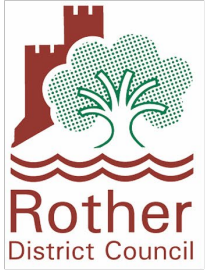


Rother District Council – All Colleague Briefing 19 March 2025



Agenda

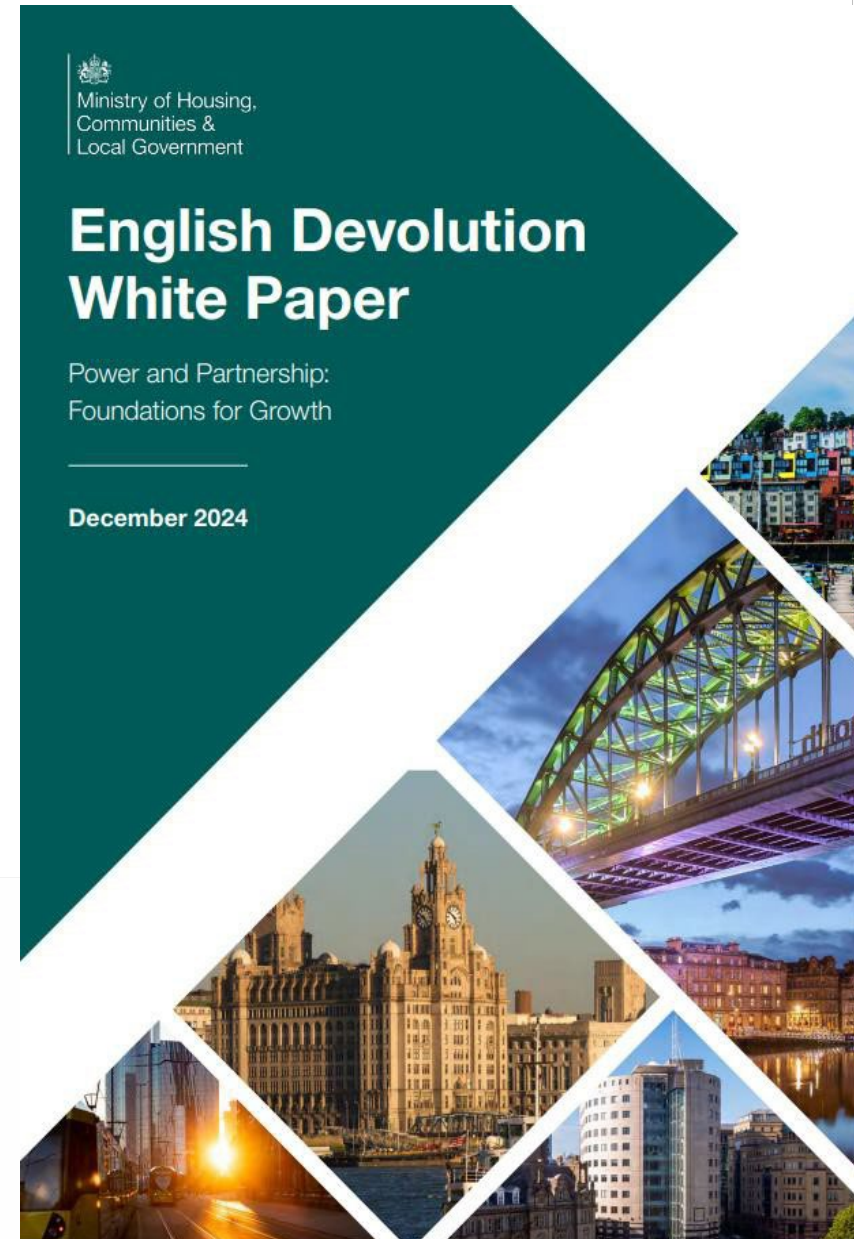


Number	Item
1	Welcome
2	<p>Update on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and Devolution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interim Plan for LGR• Consultation and engagement on Devolution• Next steps
3	Colleague Survey Update
4	Feedback, questions and answers

