

**East Sussex County Council's responses to questions in Government's consultation on proposals for Local Government Organisation (LGR) in the area of East Sussex and Brighton & Hove**

**One East Sussex:** Proposal submitted by East Sussex County Council, Eastbourne Borough Council, Hastings Borough Council, Lewes District Council and Rother District Council for two unitary councils across the whole of the area of East Sussex and Brighton and Hove, comprising:

- A single unitary council covering the current district areas of Eastbourne, Hastings, Lewes, Rother and Wealden
- Brighton and Hove to remain unchanged

For each question, the following answers can be provided:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

Respondents will also be invited to explain their answers to questions 1 to 8 using a free text box as question 9.

**1) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal [including the requested boundary change] suggests councils that are based on sensible geographies and economic areas?**

**Strongly agree.** The communities of East Sussex have a strong shared identity built on culture, landscape, transport links, economic ties and organisational partnerships. Public engagement has told us that many people would be distressed to have their communities moved into a different organisational area, severing the connections and sense of belonging they feel in a unified county.

Many of our public services, including social care, education, highways and hospitals, are already arranged on the East Sussex footprint and are effective. It would be disruptive and costly to break those up. The economy of East Sussex has a different character from many neighbouring areas, with challenges of lower wages and few larger companies. Growth is often constrained by environmentally protected landscape and corresponding limited infrastructure. East Sussex already has a shared strategy for its economic growth, developed by the Team East Sussex partnership. A unitary authority would naturally fit with and support this approach.

**2) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils will be able to deliver the outcomes they describe in the proposal?**

**Agree.** A single unitary council in East Sussex would be equipped to deliver the outcomes proposed for One East Sussex. It will be able to draw on long-established

collaboration and partnership working which is already very strong: from cost-of-living support to neighbourhood health and care, from joint recycling support to supporting people back into work, the six councils of East Sussex deliver public services with each other, with the voluntary sector and with the Government.

The One East Sussex proposal also includes a clear commitment to transparent decision-making and the principles for achieving this, including assurance every neighbourhood is listened to and involved in transforming and improving services.

**3) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils are the right size to be efficient, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks?**

**Strongly agree.** The One East Sussex proposal meets these criteria. With a population of more than 550,000 it would match the Government's guidance that new unitary councils should serve populations of 500,000 or more. With six councils merged in one, the new body would achieve efficiencies from day one particularly in senior staffing and in some back-office functions. The new unitary authority would be a vital local anchor organisation as both a key employer and purchaser of goods in East Sussex and would be able to use that power to help develop economic prosperity.

**4) [where relevant] To what extent do you agree or disagree that this proposal will put local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing, particularly given that some councils in the area are in Best Value intervention and in receipt of exceptional financial support?**

**Agree.** No reorganisation process alone will address the chronic underfunding and cost pressures facing local government. However, a single unitary authority replacing six councils will offer clear efficiencies in set-up costs and in operation for years ahead. *One East Sussex* is the only published proposal for the area which should reduce the cost of local government. There would be a net cashable benefit of £20m from the initial set-up. Once established, it would save £64m compared to the current model over the first five years, and an additional £25m each year thereafter. It also has the capacity to create more effective services by building on its existing East Sussex partnerships.

**5) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils will deliver high quality, sustainable public services?**

**Agree.** There are already many strong examples of successful county-wide services and partnerships in East Sussex (including in place-based health and care, targeted employment support, community safety and shared services such as public procurement). It seems clear that a county unitary offers the best chance to sustain and build on those services. The *One East Sussex* proposal is rigorously researched and evidenced. Our modelling uses transparent data and methodology. The proposal was prepared over more than six months by all six tier one and two councils in East Sussex (the five district and borough councils and the county council) as partners working together with expert consultants to combine expertise and insight.

**6) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal has been informed by local views and will meet local needs?**

**Strongly agree.** There has been wide public discussion and engagement in developing the One East Sussex proposal, through surveys, focus groups and discussion with service users and partners. More than 14,000 views were received in total. A county-wide survey showed almost three in four people (74%) said a single unitary for East Sussex was the only proposal that should be submitted to Government. There are naturally a range of views and some concerns that most local voices could be lost: the business case for One East Sussex is clear that neighbourhood engagement and representation will be baked in. It also sets out core principles of local service design, taking decision as the most local possible level and fully reflecting the diversity of our population and geography.

**7) To what extent do you agree or disagree that establishing the councils in this proposal will support devolution arrangements, for example, the establishment of a strategic authority?**

**Agree.** East Sussex County Council is a committed and enthusiastic constituent partner in the process of establishing a combined mayoral authority for Sussex, working with all partners including at borough and district level. A unitary authority for the county would continue this participation, with an evidenced and coherent view of the area's particular profile and the possibilities for growth and development of behalf of all its residents.

**8) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal enables stronger community engagement and gives the opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment?**

**Agree.** The proposal for One East Sussex is based on a recognition that while we share an identity, we are made up of diverse communities. The proposal focusses on the need to build further effective community engagement and commits to giving everyone in East Sussex a chance to shape a new authority and its services.