

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

CABINET

11.30am 9 JANUARY 2025

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Sankey (Chair) Taylor (Deputy Chair), Burden, Daniel, Miller, Muten, Pumm, Robins, Rowkins and Williams

Other Members present: Councillors Alexander, Robinson

PART ONE

118 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

118a Declarations of interests

118.1 There were none.

118b Exclusion of the press and public

118.2 In accordance with Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 ("the Act"), the Committee considered whether the public should be excluded from the meeting during consideration of any item of business on the grounds that it is likely in view of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during it, there would be disclosure to them of confidential information as defined in Section 100A (3) of the Act.

118.3 **Resolved** That the public are excluded from the meeting from any items listed on Part 2 of the agenda.

119 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

119.1 The Chair provided the following Communications:

Good morning everyone and welcome to today's Special Cabinet meeting.

We are meeting today to consider whether Brighton & Hove should submit an expression of interest to join the government's Devolution Priority Programme. As outlined in the report, the urgency of today's meeting has arisen due to the Government's deadline of 10 January to receive responses to this invitation.

The English Devolution White Paper published in December, clearly set out the Government's ambition for all area of England to have devolved powers and for these powers to be equal.

For many years, we have witnessed areas particularly in the North of England, reap the benefits of devolution. Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, West Yorkshire and the East and West Midlands all have established Mayoral Combined Authorities. Their elected Mayors are prominent and known political figures who have the ear of government and are able to champion their areas. They have significant powers and integrated financial settlements enabling them to plan over a much longer period.

As a result, their residents have seen really tangible results. Following the recent announcement that the single bus fare cap would be increased to £3, Greater Manchester was able to make the decision to keep their cap at £2, because they had the powers to do so. This is exactly the kind of local decision making I think will benefit our region.

Meanwhile, the South East region has almost no devolution coverage, despite attempts in some areas to progress this. So I think it is absolutely in the interests of our city and region to reap the benefits of devolution as soon as we can. The quickest and most direct way to do this is by joining the priority programme.

The Government's new devolution framework will see even further powers given to directly elected Mayors, including:

- a statutory responsibility for the rail network
- the ability to charge developers a Mayoral Levy to ensure that new developments come with the necessary associated infrastructure
- the necessary funding to deliver on housing ambitions
- and a strategic role in the delivery of the Great British Energy Local Power Plans, delivering local sustainable energy generation.

This is to name just a few of the powers that will benefit our region, not to mention the fundamental reform of public services which will see much more integration across local authorities, police and fire services and the NHS.

So, I see this as a really exciting moment and opportunity for our city and region. I am optimistic and ambitious about devolution because of the direct benefits it would bring. There is already an extensive economic and business case for Sussex devolution to build on the experience across all our local authority boundaries.

Overall Sussex is an economically prosperous region, but there are significant regional disparities, with pockets of deprivation and unmet potential. Devolution has the potential to turn these challenges into opportunities, and support collaboration to drive economic and social benefits.

Since the publication of the White Paper in December, I have met with the Leaders of East and West Sussex and today their Cabinets are also considering the option of Sussex joining the devolution priority programme. We will continue these conversations and are committed to working together as proposals for devolution evolve.

Finally, before we get onto the proper discussion on the report, I want to emphasise that we are still at a very early stage of the process. Should it be agreed today that Sussex submits an application to join the priority programme and if we are accepted to it by government, there will be a consultation process which follows, to ensure that our residents, businesses and partners have their say on the proposals. The government have said that they will lead this consultation but we will work closely with them to ensure that it reaches all of our communities.

I know that there is significant interest from Councillors in today's report. For that reason, I have been happy to extend the member engagement time today to answer as many questions as possible.

120 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**(B) Public Questions****(i) Devolution White Paper Update**

120.1 Ben Thomas read the following question:

Is Brighton and Hove City Council actively seeking to be exempted from the required threshold of 500,000 residents in the new proposed unitary authorities, or will the authority boundaries have to expand beyond the city, thereby ending Brighton and Hove's unique identity?

120.2 The Chair provided the following reply:

Thanks Ben very much for your question and just to be really clear for anybody who is in the room and everybody that's watching, Ben is referring to the proposals that also exist in the white paper around unitization, principally of areas that are currently two-tier areas. So, for example, in our neighbouring areas of West Sussex and East Sussex, you have county councils, and you have districts and borough councils that sit underneath them each responsible for a mix of services that we here in Brighton & Hove as an existing unitary authority, already provide comprehensively and holistically.

