

# Response to Sussex and Brighton devolution consultation by Brighton & Hove City Council

## Consultation questions

**Question 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree that establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority over the proposed geography will deliver benefits to the area?**

- **Strongly agree**
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

**Please explain your answer.**

Brighton & Hove city Council (BHCC) strongly agrees that the establishment of a Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) over the proposed geography will deliver benefits to the area. We feel the Sussex geography makes sense in terms of size, identity, as well as being the right footprint to ensure delivery of the benefits of devolution including economic growth, improved governance and enhanced public services.

Sussex has so much potential. We are proudly home to a beautiful coastline and national park recognised by a UNESCO Biosphere, three leading universities, a Premier League football team and international gateways including the UK's second largest airport in Gatwick, and the ports of Shoreham and Newhaven. The total population of Sussex is 1,705,800 and as a region we welcome over 60 million visitors each year. We have so much to offer but have not yet reached our potential.

Despite our relative prosperity, 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, social and environmental benefits. We are therefore excited by the government's commitment to go further with devolution and recognise the real opportunity this presents for us to deliver change for our residents.

**Economic Development and Growth:** Brighton & Hove as a city has seen significant jobs and productivity growth- among the strongest in the UK since 2010, with one of the most entrepreneurial economies and with the strongest business density per head of population of any city outside London, according to the centre for cities- cities outlook 2024. Brighton & Hove now has 16,150 registered businesses<sup>1</sup>, plus a large number of freelancers and sole traders. The number of businesses in the city continues to rise, having increased by more than 12% since 2023. However, our economy does not exist in a vacuum. The UK economy is in a period of stagnation. Real wages have not grown in the last 15 years; income inequality is growing across the country; taxes have increased; and foreign direct investment has declined by 11% since Brexit. Our city is impacted by these larger structural

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<sup>1</sup> ONS data 2024

challenges. For residents, the city is becoming increasingly unaffordable, with those on average incomes no longer comfortably able to afford to own or rent a home within Brighton & Hove. The rising cost of essentials means that in real terms pay is decreasing, and certain places and communities are disproportionately impacted by these wider economic challenges.

**Improved Governance:** Brighton & Hove has a history of working successfully with partners across Sussex through the Greater Brighton Economic Board (which covers seven local authority areas) and the Greater Brighton and Coastal West Sussex Strategic Planning Board, alongside other key partnerships such as The Living Coast UNESCO urban biosphere and Sussex Bay (regional vision for the 100 miles of coastline of seascape and rivers across Sussex). We feel that a clear collaboration mechanism which ensures that councils across Sussex and Brighton & Hove working together in a structured way, which can take decisions over a wider area footprint, is a huge benefit for the place and people across Sussex, with the added hopeful benefit of increasing trust from residents across Sussex.

**Enhanced Public Services:** Through the governance and focus on key strategic areas such as: Transport and local infrastructure, Skills and Employment, Housing and Planning, Economic development and regeneration, Environment and climate change, Health and Wellbeing and more. A clear mechanism of improved governance and collaboration with other Sussex local authorities led by the clear direction of a democratically elected mayor, will afford us the ability to work more effectively across Sussex and Brighton & Hove to continue to drive improvements on key public services.

**Question 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed governance arrangements for the Mayoral Combined County Authority?**

- Strongly agree
- **Agree**
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

**Please explain your answer.**

Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) agrees with the proposed governance arrangements for the Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA). Coming together as a MCCA would provide greater visibility and transparency for this work across Sussex and Brighton & Hove and give us the necessary capacity to use key growth levers such as transport, skills, economic development, and regeneration. It would enable focus on the things that will make the biggest difference to the lives of our residents and the businesses within Sussex and Brighton & Hove.

**Mayor:** BHCC agree that the MCCA should have a mayor directly elected by residents to be a regional leader who will chair the MCCA and will have the powers, functions and budget outlined in the devolution white paper. We welcome the establishment of the Council of Nations and Regions and want to ensure that the region of Sussex and Brighton & Hove is represented in Whitehall. We also want to ensure that residents across the strategic authority understand who they can hold directly accountable when it comes to developing the Sussex and Brighton & Hove regional area.

**Constituency Councils:** BHCC agree that Sussex and Brighton MCCA would have the following:

- A directly elected Mayor

- Constituent Members (Members appointed by the constituent councils, with each constituent council appointing a lead member- which is expected to be the leader or their nominee) and one further member from its elected members. The number of constituent members will depend on the final proposal for local government reorganisation in Sussex
- Non-constituent and associate members to support the delivery of their work programme (who will be representatives of an organisation – for example a local NHS trust, Fire Authority, the police crime commission or local business representative or (for associate members) named individuals with expertise in specific areas. In terms of the number of non-constituent authorities, we consider that flexibility should be afforded to the MCCA to increase this number if the MCCA considers appropriate.

