

Rother District Council – RALC January 2025



Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

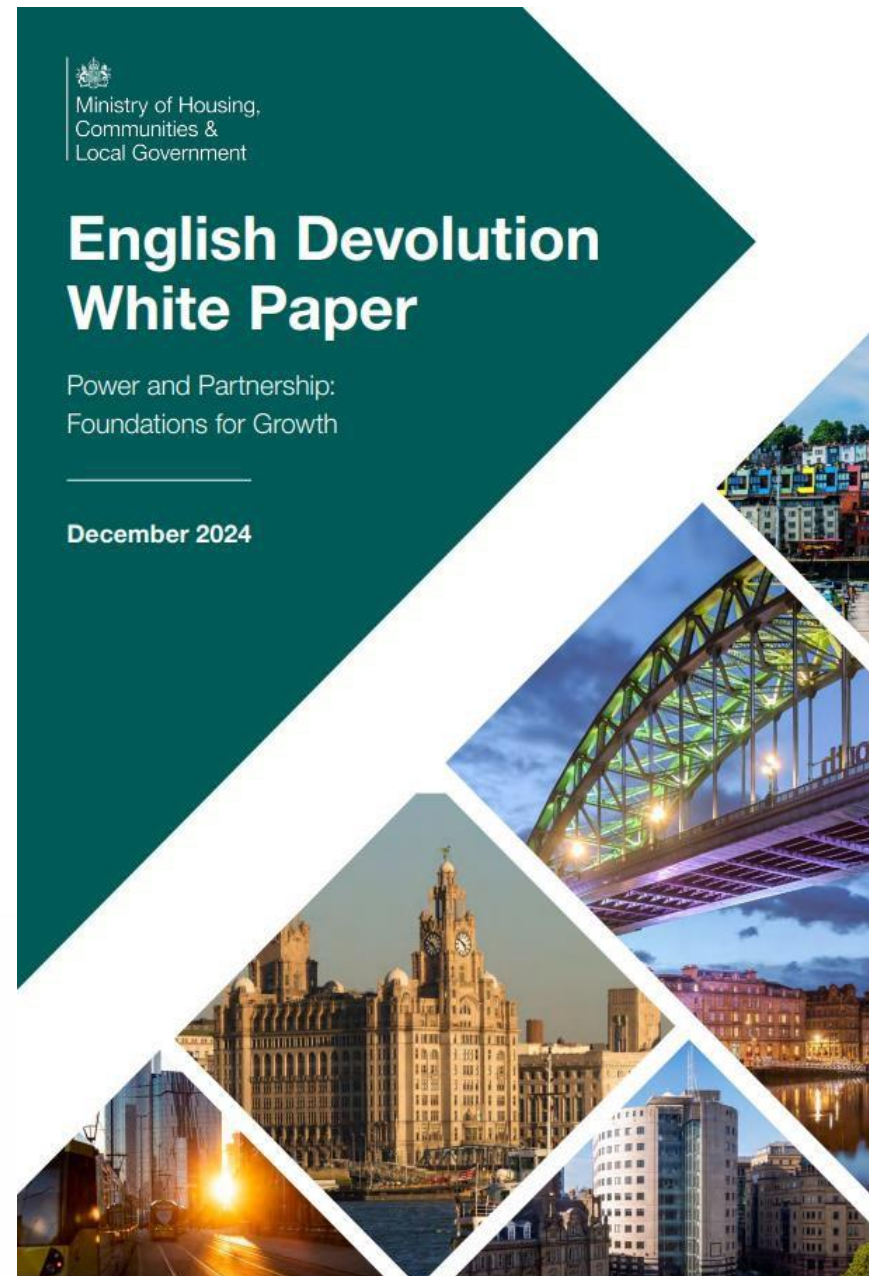
Devolution

Strategic Authorities Mayors and councils working together across the country, covering populations of at least 1.5 million

Preference for Mayors Ambition for all areas to move to a mayoral model, who would deal with the government on major projects and funding

