in other areas, and thus to further costs. The working group feels strongly that there should be no cost increase from the proposed review of CLCs, and that opportunities for savings should be sought.

Factors taken into account

4. Consultation

4.1 The working group reviewed feedback from consultation carried out in 2016 as part of the Democratic Services savings programme, which included with County Council members for Mid Sussex at the time, Mid Sussex District Council and town/parish councils. In addition, it carried out consultation as follows:

- With parish councils in the Lindfield & High Weald division (feedback received from three of four) and with Haywards Heath Town Council
- With Mid Sussex County Council members through a short survey (feedback received from nine of 12)

- With the member for the Bourne division (the only other member who sits on two CLCs)
- The following members attended a working group meeting to provide evidence in person: the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Central and South Mid Sussex CLC, the Chairman of North Mid Sussex CLC, the member for Lindfield & High Weald
- The Cabinet Member for Safer, Stronger Communities and her Senior Adviser attended a working group meeting to discuss its findings.

4.2 A summary of feedback received from Mid Sussex members, town/parish councils and the member for the Bourne division is set out in **Appendix B**.

5. Risk Management Implications

5.1 There are very limited risks associated with the recommendations in this report, as there are no proposals for change. However, Mid Sussex members have raised concerns regarding capacity and the length and complexity of Central and South Mid Sussex CLC meetings. Failure to address these could lead to reputational damage to the Council. The working group has suggested that prior to a full review of all CLCs, best practice guidance should be developed, which may help to address some of the issues of concern raised.

6. Other Options Considered

6.1 The working group considered whether or not to reinstate the Central Mid Sussex CLC (which had merged with the South Mid Sussex CLC in May 2017) and whether to move the Lindfield & High Weald division wholly to either the North Mid Sussex CLC or the Central and South Mid Sussex CLC. It is concerned that reinstating a third CLC would have cost implications in terms of staff support (both Democratic Services and other Council officers, such as Highways staff). Whilst these costs may be relatively low, any such change in Mid Sussex could lead to a demand for similar changes in other CLCs, with a consequent increase in costs. The working group feels strongly that any changes to CLC governance arrangements should be cost-neutral.

6.2 The working group is also mindful of the feedback from parish councils, which opposed moving the Lindfield & High Weald division wholly to the North Mid Sussex CLC. It has not been able to identify an easy option to resolve this split-division problem, even with the potential to hold one meeting per year in Lindfield. Moving the whole division to either CLC would lead to difficulties for some communities/parishes. Evidence from the member for the Bourne division, the only other Council division split between two CLCs, did not lead the working group to conclude that the problems associated with a split division are insurmountable. However, it does feel that the impact of these two split divisions should be considered as part of the recommended review of all CLCs.

6.3 The working group concluded that it could not support either reinstating a third CLC or moving Lindfield & High Weald division wholly to either North Mid Sussex or Central and South Mid Sussex CLC at the current time, without a full review of all CLCs.

7. Equality Duty

- 7.1 This is a report dealing with procedural matters only. It will be important to ensure that the Council's responsibilities relating to the Equality Duty are be taken into account as appropriate through the proposed review of all CLCs in 2019.

8. Social Value

- 8.1 Not applicable

9. Crime and Disorder Act Implications

- 9.1 None

10. Human Rights Implications

- 10.1 None

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Appendices

- Appendix A – Comparative Data on CLCs
- Appendix B – Summary of Consultation Feedback