

Report to	South Downs National Park Authority
Date	27 March 2025
By	Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer and Planning Policy Manager
Title of Report	Responses to the Devolution Priority Programme Consultations
Decision	

Recommendation: The Authority is recommended to

- 1. Note the consultations on Establishing Mayoral Combined County Authority across East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton and Hove (Appendix 1) and across Hampshire, Portsmouth, Isle of Wight and Southampton (Appendix 2) and the Devolution Framework Summary (Appendix 3);**
- 2. Receive and consider the draft consultation response (Appendix 4) for both Sussex and Brighton and Hampshire and the Solent; and,**
- 3. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chair of the Authority, to finalise the Authority's responses, taking into account any comments of the Authority, and to submit the responses to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government**

I. Introduction

- 1.1** On 16 December 2024 the Government set out its plans for devolution and local government reorganisation across England in the English Devolution White Paper. Local authorities across England were invited to express their interest in being included in the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP), which would see devolution progress at pace in areas accepted into the programme.
- 1.2** East and West Sussex County Councils, Brighton and Hove City Council, Hampshire County Council, Portsmouth and Southampton City Councils, and Isle of Wight Council all submitted expressions of interest in joining the DPP and were subsequently accepted into the programme.
- 1.3** The Government opened public consultations on devolution in these areas on 17 February 2025. The purpose of this report is to summarise the proposals contained in the consultations as they relate to Sussex and Brighton (**Appendix 1**) and Hampshire and the Solent (**Appendix 2**) and to recommend the Authority response to these consultations (**Appendix 4**).
- 1.4** The Devolution proposals are not expected to directly impact the powers or legal status of the South Downs National Park Authority or its role as the local planning authority for the National Park area. Devolution is likely to impact the Authority's operations and, in particular, its extensive partnership working with local authorities in and around the National Park. This will be further impacted in the future by local government reorganisation which is also likely to have other impacts, including on the Membership of the National Park

Authority. However, this report focusses solely on devolution on the responses to the consultations.

- 1.5 The Devolution proposals present an opportunity for the Authority to strengthen its relationships with the new strategic bodies and better influence strategic policies in the area.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1 All of the Partnership Management Plan outcomes are partly dependent on local authorities meeting their statutory duty to seek to further the purposes of the National Park. Examples include management of local authority owned land for nature recovery, climate action and public access and enjoyment (Outcomes 1-3 and 8); supporting cultural and visitor attractions through economic development activities (Outcome 4); managing public rights of way and supporting bus provision (Outcome 5); building in outdoor learning to education curriculums (Outcome 6); recognising the health benefits of access to the National Park in Public Health Authority decisions (Outcome 7) and exercising statutory functions such as environmental health, flood management, housing and transport to support National Park communities and regulate any adverse impacts (Outcomes 9 and 10).

3. Introduction to the Devolution Proposals

- 3.1 The Devolution Priority Programme consultations were launched on 17 February 2025 with a deadline for responses by **13 April 2025**. The consultations relate to six areas which propose to establish mayoral combined authorities or mayoral combined county authorities as part of the government's commitment to widen devolution. The ones relevant to the South Downs National Park are Sussex and Brighton, and Hampshire and the Solent.
- 3.2 For both Sussex and Brighton, and Hampshire and the Solent the Government is consulting on the establishment of Mayoral Combined County Authorities. Combined County Authorities are organisations made up of a group of upper-tier councils who work together in a structured way and take decisions over a wider area footprint, with powers and responsibilities being held by that Combined County Authority. Combined County Authorities do not replace the councils in the area, who will continue to deliver statutory functions. A Combined County Authority can be led by a directly elected Mayor. This is then known as a Mayoral Combined County Authority.
- 3.3 Government will take a decision on whether to proceed with the necessary implementing legislation after considering responses to these consultations and whether a series of statutory tests have been met. Further details on this are set out in section 1.4 of the consultations.
- 3.4 If a decision is taken to proceed, and providing councils consent, the next stage is for ministers to make secondary legislation establishing the Combined County Authority and providing for the election of a Mayor on 7 May 2026 for a 4-year term. The Mayor for the area would then also represent the area on the Council of Nations and Regions and the Mayoral Council to represent the area at a national level.
- 3.5 It should be noted that there are separate proposals for local government reorganisation to replace district and county councils in two-tier areas with unitary authorities. Councils have been asked to submit interim proposals to Government by 21 March 2025 and final proposals by 26 September 2025. Local government reorganisation is not part of the devolution consultations.

Sussex and Brighton

- 3.6 The consultation seeks views on the proposal to form a Mayoral Combined County Authority for the local government areas of East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council, and Brighton and Hove City Council, to be known as the 'Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority'. This follows a submission to Government by the Leaders of those Councils to be considered as a priority ahead of such authorities being rolled out to the rest of England.
- 3.7 Membership of the Sussex and Brighton Mayoral Combined County Authority:

- East and West Sussex County Councils and Brighton and Hove City Council would be the constituent councils of the proposed Combined County Authority. They would each appoint two representatives to be constituent members, together with nominated substitutes.
- The Mayor would be a constituent member of the Combined County Authority, and exercise the mayoral functions outlined in the Devolution Framework on behalf of the Combined County Authority. The Mayor would be required to appoint a deputy Mayor from among the constituent members to act in their absence or if the office of the mayor is vacant, and would be permitted to appoint a maximum of one political advisor.
- The constituent members would be able to appoint a maximum of six non-constituent and associate members to support the delivery of their work programme. Non-constituent members are representatives of an organisation; for example, a district council, local NHS trust, the Police and Crime Commissioner, or a local registered provider. Associate members are named individuals who can provide particular experience or expertise – for example, on active travel, or local businesses.

Hampshire and the Solent

- 3.8 The consultation seeks views on the proposal for a Mayoral Combined County Authority over the local authority areas of Hampshire County Council, Isle of Wight Council, Portsmouth City Council, and Southampton City Council, to be known as the ‘Hampshire and the Solent Combined County Authority’. As with Sussex, this follows a submission to Government by the Leaders of those Councils to be considered as a priority ahead of such authorities being rolled out to the rest of England.
- 3.9 Membership of the Hampshire and the Solent Mayoral Combined County Authority:
- Hampshire County Council, Isle of Wight Council, Portsmouth City Council and Southampton City Council would be the constituent councils of the Combined County Authority. Hampshire County Council would appoint two representatives to be constituent members, whilst Isle of Wight Council, Portsmouth City Council and Southampton City Council would each appoint one representative to be constituent members, together with nominated substitutes.
 - The Mayor would be a constituent member of the Combined County Authority, and exercise the mayoral functions outlined in the Devolution Framework on behalf of the Combined County Authority. The Mayor would be required to appoint a deputy Mayor from among the constituent members to act in their absence or if the office of the mayor is vacant, and would be permitted to appoint a maximum of one political advisor.
 - The constituent members would be able to appoint a maximum of five non-constituent and associate members to support the delivery of their work programme. Non-constituent members are representatives of an organisation; for example, a district council, local NHS trust, the Police and Crime Commissioner, or a local registered provider. Associate members are named individuals who can provide particular experience or expertise – for example, on active travel, or local businesses.
- 3.10 Further details on implementing devolution in these areas is set out in section 1.4 of the consultations.
- 4. Combined County Authority Powers and Functions**
- 4.1 Initially, secondary legislation is expected to confer some transport and economic regeneration functions onto the Combined County Authorities. Wider powers would be conferred via the English Devolution Bill as set out in the Devolution Framework Summary (**Appendix 3**) and include:
- **Buses:** They could change the current approach of buses being run by private companies to an enhanced partnership, a franchised system, or bring bus companies back into public ownership.

- **Rail:** The Mayors would have a statutory role in governing, managing, planning, and developing the rail network. They could be given greater control over local rail stations, including regeneration areas around them. They could also work with the Department for Transport to introduce integrated ticketing systems across different forms of transport.
- **Roads:** They would play a key coordination role in the local road network, working with National Highways on the strategic road network and constituent councils on local roads. Responsibility for local roads would remain with the councils, however the Combined County Authorities could introduce schemes such as bike hire, charge for roadworks and would hold a power of direction over key routes to require councils to implement Local Transport Plans.
- **Skills:** They would be able to tailor the training and support for adults in the area to the types of jobs available locally, and to local priorities.
- **Business Support:** They would manage local programmes that provide businesses with support and advice.
- **Environment and Climate Change:** They would be a crucial partner in transitioning Great Britain to a low-cost, clean power energy system by 2030, including implementing the Local Power Plan and Warm Homes Plan, and co-ordinating the zoning of local heat networks. They would play a leadership role in Local Nature Recovery Strategies, through convening partnerships and coordinating action, funding and delivery.
- **Health and Wellbeing:** They would have a legal duty to take into account the need to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities when exercising their powers and functions. Mayors will be considered for the role of chair for the NHS Integrated Care Partnership.
- **Public Safety:** Generally, where devolution geographies align with police force and fire and rescue geographies, Mayors will take on Police and Crime Commissioner and Fire and Rescue Authority responsibilities.
- **Established Mayoral Status:** In time, the Mayoral Combined County Authorities could apply for 'Established Mayoral' Status, which is a deeper level of devolution with additional funding.
- **Housing and strategic planning:** Combined County Authorities would be the main vehicle for reintroducing strategic planning. This would include:
 - The Mayor having the responsibility to develop a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) for agreement by the Combined County Authority. SDS would set strategic policies for the area and distribute housing numbers between local planning authorities, and all subsequent Local Plans would need to be in conformity with the SDS.
 - Once the SDS is in place, the Mayor would also be given powers to 'call in' planning applications of 'strategic importance' for their determination.
 - The Mayor would also receive the ability to charge Mayoral Community Infrastructure Levy to help deliver local infrastructure.
 - The Mayoral Combined County Authority would have a strategic place partnership with Homes England to bring together their respective strengths and resources.
 - The Mayoral Combined County Authority would also have powers to drive regeneration in their area including through establishing Mayoral Development Corporations.

4.2 Further details on powers and functions are set out in section 3 of the consultations and in the Devolution Framework (**Appendix 3**).

5. Funding

- 5.1 The Combined County Authorities would receive devolved funding from central government, including those relating to housing and regeneration; local growth; adult skills (except apprenticeships); and local transport.
- 5.2 In addition, they would receive a 30-year ‘Investment Fund’ from central government (amount to be confirmed in the government’s Spending Review in June 2025); capacity funding to help set up the new organisations; and the ability to introduce a mayoral precept on council tax.
- 5.3 Further details on funding are set out in section 3.1 of the consultations.

6. Governance

- 6.1 The Mayor and the constituent council members would be the decision makers within each Combined County Authority and automatically have voting rights. Non-constituent members can be given voting rights at the discretion of the Combined County Authority; associate members cannot be given voting rights.
- 6.2 To ensure effective scrutiny of decision making and audit of how resources are used, each Combined County Authority would have at least one Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and one Audit Committee, in line with the requirements of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023.
- 6.3 Further details on governance are set out in section 2 of the consultations.

7. Options and cost implications

- 7.1 The Authority is not required to submit responses to the consultations, however, given the significant impact devolution will have on the future of local government in the area in and around the National Park it is considered important that the Authority submit responses.
- 7.2 The draft response to both consultations at **Appendix 4** is the same for both consultations, however, should the Authority feel there are distinct matters for one or both of the consultations that should be addressed in the response, the response can be tailored to address these.
- 7.3 The responses to the consultations do not commit the Authority to undertaking any actions. Should action be open to or required of the Authority in the future the options would be considered at the appropriate time along with any resource and cost implications.
- 7.4 The Authority is asked to note the consultation documentation set out in Appendices 1-3, to receive and consider the draft response set out in **Appendix 4**, and to delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chair of the Authority, to finalise the Authority’s responses, taking into account any comments of the Authority, and to submit the responses to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

8. Next steps

- 8.1 Once agreed, the responses to the consultations will be submitted before the 13 April 2025 deadline.

9. Other implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	No
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	No. Any future actions open to or required of the Authority would be considered at the appropriate time along with resource and cost implications

Implication	Yes*/No
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	It is acknowledged that the processes of devolution and local government reorganisation aim to ensure the best use of public funds an increase value for money. The Authority is equally committed to value for money in the delivery of the National Park purposes and recognises opportunities for improved delivery with the Mayors and the Mayoral Combined County Authorities.
Which PMP Outcomes/ Corporate plan objectives does this deliver against	All, as detailed in section 2.
Links to other projects or partner organisations	All local authorities in and around the National Park. New Forest National Park Authority. MHCLG.
How does this decision contribute to the Authority's climate change objectives	Mayoral Combined County Authorities will have a strategic role in delivering net zero and a transition to clean energy.
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	None directly arising from this report
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	Yes. The Authority notes devolution aims to address some current sources of inequality and that Government will undertake an equalities impact assessment prior to the implementation of new legislation. Local decision making in a variety of areas, including transport, health and wellbeing, public safety, and housing may have positive impacts on those with protected characteristics who live in, work in, or visit the South Downs National Park.
Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal?	None directly arising from this report
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	None directly arising from this report. However, it should be noted that the Mayoral Combined County Authority will play an important role in public safety.
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	None directly arising from this report. However, it should be noted that the Mayoral Combined County Authority will play an important role in health and welfare.
Are there any Data Protection implications?	None directly arising from this report.

10. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

- 10.1 Failure to submit a response to the consultation would mean that the views of the Authority would not be taken into account by the Government.
- 10.2 There are a variety of other risks for the Authority associated with devolution and local government reorganisation, but which are outside of this consultation. These are recorded under Risk 8.1 on the [Authority's Corporate Risk Register](#).

RICHARD SANDIFORD

Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer

South Downs National Park Authority

Contact Officer: Richard Sandiford

Tel: 01730 819357

Email: richard.sandiford@southdowns.gov.uk

Appendices

1. Consultation on Establishing Mayoral Combined County Authority across East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton and Hove.
2. Consultation on Establishing Mayoral Combined County Authority across Hampshire, Portsmouth, Isle of Wight and Southampton.
3. Devolution Framework Summary.
4. Draft Devolution Consultation Response.

SDNPA Consultees

Chief Executive Officer, Director of Landscape and Strategy, Director of Planning; Chief Finance Officer, Head of Finance and Corporate Services, Legal Services.

External Consultees

None

Background Documents

None

CLAIRE TESTER

Planning Policy Manager

Establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority across East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton and Hove

Topic of this consultation:

This consultation seeks views on a proposal to form a Mayoral Combined County Authority for the local government areas of East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council, and Brighton and Hove City Council (referred to as Sussex and Brighton in this consultation).

In December 2024, the government published the [English Devolution White Paper](#). This sets out plans to move power out of Westminster and back to local communities, ensuring that every part of England is covered by devolution. The local council leaders from East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council, and Brighton and Hove City Council have since written to government expressing their interest in taking forward devolution within their area through the establishment of a Mayoral Combined County Authority, with the first election for a Mayor taking place in May 2026. Before taking a decision on whether to proceed with the making of the necessary legislation, the government is seeking views from interested parties, including those who live and work in the area.

Scope of this consultation:

This consultation seeks views, particularly from interested parties, including those who live and work across Sussex and Brighton, on the effect of establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority in the area. It includes questions on the proposed geography and how the Combined County Authority will make decisions, together with questions on the effects of working across this geography through a Mayoral Combined County Authority.

In some parts of the country, there may be proposals for reorganisation of existing councils. This is a separate process and is not covered by this consultation. Further information on this is set out in this document.

Geographical scope:

These proposals only have direct effect within the geographical area covered by the local councils listed above.



Body/bodies responsible for the consultation:

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

Duration:

This consultation will last until 13 April 2025 23:59.

I. Background**I.1 Devolution context**

Through devolution, areas and their local leaders receive more powers, functions and funding to take decisions about local priorities. Currently, over 34 million people – around 61% of the population of England – are covered by a devolution arrangement. However, England remains one of the most centralised countries in the developed world, meaning decisions are too often taken by central government rather than by local leaders.

In December 2024, the government published the [English Devolution White Paper](#), which set out a new Devolution Framework for English devolution which will move power out of Westminster and into the hands of those who know their area best. The White Paper sets out how further devolution to local areas within England can help deliver economic growth and more joined-up delivery of public services, and increase trust in politics.

Devolution can achieve this through enabling more decisions to be taken at a more local level, thereby making it easier to tailor decisions to local needs and priorities; enabling more coordinated action in a place; giving communities a greater say in decisions that affect them; and driving innovation in policy and delivery.

The government's ultimate ambition on devolution is universal coverage across England, with a strong preference for every area to have a Mayor, so that every part of the country can unlock the benefits and opportunities that devolution brings.

I.2 Introduction to Combined County Authorities and Mayors

Combined County Authorities are organisations made up of a group of councils who come together over larger areas that people recognise and work in. They allow councils to work together in a structured way and take decisions over a wider area footprint, with powers and responsibilities being held by that Combined County Authority. Combined County Authorities do not replace the councils in your area – and services such as social care, libraries and education that are provided by the council continue to be provided by the council.

A Combined County Authority can be led by a directly elected Mayor. This is then known as a Mayoral Combined County Authority. The government is supportive of places having Mayors because they have a mandate to take big decisions affecting more people, they have convening power to tackle shared problems, and they are accountable to the local electorate for the decisions they take. Mayors in other parts of the country have become vital local leaders, delivering on the promise of change in their area to drive growth, more joined-up delivery, and earning trust.

I.3 The Devolution Priority Programme

Many parts of the country (such as Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, the East Midlands, York and North Yorkshire, and the West of England) now have Mayoral Combined Authorities or Mayoral Combined County Authorities. London also has a directly elected Mayor and the Greater London Authority. These institutions have received funding, powers and functions in areas like skills,

transport, and housing. However, many parts of the country do not yet have devolution arrangements like this.

In the English Devolution White Paper, the government set out the ambition of delivering devolution to more parts of England, aiming to establish new Combined Authorities or Combined County Authorities that would have Mayors elected in May 2026.

To achieve this, the government has established the Devolution Priority Programme, to provide a fast-track to creating Mayoral Combined Authorities or Mayoral Combined County Authorities for areas ready to come together over sensible geographies which meet the criteria set out in the White Paper. These places will receive the full backing of government to deliver to these ambitious timescales.

In July 2024, the government invited areas currently without devolution arrangements to put forward proposals for how they would like to take on devolution in their area. Following the publication of the White Paper, these areas had the opportunity to seek to join the Devolution Priority Programme. The government received positive responses from a number of different places, and local council leaders of East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council and Brighton and Hove City Council applied to join the Devolution Priority Programme to establish a Mayoral Combined County Authority over the geography of those local councils.

Following an assessment of geography and readiness, the government announced that Sussex and Brighton will be part of the Devolution Priority Programme, along with the five other areas listed below:

- Cumbria (Cumberland Council, Westmorland and Furness Council);
- Cheshire and Warrington (Cheshire East Council, Cheshire West and Chester Council, Warrington Borough Council);
- Hampshire and the Solent (Hampshire County Council, Portsmouth City Council, Isle of Wight Council, Southampton City Council);
- Greater Essex (Essex County Council, Thurrock Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council); and
- Norfolk and Suffolk (Norfolk County Council, Suffolk County Council).

1.4 Implementing devolution in Sussex and Brighton

There is a statutory process that has to be followed to establish a Combined County Authority. This includes a public consultation to seek local views and inform a final decision by government.

The government is minded to establish a Mayoral Combined County Authority for Sussex and Brighton. It will take a decision on whether to proceed with the necessary implementing legislation after considering responses to this consultation and whether a series of statutory tests have been met. In particular, Ministers will need to decide:

- Whether they consider that the establishment of a Combined County Authority in the area is likely to improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of some or all of the people who live or work in the area;
- Whether establishing a Combined County Authority in the area is appropriate, having regard to the need to:
 - secure effective and convenient local government; and,
 - reflect the identities and interests of local communities.

Ministers will also consider all factors in the round when taking the decision on whether to proceed with the necessary implementing legislation, including an equalities impact assessment and an environmental principles policy statement.

If a decision is taken to proceed, and providing councils consent, the next stage is for ministers to make secondary legislation establishing the Combined County Authority and providing for the election of a Mayor. This legislation will also confer some transport and economic regeneration functions onto the Combined County Authority. This will allow the Combined County Authority to begin work on delivering local priorities from day one.

The Mayor for the area would then also represent the area on the Council of Nations and Regions, which includes the Prime Minister, the First Minister of Scotland, the First Minister of Wales, the First and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, and the Mayors of Combined Authorities and Combined County Authorities of England. The Mayor would also represent the area on the Mayoral Council (which includes the Deputy Prime Minister and the Mayors of Combined Authorities and Combined County Authorities of England) to enable the area's voice to be heard at a national level.

If the decision is taken not to proceed, then the Mayoral Combined County Authority would not be established to the timelines of the Devolution Priority Programme. This would mean that the area would not receive the full suite of powers, funding and functions as set out in Section 3 of this consultation, and the area would not be represented on the Council of Nations and Regions. The government will continue to work with local councils on the best devolution approach for their area.

The government will introduce an English Devolution Bill to Parliament in due course. The intention of that Bill is to automatically confer all the powers and functions in the Devolution Framework to the Mayoral Combined County Authority once it is established. Section 3 of this consultation outlines what these functions would be and explains the Devolution Framework.

If the Bill does not receive Royal Assent and its provisions do not come into force, the government intends to bring forward secondary legislation to confer the functions in the Devolution Framework to the Mayoral Combined County Authority.

2. Proposed Institution, Governance and Decision Making Arrangements

2.1 Name and geographic area

It is proposed that a Mayoral Combined County Authority is established over the local authority areas of East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton. The government's proposal is that the Combined County Authority would be formally known as the Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority.

2.2 Membership

Constituent councils

The county councils of East and West Sussex, and Brighton and Hove City Council, would be the constituent councils of the proposed Combined County Authority.

Each council would appoint two representatives to be constituent members. This means that there would be six constituent council members in total. Constituent councils would each be able to appoint the same number of substitute members as they appoint constituent members to act in the absence of their constituent members.

The Mayor

The Combined County Authority would have a Mayor, directly elected by local government electors (which are those eligible to vote in local council elections who are on the electoral register) across the three constituent council areas. The first mayoral election would take place on 7 May 2026. Mayors are typically elected on 4-year terms.

The Mayor would be a constituent member of the Combined County Authority, and exercise the mayoral functions outlined in the Devolution Framework on behalf of the Combined County Authority.

The Mayor would be required to appoint a deputy Mayor from among the constituent members to act in their absence or if the office of the mayor is vacant.

The Mayor would be permitted to appoint a maximum of one political advisor.

Non-constituent and associate members

The Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority's constituent members would be able to appoint a maximum of six non-constituent and associate members to support the delivery of their work programme. Non-constituent members are representatives of an organisation; for example, a district council, local NHS trust, the Police and Crime Commissioner, or a local registered provider. Associate members are named individuals who can provide particular experience or expertise – for example, on active travel, or local businesses.

2.3 Role of district councils

Much of England has two tiers of local government – upper-tier county councils and lower-tier district councils – with responsibility for local services split between the two.

The constituent councils of the proposed Combined County Authority would be the upper tier authorities only. Under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, district councils cannot be full constituent members of a Combined County Authority. However, they could participate as non-constituent members and serve on committees (see section 2.5 on non-constituent members' role in decision-making).

2.4 Combined County Authority powers, functions and funding

The Combined County Authority and its Mayor would have some functions conferred onto them as part of the secondary legislation establishing the Combined County Authority as an institution. These functions would enable them to begin work on delivering local priorities from day one and are expected to include economic development and transport.

The [English Devolution White Paper](#) sets out the government's ambitions for devolution. This includes the powers, functions and funding available to combined county authorities – a summary table is included at Annex A.

The collection of powers, functions and funding is known as the Devolution Framework. The powers, functions and funding of a Combined County Authority vary depending on its governance and maturity. The government's intention would be for the Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority to have the powers, functions and funding set out at the mayoral level of the framework. These functions would give the Combined County Authority and the Mayor greater local control over areas such as transport, adult education and skills, and housing to enable improvements in local connectivity, educational outcomes, economic development, driving economic growth and improved social wellbeing.

The government intends to implement the Devolution Framework via the English Devolution Bill; the functions within it would then automatically be conferred onto any existing Combined County Authority if the Bill receives Royal Assent, and the provisions come into force.

2.5 Decision making at the Combined County Authority

The Combined County Authority's constituent members (the Mayor and the six constituent council members) would be the decision makers within the Combined County Authority. Constituent members would automatically have voting rights. Non-constituent members can be given voting rights at the discretion of the Combined County Authority; associate members cannot be given voting rights.

All members would have a single vote. The default voting arrangement for Combined Authority decisions to be approved would be a simple majority in favour, including the Mayor (i.e. 4 out of 7).

No decisions can be made at a Combined County Authority meeting unless the Mayor (or deputy Mayor) and at least four constituent council members are present.

2.6 Oversight

To ensure effective scrutiny of decision making and audit of how resources are used, the Combined County Authority would have at least one Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and one Audit Committee, in line with the requirements of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023.

Further improvements to accountability and oversight are in development and are included in Section 5 of the English Devolution White Paper ahead of legislation being laid.

2.7 Remuneration

The Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority would approve a scheme for the allowances for constituent members, following consideration of a report from an Independent Remuneration Panel. The Mayor can be paid an allowance as agreed by the constituent council members, also following consideration of a report from an Independent Remuneration Panel.