Set powers and funding focused on driving growth

Combined authorities already exist in some parts of the country- for Sussex this means combining West Sussex County Council, Brighton & Hove City Council, and East Sussex County Council

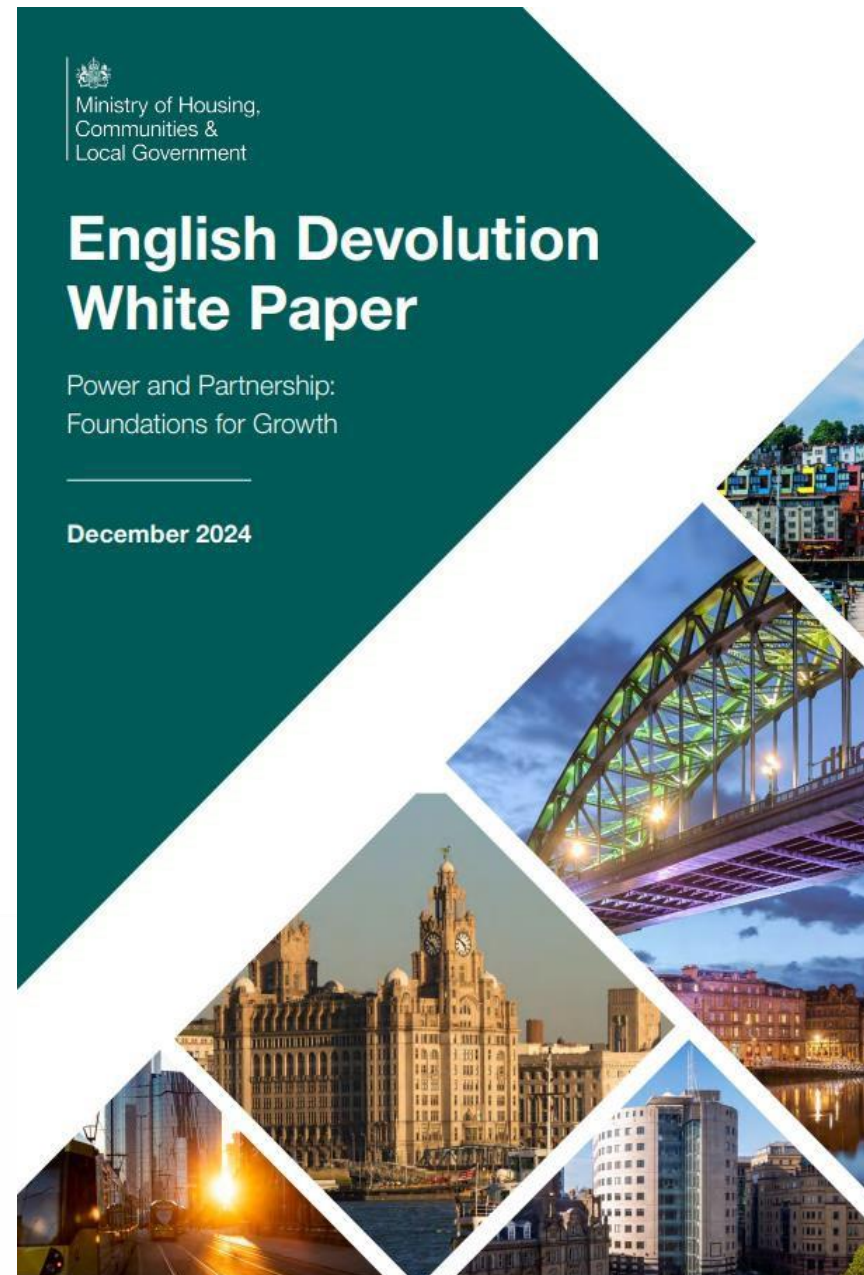


Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

The Government's White Paper also sets out its intention to **reform and strengthen local government**

This includes asking areas with two-tier local government (including East Sussex) to identify how they might move to **unitary government**.

