



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 in West Sussex

By email

16 July 2026

Dear Leaders,

Thank you for your continued work to deliver local government reorganisation in West Sussex. This Government is delivering the most ambitious programme of local government reform in a generation, replacing the inefficient two-tier system with new unitary councils so that all parts of our country can access strong services, and are ready for devolution. We need to devolve power out of Whitehall so that we can rebalance wealth, power and opportunity across our country. But devolution must be built on strong local councils that can deliver good public services, support growth, and remain closely connected to the communities they serve.

Following the closure of the further consultation on 15 June, I have sought to carefully consider all proposals, including the potential modification to the two unitary proposal, against the criteria set out in the invitation letter of 5 February last year, alongside the responses to both the initial consultation and the further consultation on potential modifications, representations made, and all other relevant information.

I have not decided which proposal, if any, to implement at this time in West Sussex. I have received additional representations after the close of the consultation as well as updated financial information and it is only right that these are given full consideration. Unfortunately, this means that I am unable to make a decision at this time, as I need further time to scrutinise the additional materials.

I recognise that this will be disappointing news. This is not a position I have taken lightly. Local government reorganisation is a fundamental change that will affect residents for generations to come, so it is absolutely imperative that we make the right decisions. We remain absolutely committed to delivering reorganisation in West Sussex. I would like to thank you for your efforts to date to prioritise the best outcomes for your residents.

I can update you that for East Sussex and Brighton and Hove I have decided to move forward with the implementation of the potential modification to the two unitary proposal that will result in an expanded unitary council for Brighton and Hove and a unitary council for East Sussex minus four wards from Lewes District Council. With regard to the five unitary option, the cost implications and potential disruption to public services due to the scale of change put forward have led me to conclude that this option did not meet the criteria. I also had concerns that the proposed councils could be less resilient than the current structures.

Next steps

We will continue considering the material and aim to make a decision on which option, if any, to implement, with or without modification, in October at the latest. This will still allow elections to new councils in May 2027 before they go live in April 2028 and will not have an impact on plans for wider devolution in the area.

A broad support offer is in place for councils, including support to councils through our sector advisors and through funding to the Local Government Association for an enhanced support offer. We have already announced £63m in capacity funding to support the reorganisation process, and I am pleased to provide further detail today on how this funding will be allocated.

Of the £63 million capacity funding, as well as the unprecedented £900,000 transition support to each new unitary already announced, we are also committing up to £150,000 per each new unitary as supplementary funding for Leadership Capacity and Continuity in Children's Services, Adult Social Care and Public Health. This is part of a wider package of support worth up to £10m for children's services, adult's social care and public health leadership, which will also fund targeted development, mentoring and peer support for current, new and aspiring leaders.

In addition, up to £1m of funding overall will be available to support the small number of areas with complex fire and rescue authority transitions.

Taken together, this means that areas undergoing local government reorganisation will receive more than £1 million per new unitary created. This is the first time reorganisation has been supported in this way and shows this Government is committed to supporting councils to get these reforms right. We will confirm details of these allocations in due course.

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, the chair of the Sussex and Brighton Strategic Authority and the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Steve Reed". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underneath the name.

RT HON STEVE REED OBE MP

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government