

County Council – 24 September 2025

Item 7 – Notice of Motion by Councillor Taylor

Motion proposing a delay in the Mayor election to 2027

1. Introduction

1.1. This briefing summarises;

- The introduction of the Supplementary Vote system for mayoral elections; and
- The potential implications of delaying the election to the Sussex Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA)

1.2. The background information for this Motion relating to the establishment of the MCCA is contained within the Leader and Lead Member for Strategic Management and Economic Development report which is due to be discussed at item 6 on the agenda.

2. The introduction of Supplementary Vote system

2.1. On 10 July, the Government published the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill which expanded on the initial proposals of the White Paper and provided greater clarity on the MCCA's functions. The Government published accompanying guidance outlining the details of the Bill.

2.2. Contained within the Bill is the provision for mayors to be elected using the Supplementary Vote (SV) system. This change would see SV replace the existing First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) system in mayoral elections.

2.3. Due to the timings of the 2026 mayoral elections, the government is proposing that mayoral elections in May 2026 would take place under FPTP and subsequent elections, once the Bill is enacted, taking place under the SV system.

2.4. In a FPTP system, each voter has one vote, and the candidate with the greatest number of votes is elected. This does not require a majority threshold to be met. Since the introduction of Section 13 of the Elections Act 2022, FPTP has been used when electing mayors, and Police and Crime Commissioners.

2.5. The SV system requires voters to choose a first and second preference candidate. If a candidate receives over 50 percent of the first preference votes, then they are elected. Should no candidate reach this threshold then all but the top two candidates are discounted, and the second preference votes of those who voted for

the eliminated candidates are distributed amongst the two remaining. The candidate with the highest number of votes at this stage is then elected.

2.6. A briefing produced by the House of Commons Library published on 20 August to accompany the Bill outlined the following regarding changes to the electoral process:

Standard practice in electoral administration is that major changes are not implemented less than six months before an election. This is to allow time for the government to make any relevant regulations, and for the electoral administration sector and the Electoral Commission to develop guidance. It is also unknown at the time of writing how long the bill will take to pass through Parliament. Therefore, it is likely that this change will not be implemented in time for the mayoral elections scheduled for May 2026.

2.7. The Bill is entering the Committee Stage in the House of Commons at time of writing. As such mayoral and Police and Crime Commissioner elections scheduled for May 2026 would be the last to be conducted under the FPTP system with subsequent elections being held under the SV system.

3. Deferral by areas on the DPP

3.1. Since the publication of the Bill in early July, two areas on the DPP have requested and received confirmation of the deferral of their respective mayoral elections to May 2027. These areas were Cumbria (Westmorland and Furness Council, and Cumberland Council), and Cheshire and Warrington.

3.2. Westmorland and Furness Council and Cumberland Council underwent Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and became unitary authorities in 2023. As part of the Cumbria deferral request, the councils sighted capacity concerns over the simultaneous implementation of reform programmes for LGR and the formation of the strategic authority. The authorities believed that a deferral, would ensure that high-quality service delivery remained a primary focus alongside preparation for a new strategic authority.

3.3. The councils sighted the cost efficiencies in conducting the inaugural mayor elections with existing local elections scheduled to take place in May 2027. It was also outlined that deferring election to align with scheduled elections in 2027 would aid in reducing voter confusion and support a higher turnout.

3.4. In addition to the benefits outlined above, the councils stated that May 2027 elections would permit more time to prepare for the formation of the Combined Authorities and in the case of Cumbria, deepen joint working partnerships.

3.5. Following confirmation of the deferral, the Government confirmed that the timing of the elections would not affect the formation of the MCCA, and that the Strategic Authority would be under the leadership of the constituent authorities until a mayor is elected.

3.6. In relation to Cheshire and Warrington, as a new Mayor would not be in place until May 2027, the first instalment payable to the Combined Authority in 2026-27 would be reduced by 50% of the normal annual value. Funding would then be paid annually for each of the next 29 years before a final balancing payment of the remaining 50% is made in 2056-57.

4. Implications of deferral

4.1. As outlined above ESCC expressed an interest in and was accepted on to the Devolution Priority Programme to progress towards a MCCA at an accelerated pace.

4.2. The Government has written to the Council to confirm that as a Devolution Priority Programme area the area will benefit from a 30-year Investment Fund to drive economic growth across the area. The Government confirmed that this is new funding and is only available for areas at the mayoral tier of the Devolution Framework and above. The annual amount the new MCCA would receive is £38m. This figure has been calculated on a per capita basis to ensure consistency and fairness across areas in the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP). The letter from Government sets out that this would initially be paid in 26/27, following the election of the mayor in May 2026, and would be split 50/50 between capital and revenue. Beyond that split, the MCCA will have complete flexibility to spend this funding on the priorities for the area as identified by it.

4.3. Whilst there are clear benefits in terms of aligning the mayor election with the elections in May 2027, this would need to be balanced against the potential disadvantages which may include:

- Losing access to the benefits of being at the mayoral strategic authority level of the framework set out in the White Paper and Bill;
- Not having a seat at the Council of National and the Regions, mayoral council and as such not being able to feed into national policy making;
- Reduced support from government; and
- Delaying or significantly reducing the receipt of the mayoral investment fund of £38 million per year for 30 years for the area as this is predicated on having a mayor in post in May 2026.

4.4. The implications would need to be fully understood prior to requesting any delay so that they could be thoroughly considered.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Joint working between ESCC, WSCC and BHCC and MHCLG is ongoing to meet the timescales for the formation of a Sussex MCCA as outlined for areas on the DPP. By doing so, the authorities aim to unlock support and funding from Government to deliver the new authority at an accelerated rate.

5.2. Should the inaugural mayoral election take place in 2026 it would do so under FPTP system. Whilst requesting a deferral does not delay the establishment of the Strategic Authority, it would risk delaying the potential advantages including access to the Mayoral Investment Fund.

Background information

The Bill has had its first and second readings in the House of Commons and is now in the Committee Stage in the House of Commons. Details are available at: [English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill - Parliamentary Bills - UK Parliament](#)