The government has not published its final criteria for this, but it suggests new unitary councils should cover areas with not less than **500,000 people**. (The population of East Sussex is 560,000).



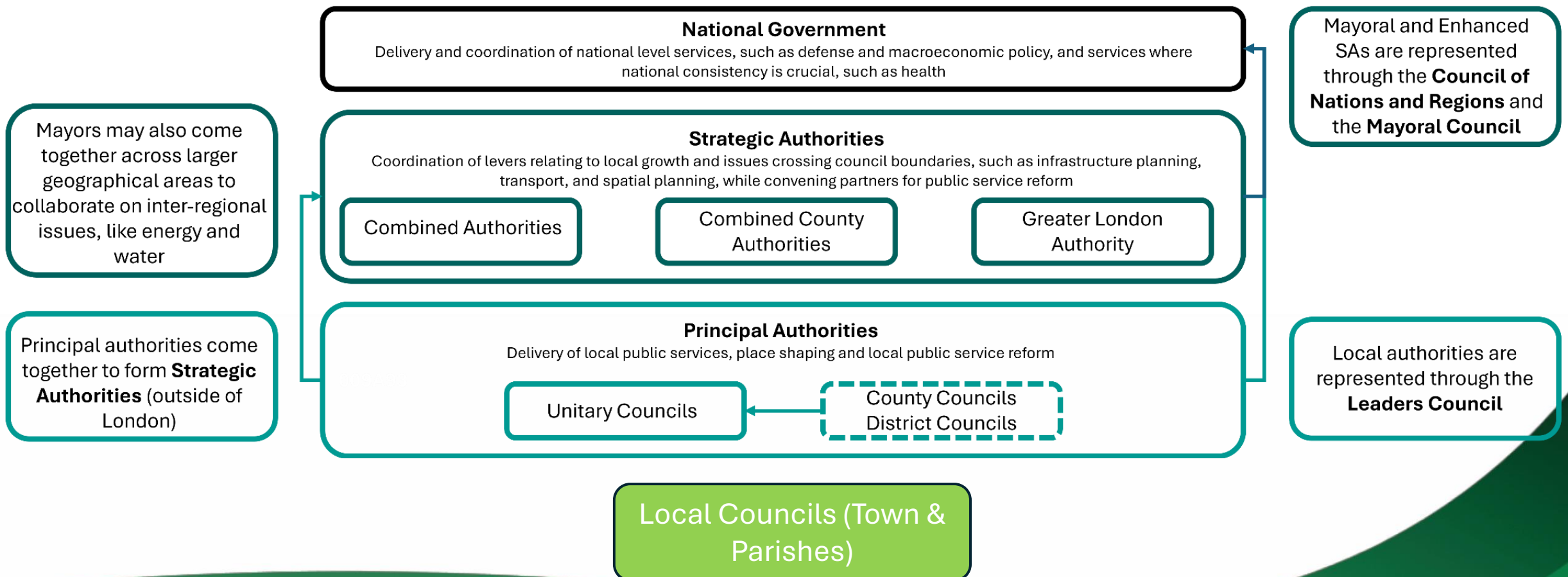
Proposed Tiers of Government



Policymaking and coordination

Tiers of government

Representation



English Devolution White Paper (1)



Published on 16 December 2024

- Delivering Government agenda for economic growth, housing, reform
- Further devolution of power to local areas – building on existing metropolitan mayor, unitary authority models
- Improving accountability, delivering a local authority system that is close enough to communities to reflect them...
- ...but of sufficient size to deliver improved efficiency and robust enough to withstand financial shocks

English Devolution White Paper (2)



- Creation of **strategic authorities**, generally covering areas wider than current counties (population c. 1.5 m plus), ideally led by an elected Mayor
- Responsible for major infrastructure, transport, strategic planning, skills, economic development, crime prevention, health
- Abolition of 2-tier local authority areas. Creation of **unitary authorities** (population c. 500k plus) delivered through local government reorganisation
- To be delivered in phases
- Sussex very likely to be on the Devolution Priority Programme (fast-track)

