



ADUR & WORTHING
COUNCILS

Joint Strategic Committee
24th September 2025

Key Decision Yes

Ward(s) Affected:

Submission of Local Government Reorganisation Proposal

Report by the Interim Chief Executive

Executive Summary

1. Purpose

- 1.1. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) has been progressing contemporaneously to the devolution programme and the creation of a Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) across Sussex. The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government has invited all Councils in Sussex to submit their Proposals for LGR by 26th September 2025.
- 1.2. Councils in West Sussex have been working collaboratively in developing proposals which are set out in the 'Final Business Case for LGR' which is attached to this Report. The Final Business Case sets out three viable options that have been considered for the formation of a new single tier unitary (or unitaries).
- 1.3. In addition to the Final Business Case, this Report attaches the document 'Supplementary Statement: A Two-Unitary Model for West Sussex'. This has also been developed collaboratively, its purpose to reflect the outcome of the Shaping West Sussex and Thriving Together engagement; it presents compelling rationale for creating two unitary councils of the right size, large enough to be efficient, small enough to genuinely be connected to the communities they serve.
- 1.4. The purpose of this Report is for the Joint Strategic Committee to consider any comments from the Full Council meetings and thereafter approve as

required, an LGR Proposal for Adur District Council and an LGR Proposal for Worthing Borough Council as outlined in the recommendations, to be submitted to MHCLG in advance of 26th September.

1.5. Appendices to this Report include:-

- Appendix 1 - The Final Business Case for LGR with sub-appendices as follows:-
 - 1: West Sussex profile
 - 2: Partner overlays
 - 3: Engagement activity and findings
 - 4: Options evaluation evidence
 - 5: Financial modelling and sensitivity analysis
 - 6: Service delivery insights and considerations
 - 7: Implementation plan
 - 8: Risk register
 - 9: Equality impact assessment
 - 10: IT reorganisation

11. Summary of source information Business Case Appendices (including the Equalities Impact Assessment and Engagement Activity and Findings)
- Appendix 2 - Supplementary Statement: A Two-Unitary Model for West Sussex
- Appendix 3 - Outcome of the Thriving Together engagement

2. Recommendations

2.1. Members of the Joint Strategic Committee are being asked to:

- 2.1.1. Consider the comments referred to this Committee from Adur District and Worthing Borough Councils on the proposals for the creation of new unitary authorities in West Sussex
- 2.1.2. Consider this Report and its Appendices; to note the viable proposals for the creation of unitary options in West Sussex and the invitation to submit proposals to the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) by 26th September 2025; and further note the decision to submit a

proposal to MHCLG is urgent as defined in the Councils' Joint Overview and Scrutiny Procedures Rules.

- 2.1.3. Agree the recommendation of the Leaders to submit Option B2 as the preferred Option for both Adur and Worthing Councils, or to debate and agree such other option presented within the documents as a viable option having considered all relevant matters.
- 2.1.4. Delegate authority to the Interim Chief Executive in consultation with the Leaders of Adur and Worthing Councils to submit the Letters of Preference on their behalf to MHCLG, confirming the approved LGR Option by 26th September.
- 2.1.5. To note the complexities arising from the different options for community governance set out at section 8 of this report; the need to avoid a democratic deficit and ensure good custodianship of place; and agree to the creation of a cross party members working group to review and scope the options for community governance for the residents of Adur and Worthing as we move into the new unitary.

3. Background

Background to Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

- 3.1. On 16 December 2024, the government published The English Devolution White Paper providing detailed proposals for English devolution that would involve the creation of new mayoral combined authorities and unitary authorities in Sussex. The devolution programme is aimed to empower local areas with greater decision making powers, in areas such as transport, housing, and economic development. In Sussex, devolution involves the creation of a Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) covering West Sussex, East Sussex, and Brighton & Hove, with the first mayoral election scheduled for May 2026. The paper also included the invitation of proposals for local government reorganisation to be aligned with the implementation of the devolution plans based on the geography of upper tier local authorities comprising a new combined authority.
- 3.2. In a letter to all leaders dated 5th February Leaders of all Councils in two-tier areas and small neighbouring unitary Councils were formally invited to submit interim plans on unitary proposals to be submitted on or before 21st March 2025. Interim

plans were submitted by the Leaders of Adur District and Worthing Borough Councils.

