



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Consultation outcome

Sussex and Brighton devolution consultation response

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Introduction

The government ran a [statutory public consultation on the proposal to establish a Sussex and Brighton Mayoral Combined County Authority which would include the areas of Brighton and Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council, and West Sussex County Council](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/sussex-and-brighton-devolution/sussex-and-brighton-devolution-consultation) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/sussex-and-brighton-devolution/sussex-and-brighton-devolution-consultation>). The consultation ran for 8 weeks.

The purpose of this consultation was to gather evidence and information on the effects of establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority across this area. The results of this consultation form part of the assessment by the Secretary of State of whether the statutory tests to establish the proposed Sussex and Brighton Mayoral Combined County Authority (SBCCA) have been met.

The statutory tests are as follows:

- a) is likely to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of some or all the people who live or work in the area
- b) is appropriate having regard to the need
 - (i) to secure effective and convenient local government
 - (ii) to reflect the identities and interests of local communities
- c) that a public consultation has been carried out and no further consultation is necessary

Consultation process

The government undertook an 8-week public consultation from 17 February to 13 April 2025 to engage and seek responses from a diverse range of interested parties. This included councils, public sector bodies, parish and town councils, local businesses, voluntary sector groups, and local residents. Consultation responses could be submitted through an online form, or in writing by email or post.

To promote awareness of the consultation, the government undertook a series of engagement and promotional activities, including:

- issuing a press notice at the start and towards the end of the consultation for local and regional media

- the Minister for Local Government and English Devolution visited Crawley on 8 April and met with local leaders
- a social media advertising campaign promoted the consultation on Facebook and Instagram. Across these platforms, 768,000 impressions and 6,765 video views were reported
- physical assets were distributed (3,500 flyers, 200 posters, and 100 hard copy consultation documents)

Officials from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government ran an in person event on 31 March in Brighton. Officials from MHCLG attended a further 5 stakeholder run events to provide information on the consultation:

- Brighton and Hove Growth Board
- Brighton and Hove Faith in Action
- Hastings Town Deal Board
- Newhaven Growth Board
- West Sussex Youth Cabinet

The 3 prospective constituent councils also promoted the consultation. This included promoting the consultation on social media, council websites and in residents newsletters. They made consultation material available in council buildings such as libraries and town halls.

Number of responses

Overall, the consultation in Sussex and Brighton resulted in 6,122 responses from individuals and organisations including:

- 5,959 from members of the public and 163 from a range of organisations including the prospective constituent and other local councils, businesses, the voluntary and community sectors and academic institutions
- 6,092 of the responses were received online, whilst 30 responses were via email or post

Summary of responses

Opinions were divided across respondents and themes set out in the consultation. While many respondents stated that the proposal could allow for greater coordination across transport, housing, skills and environmental management, some expressed concerns on the ability of the proposed SBCCA to reflect the varied identities of towns, cities and rural communities across the area.

Respondents in favour of the proposal said that it would provide opportunities to:

- enhance transport links across Sussex and Brighton as a key driver for economic development, social mobility and access to services
- unlock investment for coastal regeneration: coastal towns such as Hastings, Newhaven, and Bognor Regis were repeatedly mentioned as needing targeted regeneration with many feeling that greater devolved funding would revitalise coastal towns boost local economies, improve housing quality, and create new jobs
- improve skills training for key sectors: Respondents who supported the proposal were positive about the potential for SBCCA to better align skills training with the region's economy. A locally focused SBCCA was seen as being able to tailor apprenticeships, retraining programmes, and college courses more closely to employer demand than national agencies are currently able to achieve
- prioritise affordable housing: Respondents in favour thought that SBCCA would be able to push for new models of affordable housing delivery, including social housing, first-time buyer schemes, and affordable developments in rural areas
- strengthen Sussex and Brighton influence at a national level: Respondents in favour thought that a directly elected Mayor would champion Sussex and Brighton's needs nationally, particularly on issues like transport investment, coastal regeneration, and climate adaptation. Some felt that a "unified voice" could secure greater funding and recognition

Respondents who disagreed with the proposal expressed concerns about:

