

Bingley Town Council:

New Community Council Created

**How a new Town Council was created in the previously un-Parished area
of Bingley, City of Bradford, West Yorkshire**

Headlines:

- Bingley is a market town in the metropolitan borough of the City of Bradford, in West Yorkshire, England. It is situated on the River Aire and the Leeds and Liverpool Canal.
- Local travel links include Bingley railway station in the town centre and Leeds Bradford International Airport, which is located 10 miles from the city centre. The B6265 (Main Street), connecting Bingley to Keighley, runs through the town centre.
- Historically a part of the West Riding of Yorkshire, Bingley appears in the *Domesday Book* of 1086 as "Bingheleia".
- Residents clearly wanted their own local identity and felt that the Bradford Metropolitan District Council (the principal local authority) were becoming unresponsive to the needs of Bingley residents on key service and asset matters.
- The campaign to create a new Bingley Town Council has been one of the best run and well managed in the country, being delivered at astonishing speed.

Ros Dawson, Bingley Campaign Champion, said *"The campaign for a Town Council for Bingley was started because it was apparent that thousands of residents needed a "voice". It felt like no one was "batting" for us when it came to cuts in public services and issues surrounding planning and development – and there was no clear plan for regeneration and investment. Without a regular forum for our communities to discuss issues that matter to us, there was little opportunity to be pro-active, not just react to events such as the closure of our public toilets and plans to close our swimming pool. After research, thought and consultation, it was clear that a Town Council will provide a basic and essential piece of "civic infrastructure" that will underpin and support our communities; provide a communications hub; enable local people to engage with national policies and address some challenges facing our area."*

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 Bingley, Bradford. 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 phase.

Ros Dawson, John Burrill and Edwina Simpson from the Bingley Community Council Group campaigned for years to create the new Town Council in Bingley in the belief that services could be best delivered locally. Residents will benefit from a Parish precept and their Town Councillors on their behalf will determine how it is best spent in Bingley.

Contextual issues related to the theme:

Since 1974 (when the old Bingley Urban District Council was abolished with its civil Parish of Bingley) residents of Bingley have wanted a better deal on issues like planning, housing and town planning. 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 not planning authorities or highways authorities. However, the creation of one of the largest town Councils in Bradford District will do much to give residents a bigger say on these key policy issues.

Other recently formed Parish Councils have been achieved in areas such as Kipperminster, Finham, Pannal and Westgate. Elections for the new Town Council will take place on 5 May, 2016. There has been historic interest before in Parishing the centre of Bradford – but other campaigns in Yorkshire are taking their lead from Bingley in areas such as Thornton and Stainland. Pannal and Burn Bridge Parish Council has also just been formed in Harrogate.

Who are the key partners / stakeholders involved?

The key individuals involved in the campaign from the campaign group perspective were Ros Dawson, John Burrill and Edwina Simpson. Securing support from Bradford Council and ward Councillors was a challenge – but in the end, just enough support was gained to see the campaign through the Community Governance Review. These campaigners were supported by the Bingley Community Council Group and hugely assisted by Susan Saunders, Electoral Services Manager at Bradford Council.

The campaign group was grant funded with £17,000 over three financial years to help stimulate and sustain resident interest through producing leaflets, organise public meetings, etc. to. Such funding was provided by DCLG and accessed from the Yorkshire Local Councils' Associations via the National Association of Local Councils. This funding was regarded to have been crucial in the delivery of this – the largest new Town Council in Bradford.

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

It took approximately two years to gather the relevant signatures required to trigger the Community Governance Review for the creation of the new Bingley Town Council. Apart from the large logistical challenge of gathering such signatures, there was also the matter of neutralising ward Councillor and Bradford Councillor opposition to the creation of the new Town Council ahead of the completion of the Community Governance Review. Due to this, the BCCG are currently undertaking an appreciative enquiry process of residents in the town. Party politics has also been an issue and the ongoing need to minimise its involvement in the

campaign. There was a point – particularly late in 2015 – when it appeared as though the campaign would not succeed for a lack of Councillor support from Bradford Council.

Chris Pilkington, of YLCA, said, *“Full marks are owed to Ros Dawson and the excellent support she has continuously received from her colleagues in the Bingley Community Council Group. Gathering the petitionary signatures proved to be the easy part of this process. Getting through the Community Governance Review phase nearly dealt the campaign a fatal blow, but the campaign won out brilliantly.”*

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 petitionary signatures and winning support from sufficient Bradford Councillors to see the campaign through the Community Governance Review. The main solutions paid for by these monies were as below;

- Printing of newsletters and briefing leaflets;
- Hire of community halls for briefing events;
- Holding an Appreciative Enquiry of Residents at the start of 2016; &
- Holding a joint public awareness event with Bradford Council in early 2016.

