

devolution

and local government reorganisation

Issue 3 February 2025

Update from Diane and Adrian



The government has announced that the bid submitted by West Sussex County Council, East Sussex County Council and Brighton and Hove Council, to create a new strategic authority covering Sussex, has been approved. The area has now been placed on the government's fast-track devolution programme.

This means that people will shortly be consulted on the proposals, during February and March, with the aim of agreeing the new strategic authority by September. If this process is successful, the mayoral elections will be held in May 2026.

The government has also now written to all county, district, borough and unitary authorities to ask for interim plans for local government reorganisation to be submitted by March.

As previously explained, the government wants all areas to have unitary councils, with each serving a minimum of 500,000 residents. For the Sussex area, this is likely to mean the creation of three new unitary councils. This means that the existing councils in Sussex will merge into three new unitary councils. Each area has to submit interim proposals by 21 March and detailed proposals by 26 September.

Within their recent letter to us, the government did not set out the timeline for elections for the new authorities and when they will come into effect. However, as Sussex has been accepted on the fast-track devolution route, the government will want our plans to move at pace. We hope this will become clearer in the coming

weeks and we will let you know as soon as the timeline is confirmed.

What does this mean?

We still have a long way to go – but we now have a slightly clearer timeline to work towards. The leaders and chief executives from councils across Sussex are already in talks about how the new authorities might look and the geographic areas they could cover. On page two we have explained what they are expected to include in their proposals.

The government expects to see interim plans by March and each area has until the September to submit detailed proposals. As soon as we have more information, we will let you know. It also means that the West Sussex County Council elections that were due to take place this year have been delayed for one year.

Over the coming months there will be the opportunity for staff to get involved in cross-council working groups to start planning for the transition into the new authority. As soon as we reach this point, we will let you know.

Frequently Asked Questions

A list of frequently asked questions can be found at www.chichester.gov.uk/devolution and we will also continue to provide staff and councillor specific Q and As through our internal communications. If you have a question, please either use the staff grapevine system on the intranet, or email sjparker@chichester.gov.uk

Proposals for the new unitary authorities

What does the government expect?

The government has now asked councils to come up with plans for the new unitary authorities. There are likely to be three covering the whole of Sussex.

They want councils in Sussex:

- **to propose the geographical areas each unitary (single tiered) council should cover.**

This should take account a number of things, such as sensible economic areas with an appropriate tax base; a sensible geography that will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs; the structure of each council; and local engagement.

- **to make sure that each unitary council is the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.**

New councils should aim for a population of 500,000 or more. Councils are also being able to look at how councils' finances can be improved, consider any transitional costs, and outline how taxpayers will get the best value for their money.

- **to prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to residents.**

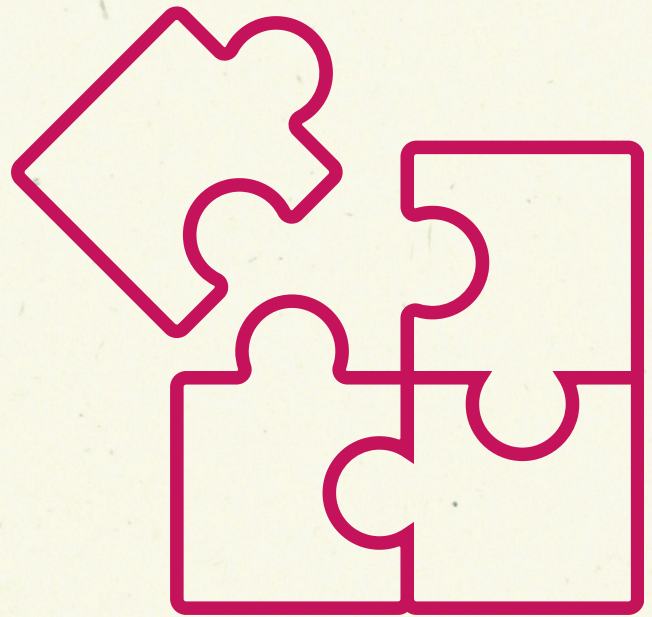
This should show how new structures will improve local government services, while avoiding unnecessary fragmentation of services. It will also look at how we offer better value to our residents.

- **to demonstrate how councils have worked together in reaching a proposal that meets local needs and is informed by local views.**

This should show how we have engaged with our local communities and how concerns will be addressed. We are also expected to show how we are considering issues of local identity and cultural and historical importance.

- **to show how the new unitary structures support devolution arrangements.**

This should look at how the proposal will help unlock devolution and that there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority.



- **to enable stronger community engagement and deliver opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.**

Proposals need to include plans on how communities are engaged.

- **to consider any boundary changes.**

Existing district areas should be considered the building blocks for proposals, but boundary changes will be considered where there is a strong argument. As part of this work, councils need to make sure that there are strong public services and there is financial sustainability for any proposals that involve boundary changes, or that affect wider public services, such as fire and rescue authorities.

- **to engage and consult on reorganisation.**

Local leaders are expected to engage with their Members of Parliament and ensure that there is wide engagement with local partners, stakeholder, residents, workforce, staff and businesses on any proposal. The views of other public sector providers will also be crucial. Once a proposal has been submitted it will be for the government to decide on taking a proposal forward and to consult as required by statute. This will be a completely separate process to any consultation undertaken on mayoral devolution in an area.