

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Scrutiny Member Reference Group – views to Cabinet

1.1 The cross Place and People Scrutiny Committees' Member Reference Group (MRG) met on 11 September 2025 and agreed the following comments to be put to Cabinet for its consideration of 'Local Government Reorganisation (LGR): Proposal for a single tier of local government across East Sussex' on 24 September 2025.

1.2 The MRG expressed its support for the Cabinet agreeing to submit to Government the 'One East Sussex' proposal for a single unitary council on the current county council boundary. The MRG recognised the transparent and partnership-based approach that has been taken in the development of the business case between the county council and the five district and borough councils, and the robust evidence base that supported it.

1.3 The MRG expressed its strong opposition to any proposals for LGR that would change the boundaries of East Sussex, including any proposals that would result in parts of Lewes District Council being in a separate unitary council. The MRG noted that resident engagement had shown an overwhelming majority of residents in Lewes District opposed changes to the existing boundaries.

1.4 The MRG recognised the public engagement that had already taken place in the development of the proposal and expressed a desire that further engagement and consultation activity take place to ensure that changes are well understood by residents and that they get the opportunity to feed into the development of the new unitary. The MRG recognised that Government has not indicated that there will be a greater role of town and parish councils in its proposals for neighbourhood governance but commented that the Council should continue to proactively engage with town and parish councils as LGR progresses.

1.5 The MRG noted the concerns expressed in the consultation that LGR may result in residents feeling that their services are less local. The MRG commented that it would be important for services to remain locally accessible for residents, and that neighbourhood governance structures were designed to ensure that residents felt that decisions were taken close to them, particularly local planning decisions.

1.6 The MRG noted that any proposal for LGR in East Sussex would result in a reduction in the overall number of councillors and therefore residents may feel their elected representative is more distant and less able to represent them. The MRG emphasised the importance of ensuring that concerns about a drop in local representation are taken into account when developing and implementing local neighbourhood governance arrangements to mitigate the risk that a new council would feel less local to residents.

1.7 The MRG expressed concern that LGR in East Sussex may not lead to lower Council Tax for residents.

1.8 The MRG commented that the Council should seek to learn from the experiences of other authorities that have recently unitarised as part of the implementation of LGR in East Sussex.