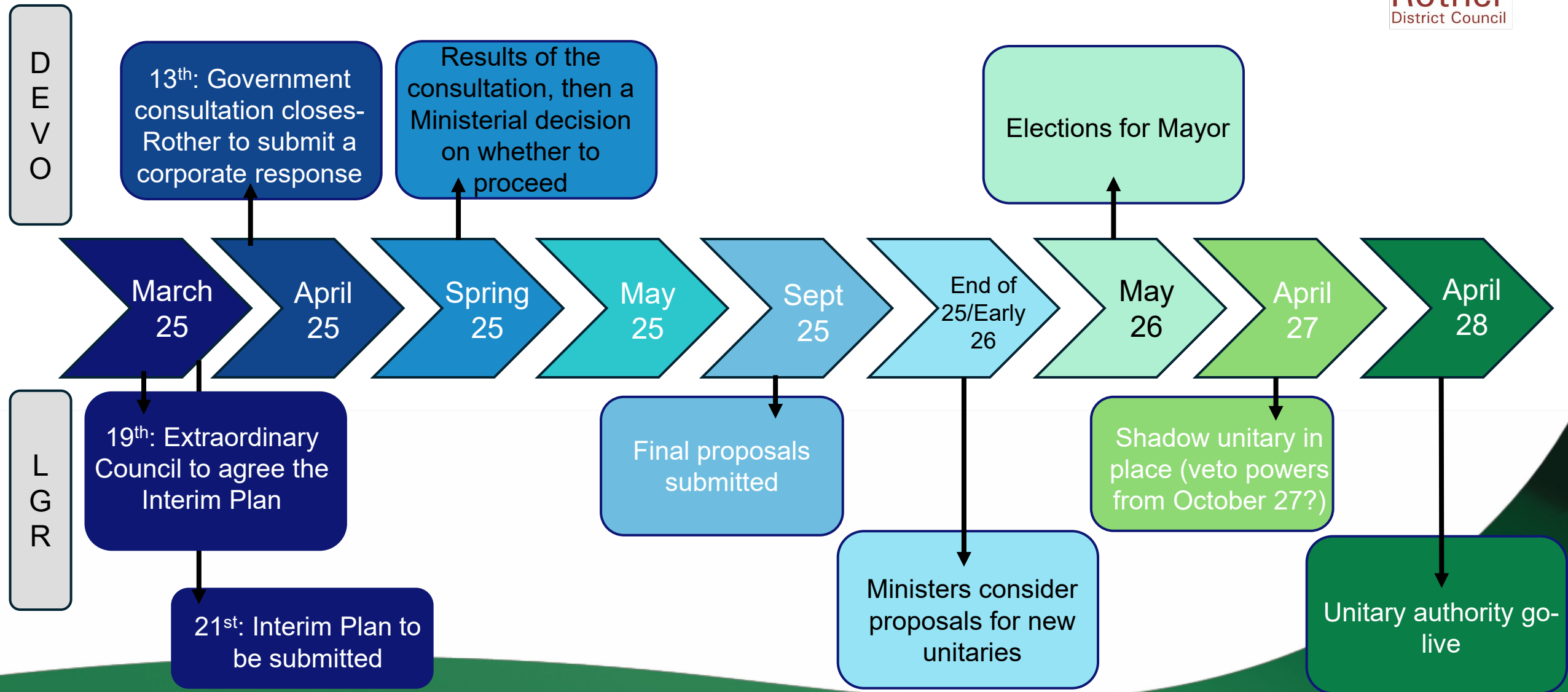
Update on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and Devolution

Devolution White Paper

- English Devolution White Paper published 16 December – outlined plans for devolution and LGR:
 - Devolution – Establishing regional strategic authorities, each with an elected Mayor. These will cover populations of at least 1.5 million.
 - LGR – Replacing two-tier local government with unitary authorities. These will cover populations of at least 500,000.



