



10 January 2025

Jim McMahon OBE MP
Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

BY EMAIL to: EnglishDevolutionLGENquiries@communities.gov.uk

Dear Minister,

This letter is sent on from the Leaders of East and West Sussex County Councils and Brighton and Hove City Council in response to your letter of 16th December 2024.

Following the publication of the Government's White Paper on English Devolution the three upper tier councils which comprise the area of Sussex came together to discuss and agree a collective response to your invitation. What emerged from those discussions is a firm agreement on a shared ambition for Sussex and a wish to join the Government's Priority Programme for the establishment of a Mayoral Combined Authority for the area covered by the three councils.

The agreed approach was presented separately to the three Cabinets of the councils on 9th January and each of the Cabinets has fully approved, on behalf of their respective councils, this expression of interest in the Government's Priority Programme for Devolution.

Over the course of the process the three councils have initiated engagement with key stakeholders, including MPs and the leaders of districts and borough councils and have ensured that all stakeholders have been briefed on the proposals and the rationale which underpins them.

The proposal is for a Mayoral Combined Authority for Sussex to be worked up in accordance with the timetable set out in the White Paper.

Devolution

As the Government's position on scale, size and ambition for devolution is now clear, we recognise that the right geography locally is on a pan-Sussex footprint, taking account of the alignment of boundaries with other public services including Sussex Police, Sussex ICS and considering the historic ties across the different communities of our area.

Our vision for a future mayoral authority of Sussex is that it will act as a strong voice for our historic county, whilst providing collegiate and strategic leadership, working closely with partners to drive economic growth and prosperity. Sussex and the City of Brighton and Hove, with a population of 1,712,000, has a modern and diverse

economy, vibrant and innovative urban and rural businesses, three leading universities, the South Downs National Park, multiple AONBs and cultural assets and, with our strong international connections via Gatwick (the UK's second largest airport) and the ports of Shoreham and Newhaven, is a strong and natural contender for the growth benefits mayoral devolution will drive. This is important given the need both to contribute to the national growth mission but also to address the very acute needs of some parts of Sussex, particularly some of our coastal towns which experience significant deprivation and health inequalities.

Devolving on a Sussex geography will be sustainable and recognisable by communities. Sussex and the City of Brighton and Hove have a strong identity and sense of place, and long established and effective partnership arrangements at a strategic level. As well as being recognisable to local people, the Sussex geography would be well placed to balance the need to ensure that communities are empowered whilst also ensuring that decision making is long-term, strategic and embedded in an understanding of the varied needs of the area and the benefits of direct engagement with national forums.

The three upper tier councils have fully considered the benefits a mayoral combined authority would bring and are now keen to follow that momentum of collaboration by joining the Government's Priority Programme so that those benefits can be realised.

Local Government Reorganisation

The three councils recognise and understand the Government's design principles for effective strategic governance and the rationale for working towards single tier local government within strategic authority areas. The councils are therefore committed to meeting the Government's timetable for bringing forward plans for the reorganisation of local government for Sussex. The three councils wish to engage with all key stakeholders and bring forward plans in a timely manner.

It is understood that the Government will soon publish its criteria for unitary local government within combined authority areas – addressing the need for efficiency and sustainability with proposals that make sense and provide clear lines of accountability and are aligned with the identity and connections of the communities the councils will serve. The councils have already considered some of the issues and challenges the proposals would present both for the councils and their communities but have also recognised the benefits that can be realised by securing change through the simplification of governance in the interests of those communities. It is important that any change ensures that local government is financially sustainable in the long term and capable of achieving economic growth whilst delivering effective sustainable services alongside public sector partners.

The three councils also recognise the need to continue the effective working relations with the district and borough councils of the two counties as proposals are developed and the case for change is made. We recognise, in light of the unprecedented financial challenges facing the sector, as well as the continued challenge of delivering the required level of housing development, that it is now necessary to move to a simpler, more effective and more efficient structure to deliver services to all Sussex residents.

The proposals to be developed will also seek to maximise the efficiency savings unlocked through local government reorganisation and build on the sound working arrangements with health partners and others already working at a Sussex geography.

Sussex is well placed to embrace the benefits of devolution. What is more, a Sussex solution, which includes new unitary councils, and a mayoral authority, could be delivered relatively quickly and without undue complication, resulting in financial savings and the longer-term financial viability for the sector locally.

We look forward to receiving the Government's reply to this considered response to its invitation in the White Paper and look forward to working with the Government at pace to finalise the proposals and to help realise the benefits the devolution programme aims to deliver.

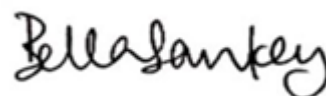
Yours sincerely,



Cllr Paul Marshall
Leader of West Sussex
County Council



Cllr Keith Glazier
Leader of East Sussex
County Council



Cllr Bella Sankey
Leader of Brighton & Hove
City Council