2.8 Local government reorganisation and its impacts

Councils in this area have been invited to develop proposals for new unitary local government. This would replace the existing two-tier system, where services are split between a county and district councils, and bring these services together in unitary local government, creating opportunities for service transformation which can support improvements in delivery. The aim is to build empowered, simplified, resilient and sustainable local government for your area that will increase value for money for council taxpayers and enable more funding to be spent on local public services.

This process (known as "local government reorganisation") is a separate process to the one in this consultation. On 5 February 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution invited all councils in your area to develop unitary proposals. All councils in your area have been invited to undertake wide engagement before submitting robust and evidenced unitary proposals to government by 26 September. The established assessment and decision making process will then be followed to determine which, if any, of the proposals submitted are to be implemented.

Further information is being made available at [Local government reorganisation: Policy and programme updates - GOV.UK](#)

This local government reorganisation process does not affect the potential establishment of this Combined County Authority or the Mayoral election in May 2026. In due course, if a proposal is implemented, any new unitary councils will become the constituent members of the Combined County Authority and, legally, it will become a Combined Authority. This change does not affect the functions/powers or funding available to the area. The governance and decision making arrangements within the Combined Authority will then be updated to reflect any changes needed.

Legislation has also been made to postpone local council elections from May 2025 to May 2026 in: Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council; Essex County Council and Thurrock Council;

Hampshire County Council and the Isle of Wight Council; East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council. This will allow these councils to deliver both devolution and local government reorganisation to the most ambitious timeline, working toward the first election for the Mayors of the Combined County Authorities in May 2026.

3. What powers would be available

The [English Devolution White Paper](#) sets out the powers, functions and funding for all Combined County Authorities such as the one proposed in this consultation. This is known as the Devolution Framework. The framework is the floor, not the ceiling, of the government's ambitions, which means it will be reviewed regularly to consider whether it can be deepened, with more powers being given to local areas that have a Combined County Authority with a Mayor.

The framework has three tiers – Foundation, Mayoral, and Established Mayoral. If the Mayoral Combined County Authority in this consultation was created, it would be set up at the 'Mayoral' tier. The institution could then progress in the future to the 'Established Mayoral' tier, subject to meeting certain eligibility criteria (see section 2.2.4 of the White Paper). This means that, at the Established Mayoral tier, it would be eligible to receive more powers and funding from central government.

The framework is to be implemented through the English Devolution Bill, subject to its passage through Parliament and receiving Royal Assent. A table summarising the devolution framework is provided in Annex A, and a more detailed summary of what powers, functions and funding the Combined County Authority would receive under that Bill is set out below. For full detail of the powers, functions and funding that the Combined County Authority would receive based on being in the Mayoral tier, please refer to Chapter 3 of the English Devolution White Paper.

3.1 Funding

The below sets out the types of funding available to Mayoral Combined County Authorities.

The Mayoral Combined County Authority would receive devolved funding from central government, including those relating to the following policies:

- Housing and regeneration.
- Local growth.
- Adult skills (except apprenticeships).
- Local transport.

This gives the Mayoral Combined County Authority control over how funding is spent, including to tailor how it is spent to meet local needs in the area. As with all government programmes, the precise programmes that will be devolved (and the amount of funding) will be determined through the Spending Review in June (which is central government's process for setting budgets, which determines which government programmes exist and their funding amount).

However, Mayoral Combined Authorities that were in existence in the Spending Review period 2021-2024 received funding from central government, such as:

- Funding to support housing on brownfield sites in the area.
- Funding for local growth in the area.
- Devolved funding for skills, such as the Adult Skills Fund, which is used to fund education and training for adults aged 19 and above.

- Devolved funding for local transport, such as funding to support maintaining and improving the highways network and funding to support bus services and keep fares down.

In addition, the Mayoral Combined County Authority would receive a 30-year 'Investment Fund' from central government. The amount of this fund would be confirmed at the government's Spending Review in June 2025. However, the parameters of it are:

- It is a flexible fund for local leaders to drive economic growth. The priorities for it are set locally through the Mayoral Combined County Authority – not by central government.
- It is long term, covering a period of 30 years. The intention of this is to give certainty when local leaders (through the Mayoral Combined County Authority) make decisions on investments.
- It is a mix of revenue spending (which can be spent on 'day-to-day' policies like adult skills) and capital spending (which is money spent on investment in policies like housing).

The Mayoral Combined County Authority would also receive capacity funding from central government to help set up the new organisation.

The Mayoral Combined County Authority would have the ability to introduce a mayoral precept on council tax should they choose to do so. This allows the authority to raise money to fund local priorities.

3.2 Transport and local infrastructure

The government believes that high quality transport infrastructure and services support growth and opportunity, and that bringing decisions about transport closer to people is key to improving the transport networks everyone relies on. The Combined County Authority would become the Local Transport Authority for its area, which means it is responsible for public transport services, like buses, instead of local authorities.

Buses and active travel

In many parts of England, bus services have been deregulated since the Transport Act 1985. This means services are run by private bus operators who set the routes, fares, and timetables.

As a Local Transport Authority, the Mayoral Combined County Authority would be empowered (but not required) to change this approach across the whole area in order to improve local bus services. They could decide to pursue:

- An Enhanced Partnership, under which Local Transport Authorities (like the Mayoral Combined County Authority) have more powers to work with bus operators to set a vision for bus services across the whole area and a plan to help achieve these improvements.
- A franchised system, under which the Mayoral Combined County Authority awards contracts for buses in their area (or in specific routes), and these contracts can be used to determine things like routes, timetables, fares and branding. This is the model used in London and introduced recently in Greater Manchester.
- Publicly owned bus companies, which could work alongside either an Enhanced Partnership or a franchised bus system.

The powers for this are set out in the government's Bus Services Bill and more information on the powers available to Local Transport Authorities (such as the Mayoral Combined County Authority) is set out in the [overview of the Bus Services Bill](#).

The Combined County Authority would play an important role in decarbonising transport and reducing the environmental and health impacts of transport. The government would expect the

Combined County Authority to develop plans to decarbonise and reduce air pollution from their local bus fleet, including how and when emissions reductions will be delivered.

Active travel (such as walking, wheeling, and cycling) delivers a range of benefits for people and communities. Active Travel England (which is a central government organisation sponsored by the Department for Transport) would support the Combined County Authority to increase capability and address skill gaps to ensure a consistent approach to safety and accessibility for all users, with a right to request capability assessments for their constituent authorities.

Rail

The government is seeking to put passengers and local communities back at the heart of railways and to protect their interests. The proposed Mayoral Combined County Authority would play an important role in this:

- The Mayor would have a statutory role (meaning a role set out in law) in governing, managing, planning, and developing the rail network. The intention is that the Mayor can use this role to embed the voice of their community in decisions on the rail network. Government will consult on this role ahead of the legislation required.
- If they meet transparent criteria, the Mayor would also be given the option for greater control over local rail stations. Rail stations are generally currently controlled either by central government, through a body known as Network Rail, or by train operating companies. Mayors will be given the option of greater control so they can capitalise on the opportunities in and around rail stations for local people, for economic growth, accessibility, and intermodal connectivity. For example, this might include regenerating the area around the rail station, working to join up different forms of transport, or building homes.
- Engagement with the Department for Transport on its national rail planning processes. This has been trialled with Greater Manchester and West Midlands Combined Authorities already, and is intended to allow local ambitions to be better reflected in national policy.
- The government would work in close collaboration with the Mayoral Combined County Authority to deliver shared ambitions on ticketing. London has shown how ticketing systems that are integrated across different forms of transport can help to get more people onto public transport. The Department for Transport (through an organisation known as Great British Railways) is committed to working in partnership with Mayoral Combined County Authorities to deliver these sorts of ambitions, building on existing 'pay-as-you-go rail pilots' (which are trials that allow passengers to tap in and out of stations using a contactless card or device).

Roads

The Mayoral Combined County Authority would play a key coordination role in the local road network. It would work with National Highways on the strategic road network (which covers motorways and some A roads), and its constituent councils on local roads. Responsibility for local roads would remain with the councils, and not with the Mayoral Combined County Authority.

This includes:

- The Mayoral Combined County Authority would set up and coordinate a 'Key Route Network' (KRN) on behalf of the Mayor. A KRN is a collection of locally important roads – the aim of setting it up is to allow for major roads to be managed in a strategic way, to improve traffic flow, reduce congestion, introduce bus priority, or cycle infrastructure across an area. Mayors would also hold a 'power of direction' over this network to support

delivery of their agreed Local Transport Plan. This means they can require a constituent council to use their road powers in a way that is consistent with the KRN.

- As the Local Transport Authority, the Mayoral Combined County Authority would be empowered to regulate on-street micromobility schemes (like hire bikes), so local areas can shape these schemes around their needs, connect people to public transport, and tackle the problem of badly-parked cycles and e-cycles.
- Subject to a separate consultation, it is proposed that the government will devolve approval of local Lane Rental schemes to Mayoral Combined County Authorities. This would enable constituent councils to charge the companies undertaking roadworks on busy roads at busy times with the aim of minimising disruption by seeking the Mayoral Combined County Authority's approval, rather than the Department for Transport.
- National Highways are committed to formalising and strengthening its relationship with Mayoral Combined County Authorities, which will ensure a more cohesive approach to the management and development of England's strategic road network alongside local roads.

3.3 Skills and employment support

The Mayoral Combined County Authority would receive:

- Devolved adult skills funding and functions from the Department for Education. Adult skills funding is intended to support adults aged over 19 to participate in education and training.
- Devolution of future 'supported employment' funding from the Department for Work and Pensions – which is funding to help disabled people, people with health conditions, and those with more complex barriers to work to find a suitable job and sustain work. It can also be used to help those in work but at risk of falling out of the labour market to retain their job.

These funds would support the Mayoral Combined County Authority to do things like tailor the training and support for adults in the area to the types of jobs available locally, and to local priorities. The government has also committed to giving Mayoral Combined County Authorities a substantive role in co-designing any future national employment support programmes that is additional to the core work done by Jobcentre Plus. The Mayoral Combined County Authority would also be asked to produce a local Get Britain Working Plan for its area, which would be focused on reducing economic inactivity and driving integration between national and local health, work, and skills provision in the area.

The Mayoral Combined County Authority would also take on joint ownership of the Local Skills Improvement Plan model with Employer Representative Bodies. These Plans set the strategic direction for skills provision in the area and could help to facilitate opportunities for 16-19-year-olds to undertake apprenticeships, education and training that lead to good quality employment opportunities.

3.4 Housing and strategic planning

The government is committed to delivering 1.5 million new homes in this Parliament, and Mayoral Combined County Authorities are integral to meeting that commitment:

- The Mayoral Combined County Authority would be given control of funding to support regeneration and housing delivery. As set out in section 3.1, the precise funds and amount would be determined through the next Spending Review. However, as context, Mayoral Combined Authorities that existed in the period 2021 to 2024 received control of funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to support the delivery of housing on brownfield sites.

- The Mayoral Combined County Authority would have a strategic place partnership with Homes England (which is a central government organisation sponsored by the Ministry for Housing, Communities, and Local Government) – a formal partnership arrangement which brings together their respective strengths and resources.
- The Mayoral Combined County Authority would also have powers to drive regeneration in their area. For example, they would have powers to establish Mayoral Development Corporations, which are statutory bodies created to help deliver regeneration schemes. Housing and strategic planning powers are set out in Section 3.5 of the English Devolution White Paper.
- The government has recently announced that, in all parts of the country, groups of councils will be required to work together to develop Spatial Development Strategies (SDS). In this area, that work would be led by the Mayoral Combined County Authority, with the Mayor empowered to develop and propose the SDS. Once an SDS is in place, the Mayor would also be given powers, similar to those held by the Mayor of London, to ‘call in’ planning applications of ‘strategic importance’. These powers will enable Mayors to scrutinise the most significant planning proposals in their area to ensure they support the SDS. The Mayor would also receive the ability to charge new developments (such as developments led by private sector housebuilders) in their area. This is known as a ‘Mayoral Community Infrastructure Levy’ and the revenue collected is used to help deliver local infrastructure.

3.5 Economic development and regeneration

The Mayoral Combined County Authority would play a crucial role in attracting international investment for the area – supporting business to thrive and grow, and creating vibrant places where people want to live and work.

To help achieve this, the Mayoral Combined County Authority would take lead responsibility for managing and focusing local programmes that provide businesses with support and advice on things like introductions to local supply chains or help with starting a new business (known as ‘business support’ programmes). This involves hosting the local Growth Hub, which is part of a national Business Growth Service but can tailor its services to the needs of the local economy and local businesses. The Mayoral Combined County Authority and the Department for Business and Trade would form a strategic partnership to align national and local policymaking. The partnership would also ensure effective delivery of interventions to boost domestic business growth, boost exports, encourage inward investment and grow the co-operative and mutual economy.

To support the Mayoral Combined County Authority to unlock their area’s innovation potential, working in partnership with businesses and universities, there would be stronger direct connections with UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), which is a central government organisation that directs research and innovation funding, funded through the science budget of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.

