

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Devolution</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>16 October 2024</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Chair, Greater Brighton Officer Programme Board</b>		
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<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		

**FOR GENERAL RELEASE****1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 The Labour Government has set a clear ambition for devolution to reach every part of the country to support local growth. It is expected that the Government will publish a Devolution white paper later in the autumn setting out a revised Devolution Framework, including new powers and flexibilities available, and the kind of services that could be devolved in a devolution settlement. This will be followed next year by primary legislation in the form of a Devolution Bill.
- 1.2 The Government wants to avoid the situation where some areas are left as “devolution deserts”, so in July the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government invited local leaders to submit a devolution expression of interest (EOI) by end of September. This invitation from Government presents an opportunity for regions to gain greater control over economic, social and environmental outcomes for their residents, enabling tailored solutions that meet local needs more effectively than the current centralised system.
- 1.3 The Government’s continued view is that new devolution settlements should be tailored to sensible economic geographies so that local leaders can act at the scale needed to effectively deploy their powers. To that end discussions have gone on across Sussex between local authorities. Discussions in East Sussex have predominantly been led by East Sussex County with Districts and Boroughs in their County footprint; with a similar approach in West Sussex. Brighton and Hove is in a slightly different position from the Counties as the City population size is below the threshold for a single authority deal. Brighton and Hove have looked at the data and evidence base for sensible economic geographies across the region and engaged in discussions across Sussex local authorities (Districts, Boroughs and Counties) around what a sensible devolution footprint looks like in this region. These discussions have shaped the EOI submitted by Brighton & Hove City Council (Appendix 1) and letter to the Secretary of State (Appendix 2).

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That the Board notes the EOI that has been submitted to Government by Brighton & Hove City Council.

- 2.2 That the Board notes that East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council have also submitted EOIs to the Secretary of State.

### **3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 Sussex is home to 1,705,800 residents and 74,000 PAYE/VAT-registered businesses. It is connected to Europe and beyond by major international gateways including the UK's second largest airport and the ports of Shoreham and Newhaven. Sussex hosts three leading universities and the unique quality of life offer includes a beautiful coastline, the South Downs National Park and several other areas of outstanding natural beauty. The area has so much to offer but has not yet reached its potential.
- 3.2 Whilst the region boasts high levels of economic prosperity based on some economic metrics, these can mask the true picture. The most recent figures published for Gross value added (GVA) per head see the Sussex region (£23,452), as lagging behind the wider southeast (£29,415) and England (£28,096). There exist significant regional disparities, with multiple pockets of deprivation and unmet potential.
- 3.3 There are well-established transport links, including major roads the A23 and A27, and rail connections like the Brighton Mainline, which are crucial for regional connectivity. However, there is scope for improvement, particularly in reducing congestion and improving public transport frequency to reduce commute times and further environmental objectives. The region would benefit from investment in transport infrastructure, particularly across east-west corridors such as the A27-M27/West Coastway Line and A259/East Coastway Line. These challenges in connectivity hinder inclusive growth. Enhancing transport links would improve connectivity between coastal towns, support business growth, and widen access to job opportunities.
- 3.4 The above indicates a strong potential case for devolution so that local leaders are empowered to drive transformational change in their communities. Devolution can transform the known challenges into opportunities, enhancing collaboration to generate inclusive growth. By uniting efforts on growth, housing, skills, and health, devolution can spark innovation, boost productivity, create better jobs, improve services and address deep-seated inequalities.
- 3.5 A recent publication from the Institute for Government expressed the view that there is significant economic and social benefit to gain from a "Historic Sussex" devolution deal, which would bring together East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton & Hove. The argument put forward by the authors is that it achieves significant scale with a population of 1.7 million people and an economy of £48.7bn. It also reflects the economic geography of the region, in terms of the key travel to work and travel to learn commuter flows. On identity grounds it would align to earlier historic county boundaries, and it would also align well to both NHS Integrated Care Board and police force areas. The report acknowledges the established geographies and existing partnerships in East and West Sussex, and both County Councils have submitted their own EOIs to the Secretary of State based on those recognised geographies. We also know previously that consideration has been given to whether East Sussex should look to Kent and whether West Sussex should look to Surrey.

- 3.6 There is a need for local authorities and wider partners to work together to build a consensus around a devolution proposal that would deliver the maximum benefits for the residents of the region. The region presents a diverse business base, significant growth potential, and a strong case for investment, in areas such as skills, transport and housing, to enable the benefits of growth to be more inclusive. By working collaboratively with Government partners to explore these options further, a devolution settlement can be developed that maximises local autonomy, accountability, and impact.

#### **4 ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 4.1 There is the option to “do nothing”, in terms of progressing devolution, but the Government is clear in that it wants all regions to engage with them on local devolution ambitions with a view of agreeing a devolution deal. Without a devolution deal the region is likely to be left behind.

#### **5 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 Devolution is a collaborative process, it requires join up and partnership across local government and clear citizen engagement. Any approach will require engagement with our public sector institutions including the NHS, Police and Fire Authorities, and our strategic businesses, further and higher education providers and other key local organisations, at the earliest opportunity, inviting them to inform and shape the process.

#### **6 CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 Devolving powers to local regions presents an opportunity to drive significant economic and social benefits. By collaborating across local government institutions, wider public sector organisations, and strategic business partners to shape a devolution deal, the region stands to gain enhanced financial resources, improved infrastructure, greater strategic control, and the ability to deliver more responsive and integrated public services.
- 6.2 Understanding the optimal geography and governance arrangements for any devolution agreement requires further detail on the powers, responsibilities, and resources that Government intends to devolve. This is likely to become clearer when Government publishes the revised Devolution Framework.

#### **7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

##### Financial Implications:

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Any future financial implications that arise as a result of any progression of discussions regarding devolution will be assessed and reported back to future board meetings.

*Finance Officer Consulted:* Haley Woollard, Head of Finance, Planning & Reporting  
*Date:* 08/10/24

#### Legal Implications:

- 7.2 There are no direct legal implications for submitting an EOI.  
Lawyer Consulted: Siobhan Fry, Head of Legal, Commercial  
Date: 7/10/24

#### Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 There are no equalities implications directly arising from this report. However, any potential devolution agreement will have reducing inequality as one of its aims, and greater local control will mean that policies can be shaped to address inequalities.

#### Sustainability Implications

- 7.4 There are no sustainability implications directly arising from this report.

### **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

#### **Appendices:**

Appendix 1: Devolution EOI submitted by Brighton & Hove City Council

Appendix 2: Supporting letter to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

#### **Background Documents:**

[Completing the map: How the government can extend devolution to the whole of England, Institute For Government, September 2024.](#)