As Ben says what the government has said in the White Paper is that they want to move to tier areas into being unitary authorities. So, authorities that are the same as us in terms of delivering a comprehensive whole of public services. And they've also said that they believe that the optimum size or a more efficient size for unitaries to operate is at a larger size than Brighton & Hove currently is at 280,000 people.

I think it's worth saying initially that what's clear in the White Paper is a real vote of confidence in unitary authorities, including unitary authorities like Brighton & Hove. It's really clear to me from the White Paper and from my discussions with government that they believe that unitary authorities like us are best place to deliver high quality public services. I think it's also clear that they see more potential in unitary authorities that we could deliver better and potentially more and have greater coverage and really be in the driving seat of total place leadership.

So, I think it's an exciting moment to be in a unitary authority, and it's an exciting moment to look at what the government might have in store on the very specific question of what this means for Brighton & Hove. That is a conversation that has not yet started with government and has not yet started in earnest or in substance with our neighbouring authorities, although we are obviously cognizant of what the White Paper has set out.

The government has been very clear though that they believe there will be flexibilities around that number that they have identified in the White Paper of 500,000 and they've said about that that they're keen to work with places and with unitary authorities to understand what will work best in local areas. So, there is flexibility there to ensure that the best size unitaries are reached across the country from place to place. I think I would say additionally in response to your question that there is absolutely no possibility or any chance of Brighton & Hove as a proud city with city status being diminished in any way, even if we were to become part of a unitary that was slightly larger than our current footprint. We would still be the city of Brighton and home with everything that that means about our identity, our very proud history and who we are as a people and a place. So,

it's important that we don't conflate the delivery of local authority services with place identity as they are distinct. And I'll be very clear with anybody that I'm speaking to about this with the neighbouring authorities or with the government that Brighton & Hove is a very special and a very specific place and will retain our identity as such.

121 ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS

121.1 A copy of the questions received was circulated ahead of the meeting. Responses provided are as follows:

(1) Councillor Meadows- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

The White Paper represents a vote of confidence in unitary authorities, such as Brighton and Hove City Council, as the best, most holistic and efficient way to deliver high quality public services. For this reason Government is seeking to move two-tier areas into the unitary model as is clearly ambitious for unitary councils like ours to be one of the principal vehicles for public service delivery. The White Paper also states that unitary councils must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks and that for most areas this will mean creating councils with a population of 500,000 or more. However, the government has said there may be exceptions to this, to ensure new structures make sense for an area, including for devolution, and decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis. Whatever we propose for Brighton and Hove, our City status and identity will remain strong. We will continue to share reports to Cabinet and Scrutiny as proposals evolve, to ensure full engagement and consideration of options and their impacts.

(2) Councillor McNair - Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

No, Brighton & Hove will retain its city status.

(3) Councillor Meadows- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

The timeline and process for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) has not yet been confirmed. The Government has said that they will be writing to all councils (whether or not they are part of the devolution priority programme) this month to set out the process for LGR and invite proposals. We will work closely with councils across Sussex, including the Counties, Districts and Boroughs, to develop unitary proposals for our area.

(4) Councillor McNair- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

No decisions have yet been taken on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The Government has said that they will be writing to all councils this month to set out the process for LGR. We will work closely with all councils in Sussex to develop unitary proposals for our area.

(5) Councillor McNair- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

No decisions have yet been taken on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The Government has said that they will be writing to all councils this month to set out the process for LGR. We will work closely with councils in Sussex to develop unitary proposals for our area.

(6) Councillor Meadows- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

Local government reorganisation requires the passing of a new Statutory Instrument (SI) which provides an underpinning framework for reorganisation. Most SIs dealing with reorganisation will take effect prior to the creation of the new unitary authority. Should this be the case, the SI will designate the newly created unitaries as 'shadow authorities' until they are formally established. The SI would direct how the shadow authority should be structured and prescribe the obligations and standards that the shadow authority will be expected to adhere to during the transitional period and to prepare for the creation of the new unitary.

(7) Councillor McNair- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

No decisions on the form of future unitary authorities have been made, including the number of Councillors.

