

# English Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

## **What is English Devolution?**

In England, devolution refers to the transfer of powers from central government to cities and regions, with the aim of giving them more control over decision-making, enabling them to tailor policies to their specific economic, social, and geographic circumstances.

Under the last Government, a number of bespoke 'devolution deals' were negotiated with areas, which saw Whitehall devolve powers and funding to combined authorities, made up of constituent local authorities and led by directly elected Mayors.

The first devolution deal in England was agreed in 2014 in Greater Manchester. Since then, a number of other areas have agreed devolution deals including Liverpool City Region, West Midlands, South Yorkshire, Tees Valley, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Devolution now covers almost half of England's population and more than half of the country's economic output. Most devolution deals to date have been in the North of England.

## **What is the Devolution Priority Programme?**

When the new Labour government was elected in July 2024, they committed to expanding and deepening devolution to all areas of England. On 16 December 2024, the government published its English Devolution White Paper, setting out its plan for delivering devolution to all parts of England and the intention that all future devolution agreements would be underpinned by the English Devolution Bill, and not through a deals-based approach.

Within the White Paper, the Government announced that areas that wish to move towards devolution at pace, would be able to apply to be on a Devolution Priority Programme (DPP). The Upper Tier authorities of East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council collectively expressed an interest in Sussex and Brighton being on the priority programme and were successfully accepted onto it. All areas on the priority programme are expected to move at pace on devolution, with Mayoral elections and the establishment of the Combined County Authority to happen in May 2026.

## **The new English Devolution Framework**

The Government is creating a new devolution framework which will mean that devolution is now available by default rather than by an individual deal.

**The White Paper announced that:**

- The Government wants to see all of England benefit from devolution. By completing the map, the Government will oversee the rebalancing of power from central government so that local leaders can take back control and increase prosperity for local people. It is the government's strong preference that in filling the map, places do so with a Mayor over a strategic geography. (Page 24 White Paper).

**Areas that take on a Mayor will see the following benefits:**

- Prioritisation by the Government to agree and establish devolution in their area.
- Powers drawn down from the strengthened Devolution Framework, with a significant devolution offer that will continue to grow over time.
- A clear pathway to unlocking higher levels of devolution reserved for the most mature institutions, including access to the Integrated Settlement which will grow in scope over time.
- Flexible allocated funding, with a long-term investment fund and, once the area has qualified, funding granted through a flexible Integrated Settlement.
- A representative sitting round the table of the Council of Nations and Regions with the Prime Minister, First Ministers from all the Devolved Governments and the Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland.
- A representative on the Mayoral Council to work with the Deputy Prime Minister on developing devolution and local growth policy.
- A mandate to develop a Local Growth Plan, with local growth priorities agreed with the Government providing focus for central government and regional collaboration.
- Membership of the Mayoral Data Council to join up senior data leaders with central government decision-making on data issues that affect them.

**Strategic Authorities:**

The Government will create in law the concept of a Strategic Authority. All Strategic Authorities will belong to one of the following levels: (Page 28 White Paper)

- Foundation Strategic Authorities: these include non-mayoral Combined Authorities and Combined County Authorities automatically, and any Local Authority designated as a Strategic Authority without a Mayor.
- Mayoral Strategic Authorities: the Greater London Authority, all Mayoral Combined Authorities and all Mayoral Combined County Authorities will automatically begin as Mayoral Strategic Authorities. Sussex and Brighton would fall within this category.
- Established Strategic Authorities: Those who meet specified eligibility criteria may be designated as Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities. This unlocks

further devolution of powers and funding, most notably an Integrated Settlement.

### **Competencies:**

To enable effective working with the public, private and voluntary sectors, the Government will explore wide-ranging legal powers for Strategic Authorities to deliver in their areas of competence. The Government will also explore enabling Mayors to promote economic, social, and environmental aims and to convene stakeholders with a corresponding duty on public authorities to respond. The areas of competence that the Strategic Authorities will be expected to deliver are:

- Transport and local infrastructure
- Skills and employment support
- Housing and strategic planning
- Economic development and regeneration
- Environment and climate change
- Health, wellbeing and public service reform
- Public safety (Page 29 White Paper)

### **Funding:**

New Strategic Authorities will receive consolidated funding pots covering: local growth, place, housing, and regeneration; non-apprenticeship adult skills; and transport. The detailed funding is anticipated to be announced following the June 25 Spending Review.