- the risk of Brighton or larger towns dominating: Respondents who disagreed with the proposal thought that SBCCA would disproportionately benefit cities and larger urban areas, particularly with regards to infrastructure investment and connectivity, leaving rural communities and smaller towns behind which could increase inequalities
- the erosion of identity: Respondents who disagreed were concerned that the proposed geography does not have a homogenous identity and that a single Sussex and Brighton-wide political structure could potentially diminish these important local identities and traditions

- political distrust of mayoral power: Respondents who disagreed were worried about politicised leadership that could be swayed by a dominant political party or personal ambition rather than reflecting the needs of diverse communities
- administrative complexity from additional layers: Respondents who disagreed were worried about creating another level of governance, leading to confusion about who is responsible for what. Some thought SBCCA would add costs, create bureaucracy, and lead to duplication of services rather than streamlining local government as promised

Summaries of responses by questions are at [Annex A](#).

Responses were received from a wide range of stakeholders and organisations, as outlined at [Annex B](#). This included:

Prospective constituent councils

Respondents were unanimously in support of the proposal, noting the long-term funding offer would reduce reliance on fragmented national bidding processes and provide sustained transport and infrastructure investment for the area. The councils welcomed the potential for greater public accountability through a directly elected mayor and the opportunity to align housing, transport and economic development strategies. They also noted the potential for the proposal to reinforce the areas' shared history. Some concerns were raised on voting and decision-making and on potential transition costs for establishing the SBCCA.

District councils

Respondents generally agreed with the principle of establishing an SBCCA but requested changes to the proposed governance arrangements to allow for more local involvement and district council representation. They welcomed the potential to unlock long-term infrastructure investment and skills funding and the opportunity to coordinate economic development more strategically.

Town and parish councils

While some respondents welcomed the potential for collaborative planning to unlock infrastructure and funding, many expressed concerns about the potential loss of local identity and risk that smaller communities' needs would be sidelined in favour of larger urban priorities. Respondents stressed that decisions should continue to be informed by local knowledge through close engagement with town and parish councils.

Academic institutions

Respondents considered the proposal may strengthen links between education, skills, innovation, and economic growth, while emphasising the need for academic priorities to remain independent. They welcomed the chance to align regional strategies with the work of universities and research institutions.

Charities and voluntary sector

Respondents welcomed the potential for improved coordination and better access to funding but emphasised the need to protect vulnerable groups and ensuring that social outcomes remained at the centre of any new governance arrangements. Respondents called for a clear commitment to community engagement.

Business and business groups

Respondents supported the proposal, noting the SBCCA could be a mechanism to stimulate economic growth, including through opportunities for transport upgrades and business support, and provide the region with a more influential voice on the national stage. There was recognition of the need to ensure this did not result in additional bureaucracy. There was also a strong call for private sector engagement and participation in the governance of the SBCCA.

Government response

The government is grateful for the time and effort respondents took to respond to the consultation and provide informative views on the proposal.

We were pleased to see many of the key benefits of devolution acknowledged by respondents. Our firm belief remains that devolution across England is fundamental to achieving the change the public expect and deserve, including: growth, more joined-up delivery of public services, and politics being done with communities, not to them. Mayoral devolution lets Mayors use their mandate for change to take the difficult decisions needed to drive growth; their standing and soft power to convene local partners to tackle shared problems; and their platform to tackle the obstacles to growth that need a regional approach. It means they have skin in the game and are accountable to their citizens.

Devolution allows for better coordination and more locally-made decisions across transport, skills and employment support, housing and planning, the environment and climate change, business and research support, and better join up of public services. Policies across skills, innovation, and infrastructure are much more effective when used to complement each other. We have already seen the difference that can be made when local leaders and Mayors work together in the interests of the local population. It creates the right mix of local intelligence and capacity with strategic vision.

We noted the concerns expressed on powers being moved further away from local people and communities, and their identities and interests, into a new layer of local government. This goes fundamentally counter to our goal for devolution: power transferred away from Westminster and London, and into the hands of local actors who understand the needs of local communities best. Devolution means policy can be tailored to local circumstances, based on a deep understanding of regional economies, giving communities a greater say in decisions that affect them.