(8) Councillor Meadows- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

No decisions have yet been taken on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The Government has said that they will be writing to all councils this month to set out the process for LGR. We will work closely with councils in Sussex to develop unitary proposals for our area.

(9) Councillor McNair- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

Residents can rest assured that Brighton & Hove's distinct identity will remain and we will retain our city status. The focus is on harnessing the city's growth potential to make it an even better place to live, work, and visit and to ensure greater connectedness

across the region. By tapping into the unique strengths and opportunities within Brighton & Hove, we can drive significant economic and social benefits for the community.

The aim of Strategic Unitary Authorities is not to take away from the city's identity but to empower it further. This involves giving more power to local economies, health services, and other critical areas such as planning and transport, allowing for more tailored and effective decision-making that reflects the needs and values of our community. By embracing these opportunities, we can enhance the quality of life for residents while preserving the distinctiveness that makes Brighton & Hove special. The goal is to build on what makes our city unique and ensure it continues to thrive and prosper. We will ensure that any proposals align with our council missions and our vision for A better Brighton & Hove for all.

(10) Councillor Pickett- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

The focus of this cabinet meeting is considering whether Brighton & Hove should join the Devolution Priority Programme.

The issues with our refuse and recycling services and Cityclean have been well aired over recent months and there has been a recent investigation into some of the systemic issues in that service. Those are legacy issues that we are still working our way through to ensure that we have the highest quality delivery of that service for our residents in Brighton and Hove.

I'm not sure there's much to say about the impact of potential Local Government Reorganization other than I don't think that I accept the premise that this would necessarily pose a challenge to Cityclean. I think one of the driving purposes, or ideas, behind potential Local Government Reorganization and operating at a slightly larger footprint would be to gain from efficiencies and economies of scale in how our services are delivered.

It could potentially be an opportunity, but we're not yet into the business of discussing Local Government Reorganization and I don't yet have anything further that can be shared on that. The thrust of Local Government Reorganization is to improve services and to gain from efficiencies. You'll know, and I hope residents are aware, that we're currently undergoing a major piece of modernization work with Cityclean which I think will deliver significant improvements in the service because we are not yet operating fully on a digital service, which has been the case in other authorities in some cases for years or even decades. So, there is a backlog and a legacy set of issues we're addressing, and I think we'll see service improvements hopefully before we even get around to the fruits of devolution and Local Government Reorganization.

(11) Councillor Pickett- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

The Governments drive in the White Paper to make representation more local and more democratic is principally around the devolution side of it: the establishment of new strategic authorities that would exercise powers and receive investment that is currently exercised or delivered by central government.

At the moment, there are a set of decisions that ministers and civil servants, quite remote from our communities in Brighton and Hove and in East and West Sussex, are making and taking about us that we don't have any direct influence over as residents, communities, and businesses here in Brighton and Hove and wider Sussex.

The idea is that those powers, and a whole set of investment, is moved to a strategic authority for Sussex so that those decisions are being taken at a regional level. On that strategic authority would sit a Mayor for Sussex, but also leaders of the Unitary Authorities that make up the Sussex area. Those would be elected directly by residents in Brighton and Hove and Sussex. It would create a whole new layer of political accountability, political influence, and democratic oversight that the residents of our area would have over decisions that affect them. This is about bringing decision making back to the regional level that currently sits at government.

I think your question in part refers to the potential impact of the Unitarisation proposals and Unitaries on a slightly larger footprint and whether that would mean fewer Councils operating at the Unitary level. I don't yet have any details on that; we're not yet thinking about, or in discussions about, what those Unitary proposals would look like and what Ward boundaries would look like – today's discussion is about Devolution.

It's important to say, because a few of the questions reference this, that there is a lot going on in this White Paper and there are two separate, but linked, issues of Devolution and Unitarisation. But they are distinct and are talking about different things and it's going to be really important to not over conflate them. The last thing I want is residents thinking that there is no longer going to be Brighton and Hove City Council and that there will just be a Sussex Council: that is not the case. There will still be very local, very accountable and very visible local leadership and delivery of services in Brighton and Hove. The main change that I think will be experienced by residents will be that there is now this regional body that will also be able to be influenced by residents, have their oversight, and have their democratic legitimacy and making those regional decisions in the interest of people in Sussex.