Timeline for Devolution and LGR



Invitation for LGR

- 5 February: Statutory invitation from Jim McMahon for local government reorganisation (Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007)
- “simpler, more sustainable, local structures, alongside transfer of power from Westminster”
- Inviting the Leader to work with other Council Leaders to develop proposals for local government reorganisation- in two stages:
 - Interim Plan (due 21 March)
 - Final proposals (due 26 September)



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Jim McMahon OBE MP
Minister of State for Local Government and
English Devolution
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Your reference:
Our reference:

To: Leaders of two-tier councils and
unitary council in East Sussex
East Sussex County Council
Eastbourne Borough Council
Hastings Borough Council
Lewes District Council
Rother District Council
Wealden District Council
Brighton and Hove City Council

5 February 2025

Dear Leaders

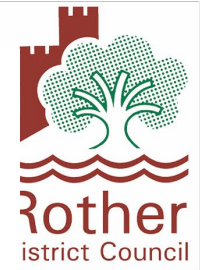
This Government has been clear on our vision for simpler, more sustainable, local government structures, alongside a transfer of power out of Westminster through devolution. We know that councils of all political stripes are in crisis after a decade of decline and instability. Indeed, a record number of councils asked the government for support this year to help them set their budgets.

This new government will not waste this opportunity to build empowered, simplified, resilient and sustainable local government for your area that will increase value for money for council taxpayers. Local leaders are central to our mission to deliver change for hard-working people in every corner of the country through our Plan for Change, and our councils are doing everything they can to stay afloat and provide for their communities day in, day out. The Government will work closely with you to deliver these aims to the most ambitious timeline.

I am writing to you now to formally invite you to work with other council leaders in your area to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation, and to set out further detail on the criteria, guidance for the development of proposals, and the timeline for this process. A formal invitation with guidance for the development of your proposals is attached at Annex A. This invitation sets out the criteria against which proposals will be assessed.

Developing proposals for reorganisation

We expect there to be different views on the best structures for an area, and indeed there may be merits to a variety of approaches. Nevertheless, it is not in council taxpayers' interest to devote public funds and your valuable time and effort into the development of multiple proposals which unnecessarily fragment services, compete against one another, require lengthy implementation periods or which do not sufficiently address local interests and identities.



Development of the Interim Plan (1)

- Deadline for submissions is on or before 21 March 2025
- Should set out progress in line with criteria and guidance
- Expectation is one interim plan jointly submitted by all councils in an area – it should set out:
 - Barriers and challenges.
 - Options for size and boundaries.
 - Indicative costs – including planning for future service transformation opportunities
 - Councillor numbers – effective democratic representation balances needs of towns, rural and coastal areas (in line with LGBCE guidance).
 - Explain how structures support devo.
 - Summarise local engagement, views expressed and further local engagement plan.
 - Indicative costs of preparing proposals, implementation team.
 - Set out voluntary arrangements to keep all councils involved in discussions.
- The Interim Plan sets out a proposal for a single unitary authority on the existing East Sussex boundary.

Development of the Interim Plan (2)

- Policy Officers group commissioned by Chief Executives to coordinate the Plan, reporting back to CEXs and Leaders
- Developed in coordination with Hastings BC, Wealden DC, Lewes DC, Eastbourne BC, ESCC
- Signed off by Leaders on 10 March for reports to Council
- Sign-off by Council (but final plan to be signed off by Cabinet)

Key Principles

1. Improves outcomes for residents and communities
2. Maximises and makes best use of resources now and for the future
3. Is Member led and developed in collaboration with a range of stakeholders, including public sector partners, business and VCSE
4. Supports the staff in all councils as they are crucial to delivery during transition and beyond
5. Enhances local democracy, local identity, transparency, accessibility, local decision making and accountability (including through scrutiny)
6. Supports and drives decision making and public service reform at both Sussex and local level
7. Provides a stronger and unified voice to help attract investment and tackle priorities

Our agreed approach

1. Collaborate whilst respecting corporate roles, responsibilities and risk of the current authorities
2. Best interests of whole area
3. Evidence led
4. Learn from others' experience of LGR and Devo
5. Decisions made until vesting day have future Council as a consideration
6. Transparency over resources
7. Commitment to appropriate levels of decision-making
8. Robust scrutiny
9. Comprehensive workforce plan
10. Date for shadow authority April 2027, new unitary authority from April 2028

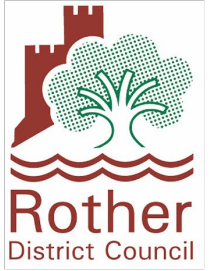
Next steps on LGR

- Council decision on Interim Plan – 19 March (limited opportunity for change)
- Letter to Minister 21 March
- Workstreams to be set out – some background work/scoping is already underway
- 26th March Cabinet awayday to establish Rother's priorities and ensure we are able to deliver LGR
- Strong engagement with colleagues and stakeholders will continue
- Deadline for final proposal 26th Sept- continue to engage with East Sussex Leaders and Chiefs to finalise

