**West Sussex Councils Submit Interim Plan for Local Government Reorganisation, Seek Clarity on Key Issues**

West Sussex councils have submitted their draft interim plan for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) to the Minister for Local Government and English Devolution, Jim McMahon, outlining their progress and seeking guidance on several critical issues to ensure a successful final submission in September 2025.

The interim plan, submitted by West Sussex Leaders and Chief Executives, emphasises the councils' commitment to devolution and a route map for creating unitary authorities that will deliver the best outcomes for citizens. The interim plan outlines potential options for new council structures. It also highlights the opportunity for public service reform and improved outcomes, particularly in areas such as homelessness prevention and social care.

The councils have also proposed how to address democratic representation, governance arrangements, and how new structures will support devolution ambitions. While acknowledging limited local engagement due to the tight timeline, they have committed to extensive consultation with local residents, businesses and wider stakeholders as proposals develop.

Indicative costs for preparing proposals and implementation have been provided, along with arrangements for inter-council cooperation and decision-making.

However, several key questions remain that require clarification from the government. Chief amongst these is the size and boundaries of potential new unitary authorities, particularly concerning any required expansion of Brighton & Hove. In addition, guidance is sought on how Crawley fits the unitarisation and devolution agenda given its strong economic links to Surrey.  The councils are seeking clear guidelines on population size limits, funding, timelines, and the impact of the Devolution Bill.

"We are making good progress, but we need clarity on these issues to avoid costly delays and ensure we develop the most effective structures for our communities," said Michael Jones, Leader of Crawley Borough Council on behalf of the West Sussex Leaders. "We are committed to working collaboratively to create a shared evidence base and develop proposals that reflect the unique needs of our area."

"We are excited about the opportunities that LGR brings for public service reform and delivering significant improvements for local communities," Michael Jones added. "We are working diligently to ensure a smooth transition and a positive legacy for West Sussex."

The councils are seeking urgent answers to their questions from the government to maintain momentum and ensure a robust final submission in September.

**Dealing first with Local Government Reorganisation**

The Government wrote to all Council Leaders in West Sussex in February to formally invite us to work together to develop proposals for local government reorganisation.

Since receiving this invitation, we have been working with district and borough leaders to develop a set of options as interim proposals. A letter from all leaders in West Sussex has now been submitted to Government to meet their 21 March deadline. Members now have that submission in front of them (see link below).

The letter provided an opportunity for us to update Government on progress and set out a list of potential options. The letter did not set out the County Council’s preferred option, or the preferred option of any district or borough council. There was no need for that at this stage and it was important to reach agreement on the range of options that could make sense.

Ministers will now provide feedback on the options we have put forward to help support the development of our proposals. Once we have received this feedback, we and our district and borough partners will work on the principles, objectives and evidence that will help us build a business case for the best model for single-tier local government in West Sussex.

At the heart of this process we will be making sure we put the needs of our residents, communities and businesses first and clear and transparent consultation process will take place once we have developed final proposals, which will invite views from our residents, communities, stakeholders, businesses and other interested parties. Feedback from this consultation will then be built into the final business case which will be submitted to Government by 26 September.

We will ensure Members are fully informed and involved in the process. The WSCC Leader will be setting up an all-party working group chaired by a cabinet member that will carry out the main work on considering evidence and building the business case. Member Days will be held from April through to September, and we will provide updates at Cabinet and full council meetings. Importantly, there will also be an opportunity for all Members to comment on the final proposal for local government reorganisation at the full council meeting on 23 September, ahead of a Cabinet meeting where the decision will be taken on the submission to the Government.

In working towards a preferred option, we will work within the Government’s criteria whilst seeking to identify robust and sustainable proposals that are in the best interest of the whole area. We are also working hard to establish a clear and robust evidence base in which our preferred option will be firmly rooted.

**Turning to Devolution**

As you will be aware, a government-led consultation is underway on the proposal for a Mayoral Combined County Authority with an elected mayor for Sussex. The consultation document builds detail into the Government’s white paper on devolution in December last year. You will recall that, in February the bid from West Sussex County Council, East Sussex County Council, and Brighton & Hove City Council to join the fast-track programme was approved.

The consultation runs until 13 April. The County Council will be submitting a response which is to largely agree with the plans. Members may wish to submit their own responses, if they have not already done so.

The results of this consultation will be assessed by the Government during the Spring and a ministerial decision will be taken whether to proceed. The Local Authority Spending Review will then confirm future mayoral investment funds for new mayoral areas. The plan is for elections for a mayor to take place in May 2026.

The creation of a combined authority and elected mayor presents a fantastic opportunity for Sussex and will bring valuable funding and new local decision-making powers from central government to our area, which will enable us to make our own plans for and deliver on economic growth, jobs, skills, health, planning and transport for Sussex.

There is much to do to make these proposals a reality, but we will not let our work on these proposals detract from the delivery of essential services and our drive to put the needs of our residents first. We will remain steadfast in our commitment to delivering on the priorities in Our Council Plan, and to ensuring we achieve a balanced and sustainable budget and plan our financial resilience to face the pressures we know lie ahead.

We will keep you all updated as the proposals progress. Key updates will be posted on the ‘future of local government in Sussex’ webpage on the County Council’s website.

The submission letter is available here: <https://crawley.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-03/West%20Sussex%20local%20government%20reorganisation%20interim%20submission.pdf>