

The Rt Hon Greg Clark MP
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

1st June 2016

Dear Mr Clark,

Re: Creating a new parish council – Funtley Community Governance Review July 2015 to July 2016

Current stage – Fareham Borough Council's draft recommendation following stage 1 of initial consultation of Community Governance Review

I am writing on behalf of the Funtley Village Society (FVS), in response to the initial draft recommendation we have just received from Fareham Borough Council following the Community Governance Review they have just conducted. We write to you as we wish to register our dissatisfaction and our complaint on the draft conclusions and recommendations from Fareham Borough Council. Normally we would write to our local MP, but as she has ignored our previous correspondence we felt it was appropriate to write to you directly.

We have had excellent support from the Hampshire Association of Local Councils (HALC) and the National Association of Local Councils and have sought expert advice at every stage of the process in our campaign to set up a parish council. Our application for grant funding was supported by HALC and was successful. This has enabled us to conduct a community wide and thorough campaign over the last 15 months.

Just to provide a little background information, Funtley is a village on the northern edge of Fareham Borough, on the border with the Winchester City Council. We have approximately 700 residents, of whom 568 are on the electoral register. In November 2014 as a result of a number of community requests, we looked at the advantages and disadvantages of having a parish council for our village and as a result decided to launch our campaign to set one up. The timeline of our campaign is listed below:

November 2014 – Following extensive research and consultation, the decision was made to campaign for a Funtley Parish Council;

January 2015 – Application made to NALC for grant funding of our campaign;

January 2015 – Grant funding approved;

February 2015 – Initial campaign literature printed and petition started to obtain 250 signatures (out of 568 residents listed on electoral register within our defined proposed parish council area);

April 23rd 2015, a petition with 322 residents' signatures supporting the formation of a Funtley Parish Council was submitted to Fareham Borough Council;

July 30th 2015 - Fareham Borough Council (FBC) agrees the terms of reference for the Funtley Community Governance Review (CGR);

September 2015, October 2015, December 2015, January 2016, June 2016 – Parish Council campaign newsletters and literature hand delivered to every household in Funtley, uploaded on to the Society's website and published via it's Facebook site, email database and on notice boards in local village pub and social club;

November 2015 - Public meetings hosted by the Funtley Village Society and Fareham Borough Council, giving residents the opportunity to find out more about the parish council proposals;

November 2nd 2015 – Letter sent to our local MP, Suella Fernandes, outlining the aims of campaign and inviting her to attend our public meeting on 19th November 2015. We received no acknowledgement or response of any kind;

21st September to 14th December 2015, the consultation period for the terms of reference and the survey issued by Fareham Borough Council as part of the Community Governance Review. **230 surveys (41% response rate) were returned;**

March 2016 – Funtley CGR workshop held for members of Fareham Borough Council (five attended). Another one is planned for June 6th;

May 24th 2016 – Letter received from Fareham Borough Council outlining its draft recommendation as a result of the Funtley CGR. Despite 74.5% of surveys returned supporting the formation of a Funtley Parish Council, Fareham Borough Council states that the 'status quo' should be maintained;

June 1st – Response sent to Fareham Borough Council and letter of complaint to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government;

We believe we have the overwhelming support of local community as clearly demonstrated above.

We feel, having read Fareham Borough Council's summary response of May 2016, that the Council has failed to meet many of the requirements that a local authority must follow in conducting a community governance review. Its draft recommendations are heavily biased against the expressed wishes of a large majority of Funtley residents, does not reflect the facts of the case in a true and accurate manner, is misleading, extremely negative in every respect and accentuates the reservations of a small minority of dissenters. In short it is a vast distortion of the case for a Parish Council.

We, as a local community body, have sought to portray our case in an even handed, reasonable and positive manner, which all of our literature demonstrates. Where the council have made misleading statements, we have addressed these promptly, factually and succinctly. At every stage we have sought advice and guidance from HALC and NALC.

Therefore as a result of this impasse and in light of the fact that this is government policy and that we have received public monies via your department in the conduct of our campaign, we request your assistance in moving this matter forward in a positive and constructive way.

As you are fully aware, the Coalition Government's 2013 consultation paper on setting up new parish councils states:

"We believe that localism is best achieved when it is led by the local communities themselves. We see town and parish councils as playing a vital role in helping local people to make this happen; it is for this reason we want to support those neighbourhoods who want to set up a parish council."

In spite of this guidance, the Community Governance Review conducted by Fareham Borough Council has not been neutral and open minded in the spirit of the guidance and legislation and it certainly does not reflect the identities and interests of our community.

In conclusion we request your help in ensuring that Local Authorities demonstrate a real engagement in the spirit of the guidance and legislation and that there is real scrutiny, due diligence, impartiality and meaningful debate. At the moment the local authority, in this case Fareham Borough Council, are 'judge and jury' and not subject to independent scrutiny. We strongly believe that there should be some form of appeals process to counter balance the powers that the local authority has in this process.

Otherwise it is pointless that Central Government promotes these types of initiatives and public monies are spent on new council campaigns that can never get off the ground, due to resistance and intransigence from some local district councils and vested self-interests. We contrast Fareham Borough Council's actions and attitude compared to Winchester City Council (our neighbouring local authority) in how they view and treat parish councils. Winchester is pro-active in encouraging and working with new parish councils. Both are Conservative led administrations, but their respective attitudes in this matter are like chalk and cheese.

Our experience has not been a positive one, as indeed we have heard from other communities up and down the country, who have experienced similar issues with their respective councils. We believe some input and a strong steer from central government is required to move forward.

Yours sincerely,

Edward Morell
For and on behalf of the Committee
The Funtley Village Society.

Enc: Fareham Borough Council CGR Summary May 2016, copy letter to Fareham Borough Council in response to CGR draft recommendation, Funtley Parish Council Campaign Literature, copy letter to MP.