Given the importance of culture, heritage, sport, and tourism to local economies and communities, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (and its Arm’s Length Bodies, such as Historic England) would explore a deeper, collaborative partnership with the Mayoral Combined County Authority.

3.6 Environment and climate change

Making Britain a clean energy superpower is one of the government’s five defining missions. The decarbonisation journey will support efforts to protect the natural environment and biodiversity. The Mayoral Combined County Authority would be a crucial partner in transitioning Great Britain to a low-cost, clean power energy system by 2030, and in implementing the Warm Homes Plan to save households money on their bills and to reduce the UK’s carbon emissions. The Combined

County Authority would have a role in co-ordinating the zoning of local heat networks, meaning they would play a role in the delivery of heat decarbonisation.

The Combined County Authority would also have a strategic role on net zero including on Great British Energy's Local Power Plan and Warm Homes Plan. In order to provide local, place-based environmental leadership, the Combined County Authority would play a leadership role in Local Nature Recovery Strategies, through convening partnerships and coordinating action, funding and delivery.

3.7 Health, wellbeing, and public service reform

The government believes that Mayoral Combined County Authorities have a key role to play in improving health and wellbeing alongside wider public service reform. To support the Mayoral Combined County Authority to drive a "health in all policies" approach, it would have a new bespoke duty in relation to health improvement and health inequalities. This duty would ensure that the Mayoral Combined County Authority takes into account the need to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities when exercising their powers and functions, giving them a clear stake in improving local health outcomes.

By working with other local leaders, the institution would also be able to bring together local partners to work together on reforming, and driving improvements in, public services. For example, the government has established an expectation that Mayors will be considered for the role of chair for the NHS Integrated Care Partnership. The government would also work with stakeholders in the Mayoral Combined County Authority's area to identify areas to facilitate the alignment of public service boundaries and closer working when there is a clear rationale for doing so, and where the benefits significantly exceed any costs and risks incurred.

3.8 Public safety

The Mayoral Combined County Authority would have an important role to play in achieving the government's Safer Streets Mission, supporting rehabilitation, and reducing reoffending, and in supporting the safety of their residents and the resilience of their communities. This should complement the role local councils play in this area. To deliver this, the government is committed to increasing the number of Mayors who take on Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) responsibilities. Generally, where devolution geographies align with police force and fire and rescue geographies, Mayors would become responsible for exercising PCC and FRA functions.

3.9 Established Mayoral Status

In time, the Mayoral Combined County Authority could apply for 'Established Mayoral' Status, which is a deeper level of devolution – meaning, for example, more powers and funding from central government. If they achieved this status, they would automatically receive the additional powers available at that level, including an Integrated Settlement, which will give the area even greater funding freedom and flexibility. The conditions the Mayoral Combined County Authority would need to meet to become eligible are set out in Section 2.2.4 of the English Devolution White Paper; and the deeper powers available to them are summarised in the fourth column of the table in Annex A of this consultation document.

4. What this means for Sussex and Brighton

4.1 Overview of Sussex and Brighton

Sussex and Brighton has a combined population of around 1.7 million.^[footnote 1] The geographic identity of the region is predominantly rural, but still has numerous and diverse urban centres such as Crawley, Worthing, Horsham and Haywards Heath, the historic town of Lewes, important market towns such as Crowborough and Uckfield, the cathedral city of Chichester and a key cultural and economic hub in the city of Brighton and Hove. There are also the coastal towns of Bognor Regis and Littlehampton, Eastbourne, Bexhill on Sea and Hastings. The area also contains two ports, three universities and two further education college groups.

Sussex and Brighton is rich in natural capital, with East Sussex being one of the most wooded parts of lowland Britain, and prominent natural landscapes such as the High Weald, Ashdown Forest, Pevensey levels, Chichester Harbour and the South Downs National Park. The Living Coast is the only UNESCO designated urban biosphere in the UK covering 390 square km of Sussex Coastline from Newhaven to Shoreham-on-Sea.

Culturally, Sussex and Brighton is renowned as having a unique identity with strong cultural and heritage traditions such as bonfire celebrations, and the Battle of Hastings in 1066. The county has its own unofficial anthem 'Sussex by the Sea' which was adopted by the Royal Sussex Regiment in the First World War. Sussex residents have a strong independence of thought, which led to the motto "we won't be druv" (meaning "we will not be driven").

The region benefits from London Gatwick Airport, and Newhaven and Shoreham Ports. The A27 is a critical east-west route along the south coast, with the A23, A29, A21, A22 and A259 roads connecting coastal towns and cities with the M25 and London.

4.2 Economic and social outlook

Sussex and Brighton contributes more than £48bn Gross Value Added (GVA)^[footnote 2], making it the seventh largest UK economy in terms of total output, and is home to 84,900 registered businesses.^[footnote 3] A particularly economically successful area is the Gatwick Diamond, which stretches from south London to Brighton and is home to 45,000 businesses including 500 international businesses and has an economy of £24bn GVA.^[footnote 4]

The area has strengths in nationally significant sectors such as advanced manufacturing and green energy. For advanced manufacturing, the Manor Business District in Crawley is home to Thales' flagship site - their largest in the UK, from which they have delivered equipment and services to the Ministry of Defence since 1964 and employs around 1600 people.^[footnote 5] West Sussex is also home to Rolls Royce Motor Cars, owned by BMW who have recently announced a £300 million investment in their Goodwood Facility in Chichester. There is also a diverse manufacturing sector in East Sussex, including companies such as Britannia Superfine, TR Fastenings and Servomex Group Limited.

The areas green energy sector is underpinned by the Hydrogen plant at Shoreham Port and Rampion 1 offshore wind farm. A second Rampion 2 offshore wind development is in planning, and has been supported by the Sussex Energy initiative launched in late 2024. The recently launched Sussex Bay scheme brings together organisations, groups and individuals from along the Sussex coastline who want to help care for coastal habitats and aims to generate a £50 million fund for marine and fresh-water restoration projects by 2050.^[footnote 6]

The region has a strong visitor economy with a history going back centuries in places such as Arundel, Battle, Chichester, Hastings and Lewes - it welcomes 62 million visitors annually and the visitor economy in Sussex is worth £5 billion to the UK economy.^[footnote 7] The visitor economy sector is a major employer that supports 74,000 jobs (equivalent to 14% of all employment versus the England average of 11%).^[footnote 8]

Other notable sectors include financial services, with companies such as American Express and Legal & General in Brighton and Hove; and digital and creative, particularly in Brighton where jobs in digital and creative sectors have grown by over 35% since 2015 and at a faster rate than London^[footnote 9] and the city has the highest concentration of gaming companies outside of London.

There are also emerging industries such its wine sector - in 2023 wine made in the region accounted for 28% of the total wine produced in the United Kingdom, and has protected regional status^[footnote 10]. Through the Wine Tourism Growth Plan, the ambition is to grow the wine sector's contribution to tourism to £238m by 2040.^[footnote 11]

Sussex and Brighton has a strong Research and Development (R&D) presence. Elekta employ 800 staff for research and development and production of radiation therapy and radiosurgery-related equipment and clinical management for the treatment of cancer and brain disorders. Two specialists in vacuum technology Kurt J Lesker and Edwards, have their headquarters in St Leonards-on-Sea and Eastbourne. Tech companies such as Universal Quantum Computing and StingRay are drawing investment to the region. Innovation is supported through Crawley's Institute of Technology, the University of Chichester's Technology Park in Bognor Regis and the Sussex Innovation Hub based at the University of Sussex. There is also a planned Science and Technology Park in Burgess Hill.

Nearly 90% of the journeys in Sussex and Brighton start and finish in Sussex and Brighton, which demonstrates the extent to which commuting and other travel patterns are based around this area.^[footnote 12]

However, there are barriers to unlocking the region's potential. GVA per head is £28,264, which is lower than both the south-east (£35,845) and England as a whole (£33,976).^[footnote 13] The region has overall lower productivity than the regional average,^[footnote 14] partly due to a smaller younger population than other areas of England, and also due to the predominance of employment in lower-paid sectors.^[footnote 15]

There is demand for skills in engineering, specialist manufacturing and the growing wine sector, and the existing skills provision has not kept up with this demand.^[footnote 16] There are lower skill levels in the coastal towns and businesses in the smaller towns compete for skilled labour with the cities of Brighton and Hove and London.

Poor intra-regional transport connectivity (especially east-west) limits choices for young people in their education providers, provides a smaller pool of job opportunities and is a potential barrier to housing growth and inward investment.

Sussex and Brighton has experienced high house price growth, leading to higher house prices than the national average,^[footnote 17] impacted by the high construction costs experienced by the South East region as well the demand from people moving to the area.

While the rural parts of Sussex are more prosperous and places like Crawley have high economic activity, significant regional disparities persist, with pockets of deprivation and health inequalities, particularly in coastal communities. This is predominantly driven by access to education, employment, health services and affordable housing.^[footnote 18] For example, compared with England as a whole a higher proportion (18%) of people living in coastal communities within West Sussex report that they are "not in good health".^[footnote 19]

4.3 Working across Sussex and Brighton

All three local councils currently share a Visit England accredited Local Visitor Economy Partnership overseeing a new 10-year Strategy for Growth. Sussex Chambers of Commerce collaborate with all three local authorities, partners and business to deliver a shared Local Skills Improvement Plan.

The area is already covered by a single police force, Sussex Police, and Police and Crime Commissioner, and the NHS Sussex Integrated Care Board.

4.4 How devolution could impact Sussex and Brighton

Based on the powers and funding available, as set out in Section 3, a Mayoral Combined County Authority across the proposed geography could have the following impacts:

- **Transport** - New transport powers, including through the Mayoral Combined County Authority becoming the Local Transport Authority, could make it easier for people to commute and travel around Sussex and Brighton. On buses, the Mayoral Combined County Authority could decide to pursue opportunities across the whole area such as a single 'enhanced partnership' or 'bus franchising'. This could improve public transport provision and enable more people to access a wider pool of job opportunities. This could be particularly impactful in Sussex and Brighton given the percentage of journeys that start and finish in Sussex and Brighton and the need to improve east-west connectivity. Given the key strategic roads that go through Sussex and Brighton, a stronger, more formal relationship with National Highways could be particularly beneficial.
- **Skills** - The skills powers and funding available could allow the Mayoral Combined County Authority to tailor the training and support for adults in the area to the types of jobs available locally and to local priorities. This could help ensure local skills provision meets the demand in sectors such as manufacturing, digital and creative.
- **Housing** – The funding and powers available to deliver new housing across the Mayoral Combined County Authority geography could help address issues around housing affordability.
- **Economic development** – The Mayoral Combined County Authority would play a key role in attracting investment into Sussex and Brighton and supporting business growth. This could support areas such as the Gatwick Diamond, and could support new businesses across Sussex and Brighton to grow and succeed. This could be particularly impactful in Sussex and Brighton given the importance of Gatwick Airport and Newhaven and Shoreham ports.
- **Environment and climate change** – A strong role for the Mayoral Combined County Authority, such as playing a leading role in local nature recovery strategies, could help maximise the benefits from Sussex and Brighton's natural environment. As a partner in the government's energy and climate change ambitions, the Mayoral Combined County Authority could also help the UK to meet its clean energy mission. This could include supporting the area's strong green energy sector.
- **Health, wellbeing and public service reform** – The Mayoral Combined County Authority could play a key role in improving health and wellbeing, underpinned by a new bespoke duty in relation to health improvement and health inequalities. This would mean that the Mayoral Combined County Authority would need to have regard to the need to improve health, and reduce health inequalities, in the exercise of its functions. Combined with an expectation that the Mayor would be appointed to the Integrated Care Partnership in the area, this could help strengthen the focus and increase the join up of action to address issues around ill health and inequalities across the area, for example in coastal communities.
- **Representation** – The Mayor would take a seat at the Prime Minister's Council of Nations and Regions as well as the Deputy Prime Minister's Mayoral Council, which would give the area a stronger voice with the government. Sussex and Brighton would be one of the first parts of the South East of England to be represented.

Establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority across Hampshire, Portsmouth, Isle of Wight and Southampton

Topic of this consultation:

This consultation seeks views on a proposal to form a Mayoral Combined County Authority for the local government areas in Hampshire County Council, Portsmouth City Council, Isle of Wight Council, and Southampton City Council (referred to as Hampshire and the Solent in this consultation).

In December 2024, the government published the [English Devolution White Paper](#). This sets out plans to move power out of Westminster and back to local communities, ensuring that every part of England is covered by devolution. The local council leaders from Hampshire County Council, Portsmouth City Council, Isle of Wight Council, and Southampton City Council have since written to government expressing their interest in taking forward devolution within their area through the establishment of a Mayoral Combined County Authority, with the first election for a Mayor taking place in May 2026. Before taking a decision on whether to proceed with the making of the necessary legislation, the government is seeking views from interested parties, including those who live and work in the area.

