



Newhaven Town Council
18, Fort Road, Newhaven East Sussex BN9 9QE

Local Government Reorganisation discussion - Brighton & Hove, Newhaven & Lewes

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| Present | Cllr Stella Spiteri (SS) | Lewes District Councillor – Kingston Ward |
| | Cllr Bella Sankey (BS) | Labour Leader of Brighton & Hove City Council |
| | Rachel Kelly (RK) | Programme Director of Brighton & Hove City Council |
| | Christopher Baker (CB) | Iford Parish Chair |
| | Cllr Lesley Boniface (LB) | Newhaven Town Councillor |
| | Cllr Jo Pettitt (JP) | Newhaven Town Councillor |
| | Cllr Corina Watts (CW) | Newhaven Town Councillor |
| | Cllr Jessa Chapman (JC) | Newhaven Town Councillor |
| | Cllr Michael Young (MY) | Newhaven Town Councillor |
| | Ken Dry (KD) | Newhaven Town Clerk |
| | Stephen Honey (SH) | Newhaven Executive Officer |
- SS Chaired the meeting and established the reasons for calling the meeting – to discuss the proposals that had come as a surprise. She opened the discussion to determine whether any part of the meeting needed to remain confidential?
- LB Said that she felt it important that we let Newhaven residents know that the meeting took place and that they were made aware of what was discussed. The group could decide what should or should not be confidential.
- JP Agreed it was important and that the minutes should be put onto the Newhaven Town Council website after the group agreed the minutes. JP also asked if this was part of the consultation.
- RK Stated that whilst it was not set up to be so, it is a conversation.
- BS Went through a brief timeline from July 2024 when the Deputy Prime Minister asked for expressions of interest in devolution (from non-devolved authorities). Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC) believes that devolution presents a lot of opportunities and are very keen to proceed and so, together with East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council, signalled an interest in devolution for a pan Brighton and Hove & Sussex footprint in January 2025. BS disclosed that she is deputy leader of the Labour group on the Local Government Association.
The Government is looking to unitary authorities to give uniformity of governance and to devolve decision making. The English Devolution White Paper in December 2024 was looking at populations of 500,000 but is flexible on that figure.

BHCC has a population of around 280,000 which is possibly too small on its own and its initial thought is that a population of between 300,000 and 400,000 would be ideal. This sort of size would mean that the unitary authority would be close to its communities whilst still gaining economies of scale. BS believes that a mayoral role for the region with five unitary authorities would work best.

In March 2025, BHCC surveyed its residents who were keen to maintain the City's unique features but signalled that local government reorganisation could be supported if it delivered improvements for residents.

BHCC looked at merging with wards to the North and West but felt they were unfeasible, but that merging with wards eastward could work.

BS is very keen on hearing from the town and parish Councils to the east of BHCC and their experiences of working under Lewes District Council (LDC), good and bad. BHCC wants to be very open, transparent and to share best practice.

CB You, BS have just explained that you would like a population of between 300,000 and 400,000 people in an enlarged unitary authority's footprint. CB, said that having done a quick calculation, 300,000 would be a 7% increase in population and at 400,000, a 35% increase. Why such a wide margin and what is the percentage increase that BHCC considers most effective for it?

BS BHCC is still gathering data to be able to make a determination that ensures an adequate financial base. They are working with LDC & ESCC and happy to share their findings. They are keen to speak with the electorate and elected representatives to see what shape any new boundaries should be, given that LDC and ESCC are going to be abolished. There would be no fundamental change to the "sense of place," just an unlocking of benefits.

JP Requested details of the resident's survey that was conducted in March 2025.

BS It was a very short engagement that was conducted online, to which all BHCC residents were given access. BHCC can send all details through. BS noted that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had stated that BHCC can only formally consult with their own residents in BHCC, but BS is keen to hear from everyone potentially affected given the nature of the issue, which is why they are hosting events/drop ins along the Eastern boundary.

