



# DEVOLUTION -AND- LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

WHAT THESE MEAN FOR LEWES

Cllr. Dr. Wendy Maples

## English Devolut ite Paper

nd Partnership:  
ons for Growth

er 2024

## Brief Timeline to NOW:

- ▶ December 2024 - White Paper
- ▶ January 2025 - COUNTY requests:
  - ▶ ‘DPP’ - the fast-track Priority Programme
  - ▶ Postponement of May 2025 elections
- ▶ February - Government agrees to DPP/election postponement
- ▶ 17 Feb - 13<sup>th</sup> April Govt consultation on Mayoral Combined Authority
- ▶ 21 March - Districts/Boroughs and County present an agreed preliminary ‘way forward’ to government for Local Govt Reorganisation



# Proposed Government Tiers for Sussex

From ESCC/LDC Devo/LGR presentation

MCCA voice to National Govt via the Council of Nations/Regions and Mayoral Council

**National Government**  
Delivery and coordination of national level services

Some powers devolved to:

**Sussex Mayoral Combined County Authority ('Strategic Authority')**

Comprised of directly elected Mayor and the Constituent Councils (currently ESCC, WSCC and B&H) - w/ 2 representatives from each, plus max. 6 non-constituent / associated members.

Responsible for a cross-county, strategic approach. Functions would give the Authority and the Mayor greater local control over areas such as transport, adult education and skills, and housing to enable improvements in local connectivity, educational outcomes, economic development, driving economic growth and improved social wellbeing.

Two members from each unitary authority would be constituent council members on the MCCA.

**Unitary Authorities**

Delivery of local public services (e.g. social care) and place shaping.

[X] Number of unitary authorities

Extant County/City Councils - ESCC (also WSCC, B&HCC)  
PLUS  
Extant District and Borough Authorities (5 in ES + WS&BH)

Town and Parish Councils?

# DEVOLUTION (DEVO) - AND - LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION (LGR)

## DEVO - Mayors

- ▶ Mayoral Strategic Authority, with preference for Mayoral Combined (County) Authority (MCA/MCCA)
- ▶ Geographically contiguous Unitary Authorities with 1.5m total pop. organized under directly elected (pref for 1<sup>st</sup> past the post) Mayor
- ▶ East + West Sussex + B&H = 1.7m population

## LGR - Unitary Authorities

- ▶ Where there is currently a County Council AND Districts/Boroughs ('two-tiers) to become 'Unitary Authorities'
- ▶ Govt wants 500K population
- ▶ East Sussex - 560K (2022), West Sussex - 900K; B&H - 280K)
- ▶ Elections as now, but for FEWER councillors

# DEVOLUTION (DEVO) - AND - LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION (LGR)

## DEVO - Mayors

- ▶ The constituent councils each appoint two representatives as 'constituent members' of the MCCA.
- ▶ One of these would be appointed by the Mayor as the Deputy Mayor.
- ▶ Six non-constituent members can be appointed by members (in advisory, non-voting roles)

## LGR - Unitary Authorities

- ▶ County and Districts/ Boroughs to be disbanded and new Unitary created
- ▶ 'Ideal' number of elected representatives around 80.
- ▶ How organized? (Cabinet, Committee etc.) NOT determined

# Proposed Mayoral (Combined) Authority



# How will MCCA be funded?

Government has committed to a simplified funding landscape:

► MCCA/MCAs will receive:

a consolidated funding pot for:

- local growth;
- housing/ regeneration;
- adult skills;
- local transport

a 30-year Investment Fund to drive economic growth

the ability to raise a precept to generate money for local priorities

the ability to impose a “Mayoral Community Levy”, to help deliver local infrastructure

# Devolution: WHY, & when will it happen?

## Government argues:

- ▶ Mayor is better voice for area in the ‘Council of Nations and Regions’ - access to Ministers
- ▶ Greater local powers than currently, including holding own budget & precepting ability
- ▶ Enables strategic decision-making on e.g. Transport, Adult Ed & Skills, Economic growth

## When?

- ▶ White Paper out
- ▶ Consultation happening NOW, closing on 13<sup>th</sup> April:  
[https://  
consult.communities.gov.u  
k/lggc/sussex-and-  
brighton-devolution-  
consultation/](https://consult.communities.gov.uk/lggc/sussex-and-brighton-devolution-consultation/)
- ▶ Mayoral elections in May 2026





From ESCC/LDC Devo/LGR presentation

# Mayors - what's not to like?

- ▶ It depends...
  - ▶ How democratic is the electoral process?
  - ▶ How democratic are the governance arrangements
  - ▶ NB. London Boroughs asking for reform
- ▶ What POWERS will they have
- ▶ What DUTIES will they have. 'Roles to play' vs 'Statutory duties' vs. 'Funding and responsibilities'...