The government will continue to encourage prospective constituent councils to engage with a wide variety of stakeholders across the area to ensure the needs of communities, including those not from the largest urban areas, are reflected in the SBCCA's decision-making. Alongside actively listening to feedback on governance, we will continue to stress the importance of close engagement with those stakeholders that understand the needs and priorities of local communities, which could include district, town and parish councils. The SBCCA will have responsibility for appointing non-constituent and associate members to provide particular experience and expertise and this could include district council representatives, business voices, charities and academic institutions.

Additionally, to enable effective working with the public, private and voluntary sectors, we will explore a wide-ranging legal power for Strategic Authorities to deliver in their areas of competence. We will also explore enabling Mayors to promote economic, social, and environmental aims and

convene stakeholders with a corresponding duty on public authorities to respond

In order to ensure that the new SBCCA has democratic accountability to all communities, we want to ensure the Mayor has strong visibility and a firm democratic mandate to ensure accountability to local people.

Government continues to firmly believe that a vital element of successful devolution is the ability for local residents to engage with and hold their devolved institutions to account. This will include, but is not limited to, the requirement to have an oversight and scrutiny committee, an audit committee, and a 'Mayors Question Time' for the public and the media to hold the Mayor to account. The current system of accountability and scrutiny is guided by the English Devolution Accountability Framework and Scrutiny Protocol, and the White Paper set out government's intention to further improve accountability. Our intention remains to continuously improve the accountability system for devolution to ensure leaders and mayors are more accountable to the public for delivering change.

The government also noted concerns around funding and investment, including costs of the Mayor and new institution. Through devolved funding, local communities are given the power to use their local knowledge to drive progress forward in their area, drive place-based economic regeneration, and increase local control over areas such as transport functions and devolution of Adult Skills Funding. The government is already working with prospective constituent councils and will provide capacity funding to help set up the SBCCA so it can deliver its priorities effectively. We will provide £1 million in Mayoral Capacity Funding in 2025-26 with future funding to be confirmed shortly. We will also confirm the 30-year investment fund the area will receive as a core part of the devolution offer shortly.

We also understand concerns that the creation of the SBCCA and the election of a mayor may add further bureaucracy. In a region like Sussex and Brighton, devolution would sit on top of the existing two-tier structure of local government (with county and district councils). Separately, but alongside devolution, the government is also facilitating a programme of local government reorganisation for two-tier areas, with the intention of moving to a single tier (with unitary councils). Fewer politicians, with the right powers, will streamline local government to focus on delivering for residents with clear roles and responsibilities for the future constituent councils and the combined county authority. As this consultation focuses on devolution only, we encourage respondents to engage on issues relating to local government reorganisation through discussions with all local councils currently involved in the process, and through any future local consultation on the matter as relevant.

Next steps

Subject to the assessment on the statutory tests, the government will continue to work with East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council and Brighton and Hove Council to establish the SBCCA.

If the constituent councils consent, the necessary secondary legislation will be laid in Parliament. If approved by Parliament, the Combined County Authority would be established in time for the first mayoral election to take place in May 2026.

Annex A: Responses by questions

Note: the percentages presented in the tables below are rounded to the nearest whole number. Due to this rounding, they may not sum up to 100%

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?

Respondents who agreed with the proposal said the area would be better able to act strategically, enabling better regional investment and building a shared cross-Sussex identity. Organisations noted the potential for enhanced strategic co-ordination, for example prospective constituent councils thought there were opportunities for strategic decision making in areas such as housing, transport, health and skills that could bring benefits to the entire area. District councils noted that the proposed geography aligns with some existing arrangements, while businesses thought it would improve recognition of the economic links between towns, cities and surrounding rural areas.

Some respondents who disagreed with the proposal were concerned about the size of the proposed geography and the risk of rural areas being overlooked in favour of urban centres. Some organisations also echoed

these concerns about the geographic diversity of the region leading to reduced accountability for local communities. For example, some town and parish council and charity and voluntary organisation respondents felt SBCCA would disconnect decision making from rural areas.