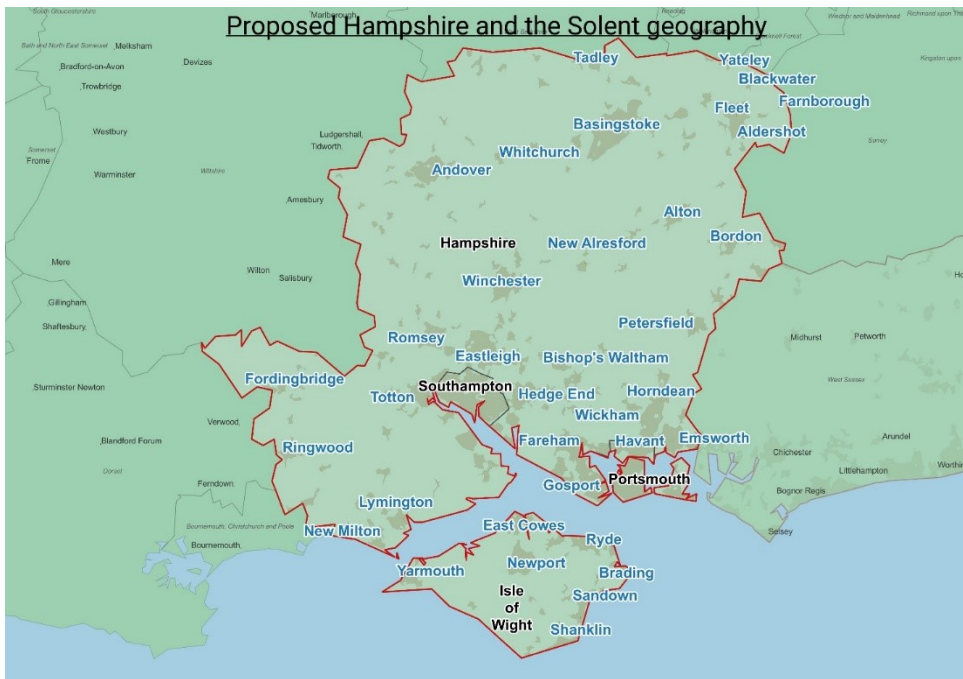
Scope of this consultation:

This consultation seeks views, particularly from interested parties, including those who live and work across Hampshire and the Solent, on the effect of establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority in the area. It includes questions on the proposed geography and how the Combined County Authority will make decisions, together with questions on the effects of working across this geography through a Mayoral Combined County Authority.

In some parts of the country, there may be proposals for reorganisation of existing councils. This is a separate process and is not covered by this consultation. Further information on this is set out in this document.

Geographical scope:

These proposals only have direct effect within the geographical area covered by the local councils listed above.



Body/bodies responsible for the consultation:

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

Duration:

This consultation will last until 13 April 2025 23:59.

I. Background**I.1 Devolution context**

Through devolution, areas and their local leaders receive more powers, functions and funding to take decisions about local priorities. Currently, over 34 million people – around 61% of the population of England – are covered by a devolution arrangement. However, England remains one of the most centralised countries in the developed world, meaning decisions are too often taken by central government rather than by local leaders.

In December 2024, the government published the [English Devolution White Paper](#), which set out a new Devolution Framework for English devolution which will move power out of Westminster and into the hands of those who know their area best. The White Paper sets out how further devolution to local areas within England can help deliver economic growth and more joined-up delivery of public services, and increase trust in politics.

Devolution can achieve this through enabling more decisions to be taken at a more local level, thereby making it easier to tailor decisions to local needs and priorities; enabling more coordinated action in a place; giving communities a greater say in decisions that affect them; and driving innovation in policy and delivery.

The government's ultimate ambition on devolution is universal coverage across England, with a strong preference for every area to have a Mayor, so that every part of the country can unlock the benefits and opportunities that devolution brings.

I.2 Introduction to Combined County Authorities and Mayors

Combined County Authorities are organisations made up of a group of councils who come together over larger areas that people recognise and work in. They allow councils to work together in a structured way and take decisions over a wider area footprint, with powers and responsibilities being held by that Combined County Authority. Combined County Authorities do not replace the councils in your area – and services such as social care, libraries and education that are provided by the council continue to be provided by the council.

A Combined County Authority can be led by a directly elected Mayor. This is then known as a Mayoral Combined County Authority. The government is supportive of places having Mayors because they have a mandate to take big decisions affecting more people, they have convening power to tackle shared problems, and they are accountable to the local electorate for the decisions they take. Mayors in other parts of the country have become vital local leaders, delivering on the promise of change in their area to drive growth, more joined-up delivery, and earning trust.

I.3 The Devolution Priority Programme

Many parts of the country (such as Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, the East Midlands, York and North Yorkshire, and the West of England) now have Mayoral Combined Authorities or Mayoral Combined County Authorities. London also has a directly elected Mayor and the Greater London Authority. These institutions have received funding, powers and functions in areas like skills, transport, and housing. However, many parts of the country do not yet have devolution arrangements like this.

In the English Devolution White Paper, the government set out the ambition of delivering devolution to more parts of England, aiming to establish new Combined Authorities or Combined County Authorities that would have Mayors elected in May 2026.

To achieve this, the government has established the Devolution Priority Programme, to provide a fast-track to creating Mayoral Combined Authorities or Mayoral Combined County Authorities for areas ready to come together over sensible geographies which meet the criteria set out in the White Paper. These places will receive the full backing of government to deliver to these ambitious timescales.

In July 2024, the government invited areas currently without devolution arrangements to put forward proposals for how they would like to take on devolution in their area. Following the publication of the White Paper, these areas had the opportunity to seek to join the Devolution Priority Programme. The government received positive responses from a number of different places, and local council leaders of Hampshire County Council, Portsmouth City Council, Isle of Wight Council and Southampton City Council applied to join the Devolution Priority Programme to establish a Mayoral Combined County Authority over the geography of those local councils.

Following an assessment of geography and readiness, the government announced that Hampshire and the Solent will be part of the Devolution Priority Programme, along with the five other areas listed below:

- Cumbria (Cumberland Council, Westmorland and Furness Council);
- Cheshire and Warrington (Cheshire East Council, Cheshire West and Chester Council, Warrington Borough Council);
- Greater Essex (Essex County Council, Thurrock Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council);
- Norfolk and Suffolk (Norfolk County Council, Suffolk County Council); and
- Sussex and Brighton (East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council, Brighton and Hove City Council).

1.4 Implementing devolution in Hampshire and the Solent

There is a statutory process that has to be followed to establish a Combined County Authority. This includes a public consultation to seek local views and inform a final decision by government.

The government is minded to establish a Mayoral Combined County Authority for Hampshire and the Solent. It will take a decision on whether to proceed with the necessary implementing legislation after considering responses to this consultation and whether a series of statutory tests have been met. In particular, Ministers will need to decide:

- Whether they consider that the establishment of a Combined County Authority in the area is likely to improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of some or all of the people who live or work in the area;
- Whether establishing a Combined County Authority in the area is appropriate, having regard to the need to:
 - secure effective and convenient local government; and,
 - reflect the identities and interests of local communities.

Ministers will also consider all factors in the round when taking the decision on whether to proceed with the necessary implementing legislation, including an equalities impact assessment and an environmental principles policy statement.

If a decision is taken to proceed, and providing councils consent, the next stage is for ministers to make secondary legislation establishing the Combined County Authority and providing for the election of a Mayor. This legislation will also confer some transport and economic regeneration functions onto the Combined County Authority. This will allow the Combined County Authority to begin work on delivering local priorities from day one.

The Mayor for the area would then also represent the area on the Council of Nations and Regions, which includes the Prime Minister, the First Minister of Scotland, the First Minister of Wales, the First and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, and the Mayors of Combined Authorities and Combined County Authorities of England. The Mayor would also represent the area on the Mayoral Council (which includes the Deputy Prime Minister and the Mayors of Combined Authorities and Combined County Authorities of England) to enable the area's voice to be heard at a national level.

If the decision is taken not to proceed, then the Mayoral Combined County Authority would not be established to the timelines of the Devolution Priority Programme. This would mean that the area would not receive the full suite of powers, funding and functions as set out in Section 3 of this consultation, and the area would not be represented on the Council of Nations and Regions. The government will continue to work with local councils on the best devolution approach for their area.

The government will introduce an English Devolution Bill to Parliament in due course. The intention of that Bill is to automatically confer all the powers and functions in the Devolution Framework to the Mayoral Combined County Authority once it is established. Section 3 of this consultation outlines what these functions would be and explains the Devolution Framework.

If the Bill does not receive Royal Assent and its provisions do not come into force, the government intends to bring forward secondary legislation to confer the functions in the Devolution Framework to the Mayoral Combined County Authority.

2. Proposed Institution, Governance and Decision Making Arrangements

2.1 Name and geographic area

It is proposed that a Mayoral Combined County Authority is established over the local authority areas of Hampshire County Council, Isle of Wight Council, Portsmouth City Council, and Southampton City Council. The government's proposal is that the Combined County Authority would be formally known as Hampshire and the Solent Combined County Authority.

2.2 Membership

Constituent councils

The councils of Hampshire County Council, Isle of Wight Council, Portsmouth City Council and Southampton City Council would be the constituent councils of the proposed Combined County Authority. Hampshire County Council would appoint two representatives to be constituent members, whilst Isle of Wight Council, Portsmouth City Council and Southampton City Council would each appoint one representative to be constituent members. This means that there would be five constituent council members in total. Constituent councils would each be able to appoint the same number of substitute members as they appoint constituent members to act in the absence of their constituent members.

The Mayor

The Combined County Authority would have a Mayor, directly elected by local government electors (which are those eligible to vote in local council elections who are on the electoral register) across

the four constituent council areas. The first mayoral election would take place on 7 May 2026. Mayors are typically elected on 4-year terms.

The Mayor would be a constituent member of the Combined County Authority, and exercise the mayoral functions outlined in the Devolution Framework on behalf of the Combined County Authority.

The Mayor would be required to appoint a deputy Mayor from among the constituent members to act in their absence or if the office of the Mayor is vacant.

The Mayor would be permitted to appoint a maximum of one political advisor.

Non-constituent and associate members

Hampshire and the Solent Combined County Authority's constituent members would be able to appoint a maximum of 5 non-constituent and associate members to support the delivery of their work programme. Non-constituent members are representatives of an organisation; for example, a district council, local NHS trust, the Police and Crime Commissioner, or a local registered provider. Associate members are named individuals who can provide particular experience or expertise – for example, on active travel, or local businesses.

2.3 Role of district councils

Much of England has two tiers of local government – upper-tier county councils and lower-tier district councils – with responsibility for local services split between the two.

The constituent councils of the proposed Combined County Authority would be the upper tier authorities only. Under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, district councils cannot be full constituent members of a Combined County Authority. However, they could participate as non-constituent members and serve on committees (see section 2.5 on non-constituent members' role in decision-making).

2.4 Combined County Authority powers, functions and funding

The Combined County Authority and its Mayor would have some functions conferred onto them as part of the secondary legislation establishing the Combined County Authority as an institution. These functions would enable them to begin work on delivering local priorities from day one and are expected to include economic development and transport.

The [English Devolution White Paper](#) sets out the government's ambitions for devolution. This includes the powers, functions and funding available to combined county authorities – a summary table is included at Annex A.

The collection of powers, functions and funding is known as the Devolution Framework. The powers, functions and funding of a Combined County Authority vary depending on its governance and maturity. The government's intention would be for Hampshire and the Solent Combined County Authority to have the powers, functions and funding set out at the mayoral level of the framework. These functions would give the Combined County Authority and the Mayor greater local control over areas such as transport, adult education and skills, and housing to enable improvements in local connectivity, educational outcomes, economic development, driving economic growth and improved social wellbeing.

The government intends to implement the Devolution Framework via the English Devolution Bill; the functions within it would then automatically be conferred onto any established Combined County Authority if the Bill receives Royal Assent, and the provisions come into force.

2.5 Decision making at the Combined County Authority

The Combined County Authority's constituent members (the Mayor and five constituent council members) would be the decision makers within the Combined County Authority. Constituent members would automatically have voting rights. Non-constituent members can be given voting rights at the discretion of the Combined County Authority; associate members cannot be given voting rights.

All members would have a single vote. The default voting arrangement for Combined County Authority decisions to be approved a simple majority in favour, including the Mayor (i.e. 4 out of 6 including the Mayor).

No decisions can be made at a Combined County Authority meeting unless the Mayor (or deputy Mayor) and at least four constituent council members are present.

2.6 Oversight

To ensure effective scrutiny of decision making and audit of how resources are used, the Combined County Authority would have at least one Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and one Audit Committee, in line with the requirements of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023.

Further improvements to accountability and oversight are in development and are included in Section 5 of the English Devolution White Paper ahead of legislation being laid.

