

Subject:	The Greater Brighton Economic Board in the context of the Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority
Date of Meeting:	28 January 2026
Report of:	Chair, Greater Brighton Economic Board
Contact Officer: Name:	Andy Hill
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Ward(s) affected:	All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 In early February 2025, Sussex and Brighton was confirmed as one of six regions to be accepted on to the Devolution Priority Programme and the establishment of the Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority (SBCCA) is gathering pace.
- 1.2 The Greater Brighton Economic Board “the Board” welcomes the Government recognition of the opportunities available from working at a larger, regional level for strategic initiatives. With the formation of the SBCCA in progress, it is clear that the role and purpose of the Board and other existing governance structures are likely to be replaced by a wider governance structure to drive the region’s economic growth. This will probably come into effect during the 2026/27 financial year, though exact timings are not yet known. As such, this report sets out some recommendations to continue the Board’s work through the period of transition to the SBCCA.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Board agrees in principle to commit funding for a further twelve months (April 2026-March 2027), so that the Board continues to operate as structures around the SBCCA are established.
- 2.2 That the Board agrees to develop an Integration Plan to ensure that Board priorities, particularly the Sussex Energy Mission, are embedded within the future SBCCA.
- 2.3 That by September 2026 the Board agree the timeline for the dissolution of the Board and transition into the SBCCA with the ambition for this to take place during 2026. It should be noted that three months is required to provide notice and close.
- 2.4 That in accord with 2.3, whilst the Board agrees to twelve months funding in principle, initially six months of funding (April-September 2026) is requested from each Member.

2.5 That a more fully worked up budget for the period April-September 2026, which includes any costs associated with Board dissolution, be presented at the next Board meeting for agreement (March).

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 The Board was established as a requirement of the Greater Brighton City Deal with Government in 2014. The Board is comprised of two parts: the Greater Brighton Economic Joint Committee (GBEJC) and the Greater Brighton Business Partnership (GBBP). Board meetings have operated as concurrent meetings of both the GBEJC and GBBP to help coordinate economic development activities and investment at a regional level.

3.2 Currently, Board membership is set out as below:

Greater Brighton Economic Joint Committee (GBEJC)	Greater Brighton Business Partnership (GBBP)
Adur District Council	Adur & Worthing Business Partnership
Arun District Council	Brighton & Hove Economic Growth Board
Brighton & Hove City Council	Chichester College Group
Crawley Borough Council	South Downs National Park Authority
Lewes District Council	University of Brighton
Mid Sussex District Council	University of Sussex
Worthing Borough Council	NHS Sussex Integrated Care Board

3.3 The main remit of the Board is to help nurture sustainable economic prosperity, by co-ordinating economic development activities and investment at City Region level, and by joining together places and working collaboratively to build on the area's economic assets and unblock its barriers. In bringing together, in a partnership of the willing, seven local authorities, business partnerships, two universities, a college group, a National Park, and recently NHS Sussex, the Board has occupied a unique position within the local governance landscape.

3.4 The forthcoming English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill will create a statutory requirement for Mayoral Authorities to produce a Local Growth Plan which sets out a long-term vision for growth in their region over the next decade and a roadmap for how this can be achieved. Established governance structures such as the Board, and the Economic Growth Boards of East and West Sussex and Brighton & Hove have a detailed understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing residents and businesses.

3.5 The Board boasts a lot of experience and expertise in sustainable economic prosperity and this knowledge will be pertinent to the new SBCCA once established. The Board's experience, expertise and good practice will be shared to ensure that this knowledge is transferred to the SBCCA.

3.6 Mayoral Authorities will have a defined list of 'Areas of Competence', set out in law. These are designed to strengthen, not detract from, the functions and roles of other public bodies, such as NHS England, Environment Agency or Local Authorities. The Areas of Competence include:

- Transport & local infrastructure
- Skills & employment support
- Housing & strategic planning
- Economic development & regeneration
- Environment & climate change
- Health, wellbeing & public service reform
- Public safety.

3.7 Thus far the Board has been able to add great value and demonstrate competence in the areas of economic development & regeneration and environment & climate change, with successes demonstrated through the Investment Programme and Sussex Energy Mission, launched in 2024. Transport and local infrastructure are key enablers of economic growth; high quality transport infrastructure supports growth and opportunity. Skills and employment support are equally foundational to sustainable economic growth, ensuring that investment translates into jobs, productivity gains and inclusive prosperity. Infrastructure will also be fundamental to realising the Sussex Energy Mission.

