

**Sutton Coldfield Town Council:**

**New Parish Council Created**

**How a new Town Council was created in the previously un-Parished area  
of Sutton Coldfield**

## Headlines:

- Sutton Coldfield is a large urban town located on the edge of Birmingham, West Midlands.
- Sutton Coldfield's current population is of 100,000 which meant 10,000 signatures had to be obtained on the petition to submit to Birmingham City Council to trigger the necessary Community Governance Review to Parish the town.
- Residents keenly felt the loss of the old urban district council in 1974 and further with the removal of the old Sutton Mayoral chains.
- The campaign to create the new Sutton Coldfield Town Council has therefore been a Herculean effort to regain a local political identity for the town.
- This case study tells the story of how Sutton Coldfield successfully established a Town Council in the summer of 2015.

## What is the theme? – Why a Council is wanted:

The theme of this case study is the creation of a new Town Council in the locale of Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham. Using the NALC / DCLG campaign pyramid - this is the phase at the summit of the journey a campaign group travels to after the principal local authority has given the green light to the creation of the new Parish Council during the relevant Community Governance Review (CGR) phase.

Ken Rushton, Cllr. Rob Pocock, Stephen Smallwood and the Sutton Vesey Community Association campaigned for years to create the new Town Council in Sutton Coldfield in the belief that services could be best delivered locally due to the size of Birmingham City Council which meant the needs of towns became difficult to voice – Birmingham City Council is the largest local authority in Europe. Following the creation of Sutton Coldfield Town Council, residents will now benefit from a £1.8 million precept; newly elected Sutton Coldfield Town Councillors will determine how this sum will be best spent on behalf of residents in the area.

## Contextual issues related to the theme:

Since 1974, residents of Sutton Coldfield have wanted a better deal on issues like town planning, car parking, highways and green spaces. Whilst the campaign group have recognised that though the General Power of Competence (GPC) is a power of first resort for Parish Councils – campaigners also know that Parish Councils are neither planning nor highways authorities. However, the creation of the largest Town Council in England in the town will do much to give residents a bigger say on these key issues. Other recently formed Parish Councils have been achieved in areas such as Kidderminster, Finham, Pannal and

Westgate. Elections for the new Town Council will take place on 5 May, 2016. Given the success of the Sutton Coldfield campaign, it is now likely that there will be other campaigns to create new Parish Councils in Castle Vale and Shard End, to join Sutton Coldfield and New Frankley as the first two parish councils in Birmingham.

### Who are the key partners / stakeholders involved?

The key individuals involved in the campaign from the campaign group perspective were Ken Rushton and Stephen Smallwood. The key member from Birmingham City Council was Cllr. Rob Pocock who was always up front since his election in 2012 that a Town Council was his aim. These campaigners were backed by the Sutton Vesey Community Association and hugely supported by officers Ifor Jones and Olive O'Sullivan from Birmingham City Council.

The campaign group was grant funded with £17,000 over three financial years to help produce leaflets, organise public meetings, and so forth to galvanise and sustain resident interest. Such funding was provided by DCLG and accessed from the Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils (WALC) via the National Association of Local Councils. This funding was regarded to have been crucial in the delivery of the largest Town Council in England.

### What are the key issues/ challenges? – Progress with campaign to date:

It took approximately two years to gather the 10,000 signatures required to trigger the CGR for the creation of the new Sutton Coldfield Town Council. Apart from the huge logistical challenge of gathering such signatures, there was also the matter of widely advertising to create greater awareness of the campaign given the sheer size of the town. Which is why posters posted on local trains and stations were crucial in raising awareness. Party politics has also been an issue and the ongoing need to minimise its involvement in the campaign. There were points – particularly earlier in 2015 – when it appeared as though the campaign would not succeed for this reason alone:

*"WALC congratulates the group of residents, led by Ken Rushton that have, through sheer hard work and determination, pulled off the amazing achievement of re-establishing Sutton Coldfield Town Council. We look forward to welcoming them as members and providing, in the years ahead, the advice and support they will need to deliver quality services to their community that will make Sutton Coldfield an even better place to live." – John Crossling, WALC*

### How have these issues / challenges been overcome?

The £17,000 of DCLG funding since September, 2013 has helped the campaign group to massively overcome difficulties which may have proved insurmountable otherwise. The two main problems were gathering the 10,000 signatures and sustaining awareness of the campaign over a two or three year period. The main solutions paid for by these monies were as below;

- Printing of newsletters and briefing leaflets;
- Hire of community halls for briefing events;
- Postage and distribution of selected Direct Mail to community groups; &
- Advertising and promotional posters.

### Outcomes - Learning From The Campaign



#### *The campaign poster for a Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council.*

The initial campaigning achievement was the securing of the 10,000 signatures required to trigger the Community Governance Review to create the Town Council. The second main achievement was to secure an overwhelming majority of 'Yes' votes when the final referendum of the Review took place of residents earlier in 2015.

On the final referendum, an overwhelming majority of the electorate – 70% – voted 'Yes'. No one on party political grounds or otherwise could then dispute this. Since this time and also when Birmingham City Council communicated back its formal agreement to the creation of the Town Council later in 2015 – the sharing of the learning has been national (in the form of presentations at NALC events) and local – in the form of sharing campaign ideas with Shard End and Castle Vale.

### What have been the key elements of success?

The key element of success on a project of this scale was to persuade 70% of the residents voting in the 2015 referendum to create the Town Council to vote 'Yes'. The second main achievement was then to persuade officers and members on Birmingham City Council that they had nothing to fear from the creation of the new Sutton Coldfield Town Council –

political or otherwise. This latter task may have been made marginally easier by the outcome of the referendum result – but campaigns elsewhere (as in Fenton and Corringham) have failed at the first attempt at a similar stage of the campaign.

### **What has been learnt? Campaign lessons to share with others:**

Sutton Coldfield residents will benefit from a strong and permanent voice on several strategic policy issues such as highways, car parking, green spaces and town centre management – through the new Town Council – and largely through relationships with Birmingham City Council. As mentioned, residents will benefit in year one from £1.8 million from a local precept which can be spent on services in Sutton Coldfield. Communicating the benefits of a Town Council has not been as much of a challenge as first thought as most residents recognise that due to the size of Birmingham City Council, their services are not local enough at the moment.

The campaign group also recognises that sharing lessons on gathering petition signatures and how to sustain a long campaign are critical. Engaging with the principal local authority once a CGR has been triggered is also critical. Finally, it is also important to recognise once a re-organisation order has been issued by the principal authority, the entirely new set of challenges with creating the new Town Council: budget setting, vesting and namely, having sufficient residents to stand for election.

### **Who Can I Contact?**

**Ken Rushton: Sutton Coldfield Campaign Champion - [kenrushton@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:kenrushton@blueyonder.co.uk) / 0121 355 3224.**

**John Crossling: Warwickshire & West Midlands Association of Local Councils – [johnc@walc.org.uk](mailto:johnc@walc.org.uk) / 01789 472 616 .**

### **Other information**

**More information on how to create a new council: The NALC ‘Create a Council’ page:**  
**<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council>**

**The NALC ‘Power to the people’ resource:**  
**<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/publications>**

**The Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council Campaign:**  
**<http://www.suttoncoldfieldtowncouncil.com/> .**

**Warwickshire & West Midlands Association of Local Councils:**  
**<http://www.walc.org.uk/> .**