

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

PLACE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

4.00pm 31 JULY 2025

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Evans (Chair) Cattell, Goddard, Fowler, Mackey, Winder, Fishleigh, Sykes and Meadows

Other Members present: Mark Strong (CVS), members of People Overview & Scrutiny Committee: Cllr O'Quinn, Lesley Hurst (online) and Adam Muirhead (CVS), and members of Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee: Cllrs Wilkinson, Simon and Geoffrey Bowden from HealthWatch.

PART ONE

21 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

21. Procedural Business

21a Declarations of substitutions

21.1 Apologies from Cllr Loughran

21.2 Apologies from Mary Davies, OPC

21b Declarations of interest:

21.3 There were none.

21c Exclusion of the press and public

21.4 The press and public were not excluded

22 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

22.1 The Chair gave the following communication:

Today we are holding another special Place Overview & Scrutiny meeting to look at the ongoing programmes of Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) for Sussex and Brighton. We will look at LGR first and then we will move on to Devolution. We are being asked to note the updates on both Devolution and LGR and to make any comment on the public engagement survey presenting the boundary options for LGR.

As this subject has an overlap in remit, we have invited members of both People and Health Overview & Scrutiny Committees to attend and provide input if they wish to.

We are joined today by Cllr Sankey, Leader of the Council, and Cllr Hewitt, Cabinet advisor on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation who will be presenting today. We also have Liz Culbert, Director for Governance and Law, Rachel Kelly, Programme Director for LGR, who are on hand to help with any questions. We also have in the room, Lucie Spicer from the Policy Team and two consultants, Julian Osgathorpe and James Stainer. I'd like to welcome them all to the meeting.

23 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

23.1 There were no public questions.

24 MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

24.1 There were no member questions.

25 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION UPDATE

- 25.1 Cllr Hewitt presented the slides on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). Key points included the timeline which showed that the consultation ends on 25th August to be submitted to government on 26th September. Government will then hold another consultation before making the decision on the boundaries for Brighton and Sussex in early 2026. Cllr Hewitt described the approach to the consultation including the survey which had already received 433 responses in the first 6 days, public meetings and online promotion; he then went through the 4 different options that are being presented to the public for comment. There are no preferences at this point and ongoing analysis of data and feedback will continue to inform the final proposal.
- 25.2 Cllrs Sykes, O'Quinn and Meadows asked about the cost and deliverability of LGR considering the council's current financial pressures and no additional funding coming from the government, whether this risk is being monitored, whether it would mean an increase in council tax, whether the council would take on the budgets and debts of any areas it merges with and what the cost impact would be on services such as Home to School Transport and Adult Social Care if the area being served is expanded and may result in higher expense. Cllr Sankey said that they are currently sharing data with neighbouring authorities to understand the cost pressures involved in service delivery and this will be worked into the financial analysis to understand what would work for the city and its neighbours and whether it is deliverable and sustainable.
- 25.3 Cllrs Sykes, O'Quinn and Goddard asked questions about the economic impact of LGR, and the potential for Brighton and Hove's digital economy to power growth across all areas. Cllr Sankey said that this is being considered as part of the analysis, that scaling up businesses has been a longstanding challenge and this could be a positive opportunity to generate more jobs and be mutually beneficial to all. Some businesses are already moving to Newhaven and this is accelerating and amplifying the trailblazing work that is going on.

- 25.4 Cllr O'Quinn asked about political representation if option 4 were to be chosen. Cllr Hewitt said that the existing councillors in the new areas including towns and parishes, would remain. If option 4 was chosen, there would be a significant shift in terms of the number of parish and town councils that the city council would be required to work with which was important to take into consideration in this process. Cllr Fishleigh asked why they didn't have an option for expanding just Falmer village and East Saltdean, Cllr Hewitt explained that this wasn't possible as they had to use full wards as building blocks and were not allowed to split them.
- 25.5 Cllr Goddard asked about the speed of the proposals and the short consultation time and how best to raise awareness of it. He would have liked to have heard voices from the wider areas mentioned in the proposals. Cllr Sankey acknowledged the pace of the process and said they were doing as much as they can to engage in a meaningful way and that there will be other opportunities to provide feedback in the subsequent consultation in November. They encouraged ward councillors to help promote the consultation to their constituents. Mark Strong said that the community voluntary sector were agnostic on the options but would like more of a discussion on the risks and benefits of the proposals. Some organisations' defined area of benefit is the boundaries of the city so they will need to change the way they work. Mark Strong asked about the impact on community groups, charities, resident associations etc both in the city and in the areas for potential merging and raised concerns about the impact on officer time in terms of service delivery, funding bids and partnership working. Cllr Hewitt said he wanted to meet with all the CVS groups but due to limited time, attending 1 or 2 larger community-based meetings might be better suited. They are hoping to have more events during the next consultation period and will try to attend meetings already set in the calendar. Jess Gibbons said that it is an iterative process at a very early stage and engagement will continue throughout the period with residents, stakeholders, businesses, CVS etc. They would particularly like to hear from young people. Adam Muirhead from the CVS said he could help reach young people. He asked whether they would be combining the results of this consultation with those being held by the neighbouring authorities.
- 25.6 Cllr Wilkinson asked how LGR affects the arrangements for Health services and the need to have clear systems in place between local councils and NHS partners, ensuring that Brighton and Hove's needs are not overshadowed. Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee holds health services to account and this role should not be weakened. Cllr Sankey said that health inequalities would be built into the new remit of the mayor and LGR would ensure health services are localised and responsive to the different health needs that exist in the city and more rural areas. The government has a clear vision for partnership working between the new authorities and health services and the role of HOSC is key to holding this to account. Geoffrey Bowden from HealthWatch said that the decision had been made to bring HealthWatch in-house working with the ICB, he asked how this will be financed and remain independent. Cllr Sankey said she would be happy to find out and get back to him.
- 25.7 Cllr Fishleigh asked how it would be more efficient serving a larger area and what services need improvement. Cllr Sankey said looking into the cost of delivery is part of the ongoing analysis and that they always want to improve services in the city and take an outcome focussed approach. Currently, there is a lot of improvement happening within the waste and recycling service, housing repairs and street cleansing. Cllr