3.8 Work has begun on the establishment of the SBCCA. Following the decision by the government to delay the election of a new mayor they also confirmed the intention to move forward with the creation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority in 2026. It is anticipated that the new SBCCA will be created in March 2026 but will take time to become fully established. As devolution for Sussex and Brighton gathers pace, the role for the Board becomes less defined. The areas of focus for the Board, including Sussex Energy will be increasingly led by the SBCCA as the primary governance structure for developing and growing the region's economy. Once established, the SBCCA will likely establish a Business Board to provide a strong and independent business voice and advice. Similarly to the Board, Business Boards are routinely made up of representatives from business, higher/further education and local government.

3.9 In the likelihood that the role and purpose of the Board will eventually be subsumed within the SBCCA advisory structures, it is recommended that the Board agrees to commit funding for twelve months in principle, by which time the governance structures around the SBCCA are likely to be more established. Recommendation 2.2 outlines the intent to prepare an Integration Plan, so that the Sussex Energy Programme and other Board priorities are embedded within the SBCCA at an early stage, and therefore this important work continues beyond the life of the Board. The recommendation at 2.3 is that the Board agrees a timeline for dissolution by September, if work around establishing the SBCCA and embedding the integration plan is sufficiently progressed.

3.10 The 2025/26 Operational Arrangements & budget, agreed by the Board in April 2025, was framed within the context of the region being on the Devolution Priority Programme. At that stage it was unclear how quickly the SBCCA and its structures would be established and the future of the Board beyond the end of March 2026 was not certain. There was a large underspend being carried forward into 2025/26, and to avoid a situation where at the end of 2025/26 there was another large surplus, contributions sought from Board Members were reduced from previous years. The aim was that by the close of 2025/26 there would be zero budget

remaining which would avoid the situation of having to redistribute remaining funds to members if the Board were to be dissolved at the end of March 2026.

The table below shows the contributions from Board Members for 2024/25 and the much-reduced contributions for 2025/26.

Organisation	2024/25 Contribution	2025/26 Contribution
South Downs National Park Authority	£7,970.00	£1,995.00
University of Sussex	£7,970.00	£1,995.00
University of Brighton	£7,970.00	£1,995.00
Chichester College Group	£7,970.00	£1,995.00
NHS Sussex ICB	N/A	£1,995.00
Adur District Council	£10,000.00	£2,500.00
Arun District Council	£24,700.00	£6,175.00
Brighton & Hove City Council	£52,200.00	£13,050.00
Crawley Borough Council	£20,750.00	£5,190.00
Lewes District Council	£15,200.00	£3,800.00
Mid Sussex District Council	£24,750.00	£6,190.00
Worthing Borough Council	£18,000.00	£4,500.00
Total Contributions	£197,480.00	£51,380.00
Carry-forward from 2024/25		£300,000.00
Total Budget for 2025/26		£351,380.00

3.11 The reduced contributions for 2025/26 were made possible due to the large carry-forward from 2024/25. These funds are now being used to cover 2025/26 costs, which will only leave a small surplus for 2025/26. If the Board is to continue its work into 2026/27, further contributions will need to be requested from Board members.

3.12 The recommendation at 2.1 is that the Board agrees in principle to commit twelve months of funding so that the Board can operate to March 2027. However, recommendation 2.3 is that the initial request is for six months of funding for the period April-September 2026. The sought contributions are illustrated in the table below, based on the baseline of the 2024/25 contributions highlighted in the table above.

Organisation	Annual Contribution (from 2024/25)	Six-month contribution (April-September 2026)
South Downs National Park Authority	£7,970.00	£3,985.00
University of Sussex	£7,970.00	£3,985.00
University of Brighton	£7,970.00	£3,985.00
Chichester College Group	£7,970.00	£3,985.00
Adur District Council	£10,000.00	£5,000.00
Arun District Council	£24,700.00	£12,350.00
Brighton & Hove City Council	£52,200.00	£26,100.00
Crawley Borough Council	£20,750.00	£10,375.00
Lewes District Council	£15,200.00	£7,600.00
Mid Sussex District Council	£24,750.00	£12,375.00
Worthing Borough Council	£18,000.00	£9,000.00
Total Contributions	£197,480.00	£98,470.00

3.13 The requested budget will cover the essential elements of running the Board, chiefly the cost of the Business Managers and the other operational costs as per the figures in the table below, which are based on 2025/26.