- 3.3. In the letter dated 5th February, MHCLG invited all leaders to work together and to develop proposals for local government within guidance criteria. The letter confirmed:-

“As your area has been successful in joining the Devolution Priority Programme, we will be working with you toward an election for the Mayor of the Strategic Authority in May 2026. To help manage these demands, I have decided to make legislation to postpone the local elections in your area from May 2025 to May 2026.

My department will work with your area to take forward both devolution and *[local government]* reorganisation to the most ambitious timeline possible. The government will be consulting across your area in February and March on the benefits that devolution will bring, and to allow sufficient time for you to also carry out engagement necessary to develop robust and evidenced unitary proposals, I will expect any full proposal to be submitted by **26 September**.

If I decide to implement any proposal, and the necessary legislation is agreed by Parliament, we will work with you to move to elections to new ‘shadow’ unitary councils as soon as possible as is the usual arrangement in the process of local government reorganisation. Following submission, I will consider any and all proposals carefully before taking decisions on how to proceed. My officials are available throughout to discuss how your reorganisation and devolution aspirations might work together and what support you think you might need to proceed. This is a once in a generation opportunity to work together to put local government in your area on a more sustainable footing, creating simpler structures for your area that will deliver the services that local people and businesses need and deserve. As set out in the White Paper, my commitment is that clear leadership locally will be met with an active partner nationally”.

- 3.4. On 17th July, Brighton & Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council received confirmation of the establishment of a Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority, the Government confirming it will make regulations to provide for a Mayor of the combined authority with inaugural elections in May 2026, with vesting day for the MCCA being 1st April 2027.

3.5. Leaders and Chief Executive Officers have been working collaboratively together to develop and agree a Final Business Case. This business case has been prepared by the West Sussex Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Programme on behalf of the constituent councils who are:-

- Adur District
- Arun District
- Chichester District
- Crawley Borough
- Horham District
- Mid Sussex District
- West Sussex County
- Worthing Borough

4. The Final Business Case for LGR

4.1. The Final Business Case attached at Appendix 1 has been based on the following criteria, specified by MHCLG, for the creation of a new unitary system:-

- A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned in the establishment of a single tier of local government.
- Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity, and withstand financial shocks.
- Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.
- Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.
- New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.
- New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.

4.2. The business case outlines viable options for LGR in the West Sussex area and has been developed collaboratively by all Councils in response to the government's invitation to submit proposals for unitary local government by 26th September 2025. It sets out a clear, evidence-based case for replacing the current two-tier system in West Sussex with one or two new unitary authorities, aligned with government

criteria and designed to serve our communities effectively and efficiently.

- 4.3. The business case takes a pragmatic approach, recognising the limitations of the current system and the challenges faced, while valuing existing strengths and good practice. Its aim is to build on what works well, ensuring any future arrangements are resilient, adaptable, and responsive to the evolving needs of residents. The business case recognises that both single and two unitary models are viable options for the future of local government in West Sussex.
- 4.4. The information, analysis, and financial modelling contained within the business case were based on the best available data at the time of writing, alongside a number of assumptions, which are acknowledged as being subject to change.
- 4.5. The options we have considered are based on current financial modelling and we remain open to consideration of alternative options should the government's funding reforms signal a change in the economic viability of smaller councils. However at present, other than options A, B1 and B2, the alternative options remain unviable in the shared business case developed for West Sussex.

