

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 16 December 2025

By: Chief Executive

Title: East Sussex County Council's responses to Government's statutory consultation on proposals for local government reorganisation (LGR) in the East Sussex and Brighton & Hove area

Purpose: To seek Cabinet approval of East Sussex County Council's responses to statutory consultation on proposals for LGR in the East Sussex and Brighton & Hove area

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 1) **Agree East Sussex County Council's responses to Government's statutory consultation on proposals for local government reorganisation in the East Sussex and Brighton & Hove area as set out in the appendices and;**
 - 2) **Approve their submission to Government by the closing date of 11 January 2026.**
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1. Background

1.1 The English Devolution White Paper, published 16 December 2024, set out Government's ambitions in relation to devolution and announced a programme of local government reorganisation (LGR) for two-tier council areas and some existing unitary councils.

1.2 On 5 February 2025 the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution wrote to all district, borough and county councils in two-tier areas and some unitary councils, issuing a statutory invitation for proposals for a single tier of government within their respective areas. The area that our invitation related to was the County of East Sussex, which includes Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC).

1.3 The East Sussex district, borough and county council Leaders and Chief Executives met regularly throughout the development of the proposal for the East Sussex and Brighton and Hove area to oversee the process, provide strategic direction, and ensure that work is co-ordinated.

1.4 LGR capacity funding from Government was used to pay for external consultants to work with the six councils to deliver an evidence-led business case which would develop to set out a proposal that follows Government criteria and guidance and takes account of the outcomes from resident and stakeholder engagement, financial analysis, and the economic case for change. The consultants were jointly appointed by the six councils. The business case recognises the importance of continuing to provide key services while the changes are being developed and implemented and clearly details how the six criteria set by Government will be met.

1.5 As part of developing the proposal very careful consideration was given to the terms of the statutory invitation that were laid down by Government. The benefits, risks, costs and feasibility of a single East Sussex unitary council were evaluated alongside other options, including those BHCC consultation proposals that had been shared at that time, which were four options to extend BHCC's boundary to include parts of the county in Lewes District. Having evaluated the potential impact, all the options moving communities in Lewes District into Brighton and Hove are strongly opposed by the councils supporting 'One East Sussex'.

1.6 'One East Sussex', the proposal for a single tier of Local Government for East Sussex as a unitary council on the current footprint of the county council, with Brighton and Hove City

Council remaining unchanged, is underpinned by a clear evidence base. It is the only option for LGR in East Sussex that:

- Aligns with existing service delivery footprints (e.g. social care, education, public health).
- Minimises disruption to statutory services and partnerships.
- Builds on established collaboration across the six councils.
- Meets the Government's population guidance and maintains a coherent geographic identity.
- Creates operational savings and avoids the substantial costs of disaggregation.
- Does not require boundary changes at county or district level, which are costly and disruptive to implement.

1.7 In September 2025 the One East Sussex proposal was agreed by East Sussex County Council (ESCC), Eastbourne Borough Council, Hastings Borough Council, Lewes District Council and Rother District Council, and was submitted to government by each of the councils on 26 September. Wealden District Council (WDC) had worked with the other five councils on the proposal but at its meeting on 24 September WDC Cabinet made the decision to not submit a proposal.

1.8 The proposal BHCC submitted to Government was a five unitary model for the whole of Sussex. This model had not been consulted on by BHCC and was only made available to ESCC through publication for BHCC's Cabinet meeting on 25 September 2025.

2. Government's statutory consultation

2.1 Government has launched a statutory consultation on proposals for a single tier of local government in East Sussex and Brighton & Hove. The consultation runs until 11 January 2026 and the two proposals for the area that are being consulted on are:

- i) **One East Sussex** - East Sussex County Council, Eastbourne Borough Council, Hastings Borough Council, Lewes District Council and Rother District Council proposed a single unitary council covering Eastbourne, Hastings, Lewes, Rother and Wealden, with Brighton and Hove to remain unchanged.
- ii) **Representative Councils for a Devolved Sussex: A Five Unitary Proposal** - Brighton and Hove City Council proposed 5 unitary councils across the whole of the area of East Sussex, West Sussex, and Brighton and Hove. This proposal includes a request to split existing district council areas between the proposed new councils:
 - Unitary A - Brighton and Hove plus 4 wards and 1 parish from Lewes
 - Unitary B - Eastbourne, Hastings, Rother plus 5 wards from Lewes and 9 wards from Wealden
 - Unitary C - Mid-Sussex plus 34 wards from Wealden and 10 wards from Lewes
 - Unitary D - Chichester, Crawley, Horsham
 - Unitary E - Adur, Arun, and Worthing

2.2 Recommended responses to the consultation questions for both proposals for the area are attached at Appendix 1 (One East Sussex) and Appendix 2 (Representative Councils for a Devolved Sussex: A Five Unitary Proposal).

2.3 The consultation is open to a list of statutory consultees, primarily other public sector bodies, that the Government have notified directly and all those with an interest in the proposals, including local residents, town and parish councils, businesses, and the voluntary sector. East Sussex stakeholders have been contacted by the Chief Executives of the councils that submitted the One East Sussex proposal to alert them to the consultation and encourage them to respond.

2.4 The Government is expected to make a decision on the future shape of local government for the East Sussex and Brighton & Hove area in March 2026. Elections to what will become the unitary authority would follow in May 2027 to enable the transition to vesting day on 1 April 2028.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 Following submission of proposals for a single tier of local government in East Sussex and Brighton & Hove, Government is consulting on two proposals for the East Sussex and Brighton & Hove area.

3.2 For the reasons set out in this report Cabinet is recommended to consider and approve the responses set out in the appendices.

BECKY SHAW Chief Executive

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Local Members All

Background Documents

- Letter from Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution to East Sussex Council Leaders 5 February 2025 - [Letter: East Sussex and Brighton - GOV.UK](#)
- Letter from Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution 24 July 2025 - [Local government reorganisation: letter to areas invited to submit final proposals - GOV.UK](#)
- One East Sussex proposal submitted to government 26 September 2025 - [One East Sussex – East Sussex Councils](#)
- Representative Councils for a Devolved Sussex: A Five Unitary Proposal submitted to government by BHCC - [BHCC submission documents and supporting materials](#)