2.7 Remuneration

Hampshire and the Solent Combined County Authority would approve a scheme for the allowances for constituent members, following consideration of a report from an Independent Remuneration Panel. The Mayor can be paid an allowance as agreed by the constituent council members, also following consideration of a report from an Independent Remuneration Panel.

2.8 Local government reorganisation and its impacts

Councils in this area have been invited to develop proposals for new unitary local government. This would replace the existing two-tier system, where services are split between a county and district council, and bring these services together in unitary local government, creating opportunities for service transformation which can support improvements in delivery. The aim is to build empowered, simplified, resilient and sustainable local government for your area that will increase value for money for council taxpayers and enable more funding to be spent on local public services.

This process (known as "local government reorganisation") is a separate process to the one in this consultation. On 5 February 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution invited all councils in your area to develop unitary proposals. All councils in your area have been invited to undertake wide engagement before submitting robust and evidenced unitary proposals to government by 26 September. The established assessment and decision making process will then be followed to determine which, if any, of the proposals submitted are to be implemented.

Further information is being made available at [Local government reorganisation: Policy and programme updates - GOV.UK](#)

This local government reorganisation process does not affect the potential establishment of this Combined County Authority or the Mayoral election in May 2026. In due course, if a local government reorganisation proposal is implemented, any new unitary councils will become the constituent members of the Combined County Authority and, legally, it will become a Combined Authority. This change would not affect the powers, functions, or funding available to the area. The governance and decision-making arrangements within the Combined Authority will then be updated to reflect any changes needed.

Legislation has also been made to postpone local council elections from May 2025 to May 2026 in: Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council; Essex County Council and Thurrock Council; Hampshire County Council and the Isle of Wight Council; East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council. This will allow these councils to deliver both devolution and local government reorganisation to the most ambitious timeline, working toward the first election for the Mayors of the Combined County Authorities in May 2026.

3. What powers would be available

The [English Devolution White Paper](#) sets out the powers, functions and funding for all Combined County Authorities such as the one proposed in this consultation. This is known as the Devolution Framework. The framework is the floor, not the ceiling, of the government's ambitions, which means it will be reviewed regularly to consider whether it can be deepened, with more powers being given to local areas that have a Combined County Authority with a Mayor.

The framework has 3 tiers – Foundation, Mayoral, and Established Mayoral. If the Mayoral Combined County Authority in this consultation was created, it would be set up at the 'Mayoral' tier. The institution could then progress in the future to the 'Established Mayoral' tier, subject to meeting certain eligibility criteria (see section 2.2.4 of the White Paper). This means that, at the Established Mayoral tier, it would be eligible to receive more powers and funding from central government.

The framework is to be implemented through the English Devolution Bill, subject to its passage through Parliament and receiving Royal Assent. A table summarising the devolution framework is provided in Annex A, and a more detailed summary of what powers, functions and funding the Combined County Authority would receive under that Bill is set out below. For full detail of the powers, functions and funding that the Combined County Authority would receive based on being in the Mayoral tier, please refer to Chapter 3 of the English Devolution White Paper.

3.1 Funding

The below sets out the types of funding available to Mayoral Combined County Authorities.

The Mayoral Combined County Authority would receive devolved funding from central government, including those relating to the following policies:

- Housing and regeneration.
- Local growth.
- Adult skills (except apprenticeships).
- Local transport.

This gives the Mayoral Combined County Authority control over how funding is spent, including to tailor how it is spent to meet local needs in the area. As with all government programmes, the precise programmes that will be devolved (and the amount of funding) will be determined through the Spending Review in June (which is central government's process for setting budgets, which determines which government programmes exist and their funding amount).

However, Mayoral Combined Authorities that were in existence in the Spending Review period 2021-2024 received funding from central government, such as:

- Funding to support housing on brownfield sites in the area.
- Funding for local growth in the area.
- Devolved funding for skills, such as the Adult Skills Fund, which is used to fund education and training for adults aged 19 and above.

- Devolved funding for local transport, such as funding to support maintaining and improving the highways network and funding to support bus services and keep fares down.

In addition, the Mayoral Combined County Authority would receive a 30-year ‘Investment Fund’ from central government. The amount of this fund would be confirmed at the government’s Spending Review in June 2025. However, the parameters of it are:

- It is a flexible fund for local leaders to drive economic growth. The priorities for it are set locally through the Mayoral Combined County Authority – not by central government.
- It is long term, covering a period of 30 years. The intention of this is to give certainty when local leaders (through the Mayoral Combined County Authority) make decisions on investments.
- It is a mix of revenue spending (which can be spent on ‘day-to-day’ policies like adult skills) and capital spending (which is money spent on investment in policies like housing).

The Mayoral Combined County Authority would also receive capacity funding from central government to help set up the new organisation.

The Mayoral Combined County Authority would have the ability to introduce a mayoral precept on council tax should they choose to do so. This allows the authority to raise money to fund local priorities.

3.2 Transport and local infrastructure

The government believes that high quality transport infrastructure and services support growth and opportunity, and that bringing decisions about transport closer to people is key to improving the transport networks everyone relies on. The Combined County Authority would become the Local Transport Authority for its area, which means it is responsible for public transport services, like buses, instead of local authorities.

Buses and active travel

In many parts of England, bus services have been deregulated since the Transport Act 1985. This means services are run by private bus operators who set the routes, fares, and timetables.

As a Local Transport Authority, the Mayoral Combined County Authority would be empowered (but not required) to change this approach across the whole area in order to improve local bus services. They could decide to pursue:

- An Enhanced Partnership, under which Local Transport Authorities (like the Mayoral Combined County Authority) have more powers to work with bus operators to set a vision for bus services across the whole area and a plan to help achieve these improvements.
- A franchised system, under which the Mayoral Combined County Authority awards contracts for buses in their area (or in specific routes), and these contracts can be used to determine things like routes, timetables, fares and branding. This is the model used in London and introduced recently in Greater Manchester.
- Publicly owned bus companies, which could work alongside either an Enhanced Partnership or a franchised bus system.

The powers for this are set out in the government’s Bus Services Bill and more information on the powers available to Local Transport Authorities (such as the Mayoral Combined County Authority) is set out in the [overview of the Bus Services Bill](#).

The Combined County Authority would play an important role in decarbonising transport and reducing the environmental and health impacts of transport. The government would expect the

Combined County Authority to develop plans to decarbonise and reduce air pollution from their local bus fleet, including how and when emissions reductions will be delivered.

Active travel (such as walking, wheeling, and cycling) delivers a range of benefits for people and communities. Active Travel England (which is a central government organisation sponsored by the Department for Transport) would support the Combined County Authority to increase capability and address skill gaps to ensure a consistent approach to safety and accessibility for all users, with a right to request capability assessments for their constituent authorities.

Rail

The government is seeking to put passengers and local communities back at the heart of railways and to protect their interests. The proposed Mayoral Combined County Authority would play an important role in this:

- The Mayor would have a statutory role (meaning a role set out in law) in governing, managing, planning, and developing the rail network. The intention is that the Mayor can use this role to embed the voice of their community in decisions on the rail network. Government will consult on this role ahead of the legislation required.
- If they meet transparent criteria, the Mayor would also be given the option for greater control over local rail stations. Rail stations are generally currently controlled either by central government, through a body known as Network Rail, or by train operating companies. Mayors will be given the option of greater control so they can capitalise on the opportunities in and around rail stations for local people, for economic growth, accessibility, and intermodal connectivity. For example, this might include regenerating the area around the rail station, working to join up different forms of transport, or building homes.
- Engagement with the Department for Transport on its national rail planning processes. This has been trialled with Greater Manchester and West Midlands Combined Authorities already, and is intended to allow local ambitions to be better reflected in national policy.
- The government would work in close collaboration with the Mayoral Combined County Authority to deliver shared ambitions on ticketing. London has shown how ticketing systems that are integrated across different forms of transport can help to get more people onto public transport. The Department for Transport (through an organisation known as Great British Railways) is committed to working in partnership with Mayoral Combined County Authorities to deliver these sorts of ambitions, building on existing 'pay-as-you-go rail pilots' (which are trials that allow passengers to tap in and out of stations using a contactless card or device).

Roads

The Mayoral Combined County Authority would play a key coordination role in the local road network. It would work with National Highways on the strategic road network (which covers motorways and some A roads), and its constituent councils on local roads. Responsibility for local roads would remain with the councils, and not with the Mayoral Combined County Authority.

This includes:

- The Mayoral Combined County Authority would set up and coordinate a 'Key Route Network' (KRN) on behalf of the Mayor. A KRN is a collection of locally important roads – the aim of setting it up is to allow for major roads to be managed in a strategic way, to improve traffic flow, reduce congestion, introduce bus priority, or cycle infrastructure across an area. Mayors would also hold a 'power of direction' over this network to support

delivery of their agreed Local Transport Plan. This means they can require a constituent council to use their road powers in a way that is consistent with the KRN.

- As the Local Transport Authority, the Mayoral Combined County Authority would be empowered to regulate on-street micromobility schemes (like hire bikes), so local areas can shape these schemes around their needs, connect people to public transport, and tackle the problem of badly-parked cycles and e-cycles.
- Subject to a separate consultation, it is proposed that the government will devolve approval of local Lane Rental schemes to Mayoral Combined County Authorities. This would enable constituent councils to charge the companies undertaking roadworks on busy roads at busy times with the aim of minimising disruption by seeking the Mayoral Combined County Authority's approval, rather than the Department for Transport.
- National Highways are committed to formalising and strengthening its relationship with Mayoral Combined County Authorities, which will ensure a more cohesive approach to the management and development of England's strategic road network alongside local roads.

3.3 Skills and employment support

The Mayoral Combined County Authority would receive:

- Devolved adult skills funding and functions from the Department for Education. Adult skills funding is intended to support adults aged over 19 to participate in education and training.
- Devolution of future 'supported employment' funding from the Department for Work and Pensions – which is funding to help disabled people, people with health conditions, and those with more complex barriers to work to find a suitable job and sustain work. It can also be used to help those in work but at risk of falling out of the labour market to retain their job.

These funds would support the Mayoral Combined County Authority to do things like tailor the training and support for adults in the area to the types of jobs available locally, and to local priorities. The government has also committed to giving Mayoral Combined County Authorities a substantive role in co-designing any future national employment support programmes that is additional to the core work done by Jobcentre Plus. The Mayoral Combined County Authority would also be asked to produce a local Get Britain Working Plan for its area, which would be focused on reducing economic inactivity and driving integration between national and local health, work, and skills provision in the area.

The Mayoral Combined County Authority would also take on joint ownership of the Local Skills Improvement Plan model with Employer Representative Bodies. These Plans set the strategic direction for skills provision in the area and could help to facilitate opportunities for 16-19-year-olds to undertake apprenticeships, education and training that lead to good quality employment opportunities.

3.4 Housing and strategic planning

The government is committed to delivering 1.5 million new homes in this Parliament, and Mayoral Combined County Authorities are integral to meeting that commitment:

- The Mayoral Combined County Authority would be given control of funding to support regeneration and housing delivery. As set out in section 3.1, the precise funds and amount would be determined through the next Spending Review. However, as context, Mayoral Combined Authorities that existed in the period 2021 to 2024 received control of funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to support the delivery of housing on brownfield sites.

- The Mayoral Combined County Authority would have a strategic place partnership with Homes England (which is a central government organisation sponsored by the Ministry for Housing, Communities, and Local Government) – a formal partnership arrangement which brings together their respective strengths and resources.
- The Mayoral Combined County Authority would also have powers to drive regeneration in their area. For example, they would have powers to establish Mayoral Development Corporations, which are statutory bodies created to help deliver regeneration schemes. Housing and strategic planning powers are set out in Section 3.5 of the English Devolution White Paper.
- The government has recently announced that, in all parts of the country, groups of councils will be required to work together to develop Spatial Development Strategies (SDS). In this area, that work would be led by the Mayoral Combined County Authority, with the Mayor empowered to develop and propose the SDS. Once an SDS is in place, the Mayor would also be given powers, similar to those held by the Mayor of London, to ‘call in’ planning applications of ‘strategic importance’. These powers will enable Mayors to scrutinise the most significant planning proposals in their area to ensure they support the SDS. The Mayor would also receive the ability to charge new developments (such as developments led by private sector housebuilders) in their area. This is known as a ‘Mayoral Community Infrastructure Levy’ and the revenue collected is used to help deliver local infrastructure.

3.5 Economic development and regeneration

The Mayoral Combined County Authority would play a crucial role in attracting international investment for the area – supporting business to thrive and grow, and creating vibrant places where people want to live and work.

To help achieve this, the Mayoral Combined County Authority would take lead responsibility for managing and focusing local programmes that provide businesses with support and advice on things like introductions to local supply chains or help with starting a new business (known as ‘business support’ programmes). This involves hosting the local Growth Hub, which is part of a national Business Growth Service but can tailor its services to the needs of the local economy and local businesses. The Mayoral Combined County Authority and the Department for Business and Trade would form a strategic partnership to align national and local policymaking. The partnership would also ensure effective delivery of interventions to boost domestic business growth, boost exports, encourage inward investment and grow the co-operative and mutual economy.