**MCCA decision making and voting:** BHCC agree that the voting members of the MCCA should be the constituent authorities (2 representatives each) and the mayor. We note that the final number of voting members will be determined following Local Government Re-Organisation, which will determine the number of Unitary Authorities that are established, so the numbers of voting members cited in the consultation may change. In relation to quoracy, again the final numbers will need to be dependent on the final number of constituent members.

We understand that the decision making at the MCCA would be by a majority voting system. However, this is an area that we would like more clarification on in terms of voting and ensuring that all areas will be effectively represented by decision making. As such, we would like to continue to develop with Government proposals around governance. For example, regarding the proposed arrangements for quoracy at MCCA meetings.

**Question 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined County Authority will support the economy of the area?**

- **Strongly agree**
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

**Please explain your answer.**

Brighton & Hove City Council strongly agrees that a Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) will support the economy of the strategic area of Sussex and Brighton & Hove.

**Current economic position:** By traditional economic measures, Brighton & Hove is in a strong economic position. External research has shown that we have some of the best conditions for investment of anywhere outside of London. Brighton & Hove is ranked as the 5th best city in which to live and work, and the 5th best city in which to start a business. The city has seen significant jobs and productivity growth- among the strongest in the UK since 2010, with one of the most entrepreneurial economies and with the strongest business density per head of population of any city outside London, according to the centre for cities- cities outlook 2024. Brighton & Hove now has 16,150 registered businesses, plus a large number of freelancers and sole traders. The number of businesses in the city continues to rise, having increased by more than 12% since 2023.

The strength of the city as a place to do business is exhibited in recent Centre for Cities research (Outlook 2025) which has the highest share of new economy knowledge-based firms when compared

to working age population.<sup>2</sup> This reflects the presence of two universities and leading FE providers, plus the University of Chichester and the Sussex and Surrey Institute of Technology located within Brighton & Hove's core travel to work area. Brighton & Hove is delivering economic growth, with a focus on sectors already identified by the government as crucial to future success. This is reflected in our recently adopted Economic Plan, which demonstrates our economic diversity and highlights the potential for growth of the digital knowledge economy, maximising the potential of our wider creative and cultural industries and our highly specialised and growing advanced manufacturing sector.

Our recent Employment Land Study shows that between 2023 and 2041 jobs in office and industrial sectors of the city's economy are forecast to grow by 8%. Combined with the city's existing strengths in financial services and the visitor economy, this demonstrates Brighton & Hove's potential for future growth.

**Key Challenges:** However, this growth may be impacted by key challenges being faced by Brighton & Hove. We have significant geographical constraints due to the South Downs National Park and the sea. This has meant that our businesses are finding it increasingly challenging to find space for expansion and competing pressures on space mean that some employment space is being lost to residential development. Between 2018 and 2023, the city lost an estimated 16% of its industrial floorspace and 7% of its office floorspace.<sup>3</sup> Our recent Employment Land Study has shown that Brighton & Hove needs a further 56,386 square metres of new industrial space over the period to 2041, with a potential supply pipeline of just 6% of this. The study also shows a need for over 87,000 square metres of new office space. In addition, our aging building stock may mean that, without adequate support, landlords may struggle to upgrade commercial space to meet required minimum energy efficiency standards.

Despite this, housing prices continue to be high, meaning that residents struggle to rent or buy a home. The median house price in the year ending September 2023 is £430,000, and the median gross annual workplace-based earnings in 2023 for Brighton & Hove is 34,876. The competing pressures on developable land means that the ratio of median house price to median gross place workplace-based earnings put Brighton at 12.33 in 2023. This is higher than average in the Southeast at 10.39, and higher than the average in England at 8.26.<sup>4</sup>

The benefits of our economic growth are not felt evenly across the city, with pockets of significant deprivation in parts of East Brighton, Hangleton and North Portslade. Around 10% of all Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in Brighton & Hove are in the most deprived decile. Parts of Whitehawk are in the topmost deprived LSOAs anywhere in the country.<sup>5</sup>

### **Strategic Benefits of MCCA**

Brighton & Hove is a key economic hub in Sussex. Our prosperity is already felt by surrounding areas, but we need to work collaboratively to address our shared issues. Where the city struggles to find space for our growing business base, Sussex can help to grow the economy at a regional level, creating new opportunities for our residents and helping to address the deprivation seen in some parts of Brighton & Hove. It can be positive displacement in action – helping to alleviate the pressure on the over-heating city economy and generating new investment and growth for the region's wider benefit.