Table 1: responses to question 1

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Prefer not to say	Don't know
Organisations	45%	9%	27%	2%	5%
Academic	57%	0%	29%	14%	0%
Business	47%	11%	39%	0%	3%
County Council	67%	33%	0%	0%	0%
Unitary Council	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
District Council	69%	25%	6%	0%	0%
Elected representative	50%	0%	25%	13%	13%
Other	34%	31%	24%	7%	3%
Parish Council	32%	26%	32%	0%	11%
Town Council	29%	43%	29%	0%	0%
Voluntary and community sector or charity	43%	22%	27%	0%	8%
Public	23%	8%	66%	0%	3%

Government response

For strategic decisions to drive growth, we need strong institutions at the right scale. The evidence is clear that to drive improved economic outcomes, we must devolve core levers over growth – like transport, skills, employment support and strategic planning – and align these across functional economic areas in which people live and work. Places have

distinct economic networks where people and companies interact, which can be much bigger than individual towns or councils.

Aligning economic policies at this scale can help deliver productivity, because specialisms develop over the wider economic area separate to the individual towns or councils within it – such as a sector specialism needing a new research institute, or regional transport network to connect to new homes. Many public services are also delivered across large areas. Devolution cannot maximise opportunities to bring these levers together unless devolved governance covers wider public service footprints too, so services like health and skills can be brought together – meaning residents get more services for their taxes.

Rural areas face different challenges to those faced by more urban areas. The powers in the devolution White Paper, and the associated funding, including the Mayoral Investment Fund, can be applied to meet local priorities in rural areas, and represent the floor, not the ceiling of government's ambition for devolution.

The SBCCA will also provide an opportunity to build on existing public service alignment across Sussex and Brighton, for example the police force and fire rescue authority. The government recognises the benefits that aligned geographical boundaries can have for improving coordination between public services.

The area is already covered by a single police force, Sussex Police, and Police and Crime Commissioner. The English Devolution White Paper states that where mayoral geographies align with police force and fire and rescue geographies, Mayors will be, by default, responsible for exercising Police and Crime Commissioner and Fire and Rescue Authority functions. There is also an expectation that Mayors are appointed to Integrated Care Partnerships and are considered for the role of Chair or Co-Chair. The Mayor should also be engaged in appointing Chairs of Integrated Care Boards. This alignment will support more public service delivery for citizens in Sussex and Brighton.

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

Respondents who agreed with the proposal said an elected mayor could allow for clearer decision-making, democratic accountability and strategic leadership, and that the governance proposal gives fair representation to all parts of Sussex and Brighton. Prospective constituent councils stated that a directly elected Mayor would provide strategic leadership which would help

coordinate policy in areas such as skills and infrastructure. Some businesses felt that the proposed governance model would allow for clearer leadership and faster decision making and increase local decision making.

Respondents who disagreed with the proposals were concerned that power would be further centralised and reduce local accountability, and that certain groups would not be sufficiently represented. District councils disagreed with the proposed governance model, as they would not be constituent members and therefore not automatically have voting rights on the SBCCA. Town and parish councils argued that a small number of constituent members could not fully capture the full range of priorities across the entire Sussex and Brighton area, which was a concern shared by some charities and voluntary sector organisations. Some of the prospective constituent councils raised concerns around the proposed voting and membership arrangements, and the proposed name – where some thought ‘Sussex Combined County Authority’ was more appropriate, and sought clarity on how the costs of establishing the CCA and holding elections would be met.

Table 2: responses to question 2

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Prefer not to say	Don't know
Organisations	23%	28%	42%	4%	4%
Academic	29%	14%	43%	14%	0%
Business	31%	19%	47%	0%	3%
County Council	33%	67%	0%	0%	0%
Unitary Council	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
District Council	19%	13%	63%	6%	0%
Elected representative	13%	13%	50%	13%	13%
Other	28%	34%	28%	10%	0%
Parish Council	5%	47%	37%	0%	11%
Town Council	14%	43%	43%	0%	0%
Voluntary and community sector or charity	22%	30%	43%	0%	5%
Public	20%	11%	66%	0%	3%

Government response

Directly elected Mayors create visible leadership and greater accountability. Mayors have become vital local leaders, delivering on the promise of change in their area to drive growth, more joined-up delivery, and earning trust. Evidence from existing Mayoral areas in England shows that Mayors can use their mandate to change to take the difficult decisions needed, have the standing to convene local partners and tackle shared problems, have a platform for tackling the obstacles to growth that require a regional approach, are accountable to their citizens and represent their area on the national stage.