Ros Dawson outlines how she and her team overcame the challenges Bingley Council faced throughout the process:

“It was nearly two years from the start of our campaign in 2013 to Bradford Metropolitan District Council’s decision to create a new Bingley Town Council. During that time we faced many challenges. As volunteers with no previous experience of Councils or how to form one we had to learn as we went along. We also had to find a lot of time in our busy lives to devote to the campaign. A first hurdle was Bradford Council’s insistence that the 1,843 signatures we needed to trigger a Community Governance Review were collected on a paper petition, rather than digitally online. Thanks to determined volunteers who staffed market stalls and local traders and churches hosting petitions we were able to meet our target in record time.

The mixed level of support from district Councillors connected to our area was a concern but this was overcome by gaining backing from two of them and from the many local societies and voluntary organisations in our area. They all saw the benefits of a local Council with democratically elected representatives, a range of discretionary powers and a budget, raised through the precept, with which to fund useful initiatives. In particular, the campaign initially got underway when Bingley Civic Trust and the town’s two Rotary clubs got behind it.

Councillors from Town and Parish Councils in Bradford district were also very generous with their time and advice. They helped to answer residents’ questions at public meetings

and their experience informed our decisions. We are so grateful to them and also to support from NALC and Yorkshire Local Councils Associations. We were very fortunate that our campaign coincided with the #CreateACouncil initiative. There is no doubt that the funding from DCLG was vital to success. Our grant was spent on high quality information and publicity material, including a website, as well as holding public meetings and taking part in local events.

To sum up, we overcame difficulties by having a wide network of determined and enthusiastic supporters with different skillsets who were all prepared to roll up their sleeves and work hard. Funding and endorsement from central government was also crucial.”

Outcomes - Learning from the campaign



The crest logo of the Bingley Community Council Group.

The main initial campaigning achievement was the securing of the relevant signatures required to create the Town Council and trigger the Community Governance Review. The second main achievement was to secure majority support for the creation of the new town Council amongst Bradford Metropolitan District Councillors. Though the final full Council vote late in 2015 delivered a narrow victory for the campaign, it was all that the BCCG had hoped for. The sharing of the learning has been both local – in the form of sharing campaign ideas with other local groups – and national, thorough presentations by NALC at events.

What have been the key elements of success?

The key element of success on a project of this scale was to persuade enough Bradford Councillors to support the creation of the new Town Council in the second half of the Community Governance Review ahead of the final Full Council vote late in 2015. The second main achievement was to have gathered so many petitionary signatures in the first place (2,000) – in around a year – an astonishing achievement.

In truth the Full Council vote at the end of the Review could have gone either way but the casting vote secured it – thanks to superb lobbying from BCCG and YLCA in the final weeks ahead of the vote.

What has been learnt? Campaign lessons to share with others

Bingley residents will benefit from a strong and permanent voice on several strategic policy issues such as housing, planning and town planning – through the new Town Council – and largely through relationships with Bradford Metropolitan District Council.

As mentioned, residents will benefit in year one from substantial revenue from a local precept which can be spent on services in Bingley. Communicating the benefits of a Town Council has not been as much of a challenge as first thought as most residents recognise that Bradford Council services are not local enough at the moment.

The campaign group also recognises that sharing lessons on gathering petition signatures and how to lobby principal authority Councillors are critical. Engaging continuously also with residents once a Community Governance Review has been triggered is also critical.

The campaign group also recognise that once a re-organisation order has been issued by the principal authority – the entirely new set of challenges of creating the new Town Council (i.e. budget setting, vesting etc.) emerges – including the need for sufficient residents to stand for election to the new Town Council once formally in place.

Who Can I Contact?

Campaign Champion: Ros Dawson - chairman@bingleyccg.org.uk / 07720 882512.

Yorkshire Local Councils' Association: Chris Pilkington – chris.pilkington@yorkshirelca.gov.uk / 01904 436622

Other information

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

The NALC's 'Power to the people' resource:
<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/publications>

Bingley Community Council Campaign:
<http://bingleyccg.org.uk> .

Yorkshire Local Councils' Associations:
<http://www.yorkshirelca.gov.uk> .