

Report to RALC at its October 2025 from the RALC Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Working Group

The LGR working group were tasked to:

- Consider the impact of LGR on town and parish councils' roles, responsibilities, and resources
- Explore opportunities for collaboration and strengthened local representation
- Communicate key updates or messages to the wider RALC membership

With group Objectives to:

- Review proposals and policy documents relating to LGR
- Identify options for joint working or clustering among town and parish councils, to support communication with the new unitary council(s)
- Develop a response to the government's consultation on options for East Sussex, expected in Winter 2025

Report from the LGR group Oct 2025

It was recognised that there are many unknown factors or aspects of LGR that are beyond the remit of this group and town and parish councils (T&Ps). We do however need to identify what Town & Parish Council's key needs are and to communicate these in the consultation stages of the LGR and to decision makers.

The Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill introduces neighbourhood governance as a statutory duty however what this looks like in practice is unknown.

To summarise the vast array of possible variables at this point the group decided to work with some assumptions to complete scenario-based planning. Key points to consider:

- Boundaries of the unitary council(s) and Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs):

There are scenarios for an East Sussex, ES + Brighton, coastal/rural geographies options in play at this point (29 Aug 2025). The footprint will not be confirmed until government makes its decision, expected at the end of this year. (noted as of 16 Sept 2025 "One East Sussex" has emerged as the proposal for East Sussex).

The future boundaries are not yet known but representation within our current Rother Area is likely to be via both elected members to the primary, with an assumed double the number of current County Councillors, and representation via NAC's.

- Communication: Democratic representation and the number of upper tier councillors will it is assumed decrease with the demise of Districts. Officer numbers may also decrease for the Rother area. We must consider how T&Ps can communicate with the unitary council(s) on local issues, plus the mayor's office. What level of service and method of communication is required? How will Council members and NAC's contribute.
- Decision-making: The implications of the NACs was given consideration. There is a risk these may reduce the role of unitary councillors by duplicating their decision-making powers. All agreed a

preference for the NACs to have voting powers and funding to ensure they have purpose and can act effectively on key issues. The representatives on each NAC must be balanced and appropriate.

It is important to consider how many NACs may cover the existing Rother area and how representation on these may be arranged. The assumption is that the new primary authority will have to limit the number of NACs to maintain a viable and affordable structure. It is assumed that 1 or 2 NACs would be formed to cover the current Rother area and that each NAC would have 1 or 2 T&P Councilors representing the NAC area. This then raises questions about the remit of the NAC and who may be T&P representatives and how they may be appointed.

- In considering what the remit of the NACs may be, it was agreed that if for example there were 2 NAC's in our current area the remit may be better defined by local needs rather than geographic area. The group considered that the difference between needs in urban and rural demands is key and could be the over arching remit for each.

It was also noted that some current wards on the periphery of Towns (or Boroughs) may consider themselves to be more rural than urban, even if they are defined with a current town boundary (or vice versa). Could representation via NACs with a Urban/Rural split run parallel with the Primary Councilors ward boundaries?

- In considering how representatives from T&P Councils may be elected or appointed to a NAC, and have a framework to understand what the local needs are, there will probably have to another layer or forum in which NAC representatives can meet with T&P Councils. Could such a forum be formed in a similar way to RALC and possibly ESALC albeit with a new remit.
- Clustering. The future role of T&P Councils in the LGR is not yet clear. Many of the functions of T&P Councils are and will remain very local but there is opportunity for T&Ps to take on responsibility for more services and or share suppliers. The group considered that boundary changes were unlikely and that local voluntary co-operation in Clusters could be achieved if needed at a local level and would probably not feature in a formal new LGR framework.

Next Steps.

Review & respond to documents:

- Follow ESCC LGR meeting minutes.
- Review the One Sussex proposal.
- Monitor UK Gov statements.
- Respond to consultations.

Meetings.

The next meeting to be in Early Oct prior to the RALC Oct meeting.

We will invite representatives from Rother District Council and ESCC to attend the working group meetings to sense check and contribute to the group's LGR review