

Brighton & Hove City Council

Overview & Scrutiny

Agenda Item 5

Subject: Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

Date of meeting: 5th June 2025

Report of: Chair of Place Overview & Scrutiny

Contact Officer: Name: Head of Cabinet Office

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Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

Key Decision: No

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 This report informs and updates members on the ongoing programmes of Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) for Sussex & Brighton. The appendices to the report present the context for Devolution and LGR and set out the timelines and next steps
- 1.2 Brighton & Hove City Council successfully applied, jointly with East Sussex and West Sussex County Councils, to be considered by Government for the Devolution Priority Programme. This means that the timetable for Devolution for Sussex & Brighton is for a Mayoral Election and new Mayoral Strategic Authority to be in place by May 2026.
- 1.3 The timetable for LGR is for Councils on the Devolution Priority Programme to submit final proposals by 26th September 2025, with the Government's intention being to formally establish shadow Unitary Authorities in April 2027 and new Unitary Authorities by April 2028.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee to note the update to members on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation and to comment on the plans for both programmes.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 A briefing paper on Devolution and LGR and supporting slides are attached as Appendices 1 and 2 to this report. A brief summary is set out below.

Devolution

- 3.2 In England, Devolution refers to the transferring of powers from central government to local government. The concept centres around giving regions more control over decision-making, enabling them to tailor policies to their specific economic, social, and geographic circumstances.
- 3.3 On 16 December 2024, the Government published its English Devolution White Paper, setting out its ambition for devolution to all areas of England and inviting applications from areas to join the devolution priority programme. The Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) is for areas who wish to move towards devolution at pace and they must also have local agreement to move forward around a sensible geographical footprint.
- 3.4 Sussex and Brighton & Hove successfully applied to join the priority programme and were confirmed as an area in a statement made by the Deputy Prime Minister to the House of Commons on 5 February 2025. Being on the priority programme means that Sussex and Brighton will be working to the most ambitious timetable for devolution, including the establishment of a Mayoral Strategic Authority by May 2026.
- 3.5 This means a new Mayoral Strategic Authority will be created for Sussex & Brighton. 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. There will be a duty to collaborate with constituent Local Authorities and neighbouring Strategic Authorities in delivering the following areas of competence:
- 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
- 3.6 There will also be an integrated financial settlement and a statutory duty to produce Local Growth Plans.
- 3.7 Each Upper Tier Council (ESCC/WSCC/BHCC) will be required to consent to the proposed legal framework that will create the new Mayoral Strategic Authority. The Upper Tier Authorities will need to work together with the engagement of all other stakeholders and partners to set up the new Mayoral Strategic Authority.

Local Government Reorganisation

- 3.8 Local Government Reorganisation is the process of reconfiguring the structure and responsibilities of local authorities. The Government have set out plans to move away from the current two-tier system of district and county councils. In our area of 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 will be established.

- 3.9 On 21st March 2025, Brighton and Hove submitted their draft interim plan for Local Government Reorganisation to the Minister for Local Government and English Devolution, Jim McMahon. This submission outlines progress and seeks guidance on several critical issues to ensure a successful submission in September 2025. This can be accessed in Appendix 3. Feedback on this plan from the government can be accessed in Appendix 4.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 The Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee is invited to note the update report.

5. Community engagement and consultation

- 5.1 The Government ran a public consultation in areas chosen for the Devolution Priority Programme 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. 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

- 5.2 We are currently waiting on the results from this consultation from the Government.

- 5.3 Brighton & Hove City Council conducted their own public engagement exercise on Local Government Reorganisation from 24th February – 10th March 2025 which received with 597 responses. Respondents expressed a mix of opinions, with a significant number preferring Brighton & Hove to remain as it is. Further public engagement will be undertaken prior to the submission of final LGR proposals in September 2025.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 There will be significant financial implications for Brighton and Hove City Council as a result of both local government reorganisation and devolution. Any change in boundary as a result of local government reorganisation will result in the aggregation or disaggregation of budgets previously held in County, District or Unitary organisations, as well as the assets, liabilities and reserves of those organisations. In respect of devolution, it is possible that functions and associated funding previously held by central government will be devolved to the new strategic authority. A number of risks and opportunities will exist for Councils going through this process.

Name of finance officer consulted: John Hooten
270525

Date consulted

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 The Devolution and LGR legal frameworks are set out in the supporting documentation. The powers to set up a Mayoral Combined Authority are already in place through existing primary legislation, in particular the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 and the Local Democracy, Economy and Construction Act 2009. The English Devolution Bill will provide further detail to this existing legal framework. The requirement for all Upper Tier Authorities to consent to the Statutory Instrument which will create the Mayoral Strategic Authority is also set out in the briefing paper. In relation to Local Government Re-organisation, there are significant legal implications that will need to be addressed through the process and considered as the options are developed.

Name of lawyer consulted: Elizabeth Culbert

Date consulted 230525

8. Equalities implications

- 8.1 The Mayoral Strategic Authority will prioritise areas such as transport, adult skills, housing and health and may make changes to reduce inequalities in society, for example, making jobs more accessible across local authority boundaries. These changes may also allow for more locally responsive services that reflect the specific needs of diverse communities, including those with protected characteristics.
- 8.2 An Equalities Impact Assessment will be developed against the different elements of devolution and local government reorganisation proposals and will inform the final LGR proposal in September and the decision to approve the Devolution Statutory Instrument in Autumn 2025.

9. Sustainability implications

- 9.1 One of the areas of competence to be exercised by the Mayoral Combined County Authority under the new devolution framework will be Environment and Climate Change. The ambition set out in the Government's English Devolution White Paper is for the new Mayoral Strategic Authorities to deliver more long-term sustainable development, particularly in the areas of

transport and housing. They will have the power to expand and improve public transport services and promote low-carbon initiatives such as electric vehicles. They could also set sustainability standards for new housing developments to promote energy efficiency, for example.

- 9.2 Any sustainability implications arising from the development of local government reorganisation will be considered and will inform the final proposal to be submitted in September.

10. Health and Wellbeing Implications:

- 10.1 The Mayoral Strategic Authority will have a duty to improve health and to reduce health inequalities. It is expected that Mayors will have a pivotal role within the area's Integrated Care Partnership and the Mayoral Strategic Authority can take a more coordinated approach to reducing health inequality across the regions.
- 10.2 Any health and wellbeing implications arising from the development of local government reorganisation will be considered and will inform the final proposal to be submitted in September.

11. Conclusion

- 11.1 Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee is being asked to note the update to members on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation and to make any comment on the plans to progress both Devolution and LGR Programmes.

Supporting Documentation

1. Appendices

- 1. Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation slides
- 2. Briefing document
- 3. Draft Interim plan for Local Government Reorganisation
- 4. Feedback from the government on the Interim Plan

