

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

PLACE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

4.00pm 5 JUNE 2025

HOVE TOWN HALL COUNCIL CHAMBER

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Evans (Chair) Fishleigh, Winder, Goddard, Mackey, Loughran, Meadows, Asaduzzaman, Parrott and Pickett

Other Members present: Mark Strong (CVS),

PART ONE

1 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

1 Procedural Business

1 a Declarations of substitutions

- 1.1 Cllr Parrott is substituting for Cllr Cattell
- 1.2 Cllr Asaduzzaman is substituting for Cllr Fowler
- 1.3 Cllr Pickett is substituting for Cllr Sykes
- 1.4 Mary Davies, Co-optee for the Older Peoples' Council is unable to attend today so we have invited Doug Thompson, another OPC rep, to ensure that older peoples' concerns are heard at the meeting.

1b Declarations of interest:

1.2 There were none.

1c Exclusion of the press and public

1.3 There are no Part Two items today, so the press and public won't be excluded.

2 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

2.1 The Chair gave the following communication:

Today we are holding a special Place Overview & Scrutiny meeting to look at the ongoing programmes of Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation for Sussex and Brighton. As this subject has an overlap in remit, we have invited members of People Overview & Scrutiny Committee to attend and provide input if they wish to.

We are being asked to note the update to members on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation and to comment on the plans for both programmes. Any comments will be considered ahead of the Cabinet meeting in June where this will be presented.

We are joined by Cllr John Hewitt, Cabinet advisor on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation who will be presenting today. We also have with us Alex Voce, Head of the Cabinet Office, and Liz Culbert, Director for Governance and Law, who are on hand to help with any questions. We also have online Lucie Spicer from the Policy Team and two consultants, Julian Osgathorpe and James Stainer. I'd like to welcome them all to the meeting.

Although we only have one item on the agenda, there are a lot of us here this afternoon and so we will have a lot of questions to get through. Can I therefore please request that both those asking and answering questions are as brief and to the point as possible, as we want everyone who wishes to contribute to have the opportunity. So, I'd just like to remind members here that while I'm sure all questions on the timelines and processes involved in the devolution and Local Government Reorganisation pathways will be welcomed and answered by our various experts as clearly as they are able – I certainly hope so, as I don't think I'm the only one who is confounded by the dizzying speed at which the many and varied threads of all these related changes are proposed to unfold, and I hope to understand it all more clearly by the end of this meeting! – we are not here to try and make or re-make any decisions already taken. We are already on the pathway to both LGR and Sussex wide devolution, and while we are entitled to question and give opinions on the detail of the next steps to be taken, it would be a waste of our own and others' time to be questioning that they will be.

3 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

3.1 There were no public questions.

4 MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

4.1 There were no member questions.

5 DEVOLUTION

5.1 Cllr Hewitt, Cabinet Adviser for Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) presented the slides to the committee. He explained the difference between Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation and presented the process and timelines for authorities in the priority programme for Devolution. In relation to LGR, Cllr Hewitt talked through the council's proposal that suggests the creation of 5 unitary authorities across Sussex with Brighton & Hove using its existing footprint or growing to form one of these authorities. Cllr Hewitt said that the government had recently clarified that the 500,000 population figure is a guiding principle and not a strict target. Cllr Hewitt presented the governments' feedback on the interim plan, which encouraged the council to go further when collaborating with the neighbouring councils in terms of data sharing and evidence building. There will be a period of consultation starting next month with targeted promotion within the community. The completed plan needs to be submitted by 26th September.

- 5.2 Cllrs Fishleigh, O'Quinn and Pickett asked questions about costs including startup costs, the amount Brighton & Hove will receive from central government and how much has the council already budgeted for. Cllr Sankey said that the published figure is £7.5m for the 21 areas in the priority programme, of which £302,000 is allocated to Brighton & Hove and East Sussex for the first phase. Councils will need to pay for the second phase through efficiencies or via Capital Receipts. There are no plans to raise council tax for this purpose and predicted costs are low. Once the Mayoral Strategic Authority is established in 2026, it will have its own budget and there will be no ongoing costs to Brighton & Hove.
- 5.3 Cllr Mcleay asked a question about the motivation to expand the boundaries to the east of the city to help with the issue of housing since areas such as Saltdean and Telscombe are already very developed; what opportunities are there bearing in mind the need for green space. Cllr Sankey said that the government is pushing for greater efficiencies and there are benefits to looking at the current boundaries, such as the arbitrary boundary line that runs through Saltdean. This is motivated by creating efficiencies, economic growth, housing supply, the need for more industrial space and a whole range of things to consider how the city can drive progress for the region and where those boundaries make the most sense. The next stage in this process is to share data with neighbouring authorities to understand what could be delivered and use this to inform the proposal.
- 5.4 Mark Strong of the Community Voluntary Sector said that his sector would like to be more engaged and that their voices need to be embedded into the process. He mentioned the idea of creating Neighbourhood Area Committees lead by the ward councillor with community reps as members. Cllr Sankey said that the Ignite consultants are leading on the LGR consultation and have identified community groups to reach out to.
- 5.5 Cllrs O'Quinn, Shanks, Loughran and People O&S committee co-optees Sara Fulford and Anusree Biswas Sasi asked questions about the LGR consultation; expressing the importance of having different groups to consult with across the city but needing to reach rural areas too, the methods being used for the consultation and to ensure they are not too technocratic, how and when it will take place considering the short timescale and concerns around it being rushed; that they need to engage with district councils like Lewes to bring them on board, and the importance of accessibility when explaining something very complex to the general public, using examples of the impacts would be helpful. Cllr Sankey said that the aim is to publish the consultation next month.
- 5.6 Cllrs Shanks and Meadows raised concerns around the proposal of having 5 unitary authorities and whether that would result in fewer councillors, leading to less representation for residents, whether this had been discussed with the neighbouring councils and what their opinion is, citing that West Sussex County Council wants 3 unitary authorities, and raising a concern that LGR wouldn't save money but would create a duplication of back office functions. Cllr Hewitt explained that if there are 5 unitary authorities there would be 10 representatives at the table with the mayor, which is more democratic, diverse, and accurately reflect the views and needs of all areas within Sussex.

- 5.7 There was a concern that Devolution was just creating another tier of governance that would dictate what the unitary authorities must do. It was explained that the Mayoral Strategic Authority would take on devolved powers from central government so that these decisions were being made locally and not by Westminster. East and West Sussex County Council footprints will be divided into unitary authorities but as Brighton & Hove already is one, it will continue as it is, remaining operationally responsible for its services.
- 5.8 Cllr Evans asked a question about the shadow unitary authorities, the timing of local elections across Sussex and the fact that LGR will not be complete until after the new Mayoral Strategic Authority has been formed, questioning who will be part of it initially and how their role would be legitimised. Cllr Sankey said that the elections for East and West Sussex have been postponed by one year, the mayor would be directly elected in 2026 and there will be interim arrangements with 2 representatives from each upper-tier authority and the mayor. It is likely that there will be one year where it will be a shadow authority while the set up process is being completed. There could be additional non-constituent members, such as potentially the South Downs National Park, fire service, NHS etc who may be involved with decision making to help legitimise the interim arrangements.
- 5.9 Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee RESOLVED to note the report.

The meeting concluded at 6.53pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of