(12) Councillor Pickett- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

I think I would argue that, given that London started on the Devolution journey in the late 90's, given that we've seen Devolution in Wales, in Scotland, and across the North of England over many years, the idea of Brighton and Hove and Sussex looking at Devolution in 2025 is not really rushing it. It's a process that has already begun in much, if not most, of our Country. We're seeing directly the benefits that people in other parts of the Country are getting as a result.

To my mind, it would be really remiss not to explore what Devolution could bring to Brighton and Hove because it means that we potentially get left behind and aren't taking advantage of those powers, opportunities and investment that is currently going elsewhere.

The government has a very clear mandate for Devolution: it was part of the Labour Party manifesto, and we stood on a platform of change. I don't think that this is being rushed, I think this is completely in-line with what was set out in our manifesto last July. As you will be aware, and I hope as residents are aware, we first received notice from government that same month, straight after the General Election when Angela Rayner wrote to all Upper Tier Authorities inviting expressions of interest. We sent one in September. We've already started doing the work and the thinking as an Authority about

what Devolution could bring to us as an Authority and to Sussex. This isn't a rushed process, this is a staged process, but there is this window now to opt-in to the Priority Programme to ensure that we are receiving the benefits of Devolution in a timely way.

(13) Councillor Sykes- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

I don't think that the government has got in wrong in terms of diagnosing the problem. There's a huge body of evidence and material out there about how you construct a system of government that is going to best enable, not just growth, but sustainable and inclusive growth as well. What I mean by that is growth that lifts those deprived communities that most need the benefits of economic growth. If you look at where the UK stands in the international league tables, we are being held back. If you look at the way other Countries, particularly other European Countries, structure themselves, you find that we are one the most centralized Countries in Europe.

If you speak to our Local Government Minister, Jim McMahon, he's tied up making 80 to 100 decisions a day, including on some of the most small scale issues that get sent up to him by different Local Government Structures because of the way that we have set ourselves up.

There is far too much centralization; if we really are serious about wanting to drive economic growth in this country and getting the spoils and prosperity of it for our communities, then we need to push that decision making outwards and empower communities at the regional and local levels to make the decisions they need to move their places forward.

I don't think there's a problem with what the government has diagnosed. That's not to say that there aren't multiple reasons that we're being held back from growth, but I don't think that means that there isn't a problem with how we structure ourselves as well.

(14) Councillor Sykes- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

The clear thrust of the White Paper is decentralization and moving powers and decision-making outwards. In all my conversations with government, it's very clear that this is seen as a central plank of how we will deliver as the Labour Party on what we have promised in our manifesto and on our priorities. That is very genuine, sincere, and there to see in black and white.

On the issue around Local Government Reorganisation, I do accept and understand that the government is taking a directive approach to this. I think this is always the case with Local Government Reorganisation: there has to be certain parameters, or a framework, that is laid out. If you had a blank sheet of paper, and every area was able to design its own government structures, it would be pretty chaotic and difficult to manage. Ultimately, Local Government is there to deliver for residents and to also deliver things that central government is making available. So, there does need to be a structure.

When Jim McMahon talked about the process that they've gone through to identify how best to do this, he will talk about the fact that when he's been engaging with Local Government through its different representative networks, what came back to him in that first 6 months that he was Local Government Minister was a clear feeling that we need

to be told what it is that is planned and how the government wants to do things. There does need to be some directive and direction given.

That is not to say that the government then doesn't want to move into a phase of us shaping these arrangements for our local areas, whether that is: drawing up and thinking about what the Unitary boundaries might look like, thinking about the governance structure we would want on a Sussex Strategic Authority, the powers we want and how we might want to use them, what investment looks like, what the particular challenges are we face in Sussex when it comes to growth and how government can help us particularly address those.

Government recognizes that everyplace is very different and has a unique set of challenges and opportunities. The government is asking for a dialogue and a two-way conversation. They accept the parameters of how they think this new system will work. Of course, understandably, if you were in a district Council or a borough Council or a county Council, I understand that there is feeling of concern and anxiety because of what government is proposing and what that means for your existing authority. That is accepted but I think that is always going to be inevitable when there is some element of Local Government Reorganization; it's essentially constitutional reform and government has a very important role to play in that reform, but it doesn't mean that there isn't space for dialogue and for us to shape things. One of the considerations in my mind is that by being part of the priority programme on Devolution is something that I think gives us in Brighton and Hove a bigger stake in shaping the proposals that come down the line. It means that we're part of a flagship government programme where they will be wanting to work really well and productively with us to deliver something that is going to be of benefit to our residents. Government has a stake in that, we have a stake in that, and I think that gives us the best platform for the dialogue and leverage that we want in that conversation.

