



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP
*Secretary of State for Housing, Communities &
Local Government*
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Leaders of councils in Sussex
By email

25 March 2026

Dear Leaders,

Thank you for your continued efforts to deliver new unitary councils in East Sussex and Brighton and Hove and West Sussex. I very much appreciate the efforts you have made to develop proposals in your areas to the ambitious timescale we set out for this programme. This Government is undertaking the biggest reform of local government in a generation, ending the two-tier system and replacing it with new single-tier unitary councils. This agenda is key to this government's vision of local councils that deliver good services for residents and are equipped to drive economic growth, while empowering their communities.

I am writing to let you know that, after carefully considering the four proposals I received for reorganisation across East Sussex and Brighton and Hove, and West Sussex, I cannot currently give you a decision on which, if any, proposal in your areas will be taken forward at this time. I have outlined the reasons for this below, along with the next steps to progress reorganisation in your areas.

On the five unitary, pan-Sussex proposal from Brighton and Hove City Council, I very much recognise the arguments made around the geographies suggested, in particular balancing the distinct urban, rural and coastal communities in the areas. However, I have concerns around the costs associated with implementing this proposal and we are concerned about the disaggregation risks this proposal carries. Specifically, I am particularly concerned about the risk to vulnerable service users as a result of disaggregation during the implementation phase, as there was a lack of joint working on the proposal.

I feel the two unitary proposal for East Sussex and Brighton from East Sussex County Council, Eastbourne Borough Council, Hastings Borough Council, Lewes District Council and Rother District Council has some positive strengths, especially in relation to the service delivery of the new authorities. However, I have significant concerns about keeping Brighton and Hove on its current footprint.

Both my Ministers and I have been forthright in our ambitions to leverage the power of local government reorganisation to support economic growth and design public services that respond to residents. A key component of this is facilitating the growth of smaller cities such as Brighton and Hove. By keeping Brighton and Hove on its current boundaries the two unitary proposal limits opportunity for future economic growth in the city as well as the ability to build new homes there. By binding Brighton and Hove into its current geographies, we limit the city's future potential as a key economic engine on the south coast and do nothing to combat the issue of Brighton and Hove's high affordability ratio. The proposal also fails to adequately address the financial stability of councils, and we understand that this reflects the representations made to the department in your previous submission letters and consultation responses.

In West Sussex, I would like to seek further views to ensure that the proposals reflect the distinct communities and identities in the area, while maintaining balance under the Mayoral Combined Authority. The consultation revealed a concern that the two unitary proposal risks diluting the rural identity and economic profile of areas like Chichester by grouping them with coastal districts. I note that there was also some support from Adur and Worthing for the concept of a coastal unitary which could focus on specific coastal challenges and local needs. I also received representations from other government departments that Chichester should be placed with Horsham as it would be a better fit in terms of needs and demographics, rather than placed with Worthing, Adur and Arun. I would therefore like to understand views on whether there would be appetite for this at a local authority level.

To be clear, I have not reached decisions on which proposal/s, if any, to implement. I am, however, considering modifications that could address my concerns. I have attached an option for potential modification of the proposals to this letter for your consideration. This would see four unitary councils for Sussex and involves modifying the West Sussex proposal for two unitary councils, so Chichester was no longer part of the coastal unitary but was instead part of the inland unitary; and modifying both East Sussex and Brighton and Hove proposals so as to expand Brighton and Hove as requested by Brighton and Hove (and in consequence reducing the size of the East Sussex unitary). These will form the basis of a further technical consultation where I will seek views on the options for potential modification, carried out on a condensed timeline after the local elections.

I do not take this decision lightly and I know that this will be a disappointment given you were expecting decisions. I would like to reassure you that we are still fully committed to delivering reorganisation in your areas with elections in May 2027 and changes coming into effect from April 2028. I fully recognise the need for clarity on the future of local government in East Sussex and Brighton and Hove and West Sussex. My officials will be in touch to support all councils and provide more information on next steps.

I look forward to continuing to work closely with you to deliver the vital improvements that reorganisation can facilitate. I am copying this letter to your Chief Executives, MPs, and the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Steve Reed". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

RT HON STEVE REED OBE MP

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

Map:

Unitary A: Eastbourne, Hastings, Rother, Wealden and remaining parts of Lewes (pop: around 478,000)

Unitary B (coastal): Arun, Adur, Worthing (pop: around 437,000)

Unitary C: Brighton plus following wards and parish from Lewes (as requested) – East Saltdean & Telscombe Cliffs, Peacehaven West, Peacehaven East, Peacehaven North, Falmer Parish (from Kingston ward) (pop: around 308,000)

Unitary D (urban): Crawley, Chichester, Horsham, Mid Sussex (pop: around 537,000)