The Combined County Authority should work closely with a wide range of stakeholders across Sussex and Brighton to support the delivery of its work programme. This can be done formally in the SBCCA's governance structure through the appointment of non-constituent and associate members, who provide outside expertise and experience. The appointment of these members will be a matter for the SBCCA.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act established the Combined County Authority model to reflect the scale of delivery needed for devolved functions, such as strategic transport, which upper-tier local authorities are typically responsible for. By ensuring strategic decisions are made at the upper-tier level, with fewer constituent members, it allows for more streamlined decision-making to reduce bureaucracy. This streamlining also aligns with our longer-term ambitions to establish a single tier of local government to underpin Strategic Authorities, and any future unitary structures emerging from the local government reorganisation process will replace upper-tier authorities as constituent councils. Acknowledging the essential role district councils will play in delivery and the invaluable local perspective they can bring to the CCA until the local government reorganisation process has concluded, we expect effective levels of collaboration to be demonstrated between constituent members and district councils especially where the district council covers the primary city or economy in that county.

The government is already working with prospective constituent councils on our capacity funding offer to help mitigate concerns around transition costs. This funding is intended to help the SBCCA to set up and deliver its priorities effectively.

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?

Respondents who agreed with the proposal said the MCCA could promote strategic investment, reduce duplication and help align infrastructure planning with economic development. Prospective constituent councils all agreed that SBCCA would support the area's economy through taking a strategic lead in driving economic growth through long-term funding, targeted investment and a tailored skills provision. District councils felt that there were areas where a CCA structure could add value through economic co-ordination, such as transport, skills and employment. Businesses felt that SBCCA and a Mayor could encourage greater engagement with business and employment networks across the proposed area. Academic institutions considered SBCCA could drive regional innovation, skills development and economic resilience.

Respondents who disagreed with the proposal expressed concerns that funding could be diverted from rural to urban areas or would not fully reflect differing local economic needs across the area. District councils and town and parish councils particularly raised such concerns. Charities and voluntary organisations were concerned that rural communities and vulnerable groups could be left behind and stressed the need for direct engagement with local community groups. Some respondents were also worried about existing local authority debt being spread to other councils in the area.

Table 3: responses to question 3

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Prefer not to say	Don't know
Organisations	49%	18%	21%	3%	8%
Academic	43%	0%	29%	14%	14%
Business	56%	8%	36%	0%	0%
County Council	67%	0%	0%	0%	33%
Unitary Council	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
District Council	69%	25%	6%	0%	0%

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Prefer not to say	Don't know
Elected representative	75%	0%	0%	13%	13%
Other	45%	24%	14%	14%	3%
Parish Council	37%	26%	26%	0%	11%
Town Council	29%	29%	14%	0%	29%
Voluntary and community sector or charity	41%	24%	22%	0%	14%
Public	24%	12%	60%	0%	4%

Government response

The government wants to build an economy that works for everyone, and to do this we need a new way of governing. To truly get growth in every corner of the country and put more money into people's pockets, we must rewire England and end the hoarding in Whitehall by devolving power and money from central government to those that know their area best.

Mayors will be equipped with a range of new powers and greater control of local funding across planning, infrastructure, transport, skills, business and energy, with strong and effective partnerships in place with councils and other partners to deliver the missions we have set out to transform the country. Alongside this, Mayors will have a statutory duty to produce Local Growth Plans, setting out a long-term vision for growth in their region over the next decade and a roadmap for how this can be achieved.

The government acknowledges that the SBCCA would need funding certainty to be able to plan for the long-term and get maximum impact from their spending. The 30-year investment funds will remain a core part of the Devolution offer to the area to address the particular needs of Sussex and Brighton. Government will also provide support through Mayoral Capacity Funding to help with the costs of establishing the SBCCA.

