



LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION DISTRICT AND BOROUGH MODEL

Proposed by Hastings Independents Group.

WHY A DISTRICT AND BOROUGH MODEL?

This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to address the complicated and confusing two-tier model of local government that leaves residents feeling disconnected and isolated from the key decisions made by distant and unaccountable officers and politicians.

The governments proposed reorganisation of local government aims to simplify and increase the democratic accountability of local government, providing a single tier 'unitary' model that ensures that residents feel better connected whilst also saving expensive duplication of management and officer time.

And the commonsense way to address these requests by national government is this District and Borough model. You will have fully functioning 'unitary' local councils, embedded in their communities, directly accountable, able to be nimble and reactive to local concerns.

They will also be able to work collaboratively with other councils on those services and issues best organized on a larger scale.





SWEEPING AWAY EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL

The District and Borough model means abolishing the county council and returning most local decision making to the five districts and boroughs, Hastings, Rother, Eastbourne, Lewes and Wealden.

Stripping away this distant, expensive and unaccountable County Council layer of local governance will produce:

- A single tier streamlined local government structure.
- Immediate £1.35m annual savings by removing county councillors and CEO office resulting in millions being ploughed back into our communities over the next 5 years.
- zero disturbance to the vital services residents rely on.
- Local control over all finance/ ensuring that we move forward from a situation where your local council, that currently manages only 12% of the Council Tax we all pay, will have 80% oversight on how the funds are spent and how new contracts are awarded and delivered locally.

TRIED AND TESTED

This cross-boundary collaboration can already be seen locally. Hastings, Rother and Wealden have jointly provided a successful waste collection service with all Councils working together as a District and Borough board, overseeing a vital service to residents, which has delivered an excellent service, increased value for money and at the same time offered important local differences within a wider contract.

The District and Borough waste collection model has been in operation for over 10 years and this tried and tested approach would work well with other large services such as Adult Social Care and Children's Services, producing savings, local adaptions and an excellent service for residents, unlike any of the other proposed local government reorganisation models in East Sussex.





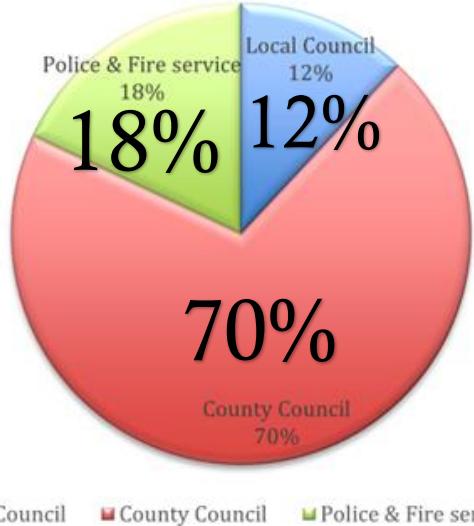
A CELEBRATION OF WHERE WE LIVE

When you ask someone locally where they live, where they belong, they will tell you they live in Hastings, Eastbourne, Hailsham or Battle rather than say they live in East Sussex or Sussex. In fact, they celebrate this local connection even more deeply with a passionate connection to their area or road in their town.

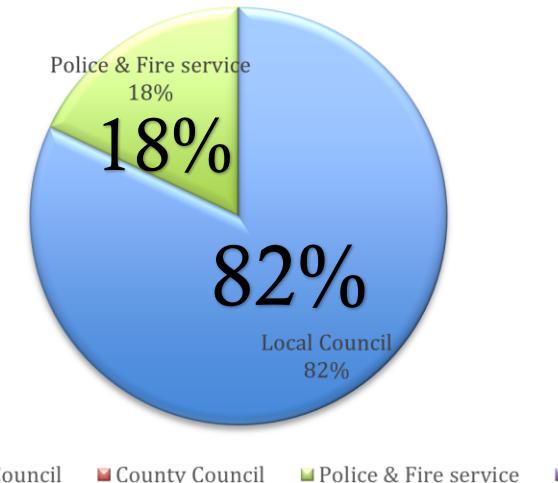
So, we retain ward councillors, best placed to represent local communities. Councillor numbers overall in Hastings will reduce from 40 to 32 (supporting 3000 residents each), compared to County Model which reduces numbers to 16 (6000 residents each).

The District and Borough model of governance places local governance right at the heart of that connection to town, estate or road. There is then no need to add new expensive town or neighborhood councils. You would have flattened democracy, making it more accountable, more affordable and more anchored in place than ever before.