To support the Mayoral Combined County Authority to unlock their area’s innovation potential, working in partnership with businesses and universities, there would be stronger direct connections with UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), which is a central government organisation that directs research and innovation funding, funded through the science budget of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.

Given the importance of culture, heritage, sport, and tourism to local economies and communities, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (and its Arm’s Length Bodies, such as Historic England) would explore a deeper, collaborative partnership with the Mayoral Combined County Authority.

3.6 Environment and climate change

Making Britain a clean energy superpower is one of the government’s five defining missions. The decarbonisation journey will support efforts to protect the natural environment and biodiversity. The Mayoral Combined County Authority would be a crucial partner in transitioning Great Britain to a low-cost, clean power energy system by 2030, and in implementing the Warm Homes Plan to save households money on their bills and to reduce the UK’s carbon emissions. The Combined

County Authority would have a role in co-ordinating the zoning of local heat networks, meaning they would play a role in the delivery of heat decarbonisation.

The Combined County Authority would also have a strategic role on net zero including on Great British Energy's Local Power Plan and Warm Homes Plan. In order to provide local, place-based environmental leadership, the Combined County Authority would play a leadership role in Local Nature Recovery Strategies, through convening partnerships and coordinating action, funding and delivery.

3.7 Health, wellbeing, and public service reform

The government believes that Mayoral Combined County Authorities have a key role to play in improving health and wellbeing alongside wider public service reform. To support the Mayoral Combined County Authority to drive a "health in all policies" approach, it would have a new bespoke duty in relation to health improvement and health inequalities. This duty would ensure that the Mayoral Combined County Authority takes into account the need to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities when exercising their powers and functions, giving them a clear stake in improving local health outcomes.

By working with other local leaders, the institution would also be able to bring together local partners to work together on reforming, and driving improvements in, public services. For example, the government has established an expectation that Mayors will be considered for the role of chair for the NHS Integrated Care Partnership. The government would also work with stakeholders in the Mayoral Combined County Authority's area to identify areas to facilitate the alignment of public service boundaries and closer working when there is a clear rationale for doing so, and where the benefits significantly exceed any costs and risks incurred.

3.8 Public safety

The Mayoral Combined County Authority would have an important role to play in achieving the government's Safer Streets Mission, supporting rehabilitation, and reducing reoffending, and in supporting the safety of their residents and the resilience of their communities. This should complement the role local councils play in this area. To deliver this, the government is committed to increasing the number of Mayors who take on Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) responsibilities. Generally, where devolution geographies align with police force and fire and rescue geographies, Mayors would become responsible for exercising PCC and FRA functions.

3.9 Established Mayoral Status

In time, the Mayoral Combined County Authority could apply for 'Established Mayoral' Status, which is a deeper level of devolution – meaning, for example, more powers and funding from central government. If they achieved this status, they would automatically receive the additional powers available at that level, including an Integrated Settlement, which will give the area even greater funding freedom and flexibility. The conditions the Mayoral Combined County Authority would need to meet to become eligible are set out in Section 2.2.4 of the English Devolution White Paper; and the deeper powers available to them are summarised in the fourth column of the table in Annex A of this consultation document.

4. What this means for Hampshire and the Solent

4.1 Overview of Hampshire and the Solent

Over 2 million people live in Hampshire and the Solent^[footnote 1]. Hampshire is one of the largest English counties, covering 1,400 square miles, much of it rural, with a third of it falling within the

New Forest, the North Wessex Downs or the South Downs. It is a polycentric area with a city, Winchester, the historic capital of England and the county town, and several large towns including Basingstoke, Eastleigh, Fareham, Gosport, Farnborough and Andover. The Solent area, covering the port cities of Portsmouth and Southampton and the scenic Isle of Wight, has 340 miles of coastline and peninsulas.

Hampshire and the Solent is a major gateway to European and global markets, benefitting from a direct highway and rail links to London, as well as international connections through Southampton and Farnborough Airport and the ports of Southampton and Portsmouth. The Solent Freeport is also a major economic opportunity as it seeks to strengthen the area's trading position and develop new trading relationships. Nearly 85% of the journeys in Hampshire and the Solent start and finish in Hampshire and the Solent, which demonstrates the extent to which commuting and other travel patterns are based around this area.^[footnote 2]

The region is home to a number of major development areas delivering significant new and affordable homes across the region. These include developments at Welborne, North Whiteley, Whitehill & Bordon and Manydown, which are all progressing in building new communities and associated infrastructure.

Hampshire and the Solent also share unique environmental assets including the New Forest, South Downs, three areas of outstanding natural beauty and coastal regions which support a successful visitor economy – making Hampshire and the Solent one of the top destinations nationally. In 2023, the visitor economy was estimated to contribute £3.3 billion and employ over 87,000 people^[footnote 3]. For the Isle of Wight alone the visitor economy is worth £470.4 million.^[footnote 4]

4.2 Economic and social outlook

Hampshire and the Solent has a strong and diverse economy, with 90,000 businesses and a Gross Value Added (GVA) of nearly £70 billion a year.^[footnote 5]

A significant asset for the UK economy, there is a great opportunity to drive further economic growth, productivity and innovation.

The maritime sector is one of the Solent's primary sectoral strengths, contributing £7.7 billion GDP (or 25%)^[footnote 6] of total economic output. This includes the Port of Southampton, which supports 45,000 jobs,^[footnote 7] Portsmouth International Port, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, Portsmouth Naval Base, and the National Oceanography Centre. Maritime UK Solent champions the region's world-leading maritime cluster.

Hampshire and the Solent also exhibit considerable strengths in aerospace and defence, with household names such as Airbus, QinetiQ, Boeing and Lockheed Martin. The region is part of the recently launched South East Regional Defence and Security Cluster.

The region supports a rich cultural and creative ecosystem, with high-growth sectors in digital, design, sound, and film, supported by strong cultural infrastructure and heritage with national and international reach, supporting 4,500 businesses and 40,000 jobs contributing £1.5 billion gross value added (GVA).

Alongside Surrey, the region has formed Space South Central, the largest regional space cluster in the UK. Hampshire and the Solent is home to over 130 space-related businesses and is highly active across the whole spectrum of space activity from upstream to downstream, employing thousands of people with businesses including InSpace Missions, Jasat, BAE Systems, and Airbus UK.

In terms of Hampshire and the Solent's energy sector and contribution to the UK's clean energy mission, the ExxonMobil Fawley Refinery in the New Forest and Southampton is important in the efforts to drive sustainable growth, focusing on carbon capture and storage, hydrogen production, and Sustainable Aviation Fuel production. The region recently benefitted from private and public

investment in the Solent Cluster – a collaborative initiative aimed at reducing carbon emissions – and the emerging Sustainable Action Network is supporting businesses across sectors to save energy and support net zero.

The region has a leading knowledge economy, including the four universities of Southampton, Southampton Solent, Portsmouth and Winchester, with well-developed links between academia and industry and a well-developed further education sector delivering vocational and professional skills of the future.

However, the region faces challenges due to variation in productivity levels, economic activity, employment rates and access to affordable housing. Disparities in labour productivity in Hampshire and the Solent are greater than in most other regions in the country. For example, in terms of productivity per hour worked, Rushmoor is the most productive local authority in the country after the City of London.^[footnote 8] On the other hand, the Isle of Wight is ranked 222nd out of 361 local authorities in the country.

In terms of economic inactivity, there are an estimated 222,000 residents in Hampshire and the Solent of working age who were economically inactive in the year to September 2024,^[footnote 9] with significant disparities in economic inactivity rates across the region.

Hampshire and the Solent has a highly skilled labour market compared to national averages, but has increasingly seen labour market and skills shortages in current and future priority sectors - for example in areas such as marine engineering and maritime logistics.^[footnote 10]

4.3 Working across Hampshire and the Solent

The area shares a single police force, the Hampshire and Isle of Wight constabulary, and a Police and Crime Commissioner, as well as a single Fire and Rescue Authority.

Devolution would build on a strong history of joint working across the region including for example on transport and the joint development of the Solent Freeport.

4.4 How devolution could impact Hampshire and the Solent

Based on the powers and funding available, as set out in Section 3, a Mayoral Combined Authority across the proposed geography could have the following impacts:

- **Transport:** New transport powers, including through the Mayoral Combined County Authority becoming the Local Transport Authority, could make it easier for people to commute and travel around Hampshire and the Solent. The Mayoral Combined County Authority could tackle existing transport issues, for example connectivity between the cities and major towns in Hampshire & the Solent, through strategic engagement with Great British Railways and a statutory role for the Mayor in governing, managing, planning and developing the rail network. On buses, the Mayoral Combined County Authority could decide to pursue opportunities across the whole area such as a single ‘enhanced partnership’ or ‘bus franchising’. This could improve public transport provision and enable more people to access a wider pool of job opportunities.
- **Skills:** The skills powers and funding available could allow the Mayoral Combined County Authority to tailor the training and support for adults in the area to the types of jobs available locally and to local priorities. This could help address the skills shortage faced in Hampshire and the Solent and help ensure local skills provision meets the demand in key sectors like aerospace and defence, which could improve job opportunities for local people.
- **Housing:** The funding and powers available to deliver new housing across the Mayoral Combined County Authority geography could help address issues around housing affordability.

- **Economic development:** The Mayoral Combined County Authority would play a key role in attracting investment into Hampshire and the Solent and supporting business growth. This could support growing sectors in, for example, advanced manufacturing and could support new businesses across Hampshire and the Solent to grow and succeed.
- **Environment and climate change:** A strong role for the Mayoral Combined County Authority, such as playing a leading role in local nature recovery strategies, could help maximise the benefits from Hampshire and the Solent's natural environment. As a partner in the government's energy and climate change ambitions, the Mayoral Combined County Authority could also help the UK to meet its clean energy mission, building on the existing work across the area.
- **Health, wellbeing and public service reform:** The Mayoral Combined County Authority could play a key role in improving health and wellbeing, underpinned by a new bespoke duty in relation to health improvement and health inequalities. This would mean that the Mayoral Combined County Authority would need to have regard to the need to improve health, and reduce health inequalities, in the exercise of its functions. Combined with an expectation that the Mayor would be appointed to one or more of the relevant Integrated Care Partnerships in the area, this could help strengthen the focus and increase the join up of action to address issues around ill health and inequalities across the area.
- **Representation:** The Mayor would take a seat at the Prime Minister's Council of Nations and Regions as well as the Deputy Prime Minister's Mayoral Council, which would give the area a stronger voice with the government. Hampshire and the Solent would be one of the first parts of the South East of England to be represented.

Consultation questions

Having considered all of the above, please respond to the following questions. For each question, you can provide the following answers:

- Strongly agree.
- Agree.
- Neither agree nor disagree.
- Disagree.
- Strongly disagree.
- Don't know.
- Prefer not to say.

You will also be invited to explain your answers.

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?

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

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

Next steps

Following the consultation, the Secretary of State will consider all responses and decide whether to establish a Mayoral Combined County Authority. If the Secretary of State decides to proceed, the government will confirm funding (subject to Spending Review) and, provided the constituent councils consent, the necessary secondary legislation will be laid in Parliament. If approved by Parliament, the Combined County Authority would be established in time for the first mayoral election to take place in May 2026.

Devolution Framework Summary

The government intends to implement the Devolution Framework via the English Devolution Bill; the functions within it would then automatically be conferred onto any existing Combined County Authority if the Bill receives Royal Assent, and the provisions come into force.