Devolution/LGR Timetable

Devolution	LGR
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government is clear it wants to move quickly – incentives to go early (offers of support) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government to set out terms for unitarisation in January 2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deadline of 10 January 2025 for authorities to opt into the Devolution Priority Programme – cancellation of May 2025 County elections? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interim proposals submitted March 2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government will announce those areas on the DPP by end of January 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final proposals by September 2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commits to Mayoral devolution and elections in May 2026 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New unitaries to be in place by April 2027 or 2028

East Sussex County Council position



On 9 January, ESCC wrote to the Minister of State for Local Government and Devolution to:

- **Request a place on the Devolution Priority Programme**, based on a proposal for a new combined authority for the Sussex area covering the areas of the three upper tier authorities (ESCC, WSCC, and B&HCC)
- Confirm their commitment to developing a proposal for **unitary government in East Sussex** –favouring current boundary to create a ‘continuing authority’
- Invite the Government to **postpone elections in May 2025**, for a year, to enable the proposals for Local Government Reorganisation to be developed and the early implementation of the proposed devolution arrangements
 - HBC, LDC, WDC and EBC objecting to cancellation of elections – RDC is not objecting.

Considerations for Parish and Town Councils



- Ensuring the local voice is heard in shaping the new authority
- Protection of discretionary local services and assets
- Please work with RDC at pace
- Impact on our residents - need to ensure focus on service delivery is maintained during transition
- A year to make decisions... in time for 2026/27 precept
- Local Councils remain uncapped (for now)

Key Messages for Town and Parish Councils

- There is now an inevitability to Devo and LGR, and this is moving at pace. Work with us!
- The emphasis and funding has shifted- need to accelerate devolution and consider how the precept can be used to protect local services.
- Shape of new unitary authorities across Sussex still to be determined - will be statutory consultation. Local identity is important.
- Recognise that this creates uncertainty- at the earliest a new unitary authority would be in place April 2027
- The day-to-day business of RDC continues

Next steps

- The Government will announce those authorities on the Devolution Priority Programme by the end of January
- Rother will receive a letter end of January regarding LGR
- Continue to engage with County and other Districts/Boroughs to agree proposals for the new unitary authority
- Continue to update town and parish councils- we are committed to working together to ensure Rother's voice is heard

Budget 2025/26

Funding Squeezed

- Poor Government Settlement – funding cut of over 5% in real terms, after inflation
- Council tax still capped at 2.99% or £5 (whichever is higher) – DCN bid for £10 ignored
- Government has begun to move funding to social care authorities and from “richer” to more deprived areas
- Will move even more next year and in future – effect on us depends on transitional arrangements

Budget Summary

- Poor Settlement – money re-allocated elsewhere – 3% cut in cash, more in real terms after inflation (over 5%)
- Council Tax Rises by maximum £6.11 (2.99%) to £210.65
- Budget deficit of nearly £1.5 million
- So we are using nearly £1.5 million from reserves – only £2.8m left

Savings/Income Generation

- £1.176m savings/income generation
 - Planning fee increases – Householder application increase from £258 to £528
 - Raises over £400k
 - Car parks
 - De La Warr Pavilion (evenings)
 - New charges at Sidley/rural car parks – controversial!
 - Coach parking
 - Beach huts

Growth

- Growth of £540k
 - Temporary Accommodation £260k
 - Loss of rental income upon lease renewal £108k
 - New Planning Posts
- Also funding for £1000 flat rate pay offer – from April not September
- Proposed move to NJC in 2026

Public Consultation

- Closed 10 January
- By 8 January:
 - Over 1300 responses – a record
- Over 800 objections to charging at Northiam car park
- Majority oppose full 2.99% council tax increase

Timetable

- 20th January – Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- 3rd February – Cabinet
- 27th February – Full Council – includes Council Tax setting
- Mid- March – Bills sent out (2 weeks' notice of Direct Debit)

Feedback, questions & answers