Current Council Tax Control County Model



Proposed Council Tax control Borough and District Model

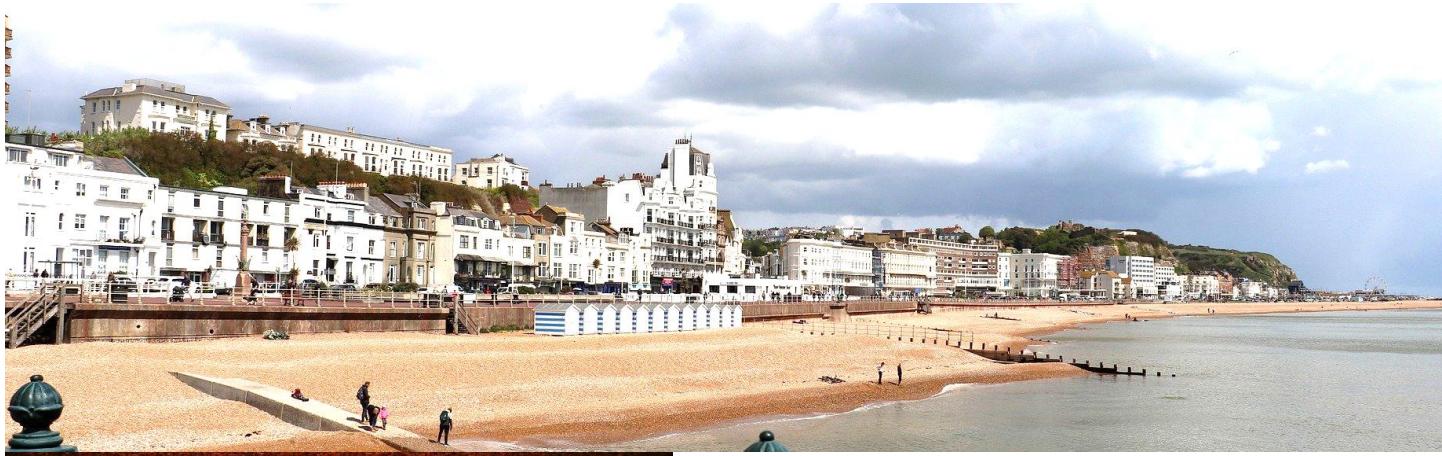


COUNCIL TAX, INCREASED LOCAL CONTROL.

Every year we all receive our local council tax bill, every year it goes up and every year you will notice that the greatest increase will be the East Sussex County Council part. Currently your local council has responsibility for a tiny 12% of all the money collected. The rest is overseen by a County Council based in Lewes who have little or no connection with Hastings, little understanding of or care for the town's challenges, and little clear local accountability for the senior officers delivering the services.

With the District and Borough model this all changes. We move from your local council having 12% control, to overseeing all local spending, contracts and policies your hard-earned Council Tax is spent on. And you can directly hold your local Councillors, local leaders and officers to account, with accessible offices in the town, not the other side of the county.

District and Borough Model for East Sussex Business case



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This business plan sets out an alternative model for local government reorganisation in East Sussex. It proposes a phased transition from the current two-tier system to a District and Borough led single-tier model, retaining statutory officers to safeguard services while consolidating administrative structures to increase efficiency, reduce duplication, and improve local accountability.

This model is low-cost, high-impact, and legally viable under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. It is based on proven inter-authority collaboration and extensive community consultation, offering a practical, resident-focused pathway to reform.

CORE PRINCIPLES:

Streamlined Governance	Service Continuity	Local Control of Budgets	Efficiency & Savings	Legal Viability
Abolishing the County Council, replaced with a Main Board of district and borough leaders.	Retaining statutory officers, frontline staff, and core systems during transition.	shifting the majority of spending decisions to the local level (12% - 82%).	removing duplication, reducing senior management costs, consolidating contracts and overheads.	fully compliant with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

KEY BENEFITS

Key Benefits include immediate savings (£5m by Year 5), stronger local accountability and minimal disruption.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Extensive engagement has been undertaken to inform the District and Borough Model:

- **5,500+ responses to the East Sussex LGR Draft survey**
- **805 responses to the Hastings-specific consultation**

The overwhelming response to the HBC consultation, over **66%**, was in support of the non-East Sussex footprint model, retaining the local council connection and the accountability this system provides. Hastings residents most favoured option is the District and Borough Model.

It was clear that for those who responded the County footprint option was the least favored, siting physical and psychological disconnection, poor track record of service delivery and poor value for money.

Key themes from engagement included support for cost savings, improved access to services, and stronger local accountability.

Concerns included potential loss of local identity and representation. Residents also requested greater transparency, protection of natural areas, and ongoing consultation.



