

## Sussex & Brighton Combined Authority Consultation - West Sussex County Council Response

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**Question 1:** To what extent do you agree or disagree that establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority over the proposed geography will deliver benefits to the area?

### **Strongly agree**

#### **Why?**

The County Council is pleased that the Government believe Sussex has the right geography for successful and effective devolution and strongly agrees that it will bring benefits to the area. The proposed Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) is an exciting opportunity and will bring valuable funding and new local decision-making powers from central government to our area, which will enable local leaders to make plans for and deliver on economic growth, jobs, skills, health, planning, and transport for Sussex at a strategic level across an area of economic importance and potential.

A MCCA for Sussex will empower local leaders and communities and provide much-needed, long-term investment. We have seen how other regions of the country have benefitted from the mayoral model which brings local people and places together, and we would like to Sussex benefit from the same opportunities. The mayor will have a seat at the Nations, Regions, and Mayoral councils, providing the valuable opportunity to feed into national policy making, acting as the champion for our area, giving Sussex a much more effective voice in the national agenda.

West Sussex is the largest component of the Sussex geography, in terms of geographic areas, population and economy.

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**Question 2:** To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed governance arrangements for the Mayoral Combined County Authority?

### **Neither agree nor disagree**

#### **Why?**

The County Council supports the majority of the proposed governance arrangements set out in the Consultation as these meet the Council's expectations having previously been set out in the White Paper. There are two components which the Council cannot support which are the proposed number of representatives that each constituent council will be allocated as constituent members and the proposed name.

The Council does not support each constituent council being allocated two constituent members due to the expected population disparity between the component authorities. Assuming that the constituent authorities remain as they are the proposed allocation massively overrepresents Brighton and Hove (population 279,600) and underrepresents West Sussex (900,900). This would create a democratic imbalance of some significance. We propose that the allocation should better reflect population ratios, as Government has previously proposed for Greater Essex and Hampshire and Solent. A more proportionate allocation would be for West Sussex to have three members, East Sussex (pop 555,500) two members, and Brighton and Hove one member.

As well as having a much larger population, West Sussex has a substantially larger economy than our Sussex devolution partners, with a GVA of £26.7 billion in 2022, whilst Brighton and Hove had a GVA of £11.3 billion, and East Sussex having a GVA of £10.7 billion. The GVA of West Sussex represents 7.95% of the South East region's economy and 1.38% of England's economy.

Mechanisms should be put in place that ensure that future constituent authority member allocations following Local Government Reorganisation in Sussex reflect population ratios.

The Council also does not support the proposed name. The area covered by the MCCA is Sussex, of which the three constituent authorities are all part both historically and geographically. The proposal suggests that Brighton and Sussex are different or separate places. They are not. Also, there is no basis or rationale to single out not just one part of the area, but one of the constituent Members. To do so risks disenfranchising and diminishing the status of other larger and more populous key areas in Sussex and undermining joint working. The fact is that the area covered by the MCCA is Sussex and there is no basis for specifying particular areas of the Constituent Authorities. We strongly believe the name of the MCCA should be Sussex.

The proposed name also risks unnecessary confusion between the Mayor of the MCCA and the established position of Mayor of Brighton and Hove due to the similar titles.

Clarity is also sought in relation to transitional arrangements. The Consultation document sets out that functions will be transferring from local authorities and detailed confirmation is needed about exact changes so we can ensure they are appropriate and practical and ensure clarity of responsibilities and accountabilities. This is particularly important in relation to staff, funding streams, partnership arrangements and contracts.

Confirmation is also sought in relation to how the costs of establishing the MCCA will be met.

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**Question 3:** To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined County Authority will support the economy of the area?

**Strongly agree**

**Why?**

The Council strongly agrees that the MCCA will support the economy of Sussex and would welcome the MCCA playing a key role in attracting investment into Sussex and supporting business growth. This could support new businesses across Sussex to grow and succeed. This could be particularly impactful in Sussex given the importance of Gatwick Airport, now likely to expand, and Newhaven and Shoreham ports.

Transport links are currently a barrier to growth across Sussex and is an area that the new authority would be well placed to improve. New transport powers would enable better strategic input into improving transport plans to help people to commute and travel around Sussex. The region would also benefit through the authority building a stronger and more formal relationship with National Highways, given the key strategic roads which cross Sussex, including the congested A27 which hampers local growth and business efficiency.

The Council welcomes the proposed devolution of skills powers and funding as it will allow Sussex to tailor the training and support for adults to reflect local priorities and to meet local

business needs, particularly in locally significant sectors such as manufacturing, digital and creative industries, and agriculture.

The West Sussex economy, the largest within the proposed Sussex geography, with a GVA of £26.7 billion in 2022, represents 7.95% of the South East region's economy and 1.38% of England's economy.

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**Question 4:** To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined County Authority will improve social outcomes in the area?