4.6. The Conclusions from the LGR Business Case are:-

- **Viable Options Identified:**
Following a detailed assessment, three viable options for local government reorganisation have been identified: Option A (a single county-wide unitary authority) and Options B1 and B2 (two unitary authorities with different configurations). Two other options (C and D) were discounted at an early stage as they were not financially viable.
- **Financial Outcomes Vary:**
Option A is projected to deliver ongoing annual net savings of £48.8 million with an investment payback period of 2.3 years. Options B1/B2 are estimated to deliver £18.8 million in annual net savings with a payback period of 6.4 years.
- **Public Preference for Two Unitaries:**
Of the 9,332 responses to the public engagement survey, 62% of respondents preferred a two-unitary model, while 23% preferred a single unitary model. Of those preferring a two unitary 62% of the public preferred Option B2.
- **Overall Comparability:**
Despite financial differences, the formal appraisal against the government's six criteria concluded that the viable options (A, B1, and B2) are "broadly comparable in their ability to meet the government's tests".

- No Single Recommended Option:

The business case presents a shared evidence base for all councils but does not recommend a single preferred option. It is intended to allow each council to determine its own preference for submission to the Secretary of State.

- Significant Financial Risks:

The long-term financial sustainability of any new structure faces significant risks, notably the potential for reduced government funding from the Fair Funding Review and the impact of the growing Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit

5. Supplementary Statement: A Two-Unitary Model for West Sussex

- 5.1. The supplementary statement is an additional evidence-based assessment, produced collaboratively and advocates for a two unitary model of local government in West Sussex.
- 5.2. The assessment builds on the evidence developed in the shared LGR business case, and provides more detailed considerations and benefits of the two unitary model against the six government criteria, drawing on a range of insights, including from two key District Council Network commissioned studies on [Adult Social Care](#) and [Children's Social Care](#).
- 5.3. **The Conclusions from the Supplementary Statement: A Two-Unitary Model for West Sussex:-**

The Statement highlights several key advantages of the two-unitary model:

- Better alignment with the economy. It argues that West Sussex has two distinct economic zones: a coastal/downs area and the Gatwick/M23 corridor. The proposed two councils would be tailored to the specific needs and strengths of these areas.
- Strong public support. The statement emphasizes that this model is the clearly preferred choice of the public, council staff, and other stakeholders.
- Financial viability. It projects annual savings of between £18.8 million and £34 million once the new system is established.
- Improved services. The proposal suggests it will lead to better and more integrated public services, especially in crucial areas like social care, housing and prevention.

- Enhanced local democracy. The new structure would result in a better ratio of councillors to residents, making local government more accessible and accountable, as well as better representation of the West Sussex population at the Mayoral Combined Authority.
- The statement also advocates for a specific version of the two-unitary model, referred to as "B2," which has the strongest public backing and offers additional strategic benefits, including preserving coastal links and shared services at Adur & Worthing.

6. Summary of the anticipated proposals to be submitted from other Districts and Boroughs in West Sussex

6.1 Members are asked to note that it has been agreed with authorities in West Sussex that committee reports for this item will be published on the same day, being 12th September 2025. More will be known about the preferences for each authority when reports have been published. At the time of writing however, indications lean towards a preference for the B2 Option.

7. Next Steps and timetable

7.1 After Proposals have been submitted by the West Sussex authorities a Ministerial decision on which proposal to implement is expected in July 2026; a time table has been given for West Sussex as follows:-

- September 2025: Proposals submitted
- November 2025: Statutory Consultation Launched
- March 2026: Ministerial decision on which proposal to implement.
- July 2026 (and prior to summer recess): Structural Change Order laid in parliament.
- Autumn 2026: Structural Change Order passed.
- 6th May 2027: Elections to new shadow unitary authority.
- 1st April 2028: Vesting Day.

8. Community Governance, avoiding a Democratic Deficit

8.1. This report recognises the importance of establishing effective neighbourhood governance and ensuring responsible custodianship of place, benefiting not only residents in Adur and Worthing but all residents throughout the new unitary authority's geographical area. As we enter the next transitional phase, a deeper

consideration is needed for how inclusive community governance can ensure effective community representation and provide optimal support to our residents. All councils are expected to hardwire local community engagement within their structures.