(15) Councillor West- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

Today we're discussing the Devolution Priority Programme, we're not discussing anything around Local Government Reorganisation. Essentially what the Priority Programme offers to residents in Brighton and Hove and in wider Sussex is more funding, more investment, and more powers to make decisions about our area and what we need: whether it's integrated transport, whether it's net zero, or whatever it may be. Of course, as we go on this journey, if that's the decision that Cabinet makes today, we will bring back regular reports and updates to all of Council and we will communicate regularly with residents. As I mentioned earlier, if we are on the Priority Programme there will be a full consultation on that with residents.

It's not an issue that constitutionally requires a referendum: it's government offering more investment and more powers to make decisions, so it's a democratising initiative that offers more to residents than they currently have.

(16) Councillor Hill- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

As we shape the strategic authority for Sussex, if that's the road we go down, it is not just a directly elected Mayor that would sit on that body, but also the leaders of the

constituent Unitary Authorities. The government has said in the White Paper that decision making will take place by majority on that body, so it's not just the case that only the mayor will exercise executive function.

The second thing I would say is let's make sure we elect a mayor, if we are going down this road, who believes in public ownership of the rail network.

(17) Councillor Hill- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

There have been no substantive discussions, as you might expect, on what Local Government Reorganisation and Unitarisation and Unitary Boundaries in Sussex would look like. That's not the task of the process to signal interest in the Devolution Priority Programme. All we're doing with the Devolution Priority Programme is saying that we as a local area, and presumably East and West Sussex are considering today whether they as local authority areas, are interested in joining the programme. We're not being asked to submit any proposals on Local Government Reorganisation or anything of that detail. In discussions that myself and the Chief Executive have had with government this week (we were up yesterday meeting with the Local Government Minister to talk about Sussex), government has made very clear that whether or not you're on the Devolution Priority Programme, anyone who is within a Unitary of our size, so below the 500,000 threshold that is mentioned in the White Paper, and any authority that is in a 2 tier area will receive a letter from government this month inviting proposals on Local Government Reorganisation. So, the government have linked the 2 things to a certain extent, but it's also very clear that, regardless of Devolution, the government is pursuing a path of Local Government Reorganisation that would happen, and you will be involved in as an organisation, whether or not you want to do Devolution at all. The Local Government Reorganisation process will continue regardless.

What the government has said is that their hope and their expectation is that all neighboring authorities (Unitary, Districts, Boroughs, and Counties) will speak to one and other, try and find some consensus around Unitarisation, and try and put forward a joint proposal to government on that. The government has also said that they understand that might not be possible and that competing proposals may be put forward for what Unitary boundaries look like and then a decision on that would ultimately be made by government.

(18) Councillor Hill- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

I think there is always going to be a level of arbitrariness wherever the government draws the line on the size of a Unitary Authority. My understanding is that government has done quite a bit of work in exploring and understanding the delivery of different sized Unitary Authorities and what they think would deliver greater financial sustainability, efficiencies, being able to withstand external financial shocks, etcetera, all of the things that are listed in the White Paper.

I think the difference between our Labour government and the last Conservative government, with Michael Gove in this case, is, as I said earlier, the government has already been very explicit that they are prepared to be flexible and to listen to Local

Authorities when they make cases as to why they might want to remain a certain size or only move to a certain size and not move to the 500,000 target that has been set. Whereas in this case, the previous Conservative government thought that they always knew best and were much less inclined to listen to Local Government. I think that's a really important shift that we've seen with the change of government from Conservative to Labour and, indeed, throughout the White Paper, for those that have read it, you will see a real clear commitment to a resetting of the relationship between Local and Central government: a partnership approach to the delivery of services rather than the sort of parent-child approach that I think was favoured by the last Conservative government.

(19) Councillor Hill- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

I'm incredibly proud of our city's status as being such an important city for LGBTQIA+ people. It's absolutely integral to our identity as a city and I think that it is something that is very special about this place, something that we are recognised for across the country and, indeed, internationally.