Devolution - Government Consultation

- Government is leading a consultation on views for the proposed Mayoral Combined County Authority for the local government areas of East Sussex, West Sussex, and Brighton
- Runs until 13 April
- Colleagues can participate: [Sussex and Brighton Devolution Consultation](#)
- RDC to submit a corporate response- stakeholders and Members have been sent a survey
- Outcome of consultation will inform Ministerial decision on whether to proceed – expected Spring 25

Proposals for the Mayoral Authority



- Geography to cover Sussex and Brighton
- 6 constituent members (Mayor and 2 representatives from each unitary council)
- Constituent members will be decision-makers
- Receive devolved funding from central government, including for:
 - Housing and regeneration
 - Local growth
 - Adult skills (except apprenticeships)
 - Local transport



Update on Colleague Survey 2024

Colleague survey Nov 2024 - High level messages

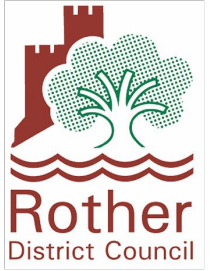
Positives to build on:

1. High level of colleague and managerial support
2. Colleagues feel they are treated with respect and are safe
3. Clarity of role, skills and provision of necessary resources
4. Alignment of individual and organisational values
5. General job and skills satisfaction

Concerns to address:

1. Low colleague advocacy (40% agree would recommend RDC as an employer, 24% disagree)
2. Lack of confidence that action will be taken as a result of colleague survey
3. Lack of clarity about progression and development
4. Senior managers perceived as out of touch with issues and well-being
5. Poor perception of pay and benefits

Action plan



Priority areas to address, following CMT and team action planning:

- 1) **Building Trust** – clarity about priorities, leadership and management roles and responsibilities, consistent colleague experience
- 2) **Improving communication** – regular updates, two-way feedback
- 3) **Making colleagues proud to work for Rother DC** – improving benefits and colleague experience at work (supporting wellbeing)
- 4) **Improving the working environment** – improving Amherst Rd, Town Hall, Villas – link with flexible/agile working

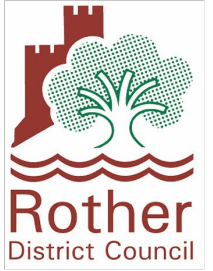
Respect

Open

Outcomes

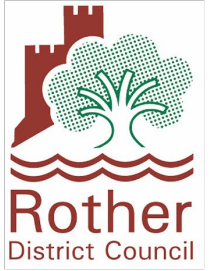
Together

What we have done



- ✓ CMT action plans developed with teams and discussed at Managers forum 29th January
- ✓ Listened to colleagues and Unison to agree new elements in the 2025 pay award; move to **NJC pay awards from April 2026** agreed by full council in February
- ✓ Agreed to create a **Colleague Engagement Group**
- ✓ Reshaped the management structure, and meetings schedule, to ensure clear roles and improved **two-way communication**
- ✓ Increasing Senior Management visibility
- ✓ Updated structures in MS Teams – helping communication/clarity of roles
- ✓ Developing a **Wellbeing Survey** with Unison
- ✓ Updated **Service plan template** to increase focus on people and development – expectation that Team Charters support wellbeing and a consistent approach to flexible/agile working
- ✓ Reviewed **People Strategy priorities** for 2025/26
- ✓ **Facilities – £300k investment to Refurbish Villas buildings**; create new breakout area with outside seating space; replace lift in Amherst; refresh 3rd floor Amherst

What we have planned



- Regular short surveys on key topics – wellbeing is a priority
- Regular updates on Local Government Reorganisation
- Further engagement on Flexible /Agile working –
 - Team Charter/Agreement reviews;
 - Management review of workspace requirements
 - Exploring a system for scheduling and booking on-site activity
- Improving People/HR Policies and systems
- Seeking feedback on colleague benefits
- Implement Easit sustainable transport network benefit scheme
- Improved facilities



Feedback, question & answer session