



news release

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West Sussex County Council states its preference for a one unitary authority



West Sussex County Council is stating its preference for a single unitary authority for the whole of the county as its preferred option for local government reorganisation.

The council maintains that a single authority is best for providing high-quality and financially sustainable services to residents.

A business case for local government reorganisation in West Sussex was developed and agreed by all 8 councils in the county. Each council is taking its own decision on its preferred option.

The joint business case and each authority's preference will be submitted to government Friday this week (26 September) for a final decision in spring 2026.

Leader of West Sussex County Council, Cllr Paul Marshall is now writing to the government to ask ministers to consider the council's preferred option.

He said: "Thank you to my fellow council leaders and chief executives who have worked collaboratively successfully to develop the options in the business case.

"As the case shows, creating a single unitary authority will save £50m per year, which is £30m a year greater than the savings that would be generated by moving to two unitary authorities, and pays back the cost of change much more quickly. This unlocks millions we can invest in crucial public services while minimising disruption to services, especially those that protect vulnerable people.

"Creating two unitary councils in West Sussex will mean having to split essential services that keep our most vulnerable people safe and that are currently delivered countywide, notably children's and adults' social care. We are very conscious in reaching this conclusion that the unavoidable disruption if a two unitary model is adopted will create further challenges in these sectors, both of which are already under significant pressure, and impact on the significant improvements we've made as a council over the last few years.

"While we prefer a single unitary option, whatever the government chooses, we will maintain our successful collaboration and shared focus of achieving the best outcome for residents.

Councils in East Sussex and Brighton & Hove City Council have also produced their own business cases. While East Sussex councils have been open about the shape of their plans for some time, Brighton & Hove City Council did not reveal the areas covered by its proposals until just a few working days before the submission deadline, meaning that it has not been possible to fully assess the proposals' impact on West Sussex at this point.

Cllr Marshall is therefore also calling on ministers not to consider the Brighton & Hove business case. He said: "I was personally very disappointed to see Brighton & Hove City Council's alternative proposal for local government reorganisation in Sussex, which was issued after our case was published in papers for our council and cabinet meetings.

"Brighton & Hove City Council has not engaged with us and so we have not been able to test their assumptions or modelling. Our initial assessment though is that the case lacks sufficient detail, due diligence and analysis, and it is difficult to see how the proposals meet the government's criteria, notably financial stability, engaging with councils affected, and managing the risks of services being disrupted."

Engaging with communities

The business case for West Sussex draws on feedback from the views of 9,000 residents who took part in engagement work over the summer.

What came across very strongly in the responses was a desire for local councils be focused on the differing needs of the places they are responsible for, and for an effective local voice in shaping decisions. This will be a key requirement to build into the new council or councils when they are created.

The government will run its own consultation on the options in the coming months, giving the public a chance to express their view based on the full business case, including the estimated financial impact of each option, which was not available for the earlier engagement exercise.

Elections

In his letter to ministers, Cllr Marshall additionally makes the case for deferring county council elections due to take place in May 2026.

He argues that when taking into account the potential disruption the process of LGR, the cost of holding elections (around £1.5m), the likely limited time for which those elected would hold office, and possible voter fatigue and confusion with elections for a Sussex Mayor represent a strong rationale for the government to postpone county council elections until the new model is agreed and elections for the new structure are held.

Further information

[Read the joint West Sussex business case for local government reorganisation.](#)

[Future of local government in Sussex](#)

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