There is absolutely no question of that changing in anyway, or of us taking our eye off the ball in terms of the work we are doing at all times to challenge the discrimination that still exists in the city and in the wider world, and to improve outcomes for LGBTQIA+ people. That is the political commitment and political vision as I see it.

On the specific point of Equalities Impact Assessment, every single move we make will be Equality Impact Assessed, as it always is. And obviously for any major decision around our size and our scale, that will be a key consideration.

(20) Councillor Hill- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

I can't speak to, and I'm not privy to, what's happened with previous Unitarisation arrangements, and I think there's also an issue here about what's within our remit and scope within what this Authority is doing and saying.

We don't have any elections scheduled in Brighton and Hove until the point at which the government is saying the elections to the new Unitary Authorities would happen in May 2027. There's a quite nice join-up there. I don't think we have any issues in terms of Brighton and Hove therefore in terms of needing to ask to postpone elections. That is a matter for East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council. My understanding is that their intention is to ask for Local Government reform to be part of the Priority Programme as well. That is not a request that we are proposing and that we are determining for Brighton and Hove today. That will ultimately be a decision for the government.

The government has clearly taken a view that, in some cases, they may need to postpone elections in order to deliver the Devolution programme, but they will make that decision, as I understand it, in individual cases. As I say, that is not a question for Brighton and Hove and we're not advocating that any elections are postponed.

(21) Councillor Hill- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

Absolutely no decisions or detail or any information on that at present and, as I said, today is discussing the Devolution Priority Programme. Local Government Reorganisation is a separate subject.

As soon as we can, and as soon as that letter is received from government this month inviting proposals, we will obviously communicate that out and ensure that we have proper debate and discussion and are working very transparently on that set of proposals as well.

(22) Councillor Hill- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

The proposal for the Devolution Priority Programme will be that a strategic Mayoral Authority will be established in May 2026. That's a new institution that would be set-up and then ready to go.

The issue around shadow unitaries is in relation to the Local Government reform proposal and the question of whether Brighton and Hove becomes a new Unitary Authority. My understanding is that any new Unitary Authorities would go live either April 2027 or April 2028.

In the context of Local Government Reorganisation, a shadow authority is established to oversee the transition to a new Unitary Authority. This body is typically composed of existing councillors from the councils that are being reorganised. The shadow authority is responsible for preparing the new unitary authority to become fully operational. This includes setting budgets, appointing senior staff, and making key policy decisions. A shadow authority operates until the new unitary authority formally takes over. There would not be 2 Mayors and 2 Council Leaders. The shadow unitary authority would be made up of existing councillors and the new councillors would be elected to the new authority when those elections are held.

Once we have any more information on how that process is set to work, we will share it.

(23) Councillor Hill- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

The focus of this Cabinet meeting is to consider whether Brighton & Hove should join the Devolution Priority Programme, which is separate to Local Government Reorganisation proposals.

We will be seeking information from government in relation to financial settlements as part of our discussions once we receive the letters around Local Government Reorganisation, and of course we will start as early as possible exploring what the implications are and ensuring that we get the best deal for our residents.

(24) Councillor Hill- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

We're not, as Brighton and Hove City Council, responsible for determining what powers different bodies have, that's a job for government and they will be legislating on this and

they have published a White Paper that sets out the different powers that different bodies should get.

What we are responsible for is ensuring that our residents get the best possible deal. I found it really striking in this role, from when I first became leader in May 2023, but particularly in the last 6 months because our new government is being so active in launching new initiatives, new schemes, and new programmes, for different parts of the country. So much of that is currently being directed towards those places that have Mayoral Combined Authorities because they're able to receive funding, receive strategic investment and initiatives so much more easily to deliver something at scale for a significant number of people.

I think it would be really remiss of me, as a leader of this authority, and of this Cabinet to not be seeking to get the very best outcome and deal for residents in this city. I don't want to see us get left behind when the government is being so clear in this White Paper about their vision, which they're talking about being a floor and not a ceiling. The vision for de-centralisation and regional governance extends even beyond what's contained in this White Paper. It would be really remiss of us not to try and maximise the partnership that we could have with government on this.

