**District Dispatch**

You are probably aware that the government wants to reform local government through devolution and local government reorganisation. The changes are quite far reaching and so I thought it would be useful to explain the government’s aims in more detail.

Devolution involves introducing strategic authorities with an elected mayor across England, so that government can hand more powers down from Whitehall. A strategic authority is a legal body that enables a group of two or more councils to collaborate and take collective decisions across council boundaries. The government wants elected mayors to oversee areas representing two or more current county council geographical areas. Mayors will be handed more power over areas such as strategic housing and planning; transport and infrastructure; adult skills; and employment support. The aim is for each mayor to have a unique role which allows them to focus fully on devolved responsibilities. The government has advised that a strategic authority should represent a population size of at least 1.5 million residents.

In December, the government invited upper tier (county and existing unitary) authorities to submit bids for devolution for a place on their devolution priority programme. In our area, West Sussex County Council, East Sussex County Council and Brighton and Hove City Council requested to create a strategic authority based on their combined footprint, which covers around 1.7 million residents.

The government approved this proposal and they are now consulting with residents and businesses at: [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/sussex-and-brighton-devolution](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/sussex-and-brighton-devolution) until 13 April, with the aim of agreeing the new strategic authority by September. If approved, this will be created in March 2026 and mayoral elections will be held in May 2026. With the changes set to bring investment and extra powers from government to Sussex, we’re encouraging anyone who lives and works in the region to give their views.

Local government reorganisation is separate to devolution, but links with the government's overall aims. The government wants all areas to have unitary councils across the country, with each serving an average of 500,000 residents. Unitary authorities are a single tier of government responsible for all local services in an area. For the West Sussex area, this is likely to mean the creation of one or two new unitary councils. This would mean existing council services from the district and county councils moving into one of these new unitary councils. Each unitary authority will have a council leader, who will continue to focus on leading their place and delivering vital services, and they will also sit on the strategic authority, along with the mayor.

We have been working closely with our colleagues from the other councils across West Sussex and have collectively submitted interim proposals to the government — you can find a link to the submission at: [www.chichester.gov.uk/devolution](http://www.chichester.gov.uk/devolution). These emphasise our commitment to devolution and a route map for creating unitary authorities that will deliver the best outcomes for our communities. However, several key questions remain that require clarification from the government, including the size and boundaries of potential new unitary authorities, particularly concerning any required expansion of Brighton & Hove. The group has also asked for guidance on how Crawley fits the unitarisation and devolution agenda, given its strong economic links to Surrey. We are also seeking guidelines on population size limits, funding, timelines, and the impact of the Devolution Bill.

Each area has until 26 September to submit detailed proposals to the government. Sussex has been accepted onto the devolution priority programme and so the proposed timeline is for the unitary authorities to be ready in shadow form in 2027, and for the new councils to come into effect in 2028. A shadow year allows the new council to prepare for the transition, but it will not run any services during this year — services will continue to be provided by the existing councils until 2028.

As you can imagine, this is a huge task. We are working with all councils across West Sussex to find the best options and solutions for our communities, and we will be asking for your views as our proposals develop. We want to assure you that regardless of what happens, our services will still be provided to you, and we will make the transition as smooth as we possibly can. We will keep you closely updated on this important matter and so please consider signing up for our monthly email newsletter at: [www.chichester.gov.uk/newsalerts](http://www.chichester.gov.uk/newsalerts) and visiting: [www.chichester.gov.uk/devolution](http://www.chichester.gov.uk/devolution).

Best Wishes

Cllr Adrian Moss

Leader of Chichester District Council

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