



Ruth Miller
Co-Deputy Directors, Local Government
Reorganisation
**Ministry of Housing, Communities &
Local Government**
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Chief Executives of East Sussex and
Brighton and Hove Councils

16 January 2026

Dear Chief Executives,

Following the closure of the consultation on proposals for unitary local government in your area, I am writing to seek your views on matters that will be necessary for the Secretary of State to consider in any Structural Changes Order (SCO). The final decision on all these matters, including whether to implement a proposal, with or without modification, lies with the Secretary of State.

We would appreciate your response by Tuesday 17 February. This is so the Secretary of State can consider these matters alongside any announcement of a reorganisation decision, which we expect to take place in March 2026 ahead of laying any SCO in Parliament, in summer 2026. It is ultimately for the Secretary of State to decide what to include in the legislation to ensure any new councils are well placed to go live and to implement the proposal that is chosen. Seeking your views is without prejudice to whether the Secretary of State decides to implement a proposal.

We strongly encourage you to work together to seek to agree one representation for each proposal that would affect your council for the Secretary of State to consider. You can respond singly, jointly, or as a collective, to LGRorganisation@communities.gov.uk and to your delivery lead. Even if agreement cannot be reached, we encourage you to discuss your thoughts with each other.

If there is a situation where you are unable to provide a view at this stage on any of the questions, it would be helpful if this could be set out so it can be considered by ministers. In the event that a decision is made to reorganise we may also seek further information from you on warding arrangements, and any further details needed before a Structural Changes Order is drafted and laid before Parliament.

Interim implementation structures

In the event of a decision to reorganise, an SCO will provide for the creation of a new single tier of local government for the area. This could either be through the creation of an entirely new council, or by establishing the new council as a continuing authority of one of the existing councils – known as a preparing council. Our current view is that a preparing council will only be considered where there is an existing council on the same geography as the new unitary council.

For either model, in advance of elections, the SCO would require the establishment of joint committees for each newly established council or an implementation executive

for any preparing council. Once elections are held (expected 6 May 2027), it would be for the executive of the shadow council or preparing council to take forward transition. It would be for them to decide how they wish to involve the predecessor councils, which we anticipate would be abolished on 1 April 2028. The SCO would place duties on all councils to cooperate, and as a key principle it is important that transitional arrangements for reorganisation is a shared endeavour.

The SCO would therefore need to specify, for each new unitary council, the membership of the joint committee/s or implementation executive, including:

- The number of councillors nominated by the county council.
- The number of councillors nominated by the district councils.

The SCO could, but does not have to, also specify who is to be the Chair and could, specify provisions around political balance. The joint committee/s and implementation executive would have a time and purpose limited existence given the expectation in this round of local government reorganisation that elections take place 11 months before any new unitary councils go live.

The SCO would also require that a senior officer implementation team consisting of officers of both the county and district councils would be formed to support the implementation of the proposal through the entire transition. The SCO would specify particular roles, such as the Lead and Deputy Lead.

Elections

The SCO would need to specify the returning officers for the first election to each of the new unitary councils created. The SCO could also align parish council elections with the elections to the new councils.

Names

The SCO would list the councils that will be abolished and name new unitary councils. For 'new' names we would use the information in proposals, where this is indicated, unless you inform us otherwise.

Questions

In summary, for each proposal these are the questions for you to consider:

- Where geographies align, would you prefer a preparing council and implementation executive model or a new council model with a joint committee?
- How many members from each relevant council would you prefer to sit on each Joint Committee or implementation executive, including the balance of members from different councils?
- Would you prefer for any individuals to be specified for the Chair/Deputy Chair roles, and if so, who?
- What are your views on any requirement for political balance in the implementation executive/joint committee(s)?
- What would be your preferences for the membership of the Implementation Team and whether roles should be specified?
- Who should be the returning officer for the first election to each of the new unitary councils, that proposals would see established?
- Would you prefer for any parish council elections to be aligned with elections to the new councils?

- What are the current legal names of the councils and what would be your preferred names for new councils?

We have attached some information that sets out how other areas have approached this previously, along with links to relevant SCOs including the recently published draft Surrey SCO.

We are happy to meet again to discuss these matters or for you to share initial views. We look forward to receiving your response by 17 February 2026. This letter is copied to Leaders.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and peaks, followed by a period.

Ruth Miller
Co-Deputy Director, Local Government Reorganisation