Fishleigh raised the issue of the coast road which is in poor condition and costs a lot to maintain, Cllr Hewitt said that work like this can be started with the Mayor and the shadow unitary before LGR is formally completed.

- 25.8 Cllr Winder said that some people might feel left behind in this process, this is a massive project with a lot of elements to bring together and some people will feel that there is already a lot going on in their lives. Cllr Winder asked how we will look after the diverse and vulnerable communities and how will they draw people together to retain a sense of community. Cllr Sankey said that devolution provides a unique opportunity to genuinely transform things for communities that are historically left behind and unlock opportunities by looking at things in a strategic way, such as more affordable travel across all areas, ensuring bus routes serve the more deprived areas etc. It is important that existing communities don't feel that their identity is being challenged by this process which is one reason why the city council is pushing for 5 smaller unitary authorities so people feel closer to decision making.
- 25.9 Geoffrey Bowden asked about benchmarking and said that the petition on change.org against the takeover of Lewes by Brighton has over 4000 signatures on it. Cllr Sankey said that Lewes and East Sussex councils have been running a consultation on the Brighton & Hove proposals and they have asked them to share the raw data so they can see the views of people in those areas. The change.org petition doesn't have the function to analyse who is responding and from where and can intentionally mislead people which is not reliable evidence. Cllr Fishleigh said that people had been whipped up on social media through the use of inflammatory language but that once the proposals had been explained to them properly, people were able to see opportunities. Jess Gibbons said that co-production with communities in this process is important.
- 25.10 RESOLVED – that Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee note the report.

26 UPDATE ON DEVOLUTION

- 26.1 Cllr Hewitt presented the slides on Devolution, key points included the structures of devolution, the roles of the Mayor, voting systems and areas of competence. The voting system will change from First Past the Post to Supplementary Voting from 2027 but not for the mayoral election in 2026. The areas of competence will enable streamlined working and strategic oversight for things such as having a local transport authority for the whole region; flexible further education offer for adults; a more tailored, localised approach to planning; the creation of local growth plans; and better coordination of net zero initiatives on a large scale such as solar farms. Health inequalities will be challenged and the Chair of the NHS Sussex Integrated Care Board will be invited to be part of the informal board. The role of Police and Crime Commissioner will be abolished and become part of the remit of the Mayoral Authority, alongside the Fire Authority. Next steps include establishing the Informal Partnership Board, collaborating with East and West Sussex County Councils, appointing Programme Directors, drafting the constitution and presenting to Full Council in the autumn. Since the last meeting, it has been confirmed by the government that Sussex & Brighton have passed the tests and are ready to progress to the next stage in the devolution process.
- 26.2 Cllr Sykes and Mark Strong from the CVS asked questions about the political make up of the new authority and how that will be managed as there might be political tensions

and conflict in decision making. Cllr Hewitt said that this is an opportunity for collaborative working between political groups and shouldn't undermine the authority, that there might be a wider range of political parties involved and this has been managed well in other parts of the country such as Tees Valley.

- 26.3 Cllr Mackey asked about the diversion of grants to the Mayoral Authority and how this will impact Brighton and Hove. Cllr Sankey said that some funding the council currently receives will move to the new authority with its new responsibilities, that over time there will be an increase in the amount of investment coming in from both the government and private investors as can be seen in the examples of Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire Combined Authorities. The Mayoral Authority will also pass funding down to local councils who will retain the implementation and operational responsibilities but with a clearer strategy across the unitary boundaries.
- 26.4 Cllr Goddard asked about the voting system, that Supplementary Voting is more democratic and why can't the Mayoral election in 2026 follow this voting system. Cllr Sankey agreed and said she had lobbied the government on this point.
- 26.5 Mark Strong said there was no mention of community groups and asked how they will feed into the Mayoral Authority. He also said that there is very little mention of climate change. Cllr Sankey said that community groups will be part of the informal partnership board and she agreed that more could be said about climate change. The government has made it clear that Mayoral Authorities will get the power in time to request further powers from government which can be tailored to that region's particular needs.
- 26.6 Geoffrey Bowden from HealthWatch asked about how this process dovetails with the South Downs National Park governance and said that the Mayoral Authority could end up with 2 port authorities. Cllr Sankey said both the South Downs National Park and the current port authorities will have representatives on the Informal Partnership Board and will be involved in the new Mayoral Authority.
- 26.7 RESOLVED – that Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee note the report.

The meeting concluded at 6.50pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