# Devo/Mayor - Concerns Raised

- ▶ Transport, Economic growth (lead responsibility, strategic partnership) vs Environmental protection ('roles to play')
- ▶ Democratic deficit:
  - ▶ Election deposits: Greater Lincolnshire - £5K; London - £10K  
PLUS mini-manifesto booklet: Greater Lincolnshire - £3.5;  
London - 10K PLUS campaign spending limits around £175K
  - ▶ First past the post?
  - ▶ Turnout: Sussex PCC turnout in 2024 - 24.49%  
ESCC in 2021 - 38.2%; West Sussex - 36.7%; B&H (2024) - 43.8%  
General Election 2024 - 59.7% (Southeast - 64.6%)  
London Mayor 2024 - 40.5%

# Aren't people more likely to vote at Unitary elections (filling Democratic Deficit)?

Maximum, minimum and median turnout at sub-national elections, 1990-2022 IfG



Source: Institute for Government analysis of House of Commons Library data, ARK Northern Ireland elections data, Ulster University CAIN data, Electoral Commission data and BBC News.

## What can you do?

- ▶ Consultation happening NOW, closing on 13<sup>th</sup> April: <https://consult.communities.gov.uk/lggc/sussex-and-brighton-devolution-consultation/>

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

- ▶ = UNITARY Authorities
- ▶ Leaders and officers from each local authority have been meeting since January, with Zoe Nicholson chairing.
- ▶ Each council sent in the same agreed ‘in principle’ proposal by 21<sup>st</sup> March deadline:

# Initial plan approved for Local Government Reorganisation in East Sussex

**Cabinet councillors at Lewes District Council have today (March 20) agreed an interim plan on Local Government Reorganisation for submission to government, despite 'reservations' about the process.**



The plan is required after the government announced last month that the East Sussex area would be part of a Devolution Priority Programme.

The document outlines an initial proposal to create one new unitary authority based on existing county boundaries, following the abolishment of the six existing councils in East Sussex.

The interim plan - which was jointly compiled by Lewes District, Eastbourne Borough, Hastings Borough, Rother District, Wealden District and East Sussex County councils - states that funding for the organisation must come from government as it cannot be met from existing councils' budgets.

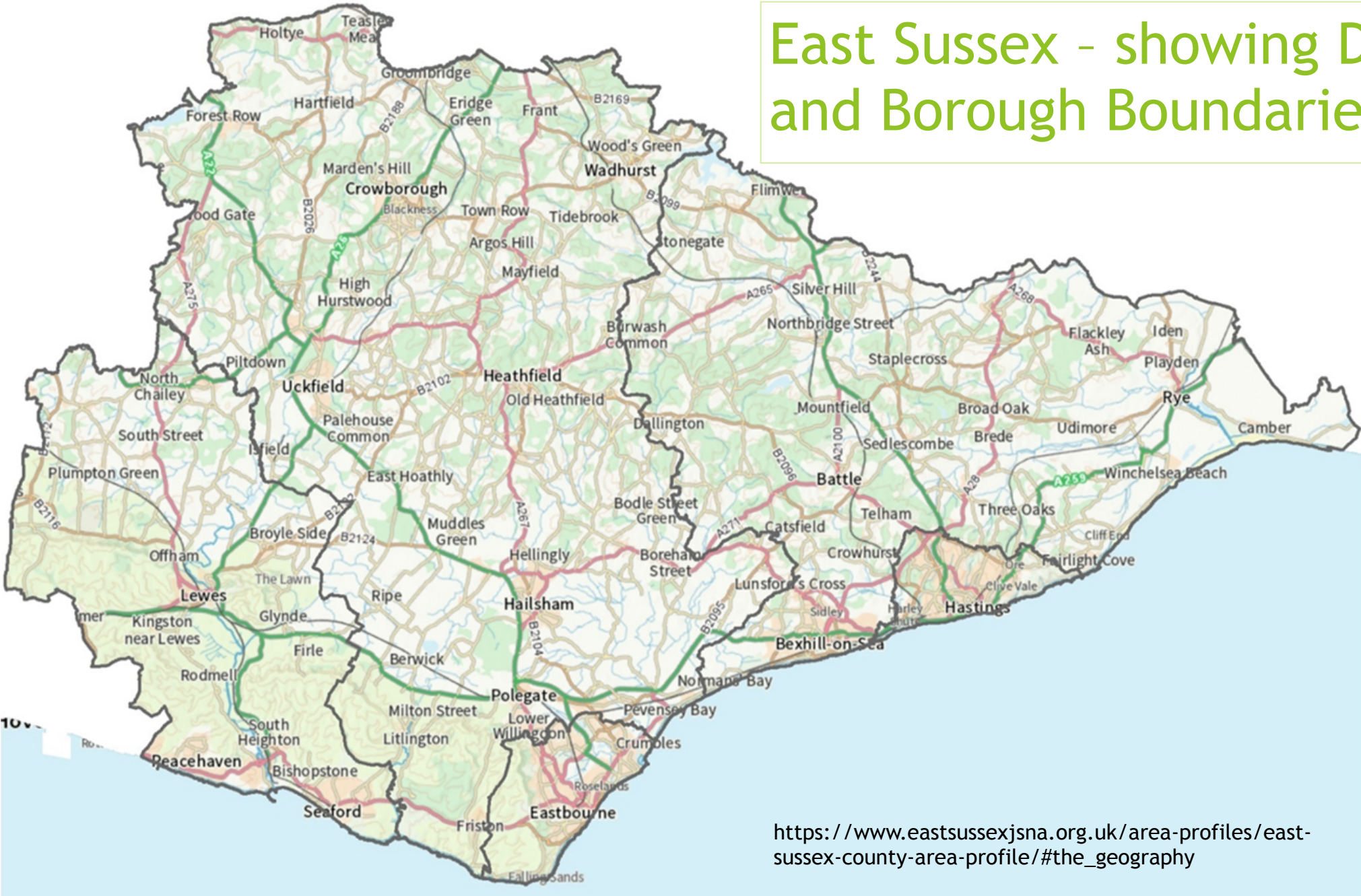
**D**ouncillor Zoe Nicholson, Leader of Lewes District Council, said: "We have reservations about this devolution process, however these will not get in the way of our primary objective to deliver a reorganisation that benefits all our residents. We will work to establish a future framework of service delivery that works