- 8.2. Members will be wanting to ensure the new unitary authority avoids a democratic deficit. MHCLG expects LGR to foster improved and sustained community engagement through a simplified, standardised system of local area-working and governance. This is envisioned by MHCLG to be achieved via Neighbourhood Area Committees, led by front line ward councillors within the new unitary structure. These committees are intended to provide a model for place-based engagement, designed to enhance the structural efficiencies gained from LGR. Effective Neighbourhood Area Committees will work with stakeholders, local groups and organisations, including town and parish councils, to ensure the unitary authority, through the committee, makes responsive place based decisions to meet the needs of our communities.
- 8.3. [The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill guidance \(Communities Section 2\)](#) confirms that neighbourhood governance obligations on local authorities will be set out in Regulations to be made after the Bill is in force and following a government review on effective neighbourhood governance. While local authorities can still establish town and parish councils, the guidance to the Bill confirms '*effective neighbourhood governance structures can work well with town and parish councils. Town and parish councils are independent of local authorities. MHCLG wants to make sure that all local authorities have a way of working with people in their neighbourhoods, so they are not relying on town and parish councils to do it.*
- 8.4. Before further Regulations are made the government confirms it will be undertaking a review as to the best way to achieve its neighbourhood governance aims, including speaking to and engaging with the sector to ensure they have the opportunity to contribute and share existing good practice.
- 8.5. Although the government indicates a preference for Neighbourhood Area Committees, in the absence of more detailed Regulations relating to neighbourhood governance at this time, additional pressures are placed on Local Authorities to conduct Community Government Reviews (CGR).
- 8.6. A CGR is a prescribed legislative process under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. It can be commenced by the Council, by application or by petition. A CGR considers the creation of Town and Parish Councils. To date Town and Parish councils have provided local connections for

responsive community engagement. The CGR process allows councils to adapt their local governance arrangements to reflect the identities and needs of their communities, ensuring that local governance remains effective and convenient. The outcomes of a CGR can result in creating, merging, altering or abolishing parish or town council electoral arrangements, its purpose is to foster better local democracy for those matters within their responsibility.

- 8.7. However, conducting a CGR at this transitional stage of LGR creates challenges. It is potentially a costly and resource-intensive undertaking that could divert resources from engagement with necessary LGR transition. Furthermore, initiating a CGR now risks causing community fatigue and confusion amidst the ongoing LGR process, potentially conflicting with the efforts required for establishing the shadow authority and its governance arrangements. There are also additional financial considerations arising from the creation of Town and Parish Councils resulting in increased precept demands through council tax payments. Currently, parishes can increase their precepts annually without limitation or the need for a referendum.
- 8.8. Until the anticipated future Regulations from MHCLG arrive, there remains some uncertainty and this, coupled with guidance that town and parish councils will work with Neighbourhood Area Committees and not in place of those Committees, means that a great deal of consideration needs to be put into achieving the right form of community governance under the new unitary.
- 8.9. The above paragraphs provide some background on the options available for good governance. To ensure that we deliver the right and best form of local democracy for our residents this report anticipates the need for a key workstream on community governance that will require ongoing involvement of members and community leaders.
- 8.10. Members will be invited to attend a workshop in October 2025, to scope out terms of reference for a member working group; its purpose will be to consider what good community governance will look like in the new unitary and how best to achieve it.
- 8.11. The working group will engage with parish councils, stakeholders, and local businesses, hear from experts in this area and learn from other councils that have already been through this process. The working group will consider how community governance can provide a forum in the new unitary for local residents and councillors to discuss and support initiatives that improve social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing which contribute to community action plans and advise on service delivery and development, within specified areas.

8.12. The engagement would be based on the Thriving together model and investigate how we align community governance with other districts and boroughs within the new unitary footprint, and also models of service delivery such as neighbourhood prevention and health services.

Protecting Civic and Ceremonial Tradition in the absence of a suitable Parish or Town Council

8.13. Members are asked to note that the Local Government and Housing Act 2007, provides the Secretary of State with the power to make incidental, or supplementary provisions when making an order under the 2007 Act. This means that where there is no suitable local government body such as a parish council in any particular area, charter trustees may be established to preserve historic property, privileges, rights and traditions presently enjoyed by local residents in outgoing council areas.

