



# ROSS-ON-WYE TOWN COUNCIL

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QUALITY  
PARISH  
COUNCIL

Mrs D Mason MILCM  
TOWN CLERK

9 September 2014

Mr W Norman  
Assistant Director  
Governance  
Herefordshire Council  
Brockington  
35 Hafod Road  
Hereford  
HR1 1SH

Dear Mr Norman

## **Response Ross-on-Wye Town Council to Community Governance Review draft report**

We strongly welcome most of the recommendations in the report, in particular the unification of boundaries, the sensible warding arrangements and the increase in the number of Councillors to eighteen.

We are disappointed with the decision to call the new Council Ross-on-Wye Parish Council. We believe this demotes the town in relation to neighbouring market towns. We also note that only a Town Council can have a Mayor and believe that respondents to the consultation were not aware of this factor. However we recognise that the new body will have the power to change its name if it chooses and are content to leave this matter to be determined by the new authority.

However, the currently proposed transition arrangements are of considerable concern as we do not believe that the proposal to create a new Ross Parish Council on 1<sup>st</sup> April and have this run on a temporary basis by the four County Councillors is realistic.

The context to this is that Ross Town Council has considerable responsibilities and these are increasing as a result of the Council's agreement to Herefordshire Council's request that we assume responsibility for several assets in the town. We have a small number of part-time staff, led by the Town Clerk, and these work closely with Town Councillors.

Pragmatically, it is unrealistic to expect the well-established system of Mayor, Deputy Mayor and ten other Town Councillors in active committees to be replaced by four individuals, especially during the weeks leading up to an election, when County Councillors are likely to be pre-occupied with campaigning. In fact one of the Councillors is a Parliamentary Candidate for a constituency 100 miles away. It is an unfair expectation on these four individuals that they should be expected to shoulder the entire burden of running the new authority with all the extra work that will be involved in making the transition from two parishes to one.

Particular issues we foresee are:

- Quoracy - it will be difficult to assemble meetings of all four Councillors, which will leave the Town Clerk in a difficult position re decision making.
- Plurality - Parish Councils exist as a counter-balance to Principal Authorities. At a time of transition in terms of asset transfers and structures it is vital that there is visible autonomy at the parish level in Ross-on-Wye so that County Councillors cannot be accused of acting in the interests of the County rather than the Town.
- Planning - one of the County Councillors chairs Herefordshire Council's Planning Committee and therefore cannot take part in planning discussions at Parish level. If a significant planning application affecting Ross was submitted during this period it would be very difficult if not impossible for the new Parish Council to respond to it.
- Transition - no matter how much preparation the predecessor bodies do there will be significant decisions with large financial implications about employment and management structures, insurance, banking and other issues arising from the transition which will need to be confirmed immediately upon the transition. It would be far preferable for these decisions to be taken by the newly elected Parish Councillors than by a small group of County Councillors post-election.
- Contingencies - the new Parish would be vulnerable in its early weeks if exceptional events occurred that needed emergency response.

We recognise the issue that only one precept can be raised in the new Parish for 2015/16. However, Ross Town Council has adequate reserves to run from 1<sup>st</sup> April to the date of the election without raising a precept. We are already in dialogue with Ross Rural Parish Council to determine what the precept for the unified Council should be so that we can make a recommendation to Herefordshire Council with the support of both bodies. Hence running with the two existing Parishes (unsupported by precept) up to the date of the election would mean the 2015/16 precept would be at the disposal of the new unified Parish rather than the predecessor bodies.

We therefore recommend that the date for the abolition of Ross Town Council should be election day and that Ross-on-Wye Parish Council should come into being the day after.

Alternatively, if it is deemed necessary to make the transition on the 1<sup>st</sup> April, the new Councillors should be the existing Parish and Town Councillors. These are currently 18 in number (8 on Ross Rural, 11 on Ross Town with Cllr Grey holding seats on both bodies).

Yours sincerely

Mrs D Mason  
Town Clerk