

Report from WSCC County Councillor Amanda Jupp

I am sure many of you are aware of the Government's decision to introduce Devolution in the form of Mayoral and unitary authorities by May 2028. This was set out in the English Devolution White Paper which was published in December 2024 which states that Mayoral Strategic Authorities will bring funding and local decision-making powers from central government to deliver on economic growth, jobs and skills, housing and transport, as well as public health, police and the fire service.

The Government has made it clear that it wants unitary authorities to replace local authorities in areas which currently have a two-tier structure, ie County Councils and District or Borough Councils by May 2028.

At the invitation of Government, West and East Sussex County Councils and Brighton and Hove City Council applied at the end of January for inclusion in the Devolution Priority Programme for Sussex as a whole to be considered as a Mayoral Authority.

The Government selected Sussex as one of six places to be selected for the priority programme which means that it is now on the fast track to receive additional powers that come with a strategic combined authority and elected mayor.

Everyone – including residents, businesses, local authorities, partners, stakeholders and other organisations can have a say in shaping the future of the Mayoral Combined Authority for our region through a public consultation which is currently being run by the Government until the 13th April.

The Government made the decision to defer the forthcoming elections for County Council in May. This was requested as part of our bid to join the priority programme as we believed that we would not be able to meet the Government's timetable to deliver Mayoral elections next year.

Our application to be part of the change to mayoral and unitary authorities set out a willingness to look at the structure of local government in Sussex. We are working with all the District and Borough Councils and partners in both County Councils and Brighton and Hove City Council to develop proposals for the creation of unitary authorities and how these could be best configured based on the Government's criteria.

An initial outline of potential options was submitted to Government on 21st March following collaboration with colleagues in West Sussex. East Sussex County Council and Brighton and Hove carried out the same exercise with their colleagues and partners.

The options set out in the interim plan are

1. A county unitary
2. 2 unitaries on the county footprint or a reduced West Sussex footprint with Brighton & Hove City Council bolstered and the possibility of Crawley joining a new unitary arrangement with Surrey Districts and Boroughs.

The Government expects full and final proposals to be submitted by 26th September 2025 and these will be evidenced based as per the Government's criteria.

We understand that Town and Parish Councils will retain their important democratic role within their communities, and we will seek to champion this as a critical element of the model we pursue.

We will also seek to maintain a collaborative approach to the work in developing how the Combined Authority will discharge its new powers and on how any Local Government Reform model will continue to meet the needs and aspirations of our communities.

We will consult on reorganizational proposals once options have been confirmed by Government later in the year when a statutory consultation will also be undertaken by Government.

It is going to be a busy time for all authorities but we want to reiterate that this will not effect our "business as usual" and services will continue to be delivered as usual.

I will continue to keep your Parish Council updated with developments and would urge you to let your views be known in all the forthcoming consultations.