8.14. Upon the establishment of Charter Trustees, all civic and ceremonial rights and property would be vested in these Charter Trustees. If new parishes are subsequently created, these rights and properties may then transfer to the new parish or town council. Alternatively, the rights will remain with the Charter Trustees.

8.15. In practice this means that historic property (any charter, insignia, plate or other property which is of an historic and ceremonial nature, held by a predecessor council (AW), other than land and buildings, and any property held for the purposes of any statutory function) can be retained and transferred, with the Civic and Ceremonial traditions of the outgoing authority.

8.16. The Charter Trustees would be 5 local members from the new unitary; their role would be non-political with the primary purpose of promoting historic ceremonial traditions for the area including electing one of their Members to be Mayor.

8.17. Examples of where Charter Trustees have been created include Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, when their unitary authority was created and can be viewed on their website.

8.18. The benefits of Charter Trustees for retaining civic and ceremonial traditions, including the civic head can form a necessary part of the Community Governance Members' Working Group terms of reference.

9. Engagement and Consultation

- 9.1. In arriving at the recommendations in this Report, extensive engagement has taken place across West Sussex, including a wider Public Survey 'Shaping West Sussex' as well as our Thriving Together initiative in Adur and Worthing. Further details are set out in Appendix 1. The highlights from the Thriving Together engagement - is set out in Appendix 3 and below as a summary:-
- 9.2. Launched in May 2025, Thriving Together set out to shape the proposals Adur & Worthing councils will take to government as part of devolution and local government reorganisation. But it goes further – laying the foundations for long-term collaboration between communities, councils, and partners to imagine and deliver the future we want to see.
- 9.3. Thriving Together involved residents to develop a strong set of priorities for the future of Adur & Worthing and visions for neighbourhoods. Using digital engagement, neighbourhood conversations and deliberative events, it created welcoming and creative ways for people to share ideas. Several hundred people took part, generating hundreds of ideas and tens of thousands of votes through our digital platform, alongside dozens of community conversations, training up 20 community facilitators, a citizens' panel and a joint deliberative workshop. The process produced a People's Vision with seven aims and 21 actions covering priorities such as keeping decisions local, investing in community and culture, creating better places, and focusing on young people. It also captured the distinct identities of neighbourhoods like Shoreham, Lancing and Worthing. Thriving Together provides a strong foundation for community voice in any future unitary arrangements.
- 9.4. In July, councils across West Sussex launched Shaping West Sussex with an aim to engage residents, stakeholders, members and staff on the unitary model options to inform the business case. Engagement ran from July-August once financial modelling was ready, so people could consider clear and viable options. We engaged widely with residents, staff, unions, elected members, public sector partners, businesses, voluntary and community groups, and local councils.

10. Financial Implications and Sustainability

- 10.1. The financial business case, co-produced by all constituent district, borough and county councils within West Sussex has demonstrated that a two-unitary solution meets the government's test for local government reorganisation by providing a financially viable and sustainable solution for local government in West Sussex.
- 10.2. A key consideration was ensuring each of the proposed options is financially

sustainable and does not inadvertently financially disadvantage one area over another. To inform this, a financial baseline was created using the RA data for the options.

10.3. The business case demonstrates that the tax base and service costs across the two authorities are closely aligned, with only a £1.4m/£1.5m difference – well within acceptable margins.

RA data	Option A single unitary	Option B1 – west	Option B1 - east	Option B2 - west	Option B2 - east
Sum (-ve is surplus)	£0.0m	-£1.4m	£1.4m	-£1.5m	£1.5m
Overall gap	N/A		£2.8m		£3.0m

10.4 Each each option has been assessed for the purposes of the financial case and model against three scenarios:

- base scenario – these are prudent lower estimates of reasonable and achievable potential savings and higher more prudent levels of additional costs
- stretch scenario – these are prudent stretch figures of the base scenario resulting in higher reasonable and achievable savings and lower additional costs Both the transition and additional costs have been offset against the estimated savings to understand the net cost /benefit and payback period of implementing the proposals
- mid-point scenario – these are the mid-point between the base and stretch scenarios for both savings and additional costs.

