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Additional Report for September parish councils

As normal, I wrote my report for September parish council meetings in the last few days of August. I normally then give a verbal update in parish council meetings but due to an important Sussex meeting on 21st September I cannot attend Bodiam and Salehurst/Robertsbridge.

This would not normally require a change but in early September the government made a major change as regards Local Government Reorganisation. This short report covers these changes and reflects the verbal updates I have given elsewhere. I have sent this to all councils.

Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution Update

The previously announced plan was for Unitary elections to go ahead in May 2027. In our case this was based on the One East Sussex proposal drawn up by county and all district and borough councils. It was one of the simplest and lowest risk proposals.

The government accepted this with the exception of a few areas including Peacehaven and Telscombe which they wanted to move to be part of Brighton and Hove. This was despite consultations which have all shown that the residents are nearly 80% against this. It would also cost ESCC more than £3M to make the changes such as moving responsibility for adult and social care and children's services to Brighton.

In early September the government announced a 'pause and review' in all ongoing LGRs. It is understood that this is due to a number of Judicial Reviews (JRs) which have been raised by counties such as Norfolk and Essex. These counties would have much more significant changes in terms of disaggregation into several unitary authorities which requires time and significant expense. In a JR each party needs to make disclosures to the other and it appears that these might have shown that decisions on boundaries were taken on political grounds against the advice of civil servants. This might have meant that the JRs were successful.

It is understood that the reviews will be carried out over the 'party conference parliamentary recess' which means that they should be available by the end of October. The implications of this for Sussex are:

- In East Sussex the May 2027 unitary elections are almost certainly postponed, it is

assumed by a year

- For West Sussex the decision on the unitary configuration will be made as part of the review
- Districts and Boroughs will need to hold elections in May 2027. Previously it was expected that these could be delayed and effectively cancelled as there was only one year to go until the unitary council took over

There are other possibilities such as the mayoral elections which were going to be in May 2026 then delayed to May 2028 could perhaps be brought forward to May 2027.

As always this is subject to change!