Council finances remain separate from the SBCCA, such that council debt cannot be spread through the Combined County Authority.

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?

Respondents who agreed with the proposal said it could address inequalities, improve health and wellbeing especially in coastal and rural areas, and address other social outcomes through more co-ordinated transport, housing and skills. Prospective constituent councils highlighted how improved transport which leads to increased access to opportunities, inclusive economic growth and co-ordination of services including through a new health improvement duty could improve social outcomes. Some district councils noted the potential benefits of linking co-ordinating policies in areas such as health, housing and transport could support wellbeing and tackle deprivation, although some noted this depends on how funding is allocated. Some businesses felt that improved strategic investment in infrastructure and skills development would improve social outcomes.

Respondents who disagreed with the proposal were concerned about the potential impact of new housing development and increased inequalities, if social problems are not adequately addressed in both urban and rural areas. District councils wanted strong public health planning and early intervention strategies, and town and parish councils were unconvinced that social outcomes would improve without strong local input into the CCA from local communities. Some charities and voluntary organisations felt the CCA could lead to weakened grassroots initiative and disadvantage smaller community led organisations.

Table 4: responses to question 4

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Prefer not to say	Don't know
Organisations	38%	19%	25%	5%	12%
Academic	57%	0%	29%	14%	0%
Business	36%	14%	42%	0%	8%
County Council	67%	0%	0%	0%	33%
Unitary Council	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
District Council	69%	0%	13%	6%	13%

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Prefer not to say	Don't know
Elected representative	50%	25%	0%	13%	13%
Other	34%	24%	17%	17%	7%
Parish Council	21%	21%	37%	0%	21%
Town Council	29%	43%	14%	0%	14%
Voluntary and community sector or charity	30%	27%	24%	3%	16%
Public	18%	14%	63%	0%	5%

Government response

Devolution means policy can be tailored to local situations, based on a deep understanding of England's regional economies. It enables more decisions to be made by those who know their areas best, leading to better outcomes and a more efficient use of resources and giving communities a greater say in decisions that affect them.

Devolving powers in areas such as transport, skills, employment support and strategic planning, and aligning these across functional economic areas in which people live and work, can deliver social as well as economic benefits by, for example, putting health and wellbeing at the centre of place-based decision making, through the specific duty in relation to health in the devolution white paper, which would ensure that health is and will remain a key priority in the exercise of its functions.

SBCCA alongside other proposed Combined (County) Authorities would have a specific duty in relation to health, which would ensure that health is and will remain a key priority in the exercise of its functions. The government has committed to ensuring all areas with Mayoral devolution have a long-term investment fund for delivering health outcomes.

Existing authorities have used their devolved powers and funding to improve social outcomes. For instance, the West Midlands Combined Authority have established a homelessness taskforce, and York and North

Yorkshire Combined Authority have set up a Vibrant and Sustainable High Streets Fund and Carbon Negative Challenge Fund.

Another example is the North East where Mayor Kim McGuinness, is driving forward proactive and practical solutions to support prevention of child poverty, this year launching a Child Poverty Reduction Unit, which aims to build a strategic, long-term and collaborative approach to reducing child poverty, building on the initiatives already underway. One of the first outputs will be a Mayor's Childcare Grant, which will help parents find or return to work and keep more of their income.

Mayors will also be able to appoint and remunerate commissioners to lead on key functions, giving them more flexibility in how they choose to deliver for their area. They will not be members of the Strategic Authority, and the roles would be expected to reflect areas of competence.

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?

Many respondents provided responses relating to local government reorganisation rather than devolution when asked about local government services.

Respondents who agreed with the proposal said it could streamline delivery, bring consistency and clarity to service delivery and lead to more empowered local government. Prospective constituent councils felt an SBCCA and Mayor would provide strategic leadership, and integration and collaboration amongst local government in areas such as health, police and transport, which would improve service delivery. Many district councils noted that an SBCCA could enable more integrated planning across local government and the benefit of collaboration particularly in the context of service delivery pressures. Academic institutions considered that an SBCCA could improve regional coordination and service innovation.