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<sup>2</sup> [Cities-Outlook-2025.pdf](#)

<sup>3</sup> Economic Plan Evidence Base

<sup>4</sup> ONS data: [House price to workplace-based earnings ratio - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>5</sup> IMD 2019 stats: File 1 gives the stats: [English indices of deprivation 2019 - GOV.UK](#)

This economic growth will not just happen. Taking a strategic view to infrastructure issues, including both east-west and north-south transport, and tied to environmental sustainability, will make a significant positive impact. Likewise, working together to promote Sussex & Brighton for investment – rather than competing against each other – can only benefit the economy. This builds on the work we've started with neighbours in the Greater Brighton Economic Board, delivering £200m of investment and growth in the sub-region.

This is why we believe that a strategic view of Sussex and Brighton & Hove can address these interlocking issues and find creative solutions.

A MCCA could provide:

- Localised Decision-Making: More tailored policies and initiatives that address specific regional needs.
- Improved Infrastructure: Enhanced transport links and infrastructure projects that connect different parts of Sussex more effectively.
- Balanced Development: Leveraging the strengths of both urban and rural areas to ensure balanced economic growth compatible with the net zero transition.
- Increased Investment: Attracting investment in key sectors, boosting employment opportunities, and supporting local businesses.

In conclusion, the strategic oversight provided by a Mayoral Combined County Authority could help overcome the challenges faced by Brighton & Hove and support the broader economic development of Sussex. This collaborative approach would enable us to harness the full potential of the region, ensuring sustainable growth and prosperity for all.

**Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined County Authority will improve social outcomes in the area?**

- **Strongly agree**
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

**Please explain your answer.**

Key Social outcomes in Brighton & Hove have been developed through the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). The JSNA is concerned with wider social factors that have an impact on people's health and wellbeing. Whilst there are some benefits in living in Brighton & Hove such as a lower mortality rate for air pollution 4.5% compared to 5.7% in Southeast, low number of young people not in education, employment or training of 3.8% compared to the Southeast of 6.9%. We also have lower hospital admissions for alcohol specific conditions of 531 per 100,000 compared to 587 per 100,000 in Southeast for 2021/2022. We also have a strong community with higher rates of belonging, pulling together, formal volunteering and feeling that people from different background get compared to England. (City tracker survey results 2018).

However, we do have some unique challenges In Brighton & Hove. Whilst we are the 131<sup>st</sup> most deprived local authority in England (of 317) according to the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD),

we do have, 17% of the population of the city living in one of the 20% most deprived areas in England. Additionally, in terms of population, we have a significantly smaller number of children under aged 18 (17%) compared to the Southeast (21%), we also have a high percentage of children in care with 74 per 10,000 children and young people in care compared to Southeast of 57 per 10,000. Overall, this paints a complicated picture of social outcomes.

We believe the MCCA will play an important role in health and wellbeing alongside wider public service reform. The new bespoke duty of in relation to health improvement and health inequalities would ensure that health outcomes and reduction in health inequalities would be given a clear plan across the Sussex and Brighton & Hove region. This is essential in creating a healthier society, more resilient to the effects of climate change, and supporting in a closer collaboration and partnership across health partners in the region.

**Question 5: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through a Mayoral Combined County Authority will improve local government services in the area?**

- **Strongly agree**
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

**Please explain your answer.**

Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) strongly agrees that the MCCA will improve local government services. We understand that the MCCA will not replace Brighton & Hove City Council and that key council services will continue to be provided for our residents.

As a unitary council, Brighton & Hove provides over 700 services to residents in our area. This ranges from adult social care, to waste management to housing and planning and a lot more. Currently, we receive funding from a range of sources, some of this is controllable, where we have a say, and some of this is non-controllable. Pressures on council budgets has been mounting, with spiking inflation, high energy costs, increases to national living wage. This, combined with the increased demand on services has led to a 27% real term cut in core spending power since 2010.

The funding given to the MCCA will aid us in ensuring that devolved funding from central government, will be analysed reviewed and voted on tackling key issues locally. We agree with the MCCA having control over how funding is spent, including how it is spent to meet local needs in the area.

**Question 6: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through a Mayoral Combined County Authority will improve the local natural environment and overall national environment?**

- **Strongly agree**
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

**Please explain your answer.**

Brighton & Hove, situated between the South Downs and the sea, has over 40 percent of its area within the South Downs National Park. This unique positioning provides a substantial opportunity to enhance and protect the natural environment, as recognised by its status as a UNESCO urban biosphere (which also incorporates parts of the neighbouring Sussex area). The Biosphere has enabled the development of strong partnership working across many facets of environmental enhancement in the Brighton and Hove and wider Sussex area.