JP The residents survey was seemingly being used as a driver to support the assertion that Eastern expansion was favourable to Western. JP asked the nature of the survey e.g. research methods and population and asked what evidence there was to support the claim that East was more 'financially viable' than say Shoreham

BS BHCC could come back to the group on that.

RK Noted that whilst population is important, financial viability was equally so and westward expansion did not look viable.

CW This does not make sense, expansion Eastwards is financially viable, but Westwards is not?

- BS BHCC will get the group more information regarding the economies of scale and efficiencies.
- SS BHCC debt is around £380 million whereas LDC is considerably less at around £47 million. BHCC has had its challenges with managing its finances. How will things improve? Will the debt be spread across a wider population?
- BS BHCC's debt is very low for a unitary authority and comparing BHCC with LDC is not a fair comparison. There is one high profile example of BHCC making a bad investment, e.g. i360 but this was a decision by the Green and Tory parties, which the Labour party opposed. Lessons have been learned and our Administration makes responsible investments in new projects such as the renovation of the King Alfred centre which will more than "wash its face" over time. BS also stated that the Council Tax in BHCC is lower than council tax in LDC and ESCC.
- CB In summary BHCC is gathering data to identify the optimum answer for it. Will BHCC share in real time the data it receives to enable the group to get residents views?
- BS BHCC would be happy to do so but it is taking a while to get all the data necessary from LDC and ESCC together. They will also have a very short time thereafter as they need to submit to Government by 26th September 2025. The Government will then look at all the options and there will then be a further consultation thereafter.
- CB Is BHCC willing to change its view if the data pointed in another direction?
- BS Whatever comes out of this process will hopefully lead to a more collaborative approach and we will be able to see what works well now and what does not.
- LB Newhaven has two divisions, if BHCC expands to Newhaven, what would happen and which division(s) would it "take-over"
- RK BHCC has used district wards and not county wards, but it would be up to the Government to make a final decision.
- LB Could there be more consultation regarding boundaries?
- BS A boundary review would be a possibility
- JC At the end of the day who will make the choice, Government, BHCC or Newhaven residents?
- BS BHCC will have their consultation followed by the statutory consultation after September 2025. The local view is one part of this process but ultimately Government will be the final arbiter.

- JP Would the Council Taxpayer bear the cost of this reorganisation?
Newhaven has taken a disproportionate number of new buildings to make up LDC's housing targets. There are approximately eight hundred flats being demolished in Brighton, Would the residents be displaced to Newhaven? JP also asked if Newhaven, being outside of the SDNP was being regarded as an area to exploit to meet housing targets.
- BS Government has agreed that BHCC (and others) would be able to use Capital Receipts to fund local government reorganisation.
The demolition of the tower blocks in Brighton are categorically nothing to do with this project. BHCC does not build without ensuring infrastructure is in place. BHCC is not meeting its housing targets (nor is LDC) but they take a balanced approach. Each council will still be able to have a neighbourhood plan.
- RK Financial viability would help to free up capital receipts so no Council Tax monies would be necessary.
- BS This proposal needed less financing than the others that were put forward.
- KD You have mentioned the opportunities for Brighton, but what about opportunities for Newhaven?
- BS BHCC have a very good track record of improving services for young people, children's services is rated Outstanding, we offer free counselling for Year 9s in state education, we issue Education Health Care Plans (EHCP) in a timely manner that is below the national average and have much broader experience with regeneration – such as our Corn Exchange and Hove Beach Park - than LDC. Let us know what gaps you have at present that BHCC could help with. BHCC is very ambitious and proactive.
- KD The average Newhaven resident would not think that life under LDC was wonderful, but would it be any better under BHCC? Newhaven is constantly being “dumped on,” would it be better under BHCC?
- BS But if you were to be under an East Sussex unitary authority with over 500,000 population, it could be even worse! BHCC is a smaller, learning organisation. We see Newhaven regeneration as a very positive thing and well overdue. BHCC would want to support this even further. BHCC punches well above its weight and helps boost the regional economy. With more strategic thinking, Newhaven's economic growth could increase much further.
- RK To add to that, BHCC is very good at training and further education that open opportunities through economic development.
- CW Housing – Newhaven is “at the brink.” There is no more space available and infrastructure is at breaking point. I know that waste trucks in Brighton need improving/replacing, will that affect Newhaven?
- BS All unitary authorities will continue to look at housing and where it can go whilst improving infrastructure. There have been well documented issues in our waste service which our administration is addressing – we are modernising the service, rolling out food waste and have recently expanded plastics recycling,