GOVERNANCE REFORM

The County Council structure will be abolished and replaced by

Main Board	Local oversight	Rotation	Neighbourhood consultation	Political Balance
A Main Board comprised of District and Borough leaders or deputies.	Five Departmental Boards for: Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Business Services, Community, Transport & Economy and Public Health.	Departmental boards will have rotating lead authorities every 4 years to balance workload.	Rooted in communities led by Local Councillors giving residents direct influence over services and spending.	The model ensures balanced political representation, clear accountability, and built-in review points every 18 months.



SERVICE CONTINUITY

All existing systems, statutory Directors, officers, and frontline staff will be retained during the first two years to ensure uninterrupted service delivery. ICT, payroll, and procurement arrangements will remain in place during the early phases.

Service reviews will run in parallel with business-as-usual operations to avoid disruption.

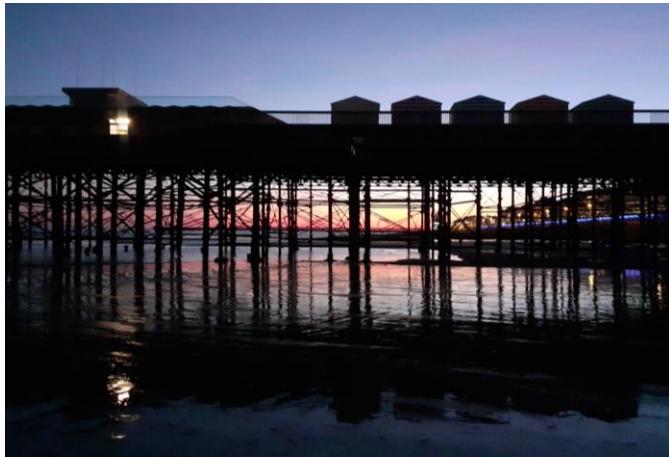
ACCESS TO LOCAL SERVICES AND LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY

All current local council offices and access points will be retained and strengthened, ensuring that residents have the ability to access, interact and engage with the services they use and their political representatives at a local and meaningful level.

Therefore, there will be no additional costs to facilitate, staff and operate new satellite offices from a central County Unitary office.

The local resident's connection will be strengthened as the council offices will truly be one stop for all services, not fragmented as is currently the case with the 2-tier governance model.





CONTEXT: EAST SUSSEX TODAY

Population: ~555,500 (2023), rising to 600,300 by 2038. Ageing profile (26.5% aged 65+). Hastings youngest, highest deprivation.

Health & Wellbeing: Life expectancy above average except in Hastings & Eastbourne. High social isolation rates.

Children & Young People: Attainment below average in Hastings; 87% increase in EHCPs since 2015.

Housing: High average house price (£340k), homelessness pressures, affordability challenges.

Economy: £9.9bn output, 246k jobs, strong visitor economy. Hastings unemployment highest (5.7%).

Infrastructure: Constrained transport, rural isolation, digital coverage gaps.

Natural Assets: Two-thirds under protection; climate risks along coast.

Identity: Distinct civic identities across Hastings, Eastbourne, Lewes, Rother, Wealden.

Finance: Districts under pressure from homelessness. Council debts covered by assets. Gearing generally low including Hastings.

LOCAL CONTROL OF BUDGETS

The model shifts control of council tax spending from 11.8% to 82% at the Borough/District level. This allows for greater transparency and responsiveness to local needs.

Hastings main issues will be prioritized by local residents working with local decision makers. Greater transparency measures will include:

- Public quarterly financial reports by service board.
- Citizen access portals to track local spending in real time.



IMPLEMENTATION PHASING



Phase 1 (Year 1) – Foundation

- Establish Main Board & Departmental Boards
- Abolish County Councillor roles (savings: ~£1m/year)
- Delete County Chief Executive & Deputy posts (savings: ~£350k/year)
- Retain all statutory officers and frontline staff
- New Board to conduct asset, contract, and estate reviews

IMPLEMENTATION PHASING



2. Phase 2 (Years 2–3) – Service Integration

- Identify overlapping service contracts for renegotiation or consolidation
- Begin merging support services (finance, HR, IT) under shared arrangements
- Maintain existing frontline operational structures

IMPLEMENTATION PHASING



3. Phase 3 (Years 3–4) – Local Budget Realignment

- Transition budget control to Borough/District Boards
- Shift ~80% of council tax spending to local authorities

IMPLEMENTATION PHASING



4. Phase 4 (Years 4–5) – Optimisation

- Implement findings from service reviews
- Start work on consolidation work on Adult and Children's services, back-room administration and systems.
- Localise service delivery models further
- Dispose or repurpose surplus assets