Key

(**) refers to functions for which funding will be included in Integrated Settlements for Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities

(^) refers to functions which apply to Combined and Combined County Authorities only

Detail	Foundation	Mayoral	Established
Funding and investment			
Access to a multi-departmental, long-term integrated funding settlement**			X
Long-term investment fund, with an agreed annual allocation		X	X
Removal of gateway review from investment fund, after Gateway One complete			X
Ability to introduce mayoral precepting on council tax^		X	X
Consolidation of local growth and place funding in a single pot**	X	X	X
Strategic leadership			
A statutory duty to produce Local Growth Plans		X	X
Membership of the Council of Nations and Regions		X	X
Membership of the Mayoral Data Council		X	X
Transport and local infrastructure			
Local Transport Authority and public transport functions, including bus franchising and responsibility for an area-wide Local Transport Plan	X	X	X
Simplification and consolidation of local transport funding**	X	X	X
Removal of certain Secretary of State consents, e.g. on lane rental schemes		X	X
Duty to establish a Key Route Network on the most important local roads^		X	X
Mayoral Power of Direction over use of constituent authority powers on the Key Route Network^		X	X
Priority for strategic rail engagement (including mayoral partnerships) with Great British Railways	X	X	X

Detail	Foundation	Mayoral	Established
Statutory role in governing, managing, planning, and developing the rail network		X	X
An option for greater control over local rail stations		X	X
A 'right to request' further rail devolution			X
Priority for support to deliver multi-modal ticketing			X
A clear, strategic role in the decarbonisation of the local bus fleet	X	X	X
Active Travel England support for constituent authority capability^	X	X	X
Formal partnership with National Highways		X	X
Skills and employment support			
Joint ownership of the Local Skills Improvement Plan model, with Employer Representative Bodies	X	X	X
Devolution of the core Adult Skills Fund	X		
Devolution of non-apprenticeship adult skills functions through a consolidated skills funding pot**		X	X
Central convening of youth careers provision including greater flexibility for Careers hubs		X	X
A clear role in relation to 16-19 education and training		X	X
Responsibility for developing local Get Britain Working Plans	X	X	X
Devolution of supported employment funding**	X	X	X
Co-design of future employment support that is additional to core Jobcentre Plus provision		X	X
Delegated delivery or commissioning of employment support that is additional to core Jobcentre Plus provision			X
Alignment of Jobcentre Plus boundaries with Strategic Authorities			X
Housing and strategic planning			
A duty to produce a Spatial Development Strategy	X	X	X
Strategic development management powers (once the Spatial Development Strategy is in place)		X	X
Ability to raise a Mayoral Community Infrastructure Levy to fund strategic		X	X

Detail	Foundation	Mayoral	Established
infrastructure (once the Spatial Development Strategy is in place)			
Ability to make Mayoral Development Orders		X	X
Ability to establish Mayoral Development Corporations		X	X
Homes England compulsory purchase powers (held concurrently)	X	X	X
Devolution of wider grant funding to support regeneration and housing delivery**		X	X
Ability to set the strategic direction of any future programme to support affordable housing provision in their area			X
Strategic Place Partnership with Homes England		X	X
Support to establish a public sector land commission			X
Economic development and regeneration			
Partnership working with Department for Science, Industry and Technology and UK Research and Innovation to explore opportunities for closer long-term collaboration in strengthening local research and innovation capacity	X	X	X
Develop joint innovation action plans with Innovate UK to shape long-term strategies and investments		X	X
Embed UK Research and Innovation lead points of contact for enhanced collaborative working on innovation with Mayoral Strategic Authorities that are committed to work collaboratively on innovation		X	X
Responsibility as the accountable body for the delivery of Growth Hubs	X	X	X
Devolution of Growth Hubs funding**			X
A Strategic Partnership with the Department for Business and Trade focused on domestic growth, exports, investment, and delivery of local growth priorities.		X	X
Partnership working with Department for Culture, Media and Sport Arm's Length Bodies to maximise culture, heritage, and sport spending in place	X	X	X
Environment and climate change			

Detail	Foundation	Mayoral	Established
Devolution of retrofit funding this parliament subject to a successful transition period (see 3.7)**			X
Heat network zoning coordination role	X	X	X
Coordinating local energy planning to support development of regional network energy infrastructure	X	X	X
Green jobs and skills coordination role	X	X	X
A strategic role on net zero in collaboration with government, including on Great British Energy's Local Power Plan and Warm Homes Plan	X	X	X
Responsibility for coordinating delivery and monitoring of Local Nature Recovery Strategies^	X	X	X
Health, wellbeing and public service reform			
A bespoke statutory health improvement and health inequalities duty^	X	X	X
Mayors engaged during the Integrated Care Boards chair appointment process		X	X
Mayors as members of local Integrated Care Partnerships, and consideration for position of chair or co-chair		X	X
A role in convening partners and driving cross-cutting public service reform, including looking at areas such as multiple disadvantage	X	X	X
Public safety			
Mayors accountable for the exercise of Police and Crime Commissioner functions where police force and mayoral boundaries align^		X	X
Mayors accountable for the exercise of Fire and Rescue Authority functions where fire and rescue service and mayoral boundaries align		X	X
A clear and defined role in local resilience, working with the Local Resilience Forum to embed resilience into broader policy and delivery^	X	X	X

Consultation Responses

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
- **Agree**
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Please explain your answer.

We agree that the establishment of a Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) has the potential to bring about many benefits for the region, particularly in terms of coordinating the strategic approach to planning, transport and infrastructure, economic growth, and simplified delivery of local government services. We also agree that the proposed area makes sense in terms of size, population, geographic area, and a strong identity across the area. However, it is essential that the unique characteristics and needs of the South Downs National Park (SDNP) are carefully considered in the development of the proposed MCCA.

The SDNP is a nationally significant and iconic landscape, designated as a National Park due to its outstanding natural beauty, wildlife and habitats, and its environmental and cultural importance. Any new local government structures must seek to further the purposes of the SDNP, in line with their duty under section 245 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023. These purposes are:

1. To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area.
2. To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public.

The natural environment is not constrained by administrative boundaries and cross-boundary working and collaboration already takes place between local authorities in the area. We see the proposed MCCA as having the potential to further improve collaborative working across the geographic area, both within and outside of the SDNP, with local authorities and with other protected landscapes to deliver bigger, better, more joined up nature; effective climate mitigation and adaptation; and recognising the importance of this asset for public access and health and wellbeing benefits for people inside and outside the National Park.

The SDNP covers a significant proportion of the area and in order to fully realise the benefits over the proposed geographic area it is important the proposed MCCA does not dilute the voice of the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) in local decision-making. The SDNPA should have a clear and integral role in any strategic decision-making within and around the SDNP.

It is also important to recognise that the SDNP will span two proposed MCCAs. Given the potential risk of conflicting policies on growth, transport, and development and the detrimental impact that

could have on the National Park, we would like to see a clear mechanism in place whereby MCCAs can collaborate to ensure a consistent and joined up approach across the whole area of the SDNP.

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

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Please explain your answer.

We agree there are potential benefits of greater collaboration and strategic leadership across the area and are keen to ensure that the governance of the MCCA impacts positively on the SDNP. We are in general agreement with the proposed governance arrangements, including the direct election of the mayor by residents, the arrangements for constituent members on the MCCA, the general powers and functions as set out in the devolution white paper, and the general decision-making provisions. However, we would like to see a clear mechanism in place which ensures the distinctive needs of the SDNP are appropriately represented at the proposed MCCA.

The SDNP is a unique and protected landscape, with its own set of challenges and opportunities, particularly around nature recovery, climate action, access, and development. A clear mechanism is needed to support the alignment of regional policies with the National Park Management Plan and maintain the strong local voice of the SDNPA in decision-making. We suggest the most effective way to achieve this is by appointing the SDNPA as a non-constituent member with voting rights on the MCCA.

The SDNP is also governed by a distinctive planning framework that supports the protection and enhancement of its natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage. The MCCA and its powers should not undermine this framework but should complement it, ensuring that decisions related to growth, housing, transport and infrastructure, etc. further the purposes of the SDNP and work in harmony with the National Park Management Plan and Local Plan.

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
- Agree

- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Please explain your answer.

We recognise that greater collaboration over a wider geographical area with a clear focus on economic development and growth could bring significant benefits. It is important though that the proposed MCCA consider carefully the particular opportunities and challenges that are presented by protected landscapes within its area with a clear commitment to regenerative tourism and design, addressing local needs for affordable housing, and conserving and enhancing the distinctive nature of the SDNP.

The SDNP is the most visited national park in the UK, attracting millions of visitors each year and making a significant contribution to the local economy, particularly through sectors such as tourism, land management and farming, small-scale enterprises, and public services such as water. The South Downs also make a substantial contribution to the identity of Sussex, its history, landscape, nature, and cultural heritage. The proposed MCCA must be mindful of the needs of the SDNP and be prepared and ready to support and enhance these sectors without compromising the natural and cultural value of the National Park.

It is important that the differing needs of rural and more urbanised areas are recognised and understood. Economic growth should be pursued in close collaboration with the SDNPA to ensure alignment with the National Park Management Plan. We welcome greater joined up thinking across the area of the proposed MCCA on economic growth and transport and infrastructure which has the potential to support improved regional connectivity and sustainable transport links to the SDNP.

We consider it vital that growth in and around the SDNP is both inclusive and environmentally sustainable. Initiatives that encourage the green economy, rural innovation, and sustainable farming and land management practices that promote the protection and enhancement of the landscape and biodiversity are crucial to the long-term economic health of the National Park and its surrounding areas.

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
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Please explain your answer.

We recognise the potential social benefits the proposed MCCA could bring with a broader regional view, particularly in areas such as housing, development of transport and infrastructure, health and wellbeing, and economic regeneration. It is important that the uniqueness of the SDNP and its communities are acknowledged so that social outcomes are not just improved across the broader geography but are sensitive to, and address, unique local needs within the SDNP.

Rural areas within the SDNP often face different social challenges compared to urban areas. These include limited access to services, affordable housing shortages, poorer physical and digital infrastructure, along with a need for specially designed solutions for rural areas in social care, transport, and education. The proposed MCCA must ensure that rural voices and priorities are not diluted or overlooked in favour of urban-centric policies.

The SDNP is a significant natural resource to support the general health and wellbeing of those who live in and around the national park. The proposed MCCA would be in an ideal position to promote the health and wellbeing benefits of the SDNP and deliver greater collaboration across healthcare providers to provide access to nature and the associated health improvements.

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
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Please explain your answer.

We agree it is likely the proposed MCCA, properly implemented, will deliver improvements in local government services. In particular, the greater collaboration on strategic matters and the devolution of powers and funding are likely to deliver improved services for the area.

It is important to recognise that the SDNPA also deliver some of these services, not only in its role as the local planning authority, but also in the delivery of our statutory purposes and duty for the SDNP. The SDNP covers a significant area of the proposed MCCA area and, whilst there are likely to be efficiencies to be gained under the proposed MCCA, the introduction of an MCCA must not dilute the local services or expertise that are critical to managing and supporting the National Park. It is essential that the various services delivered by the proposed MCCA remain responsive to the

context of the SDNP and seek to further the purposes of the National Park. It is also important that the SDNPA, as the local planning authority for the national park, is a key stakeholder for the proposed MCCA in the development and delivery of its spatial development strategy

The SDNPA can support the delivery of improved local government services through its close engagement with the communities, landowners, and businesses of the national park. The SDNPA also has significant experience and expertise in the delivery of nature recovery, climate change mitigation and adaptation, planning and development within a protected landscape, and widening access to the landscape which, again, could support improved service delivery by the proposed MCCA in these areas.

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
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Please explain your answer.

The proposed MCCA, through its ability to facilitate more cohesive and coordinated strategies on environmental issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and sustainable land and water use that transcend individual local authority boundaries has the potential to deliver significantly for nature and the natural environment. A greater sub-regional approach could enhance and deliver greater resilience in shared challenges such as flooding, coastal erosion, and habitat connectivity. The Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Catchment Partnerships are examples of existing mechanisms where the proposed MCCA would be well placed to ensure a collaborative approach across the area.

The Mayor could also advocate for and drive forward important environmental initiatives, not just at a local level, but at a national level, ensuring the voice of the region is heard in national discussions on environmental policy and funding to prioritise the natural environment in future decision-making. Also, the integrated nature of the powers and functions of the proposed MCCA mean it will be in a position to embed the improvement of the natural environment across a wide variety of delivery areas from transport and infrastructure, to economic growth, development, and health and wellbeing.

It will be important for the proposed MCCA to be cognisant of the special needs of protected areas like the SDNP, why they have been designated, the high level of protection they have, their importance in addressing environmental issues, and how crucial it is that their unique status and

requirements are adequately considered and not diluted in the wider regional agenda or overshadowed by the requirements of more urban areas.

The SDNPA could be a significant source of experience and expertise in in the delivery of nature recovery, climate change mitigation and adaptation, planning and development within a protected landscape, and widening access to the landscape. In order to take best advantage of this we again suggest the SDNPA should be appointed as a non-constituent member with voting rights on the proposed MCCA. Our specialist knowledge and experience in delivery would help the proposed MCCA to get the best outcomes for the environment.

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
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Please explain your answer.

We agree that there are potential benefits the proposed MCCA could bring in working collaboratively across wider geographies, particularly when addressing shared challenges such as economic development, transport, housing, and environmental sustainability. These are significant regional and national challenges which a more strategic approach may address more effectively, in turn reducing inequities across the area of the proposed MCCA.

We agree that an MCCA with the constituent authorities as proposed could effectively reflect local identities. Those authorities also have experience in supporting those communities, however, close liaison with the other local authorities in the area, including the SDNPA, will be key, particularly as the process for local government reorganisation progresses.

With the SDNP being a unique and protected landscape it is important that the needs and identities of communities within the National Park are sufficiently considered by the proposed MCCA. Its local communities and towns often have distinct needs related to cultural and built heritage, landscape preservation, their more rural nature, tourism, and conservation. The needs of these areas may differ substantially from more urban areas and therefore may not always align with the priorities of more urban areas within the proposed geography. The SDNPA having a voice as a non-constituent member would help support the needs of these communities and would be of particular importance in considering housing and development through the spatial development plan for the proposed MCCA area.