30-year investment funds will remain a core part of the Devolution Framework, with existing arrangements honoured, new areas receiving this funding on their creation, and funding for new institutions standardised to increase fairness.

The Government have indicated they will reduce the number of restrictive grants to Local Authorities wherever possible and that funding for service delivery will be consolidated into the Local Government Finance Settlement.

### **Governance, Accountability and Capacity Building**

The English Devolution White Paper outlines a transformative vision for governance in England, but it also signals the beginning of a broader reform agenda.

In addition to the structural and financial changes detailed in the Devolution Framework, the White Paper commits to reviewing several key areas that will shape the long-term success and accountability of devolved governance. These include: Audit and standards, public service reform and prevention, governance, capacity building, accountability and scrutiny, and a more in-depth review of the competencies.

For a full review of all areas covered please refer to the English Devolution White Paper which you can access here: [English Devolution White Paper - GOV.UK](#)

## **Government consultation on Devolution in Sussex and Brighton**

The Government ran a local public consultation in all areas chosen for the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) which **closed on 13 April 2025**.

The consultation sought views on the proposal to form a Mayoral Combined Authority for the local government areas of East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council and Brighton and Hove City Council (referred to as Sussex and Brighton in the consultation).

It asked for comments from those living and working in the county about:

- The proposed geography
- Governance arrangements
- Supporting the economy
- Improving social outcomes
- Local government services
- Improving the natural environment
- Supporting the needs of local communities and reflect local identity

Please find the background information here: [Sussex and Brighton devolution consultation - GOV.UK](#)

Please find Brighton & Hove City Council's response to the consultation here: [Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation APX. n 1.pdf](#)

## **Local Government Reorganisation**

### **What is Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)?**

Local government reorganisation is the process in which the structure and responsibilities of local authorities are reconfigured.

In the context of the English Devolution White Paper, the Government have set out plans to move away from the current two-tier system of district and county councils. In Sussex and Brighton, this means that East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County councils and their district and borough councils would cease to exist and new unitary authorities would take their place.

### **The structure of Local government**

In most of England, there are 2 tiers – county and district – with responsibility for council services split between them.

## County Councils

In West and East Sussex there is one county council in each area. County Councils provide services such as education, social services and waste disposal.

## District councils

In West Sussex there are seven district and borough councils and one county council alongside a number of town and parish councils.<sup>1</sup> In East Sussex there are there are 5 borough and district councils, and one county council alongside a number of town and parish councils.<sup>2</sup>

District councils are responsible for local services such as rubbish collection, housing and planning applications.

## Unitary Councils

Brighton and Hove City Council is already established as a unitary council. A unitary council provides all local government services in their area.

## Local Government Reorganisation Sussex and Brighton Interim Proposal

On 21 March 2025, BHCC submitted an interim plan for Local Government Reorganisation to the Minister for Local Government and English Devolution, Jim McMahon MP. The plan outlined BHCC's initial, high-level position on Local Government Reorganisation for Sussex & Brighton, from the perspective of an established unitary authority and in recognition of the diverse needs of the coastal, rural and urban areas of Sussex.

The interim plan included a summary of the feedback we had received from residents, staff and stakeholders recorded through a short engagement exercise carried out on our Your Voice platform between February and March 2025. Our plan also sought guidance on several critical issues to ensure a successful final proposal submission in September 2025.

You can read Brighton and Hove's City Council Interim Plan here:

[Devolution+and+Local+Government+Reorganisation+APX.+n+2.pdf](#)

## Feedback from the Government on our LGR interim plan

In May 2025, we received feedback from the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government and you can read the full response here: **INSERT THIS – can be a link as now on our website**

## Next Steps

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<sup>1</sup> [Local democracy - West Sussex County Council](#)

<sup>2</sup> [District and borough Councils | East Sussex County Council](#)

Taking into account the Government's feedback, the Councils will develop their final proposals for submission to Government on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2025. BHCC will work with consultants, Ignite, and with Sussex Councils, Partners and Stakeholders to:

- Gather the data and evidence of the impact of different options to be able to come to a final proposal for submission;
- Undertake public and stakeholder engagement between now and September 2025 to inform the final proposal;
- Report to Cabinet and submit to Cabinet a final proposal for Local Government Re-Organisation in the East Sussex and Brighton footprint, which also takes into account the alignment with proposals for a Mayoral Strategic Authority for Sussex & Brighton and any impact on the wider Sussex footprint.