IMPLEMENTATION PHASING



5. Phase 5 (Year 5+) – Full Operational Model

- Embed new governance model
- Complete administrative consolidation
- Maintain rolling efficiency and performance reviews

ESTIMATED CONSERVATIVE SAVINGS:

Area	Annual Saving (£)	Notes
County Councillor allowances & expenses	1,000,000	Immediate
County Chief Exec & Deputy posts	350,000	Immediate
Overhead reduction via shared services (IT, HR, Finance, Adult and Children services.)	21,350,000	Annual savings by 2030.
Contract consolidation savings	500,000	From Year 3 onwards

Immediate Annual Savings.

£1,350,000

Estimated annual savings by 2030

£21,350,000

ALL TRANSFORMATION COSTS WILL BE FUNDED FROM 10% OF ANNUAL SAVINGS (~£235K/YEAR FOR INITIAL 3 YEARS)

TO COVER PROJECT MANAGEMENT, CONSULTATION, LEGAL WORK, AND SYSTEMS INTEGRATION.



Risk Management

Risk	Mitigation
Governance disagreements	Consensus rules and rotating board chairs to balance representation
Underperformance in savings	Conservative estimates with contingency budgets
Service disruption	Retention of statutory officers and phased changeover
Technology integration issues	Retention of existing core systems in early phases; phased upgrades



BENEFITS

- **Local Control:** council tax oversight increases from 11.8% to 82% locally.
- **Cost Savings:** £21.35m annually by 2030, £1.5m immediate.
- **Service Protection:** phased approach, statutory officers retained.
- **Democratic Accountability:** accessible local offices, direct councilor oversight.
- **Identity:** protects distinct civic identities across boroughs.
- **Strategic Readiness:** balanced partner for Sussex Mayoral Strategic Authority.
- **Legal Compliance:** Fully compliant with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007
- **Community Focus:** Retains local offices and strengthens community decision-making
- **Resilience:** Low-cost model that enhances long-term operational sustainability

THE DISTRICT AND BOROUGH MODEL.

ENSURES THAT ITS POPULATION IS 500K+

COMPLIANT WITH GOVERNMENT THINKING AND ALLOWING CRITICAL SIZE FOR EAST SUSSEX WIDE CONTRACTS, OVERSEEN BY MAIN & DEPARTMENTAL BOARDS.



OPTIONS CONSIDERED

The following options were considered and appraised against the government criteria:

Criterion	Status Quo	East Sussex Unitary	Costal Unitaries	B&H Expansion	District and Borough Model
Right Size & Scale	2	4	3	2	4
High-Quality & Sustainable Services	2	3	3	2	4
Financial Sustainability	2	4	3	2	4
Local Collaboration & Consensus	2	3	3	1	4
Support for Devolution	2	4	3	3	4
Community Engagement & Empowerment	2	3	4	2	5
Total (out of 30)	12	21	19	12	25

Comparative Financial Analysis of Models

To aid decision-making, this section compares the financial implications of the different governance models under consideration for East Sussex: Status Quo, County Unitary, Two Unitaries, and the Borough & District Model.

The figures for the County-led models are drawn from the East Sussex LGR Financial Case (Draft, 2025), while the Borough & District model figures are derived from publicly available and jointly shared data. The table below sets out implementation costs, disaggregation implications, long-term savings, and overall financial sustainability.

Model	Implementation / Transition Costs	Disaggregation Costs	Net Annual Saving (steady state)	Cumulative Net Position (2032/33)	Risk Profile
Status Quo	£0	£0	£0	-£85m deficit	High (unsustainable)
County Unitary	£10–15m (est.)	£0	£20m p.a by 2030	+£25m net benefit	Medium (large restructure, some disruption)
Two Unitaries	£10–15m (est.)	Very High (ASC/Children's split)	Negative	-£426m net cost	Very High (financially unviable)
District and Borough Model	£0.7m over 3 yrs	£0	£21.35m p.a. by 2030	+£26.35m net benefit	Low (phased, pragmatic, supported)



District and Borough model

- Retains the towns history, culture and identity
- Delivers single tier local government
- Savings ploughed back into vital services
- Delivers democracy and accountability at its most local
- No disruption to vital services
- Tried and tested, low risk & high reward
- Ability to deliver local resources with local knowledge

CONCLUSION

This District and Borough Model provides the only credible, low-risk pathway to restructure local governance in East Sussex. It meets ministerial guidelines, is supported by recent community engagement, and delivers meaningful improvements in accountability, efficiency, and local empowerment.