Running Costs	Annualised figure (from 2025/26)	Six-months (April-September 2026)
Salary costs (including on-costs) and expenses	£127,420.00	£63,710.00
Finance support	£8,188.00	£4,094.00
Legal support	£11,213.00	£5,606.00
Democratic Services support	£4,778.00	£2,389.00
Scrutiny (charged £500 (excluding venue) on a 'pay as you go' basis)	£2,000.00	£1,000.00
GBEB Communications	£24,950.00	£12,475.00

GBEB Annual report, printing and other materials	£3,500.00	£1,750.00
Venue hire, hospitality, and refreshments	£500.00	£250.00
Additional costs e.g. IT, travel	£1,000.00	£500.00
Total running costs	£183,549.00	£91,774.50

These are indicative figures based on the 2025/26 Operational Arrangements. These figures need to be reviewed by Finance colleagues and may be subject to small changes. The tables above illustrate that there will likely be a very small surplus of around £7k, which will be kept as contingency. With this recommended provision there is no budget for a Board work programme as such. This would require additional funding be sought from Board members, and given the 6-month timeframe, it seems sensible to focus on delivering on current priorities and work, such as the Sussex Energy Mission, and working closely with the SBCCA through the transition to embed the Integration Plan, rather than committing to new projects which are likely to have a lifespan longer than that of the Board.

- 3.14 Further consideration will need to be given to additional costs that could be incurred by the dissolution of the Board, including any employment liabilities and ongoing costs such as maintenance of the Sussex Energy website. The recommendation at 2.5 is that an accurate final budget for April-September 2026, which includes these additional costs, be presented back to the Board at the next meeting.
- 3.15 If dissolution costs are identified which could exceed the current budget, the Accountable Body (Brighton & Hove City Council) will seek to apportion these costs equitably across Board members, in line with the original Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) at appendix 1.
- 3.16 If when the Board is dissolved there remains a surplus after all costs of dissolution have been accounted for, the Accountable Body will distribute these excess funds equitably across Board Members.

4 ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 One alternative is that the Board be dissolved at the end of March 2026, in line with the end of the financial year and current funding. This was considered, but the view was that the structures around the SBCCA are not yet mature, and the Board still has a role to play as convenor and supporter of work to establish the SBCCA, including developing the Integration Plan recommended in 2.2.
- 4.2 The other option would be to ask Members to cover the budget for the full year from the outset. Given progress to establish the SBCCA has accelerated in recent months, a year seems a long time. Agreeing in principle to fund the Board for a year, but securing funding for the first six months, seems the most prudent approach at this time.

5 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

5.1 There are no direct community engagement or consultation arising directly from this paper. However, the development of the proposed Integration Plan will set out how a) the work will continue at SBCCA; and b) make initial recommendations on ongoing community engagement and participation as part of regional devolution activity.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 As noted previously, the Sussex and Brighton region is on the Devolution Priority Programme, and progress to establish the SBCCA is gathering pace. The future purpose of existing governance structures is uncertain, so it is recommended that the Board agrees to fund operations for six months until September 2026, and then be dissolved, subject to the SBCCA governance structures being appropriately advanced, and Board priorities, including Sussex Energy, being embedded within the new organisation.

6.2 The Board has added significant regional economic value as a unique convenor of local authorities and business partners. Its experience gathered over more than 10 years mean that it is in a prime position to offer support to MHCLG and other Government departments as work to establish the SBCCA progresses, through the development of a robust integration plan to ensure Board priorities are embedded within the new SBCCA.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

7.1 The report recommends that the Board approve to commit to funding the activity for a further 12 months, but to secure member contributions to initially cover the period from 1 April 2026 to 30 September 2026. This is to ensure the Board's activity can be funded whilst work is undertaken to develop an Integration plan and a timeline and activity for dissolution.

7.2 Indicative running costs for the first six months of 2026/27 is £91,774.50 as per the table in 3.13. Updated costs will be presented to the Board at the next meeting, in March 2026, which will include any estimated costs of dissolution. Member contribution requests will be calculated based on these updated costs and presented within the same report.

7.3 Further contributions from Board members may be required to cover the continuation of activity beyond 30 September 2026, subject to the timeline of the integration of the Board's activity with the SBCCA.

Finance Officer Consulted: Haley Woppard

Date: 19/01/2026

Legal Implications:

7.4 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations set out in this report. In agreeing a timeline for dissolution of the Board, consideration will be required to be given to the treatment of any contractual arrangements that have been entered into by the Accountable Body (Brighton and Hove City Council) on behalf of the Board. If required, and as part of agreeing the timeline for dissolution, an updated legal agreement/memorandum of understanding may be presented for agreement by the March Board.

Lawyer Consulted: Siobhan Fry – BHCC Head of Legal (Commercial)
Date: 19/01/26

Equalities Implications:

7.5 None directly arising from this report.

Sustainability Implications

7.6 None directly arising from this report.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

- Greater Brighton Economic Board Memorandum of Understanding

Background Documents:

- Greater Brighton City Deal 2014
- Greater Brighton Operational Arrangements 2025/26
- Greater Brighton Operational Arrangements 2024/25