(25) Councillor Hill- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

I'm very happy to confirm for the record that I prefer the Supplementary vote election system over the First Past the Post system for any future Sussex Mayoral Election. The reason being that I think when you're electing a representative that covers such a large geographic area; an area that is of course very diverse with lots of different types of communities (urban, rural) with such diversity of political thought, opinion, and experience, you want to try and arrive at a conclusion that has the most support as possible for that large number of people that is taking part in that election. I think it is legitimate to say, as far as possible, we're giving people a different option and to try and get either their first or their second preference option will be the optimum way to try and deliver an outcome that people will feel pleased with once the count has been concluded.

(26) Councillor Shanks- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

We have been in touch with Unions about the letter that we were sent by Jim McMahon, the Local Government Minister, inviting expressions of interest. Of course, we are in regular communications with unions and staff about everything that we're doing, including this.

Today we are discussing the Devolution Priority Programme. That wouldn't have any direct bearing on staffing issues or anything like that, that's about setting up a new Authority which we would be a part of.

It's completely separate to the other issue in the White Paper which is Local Government Reorganisation. That's what we're going to receive a letter on from government this month and of course, on anything that is impacting on staff, we will be doing absolutely everything you would expect in terms of engaging with unions, engaging with staff, and engaging with our forums, making sure that staff are fully

apprised of what's being proposed and involved in the decision making that we will need to do collectively around what is going to suit us best and work best for our residents and for our staff.

(27) Councillor Shanks- Devolution White Paper

Response from Councillor Sankey:

I absolutely agree that the gap between funding and demand for our services is one of the biggest challenges facing local government.

I'm delighted that in the budget last autumn we received a significant uplift to our core spending power: an example of our new Labour government putting public services and the interests and needs of our residents first, and long may that trajectory continue. However, that doesn't take away from the fact that we have been chronically underfunded for a very long time and there are therefore huge issues in terms of Local Government capacity that we're facing here in Brighton and Hove and by the vast majority of councils.

What's in the White Paper can potentially help in different ways. I think the Devolution piece and the idea that you would build capacity at a regional level to take powers and investment from government and do better for are region, whether it's looking at our integrated transport network and how long it currently takes to get from East to West on the train line across Sussex, that there are lots of things that a Devolved Authority could do that would help unlock some of the burdens that currently rest on us here in this Unitary Authority, but equally our neighbours in districts, boroughs, and county authorities.

I think there's a role for regional government to lift that burden a bit and take some of the pressures off us, including by doing the strategic work, helping with some of the preventative work, so that we're not mopping up the consequences of there not being a proper government structure in place that eases those burdens.

The other opportunity for efficiencies and to take some of the pressures of us will be in the Local Government Reorganisation piece, and that is very explicit in the White Paper that government sees that as being an opportunity to help reduce some of the inefficiencies that currently exist. I would imagine that the majority of those inefficiencies might be within the 2-tier structure because you currently have, in those places, 2 whole structures of Local Government working for the same area delivering different services. To my mind, that would seem to be less efficient than what we have already here in this unitary, but I think government is also thinking about those slightly larger footprints for unitaries than what we have here as a way to deliver savings. I think that will be explored and that is obviously something that we need to give thought to here in working out what is going to work best for our residents and how we strike that really important balance.

122 REPRESENTATIONS FROM OPPOSITION MEMBERS

- 122.1 Cabinet received a representation from Councillor West on Item 123, Devolution White Paper Update.
- 122.2 Cabinet received a representation from Councillor Hill on Item 123, Devolution White Paper Update.

123 DEVOLUTION WHITE PAPER UPDATE

123.1 Cabinet considered a report that requested approval to confirm to Government an expression of interest to take part in the Devolution Priority Programme, alongside East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council, seeking a Mayoral Combined Authority on a Sussex footprint and local government reorganisation for Sussex in line with the criteria set out in the Government White Paper.

123.2 Councillors Taylor, Williams, Burden, Pumm, Muten, Robins, Rowkins, Sankey, Miller, Daniel and Alexander asked questions and contributed to the debate of the report.

123.3 Resolved-

- 1) Cabinet agrees to submit to Government their request to take part in the Devolution Priority Programme, by the 10 January 2025, alongside East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council, seeking a Mayoral Combined Authority on a Sussex footprint and local government reorganisation for Sussex in line with the criteria set out in the Government White Paper.
- 2) Cabinet notes that further reports will come to Cabinet and Scrutiny through the period of the Priority Programme to ensure full engagement and consideration of options and impacts on the form of the Mayoral Combined Authority and Local Government Reform.

The meeting concluded at 1.40pm