Respondents who disagreed with the proposal were concerned about reduced responsiveness of local government services particularly in rural areas and the impact it could have on resources for local government services. Town and parish councils, for example, wanted clarity on how they would be involved in service planning given their close contact with local communities. Some academic institutions noted the importance of managing the implementation appropriately, whilst a common concern amongst charity and voluntary organisations was that service delivery could become more focused to the needs of urban areas.

Table 5: responses to question 5

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Prefer not to say	Don't know
Organisations	34%	23%	31%	6%	6%
Academic	43%	0%	29%	14%	14%
Business	33%	17%	44%	3%	3%
County Council	67%	0%	0%	0%	33%
Unitary Council	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
District Council	44%	38%	6%	6%	6%
Elected representative	38%	13%	38%	13%	0%
Other	31%	28%	21%	17%	3%
Parish Council	16%	32%	42%	0%	11%
Town Council	43%	14%	43%	0%	0%
Voluntary and community sector or charity	32%	27%	30%	3%	8%
Public	20%	11%	66%	0%	3%

Government response

This government is committed to resetting the relationship with local and regional government, empowering local leaders and Mayors to make the right decisions for their communities, and working together to grow an inclusive economy, reform public services and secure better outcomes. In other developed countries that introduced greater devolution, people were more satisfied with public service.

Evidence shows that, under the right conditions, devolution can help solve key challenges with respect to local government services:

- on growth, devolution to capable local leaders at strategic scales has been linked to higher productivity meaning more money in people's pockets
- when it comes to trust in politics, directly elected Mayors are the most recognisable local political figures, and people think more power should come down from national government
- in other developed countries that introduced greater devolution, people were more satisfied with public services

The proposed SBCCA is distinct from the local government reorganisation process which is being undertaken separately. The SBCCA will not lead on delivery of local services such as waste, social care and libraries. Instead, it will take on additional devolved powers, functions and funding, which previously have been held by central government, as set out in the devolution framework.

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?

Respondents who agreed with the proposal highlighted the potential for integrated environmental planning, greater green investment and improved coordination of environmental policies including coastal and rural protection. Prospective constituent councils highlighted the potential benefits of a cohesive, area-wide strategy for environmental protection, building on the existing natural environment assets the area has, whilst acknowledging that this must remain rooted in community engagement. District councils noted that a SBCCA could help manage large scale co-ordination of environmental policies, such as the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Some businesses felt the SBCCA offered an opportunity to deliver strategic infrastructure projects such as green energy and hydrogen production. Academic institutions highlighted how the SBCCA could draw on local academic expertise and data to shape regional environmental plans.

Respondents who disagreed with the proposal said there is a risk that there could be increased development which would harm the local environment, and that the SBCCAs powers would not be sufficient. District councils want more funding for environmental schemes and called for stronger links to local environmental plans given the importance of working with key local stakeholders. Town and parish councils were generally sceptical that the SBCCA would address local environmental challenges and sought greater

clarity on the proposal, including how rural areas would be protected from unwanted and inappropriate developments in their area. Some charity and voluntary organisations suggested that the SBCCA should have a statutory duty towards climate and nature and warned that environmental goals could be deprioritised if there is a lack of funding for the SBCCA.

Table 6: responses to question 6

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Prefer not to say	Don't know
Organisations	37%	23%	31%	2%	7%
Academic	29%	14%	29%	14%	14%
Business	33%	17%	44%	0%	6%
County Council	67%	0%	33%	0%	0%
Unitary Council	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
District Council	63%	25%	13%	0%	0%
Elected representative	50%	13%	25%	13%	0%
Other	41%	31%	24%	3%	0%
Parish Council	32%	16%	37%	0%	16%
Town Council	14%	43%	43%	0%	0%
Voluntary and community sector or charity	27%	27%	30%	0%	16%
Public	18%	17%	59%	0%	6%

Government response

Local, place-based environmental leadership is essential and the government is clear that the proposed SBCCA would be crucial partner in achieving our clean power mission and support efforts to protect the natural environment and biodiversity of not only the local area but the whole of England. This includes joint work with Great British Energy through the

Local Power Plan to support the roll out of small-medium renewable energy projects at the local level. The government also recognises the unique strategic role that the SBCCA could play in planning our future energy system by operating across a functional economic area. In doing so, the National Energy System Operator will engage with them as it develops Regional Energy Strategic Plans and provide a transparent route for local insights to inform energy system planning. Over time, we envisage the SBCCA would be appointed the Local Nature Recovery Strategies responsible authority.