**Strongly agree**

**Why?**

The Council strongly agrees that the MCCA will improve social outcomes across Sussex. The MCCA will be in an excellent position to support a stronger, inclusive, and more accessible local economy and to strengthen local communities, which will result in better social outcomes for residents across the very diverse geography of Sussex. In particular, as set out under question 3, the MCCA will support local economic growth, improve access to better paid jobs through improving transport across Sussex as well as ensuring that residents have access to the skills they need to benefit from local opportunities and that businesses benefit from the availability of a more suitably skilled workforce.

High housing costs and a lack of access to affordable housing is recognised as being a problem in Sussex. The use of Spatial Development Strategy, to support the building of new homes where they are needed, across the county, will have a positive impact on social outcomes.

The new bespoke duty of a MCCA in relation to health improvement and health inequalities, combined with the mayor's role as a convener of local services, will help to drive better social outcomes for residents when coordinated with the existing responsibilities of the upper tier councils.

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**Question 5:** To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through a Mayoral Combined County Authority will improve local government services in the area?

**Strongly agree**

**Why?**

The Council strongly agrees that a MCCA will improve local government services in Sussex.

The Council welcomes the important role for mayors, as set out in the White Paper, of aligning and helping to join up disparate local public bodies. Although many local services are already aligned within the boundaries of the proposed Sussex authority, the mayor will play a pivotal role in ensuring that they deliver services to local people in a collaborative, coherent and joined up manner, through providing strategic leadership and shared objectives.

This role could be achieved through providing place-based leadership, such as through sitting on, and eventually chairing existing bodies such as the Integrated Care Partnerships,

particularly important given the new bespoke duty in relation to health improvement and health inequalities, and also through setting out the strategic priorities for the area, allowing other bodies to tailor their own local priorities appropriately.

The mayor will fulfil a key role in championing local services and flag local pressures and challenges through engagement with Government and other regional leaders across the country. Through the mayor having a seat at the Councils of the Nations and Regions, they will provide a strong voice for Sussex when feeding into national policy development.

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**Question 6:** To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through a Mayoral Combined County Authority will improve the local natural environment and overall national environment?

**Strongly agree**

**Why?**

The County Council strongly agrees that the MCCA will improve the local and overall national environment through working across the Sussex geography.

Sussex enjoys vibrant and diverse natural environments and includes most of the South Downs National Park (SDNP), as well as the Chichester Harbour and the High Weald National Landscapes, and The Living Coast, the only UNESCO designated urban biosphere in the UK. The SDNPA, given its planning role, will be well placed to be a non-constituent member once the MCCA has been established, supporting the Strategic Authority to play a crucial role in preparing for the future and tackling climate change and natural emergencies at the local and regional level.

There is already good cross-boundary working across Sussex when it comes to natural environment matters but the MCCA will provide an opportunity to further strengthen it. The two Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) for Sussex are being prepared in a coordinated manner, with shared stakeholder engagement, commissioning of evidence and mapping. This work, along with other areas of work centred on the natural environment, is supported by the Sussex Local Nature Partnership, which already operates across the proposed MCCA area.

This reflects the reality that natural environment matters are not constrained by administrative boundaries (e.g. the High Weald National Landscape covers significant parts of both East and West Sussex and the South Down National Park an even wider area). Given this level of cross-boundary working, the strategic planning and coordination roles of an MCCA can enhance work across Sussex on the natural environment. It should ensure that investment is directed to priority areas/projects, and we would hope to see that the MCCA could be a key player when it comes to implementing aspects of the two LNRSs.

The Council welcomes the Government's ambition for mayors to play a leadership role on Local Nature Recovery Strategies and wider environmental delivery. Mayors will be well placed to convene partnerships, help coordinate action, funding, and investment in nature recovery and wider environmental delivery across their areas, and monitoring and reporting on delivery.

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**Question 7:** To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined County Authority will support the interests and needs of local communities and reflect local identities?

**Strongly agree**

**Why?**

The County Council strongly agrees that the MCCA, operating across a Sussex geography, will support the interests and needs of local communities and reflect local identities.

The Sussex geography is easily recognisable by local communities and reflects a well-established local identity. The area enjoys a long-shared history, having its origins as one of the heptarchy kingdoms in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. It celebrates its unique culture and history each year on Sussex Day (16 June), has its own flag, flower (round-headed rampion) and anthem (Sussex by the Sea). It is an area of small county towns, larger urban and coastal developments and extensive rural communities extending from the sea to the fringes of the capital. Economic patterns across the area are accordingly varied.

Sussex is therefore a diverse place, reflected in the nature of the land, geology, history, demography, economies, and traditions. The differences as well as the similarities and common priorities will need to be celebrated and recognised. Experience and learning from elsewhere, as well as the councils' experience of working together and with Sussex partners on joint issues, demonstrates it can be done but it will need close attention and effort both in creating the MCCA and how it, especially the Mayor, operates.

This will be a key success measure for the MCCA, and the Mayor in particular given the large and differing geography across Sussex which already has a strong sense of the separate identities of East Sussex and West Sussex and the City.

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