10.5 The two-unitary proposal delivers significant savings (£18.8m-£34m) compared to the current two-tier system of local government through reduced duplication, greater economies of scale, and capitalising on opportunities for service transformation and improvement. The payback period is expected to be between 4 and 6.4 years.

10.6 It is proposed to build on the legacy the innovation that is prevalent in all of the districts and borough councils to drive efficiency and change to create a sustainable community led model that integrates:

- Neighbourhood Wardens to support youth, vulnerable residents, and community safety.
- Public health initiatives linked to leisure centres, libraries, and parks.
- Early intervention programmes targeting poverty, mental health, and ageing.
- Stronger social housing through the consolidation of Adur and Arun's housing revenue accounts.
- Continued digital transformation, embracing AI and system rationalisation.

10.7 Two smaller, community-focused authorities are uniquely positioned to drive efficiency and deliver meaningful change, enabling the creation of a sustainable, community-led model that responds swiftly to local needs.

10.8 Detail of the financial modelling is set out in the Business Case (appendix 1). A summary of the Annual net Benefit and the payback period for Option A and B1/B2 is shown in the following tables:

Annual Net Benefit

Benefits / (Costs)	Option A (Mid)	Option B1/B2 (Mid)
Staffing	£20.4m	£13.4m
Councillors	£1.8m	£0.8m
Non-staffing	£9.8m	£6.8m
Optimisation	£21.2m	£21.2m
Additional costs	-£4.4m	-£23.4m
Total annual net benefit	£48.8m	£18.8m

Payback Period

Benefits / (Costs)	Option A (Mid)	Option B1/B2 (Mid)
Total annual net benefit	£48.8m	£18.8m
Total transition costs	-£59.9m	-£64.8m

Payback period	2.3 years	6.4 years
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10.9 The implementation programme of each of the options will incur significant transition costs which will not be appropriately funded from council tax. It will therefore be necessary for the programme to be funded on an 'invest to save' principle with funding raised within the councils for example through savings, reserves or capital flexibilities.

10.10 It is not currently possible to model the impact of the proposed fairer funding formula changes although this has been acknowledged as an ongoing risk within the Business Case for LGR.

11. Legal Implications

11.1. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (2007 Act) allowed the Secretary of State (SoS) to invite any authority to propose a unitary model. By his letter dated 5th February 2025, the SoS invited Adur and Worthing Councils to submit proposals for a single tier of local government and unitary reorganisation by 26th September 2025 under Section 2 of the 2007 Act.

11.2. Under the 2007 Act a proposal may include the following:-

- Type A – a single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned;
- Type B - A single tier of local authority covering an area that is currently a district, or two or more districts;
- Type C – a single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned, or one or more districts in the county; and one or more relevant adjoining areas; or
- Combined proposal – a proposal that consists of two or more Type B proposals, two or more Type C proposals, or one or more Type B proposals and one or more Type C proposals.

11.3 Part 1 of the 2007 Act (Section 7) explains that where the secretary of State has received a proposal in response to an invitation he may, by order implement the proposal, with or without modification or decide to take no action. The Secretary of State may not make an order implementing a proposal unless he has consulted every authority affected by the proposal (except the authority or authorities which made it), and such other persons as he considers appropriate. Such consultation is entirely separate from any public engagement local authorities who have prepared proposals might have undertaken and is required by law.