- CW There is no space for more infrastructure, it needs improving and BHCC has more empty land.
- BS The strategic alignment that BHCC could bring will aid place-making.
- CW What will the name of the unitary authority be?
- BS We are at the beginning of the process, so that is still “up in the air.” We will work together on that.
- LB How will Newhaven Town Council interact with the new unitary authority?
- BS How does it work with LDC, BHCC want to understand this so that it can work together with Newhaven.
Regarding waste, BHCC are taking control of waste and recycling. We already have some electric vehicles and working on several net zero projects. BHCC is used to working with South Downs National Park (SDNP) and green spaces in general. BHCC oversees more farmland than East and West Sussex combined.
- SS In response to your initial survey in March - BHCC you stated residents like and want to retain the uniqueness and special identity of Brighton as a city. Within Kingston Ward we have nine rural settlements that are unique and have their own identities.
How will you manage governance of these small villages, whilst maintaining their identity?
Kingston Ward lies completely within the SDNP. What is your experience of managing land within the Park and your relationship with them?
- BS Going through this process will help us understand your uniqueness. There is no pre-determination of how governance will work. The Government will give a lot of flexibility as to how things can work. BHCC has an existing relationship with the SDNP, who will have a very important role to play in any unitary authority.
- SS You have emphasised you are a city - what can BHCC bring to Kingston Ward and what advantages do you see there will there be for Kingston and villages?
- BS BHCC can bring its experience to bear on lots of services, but what do the residents of Kingston want/need? We offer free swimming for under eighteens, a Libraries Extra service. We will be able to work together going forward. There are a lot of “ifs” at this stage.
- LB How do we sell this to our residents when we do not think it is right ourselves?
- BS Ultimately, it is a government decision. There are pros and cons to each possibility but what we want is to encourage the discussion.
- JP What would happen to this process if there were a change in government?
- BS The government’s timetable for this process means this will be delivered before the next general election.

- RK There will be legislation in place before the next general election when this will pass over to local government for completion.
- CB What opportunities are there for Town Councils to participate in your data analysis before you report on data received: once a report is presented, challenging data its conclusions is very difficult?
- BS BHCC's focus is on the region as a whole rather than BHCC and I personally want to look at communities that may have been left behind.
- RK Reporting from data will help but not be the only thing and we will be happy to discuss once we receive the reporting.
- BS We would like to thank you for this opportunity to discuss. We want to build as much consensus and collaboration as possible. We know we will not get everyone's first choice.
- RK What we deliver in September must be deliverable, but we will continue thinking of impacts after that point whilst trying to build trust with all residents.
- LB Could KD speak with NTC councillors to get all their views on what does and does not work with LDC.
- CB Consideration of these four proposals is in effect a project, management of which may be assisted by NTC maintaining a RAID log documenting Risks, Assumptions, Issues, and Dependencies so that for example sight is not lost of questions raised by residents, and to help identify in real-time what problems need addressing. RK confirmed that BHCC is maintaining its own log.
- CW EHCP was mentioned before – what does BHCC do well?
- BS BHCC's approach is to front-load funding in our children's services. We have no agency social workers and have managed to bring down the number of children in care over time. With regard to Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND), BHCC focus on support in mainstream schools and with education in general, we have worked to keep local authority schools within our network rather than the push to academies in East Sussex.
- LB Where would this council fit in?
- RK BHCC would (probably) be a new unitary authority but the town council would remain as is.
- SS Thanked BS for speaking to the group and closed the meeting.