# What's in the East Sussex Unitaries' proposal?

- ▶ A set of principles about being good meanwhile partners, including that none of the constituent local authorities will fetter the interests of the new Unitary.
- ▶ That the boundary conforms to extant East Sussex County boundaries (and includes extant Districts and Boroughs)
- ▶ It includes 'wobble room' for possibility of unitary or unitaries, should there be good argument and acceptability to government for dividing the County map to allow for, e.g. 2 x 280K population areas, rather than 1 x 560K population areas.
- ▶ That there will be CONSULTATION



# East Sussex - showing District and Borough Boundaries



[https://www.eastsussexjsna.org.uk/area-profiles/east-sussex-county-area-profile/#the\\_geography](https://www.eastsussexjsna.org.uk/area-profiles/east-sussex-county-area-profile/#the_geography)

# Principles for LGR development

“The joint council Leader’s Group will continue to lead this work, under which the East Sussex Chief Executives and LGR Project team will operate. These bodies will, in close consultation with each constituent council, help to oversee a cross- council approach, developing and agreeing a programme of workstreams for delivery of the new unitary council. Principles which will underpin the approach to be taken by the Leaders have been agreed, as follows.

1. decision making will be evidence led
2. we will learn from others’ experiences of LGR and Devolution
3. decisions made by all sovereign bodies until vesting day will have the interests of the future unitary council as an explicit consideration
4. there will be full transparency over resources including transition funding and agreed allocations reflecting costs incurred
5. a commitment to appropriate levels for decision making, engagement and local member roles including in parished and non-parished areas
6. a commitment to robust scrutiny arrangements in transition/formation and beyond
7. a comprehensive and inclusive approach to stakeholder and partnership engagement.”

(Prelude to 21 March statement, submitted by LDC)

# LGR Concerns Raised:

- ▶ Finance: If there's no additional money? 'Raid the coffers'; 'Fire sale of assets'; 'Bail outs' between solvent and non-solvent authorities
- ▶ Democratic Deficit
  - ▶ Currently Lewes Town has:
    - ▶ Two County Councillors: Johnny Denis (Lewes and Ringmer) and Wendy Maples (Lewes)
    - ▶ Seven District Councillors: Janet Baah, Graham Clews, Paul Keene, Nick Kortalla-Bird, Zoe Nicholson, Imogen Makepeace, Wendy Maples
    - ▶ Estimates suggest that we will instead have around 4 reps, with 'whole town' - County Divisions - approach. ? Where does that leave Ringmer?

Town and  
Parish  
Councils?

# LGR: From Today 'til Vesting Day

Government  
(Jim McMahon/  
Angela Rayner)  
says Y/N to LGR  
proposal

Summer?  
Public consultation

September 2025?  
November 2025?

East Sussex  
LGR Group  
submits final  
draft to govt.

Town elections

May 2027  
Unitary Elections

'Shadow'  
Unitary  
Authority  
created

Unitary  
Authority  
'Vested'

May 2028

- 2025 County elections 'postponed' - but will they happen in 2026? 2027?
- Will 2027 District elections happen?

Government  
(Jim McMahon/  
Angela Rayner)  
says Y/N to final  
submission

# The end.

▶ (It's not the end.)

▶ Please respond to the Mayoral  
consultation:

[https://consult.communities.gov.uk/  
lggc/sussex-and-brighton-devolution-  
consultation/](https://consult.communities.gov.uk/lggc/sussex-and-brighton-devolution-consultation/)