- 11.4 Whilst local authorities preparing proposals may wish to undertake public engagement this does not constitute consultation in respect of any such proposals. There is no legal requirement imposed on local authorities preparing proposals to undertake consultation as part of the preparation process. The legal requirement relating to consultation is imposed on the Secretary of State.
- 11.5 Following submission of the final plan (by 26 September), should the Minister decide to implement any proposal, legislation will have to be agreed by parliament prior to moving to elections to new shadow unitary authorities. At this stage it is envisaged that these elections would be held in May 2027. This legislation may cover such matters including structural changes, transfer of functions, transfer of property rights and liabilities, staff transfers and electoral arrangements.
- 11.6 A shadow authority is one that is elected to carry out the functions of a new unitary authority until that authority formally comes into effect on “vesting day”. At this stage it is envisaged that vesting day would be 1 April 2028. All existing councils across West Sussex would continue to operate and deliver services until vesting day.
- 12.7 The Charter Trustee Regulations 2009 apply to the establishment of Charter Trustees under the 2007 Act.

Background Papers

- Letter from MHCLG dated 5th February 2025
- [West Sussex Interim Submission dated 21st March 2025](#)

Sustainability & Risk Assessment

1. Economic

How does this proposal/issue impact on the economic development of our places or the economic participation of our communities?

Moving to one or two new unitary councils is expected to strengthen the local economy. It will reduce duplication, make services more efficient and resilient, and give councils more clout when bidding for funding. The two-unitary option also allows for strategies that fit the different economic areas of West Sussex – the coastal corridor and the central Sussex/Gatwick corridor. There are some risks. The process of transition could create costs and temporary disruption. This will be managed through close collaboration between councils, phased planning, and clear economic strategies that reflect the strengths of each area.

2. Social

2.1 Social Value

What impact does the proposal/issues raised have on our communities or specific groups within our communities?

Local people have been clear – they want decisions kept close to communities, more investment in culture and young people, and recognition of neighbourhood identities. The new unitary model gives us the chance to design services and governance that respond to these priorities. The risk is that a larger authority could feel more distant. To address this, we will set up a cross-party working group to design neighbourhood governance and make sure residents still have a strong local voice.

2.2 Equality Issues

Details of any equality issues, any equality impact assessment undertaken, or how the proposal impacts on access or participation.

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed. The engagement process has actively included underrepresented voices. Equality and inclusion will continue to be built into the transition to a new unitary authority.

2.3 Community Safety Issues (Section 17)

Details of how the proposal helps to reduce crime and disorder and meet the Council's duties regarding crime and disorder reduction targets.

No specific community safety issues have been identified.

2.4 Human Rights Issues

Does the proposal impinge on anyone's human rights and if so how is it justified under the Human Rights Act? Human rights include: Right to a fair trial, respect for family life, private life, home and correspondence, freedom of thought, expression, assembly and association and protection and quiet enjoyment of property and possessions. Also ask, is the action proportionate to the anticipated response or outcome?

No issues have been identified in relation to human rights.

3. Environmental

Are there any implications for the management, custodianship and protection of our natural resources?

A larger authority has the opportunity to plan more effectively for climate change, biodiversity and the natural environment at a strategic level. The risk is that ongoing environmental projects could lose momentum during the transition. This can be managed by embedding environmental priorities in the new councils' strategies and aligning them with the new Combined Authority.

4. Governance

Are there any implications for or alignment with the Councils' priorities, specific action plans, strategies or policies?

Are there any implications to the Councils' reputation or relationship with our partners or community?

A refreshed corporate strategy and delivery plan is expected to be presented to the Joint Strategic Committee in October 2025, which will respond to the significant new set of opportunities and transition requirements brought about by local government reform and devolution alongside continued delivery of operational services and projects for our localities. In relation to LGR, collaboration between West Sussex councils will continue into the next phase where a substantial transition programme

will be established that will provide the framework for the council's own transition work and early collaboration with partner authorities.

There would be reputational and relationship implications if the proposals were not submitted to the government as required by 26th September.

The proposals are closely tied to the government's criteria for reorganisation and the wider devolution agenda. They simplify structures, provide clearer leadership and accountability, and create space for stronger community participation. Risks include the danger of democratic deficit, reputational damage if transition is mishandled, and resource pressures during reorganisation. These will be addressed through:

- A cross-party working group on community governance.
- Continued engagement with residents and partners.
- Careful planning of resources and risks through the LGR Programme.