

MACCLESFIELD TOWN COUNCIL: HOW A NEW TOWN COUNCIL WAS CREATED IN MACCLESFIELD, CHESHIRE

Introduction

In 2012, Macclesfield Civic Society, which has long advocated the creation of a Town Council for Macclesfield renewed its campaign as Macclesfield and Crewe were the only areas under the Cheshire East Borough that didn't have a form of local democracy.

Macclesfield Civic Society felt strongly that residents in Macclesfield should have more of a local voice and have more control over decisions that affect their community.

With this in mind, Macclesfield Civic Society reminded the public of a previous petition which gained several thousand signatures and, together with others sought to persuade Cheshire East Council into launching a community governance review for Macclesfield and Crewe. The community governance led to over 6400 of the possible 40,000 voting in the community governance review. That meant 16.15% of the electorate turned out to vote. Over 12% of the electorate (4907) voted in favour of the area being parished. With this Cheshire East Council decided to form a town council in Macclesfield and the council was set up in May 2015.

Headlines

- Macclesfield is located in Cheshire and falls under Cheshire East Council
- Macclesfield and Crewe were the only areas that were unparished in 2012
- Macclesfield Civic Society had previously launched a petition to pressure Cheshire East Council into undertaking a community governance review for the area
- From this Cheshire East Council launched a community governance review to gauge the desire from residents in Macclesfield for a town council to be formed
- After a series of consultation stages took place, Macclesfield Town Council was formed

Theme - Carrying out a community governance review

Principal councils have the power to carry out a community governance review and put in place or make changes to local community (parish) governance arrangements. A review can consider a number of issues, including whether to create a new parish council, whether to alter the boundary of an existing parish council or whether to group a number of parishes together in a grouped parish council. Reviews can be triggered by local people petitioning to their principal authority to undertake a community governance review.

Contextual Issues

NALC would like every area in England to be parished. Currently there are around 10,000 town and parish councils in England, usually found in rural and coastal areas. Since 1997 there has been an increase in the number of town and parish councils created.

Macclesfield is one of the newer local councils to be created and covers an area which has a population of 52,044. This means Macclesfield Town Council is one of the larger town councils and may have a larger precept than many others. This could have been a factor when residents voted on the community governance review.

Who Are The Partners / Stakeholders Involved?

Macclesfield Civic Society was a key group driving the campaign for a town council in Macclesfield. Cheshire East Council also played their part by hosting a number of consultations which determined if the community wanted a town council to represent them. Cheshire Association of Local Councils (CHALC) and National Association of Local Councils (NALC) also provided legal and technical support to Macclesfield Civic Society throughout the campaign.

What Are The Key Issues / Challenges?

Fortunately throughout the petition and CGR stages, Cheshire East Council was quite receptive to the possibility of a town council being formed in Macclesfield. The main challenge for the civic society was to convince enough residents that having a town council was a good thing for the community. This challenge was made even bigger by the fact Macclesfield has a population of 52,044. This made it difficult for the civic society to reach every resident in Macclesfield.

How Have These Issues / Challenges Been Overcome?

Cheshire East Council ran thorough consultations during the CGR which reached a large number of Macclesfield residents. They firstly set up a community governance review sub-committee which was made up of representatives of Cheshire East councillors. They were tasked with engaging with Macclesfield residents through a number of public consultations.

The first stage of consultations with residents and stakeholders took place from 24th June to 23rd July 2013. They held a series of 8 public meetings and contacted stakeholders such as local businesses and community organisations. At the meetings, stakeholders and members of the public were invited to submit their views on what they felt was the best option for Macclesfield. They were able to choose from 7 options including No change, one or more parish/town councils being created, community forums/community development trusts to be created, neighbourhood management options, residents and tenants associations to be created or community associations to be created.

In stage 2 of the consultations, the community governance review sub-committee considered the feedback received, with a view to refining the 7 options for the next stage of public consultation. Electors in Macclesfield were then consulted, by way of postal vote, in early July 2014. The closing date for receipt was 28 July.

Based upon the public feedback received, the Community Governance Review Sub-Committee decided that the second stage of consultation would focus upon two possible options for Macclesfield – these being “Parishing” (i.e. A Single Parish / Town Council for the whole of Macclesfield ; or 7 smaller Parish Councils (based on existing Borough Ward Boundaries); or an Enhanced Macclesfield Local Service Delivery Committee (consisting of the 12 Cheshire East Councillors which represent the Macclesfield Wards).

Outcomes

Through the thorough consultation by Cheshire East Council, 6,400 (around 12% of the electorate) residents in Macclesfield voted in the CGR.

Following the consultation, Cheshire East Council made recommendations for the creation of a parish council for Macclesfield, comprising a total of 12 Councillors. It was proposed that seven parish wards be created, based on the existing Borough Ward boundaries, as indicated below, and that elections be held on Thursday 7 May 2015.

Since its creation, Macclesfield Town Council have supported Cheshire East Council on delivering a number of projects and services including the local plan, regeneration, Christmas lights, summer schools, and CCTV to name a few.

What Have Been The Key Elements Of Success?

The reason the community governance review was so successful was thanks to a good consultation, led by Cheshire East Council. Although it took over a year to complete, the consultation gave a good opportunity for residents to have their say and vote for how they would like their area to be governed. It also fairly took into consideration the possibility of launching a town council, something which has often been overlooked in previous campaigns across the country. The community governance review was not politicised and may have led to the success of engagement with local residents.

What Has Been Learnt?

This campaign has showed that if a good consultation is ran during the community governance review stage by the principal authority, it often leads to residents getting exactly what they want, whether that is a no change to the governance structure or the creation of a parish council.

The debate for and against having a town council was balanced and allowed residents to decide for themselves whether or not they would like to have a town council for their area.

It is often the case that successful campaigns are led by an organised body such as a neighbourhood forum, civic society or community group. Macclesfield Civic Society has been one of the driving forces behind this campaign and shows the success it can have.

It can also take a few attempts from a group before they become successful in their bid for a parish or town council.

Who Can I Contact?

Macclesfield Civic Society can be contacted via Keith Smith, chairman & acting secretary at keith76079smith@yahoo.com.

Macclesfield Town Council can be contacted via clerk@macclesfield-tc.gov.uk.

Other Information

http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/community-governance/macclesfield_governance_review/macclesfield_governance_review.aspx

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