The city has recently established a strategic partnership, Sussex Energy, with the goal of achieving net zero energy status in the Greater Brighton and wider Sussex area by 2040. The energy demand in Sussex is 14 times greater than the current supply from zero carbon sources and therefore it is necessary to reduce energy demand and increase the local supply of zero carbon energy. This would directly contribute to the government's priorities of transitioning to a zero-carbon electricity system by 2030. This initiative supports national efforts such as the creation of GB Energy and the UK-wide scaling up of solar panels for homes and businesses.

The proposed geography for the MCCA matches the geography adopted for the Sussex Local Nature Recovery strategy, thus the MCCA would be ideally placed to strategically oversee implementation of the strategy. In wider natural environment improvement, including adaptation to climate change, the ability of the MCCA to work strategically at catchment-level would lead to better outcomes than approaching this on a more local scale. The proposed public safety role of local resilience is also welcomed, enabling a joined-up, nature-based, approach to improving resilience to climate change.

The MCCA will play an essential role in this development. Its strategic role in convening partnerships, coordinating action, securing funding, and ensuring effective delivery is paramount in combating climate change. The devolution of retrofit funding and the hosting of heat network zonae coordination would enable the MCCA to take a strategic, joined-up approach to these activities across Sussex. The MCCA's involvement will be crucial in driving forward the initiatives necessary to improve the local and national environment.

In addition to specific powers and functions related directly to climate and the environment that are proposed for the MCCA, the powers and functions of the MCCA (transport and local infrastructure, skills an employment, housing and strategic planning, economic development and regeneration, health wellbeing and public service and public safety) are all strongly intertwined with improving the local and national environment. The proposed scope of powers and functions covered by the MCCA, and the inclusion of climate and the environment amongst them, should enable the MCCA to take a holistic view and bring about improvements that balance environmental, economic and social needs, rather than working in a siloed manner.

**Question 7: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined County Authority will support the interests and needs of local communities and reflect local identities?**

- Strongly agree
- **Agree**
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Brighton & Hove City Council agrees that a MCCA will support the interests and needs of local communities and reflect local identities. In Brighton & Hove, we have some unique challenges that we believe the MCCA will be able to support, specifically in reducing inequalities.

However, we believe it is critical that local government reorganisation and devolution go hand in hand, so that our unique identity is protected and that governance structures support the needs of our diverse communities and reflect local identities. This is vital to ensuring that the government's aim of bringing power closer to people is realised and does not get lost in the establishment of new structures.

Our city is unique and diverse. We are unofficially referred to as the LGBTQIA+ capital of Britain and we are proud to host the UK's biggest Pride Festival. More than 20% of the city's population were born outside the UK, and we have a higher migrant population than elsewhere in the southeast – and much of England. As a City of Sanctuary, we are committed to being a welcoming place of safety, acceptance and freedom of expression for all – and to offer sanctuary for people fleeing violence and persecution.

The 2021 census shows that;

- 1 in 10 residents identify with an LGB+ sexual orientation 10.6% compared to Southeast 3.1%
- One in a hundred adult residents identify as Trans, double than what is found in the Southeast
- A quarter of residents are BME 26% compared to the Southeast 21%
- One in five residents were born outside of the UK 20% higher than seen in the Southeast of 16%
- Over a half of residents have no religion or belief 55%, significantly higher than in the Southeast of 40%

We celebrate our diversity and this is one of our great strengths. While there is much to celebrate, Brighton & Hove also faces a number of significant challenges in addressing the needs of our local communities. We are a city of deep inequalities, with areas of significant deprivation.

The national housing crisis is severely impacting the city, with 7,500 households currently on the Housing Register, including 1,800 people currently living in temporary or emergency accommodation. One of our biggest challenges is how we can provide more housing to meet the city's ever-increasing needs. Due to the constraints of being situated between the South Downs and the Sea, we do not have the space to meet the full demand within our own confines.

On a city-wide basis, average household earnings are almost the same as the national level (£30,000 per year). However, in some communities, those earnings are well below the national average. 9% of our population earns below the national living wage.

In Brighton & Hove, there are neighbourhoods that rank among the worst nationally for access to healthy and affordable food and GP services. Overall wages have not kept pace with inflation in recent years, which means residents are actually worse off in real terms than they were in 2011. Women's wages remain below men's, and the gap has widened in the last two years.

As a council we are taking a number of steps to tackle entrenched inequalities, provide more affordable housing and immediate financial support to our residents most at need, we believe that the MCCA offers a strategic framework to address these challenges. By providing localised decision-making, tailored policies, and coordinated efforts across the region, the MCCA can enhance economic growth, improve infrastructure, and attract investment.

Ensuring that local representation from across unitary authorities who have a seat at the table and can champion their areas is essential to ensuring that communities feel they have a say and is essential for the growth and development of the region.