In addition, the government is committed to establishing heat network zoning in England. Zoning coordinators within the proposed SBCCA would be able to designate areas as heat network zones, enabling the most appropriate level of local government to assume the role of heat network zoning coordinator and play a key role in the delivery of heat decarbonisation.

Existing Combined Authorities have used devolved powers and funding to support their environmental objectives. For example, York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority launched a Carbon Negative Challenge Fund to support their ambition to become England's first carbon negative region and have committed £7m funding to Net Zero project across their area.

Future opportunities for devolution and partnership working will also be explored with the proposed SBCCA. The SBCCA can provide greater local leadership in responding to the impacts of climate change, and how rural communities will be considered in local policy decision making. This could be through the Mayoral Council, or the Council of Nations and Regions, giving SBCCA a significant voice in influencing national policy.

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?

Respondents who agreed with the proposal said it will provide a strong local voice could restore civic pride and strengthen regional identity, as well as improve the areas representation at the national level. Prospective constituent councils noted the deep cultural and historic ties across Sussex which result in strong and varied local identities, and they considered that SBCCA could promote a shared identity whilst recognising those local distinctions. Some prospective constituent councils suggested that tools such as local charters could be used to ensure local identities are not

diluted. Businesses felt that the governance arrangements should respect regional differences, whilst academic institutions emphasised the importance of place-based identity for community cohesion. Some charities and voluntary sector organisations felt that better collaboration between councils could strengthen cross-community working if it was rooted in local involvement.

Respondents who disagreed with the proposal noted a risk of a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach being adopted which would undermine local identities. District councils raised concerns that the proposal could fail to protect local community identities or cause disengagement and stressed the need for embedding local identity in every element of decision making and delivery to ensure that does not happen. Town and parish councils called for more direct representation and stronger community input which recognised local differences to ensure all community identities and interests are protected. Charity and voluntary sector organisations raised concerns that SBCCA could focus engagement on larger regional partners at the expensive of more community-led organisations.

Table 7: responses to question 7

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Prefer not to say	Don't know
Organisations	28%	22%	40%	3%	6%
Academic	43%	0%	29%	14%	14%
Business	33%	8%	56%	0%	3%
County Council	67%	0%	0%	0%	33%
Unitary Council	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
District Council	25%	44%	25%	0%	6%
Elected representative	50%	0%	38%	13%	0%
Other	34%	24%	24%	14%	3%
Parish Council	5%	21%	63%	0%	11%
Town Council	29%	29%	43%	0%	0%
Voluntary and community sector or charity	19%	35%	41%	0%	5%

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Prefer not to say	Don't know
Public	16%	10%	71%	0%	3%

Government response

A vital element of successful devolution is the ability for local residents to engage with and hold their devolved institutions to account – and local identity plays a key role in this. Local identity is one of the clear criteria for sensible geographies government published in the English Devolution White Paper.

By pushing more power out of Whitehall, this government is undertaking major structural reform to deliver better democratic and economic outcomes for people and places across England. With more power devolved in England, people will see priorities for their area set locally, with policies tailored to needs and circumstances.

As mentioned earlier, this includes the selection of non-constituent and associate members, that can represent different regions and sectors, alongside scope for the public to hold the Mayor to account, not just via the ballot box, but with the Mayors Question Time.

Annex B: Consultation respondents

Respondents using the Citizen Space response form were asked to self-report on their respondent type.

Respondent	Responses
Public	5,959
Academic	7
Business	36
County Council	3

Respondent	Responses
Unitary Council	1
District Council	16
Elected representative	8
Parish Council	19
Town Council	7
Voluntary and community sector or charity	37
Other	29



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