



WORTHING BOROUGH
COUNCIL

Worthing Borough Council
Worthing Town Hall
Chapel Road
Worthing
West Sussex, BN11 1HA
www.adur-worthing.gov.uk

The Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
4th Floor, Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

15 June 2026

Dear Secretary of State,

Modified Proposals for local government reorganisation in West Sussex

I am writing as Leader of Worthing Borough Council to confirm my support for the proposed modification to local government reorganisation in West Sussex, which would create a coastal authority comprising Adur, Arun and Worthing.

An urgent report on this matter was considered by Worthing Borough Council. At that meeting, Members agreed that comments from the political group leaders should accompany my submission as Leader of the Council. I have therefore attached those comments for your consideration alongside this response.

I support this modified proposal because I can see the opportunities it presents for Worthing and for the wider Sussex coast. Adur, Arun and Worthing share a common coastal heritage, linked local economies and many of the same opportunities and challenges. There are strong economic, social and cultural connections between our communities, and a clear case for bringing them together within a single authority focused on unlocking the full potential of the Sussex coast.

Within that wider Sussex context, a coastal authority would provide a strong platform for investment, growth and regeneration. It would bring together communities with shared ambitions, helping to support businesses, strengthen town centres, improve infrastructure and connectivity, deliver new homes and create opportunities for local people.

Importantly, some of the most significant challenges facing our communities are best addressed at a wider strategic level. Through the Sussex Mayoral Combined Authority there will be new opportunities to work across the region on issues such as transport, housing, skills, infrastructure, economic growth, health and social care. A strong coastal authority



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would ensure that the needs and aspirations of our communities are effectively represented within those discussions, while remaining focused on delivering high quality local services.

The proposed coastal authority strikes the right balance between scale and local identity. It would be large enough to drive investment and growth, while remaining connected to the communities it serves. Working alongside the Sussex Mayoral Combined Authority, it would help unlock regional opportunities whilst ensuring decisions continue to be shaped by the needs, aspirations and character of our coastal communities.

While I support the modified proposal, its success cannot be judged by geography alone. Of vital importance is the financial viability of the modified proposal. Reorganisation should strengthen local government, not simply redistribute existing pressures.

Based on updated local financial modelling, the proposal to remove Chichester from the coastal footprint creates an immediate and significant financial imbalance between the two authorities.

Given the scale of the imbalance, and the potential for disagreement between successor authorities, I would request clarification on the formal mechanisms the government will implement to ensure the long term financial sustainability of the new coastal authority. This may include- legally binding arrangements regarding distribution of funds in West Sussex, transitional equalisation mechanisms or ministerial directions between successor authorities. Alternatively direct Government transitional and long term financial support would be required.

It is vital that the new authority is set up for success from day one, with the financial stability, resilience and certainty needed to deliver excellent services, support local businesses and unlock the full potential of our coastal communities.

Subject to those assurances, I am supportive of the modified proposal. It presents a significant opportunity to create a strong coastal authority that builds on our unique coastal heritage, strengthens our local economy, attracts investment, drives regeneration and gives our coastal communities a powerful voice within the future governance of Sussex.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Caroline Baxter

Leader of Worthing Borough Council

Worthing Borough Council, Worthing Town Hall, Chapel Road, Worthing, West Sussex, BN11 1HA
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Appendix 1 - Comments from Cllr Claire Hunt, Leader, Worthing Green & Independent Alliance

1. We are disappointed that the Minister rejected WBC's evidence based proposal that was produced rigorously and collaboratively by all West Sussex councils and endorsed through public consultation without giving any clear rationale for doing so. We are concerned that the consultation is being conducted when no evidence has been supplied by the Minister to show that the modified unitary is financially viable - this undermines the validity of the consultation and weights it towards a more favourable response to the modification. We are also disappointed that this is now creating even more work for over stretched staff and further delay and uncertainty, with our councils now being out of the priority programme and in the main phase of reorganisation.

2. We accept that the modification to a coastal unitary of Adur, Worthing, Arun creates a better sense of place and a better size of population but, however preferable, this option was rejected because it is not financially viable or resilient. So it is incumbent on the Minister to provide the data and evidence to show that the modification will not create a unitary with an immediate deficit and an ongoing structural imbalance.

3. Further to the debate at Annual Council, we reiterate that the business case and rationale for a 2 unitary footprint rather than a single unitary still holds and option B2 was the preferred option of residents who responded. The strong preference of the GAIA group remains option B2 (Adur, Worthing, Arun and Chichester) given the lack of evidence to show that the government's modified proposal is viable, sustainable and deliverable. If the Minister decides to go ahead with his modification, the government must commit to covering both the immediate deficit and the long-term structural imbalance, with particular adjustment for the extra financial burden on already struggling coastal communities that will result from climate change (loss of council tax base, infrastructural damage, adaptations required etc).

Appendix 2 - Comments from Lionel Harman, Leader, Reform UK Worthing Group

“**Reform UK** Worthing Group strongly supports the proposal for a single unitary authority covering the whole of West Sussex. We believe this option represents the clearest, most coherent and most sustainable model for the future of local government in the county. While some have argued that two unitary councils would appear more local in character, our view is that a single authority is far better aligned with the government’s stated objectives of efficiency, financial resilience, service quality and democratic accountability. It would also better reflect the way West Sussex already functions socially, economically and strategically as a connected county rather than a collection of competing administrative units.

First, the single unitary option presents the strongest financial and administrative case. Evidence published by West Sussex County Council indicates that one authority could generate substantially greater annual savings than a two-unitary model, with savings estimated at around £48 million a year. Those savings would arise from reducing duplication across the current county, district and borough structure, including management, administration, support services, systems, procurement and property costs, while also avoiding the additional complexity and expense of splitting county-wide services between two separate new authorities. Multiple councils inevitably mean multiple chief executives, legal teams, planning departments, communications functions, IT systems and layers of bureaucracy. Reform UK Worthing Group believes taxpayers are entitled to expect better value for money than that. A single authority would be better placed to pool resources, standardise services where appropriate and redirect savings into frontline priorities such as social care, roads, libraries and local public services.

The transition costs would also be recovered far more quickly under a single authority. At a time when council finances are under sustained pressure, the model that frees up more resources for frontline services and reduces bureaucratic duplication is plainly the more responsible choice. West Sussex already functions as one interconnected economic area, in which residents commute, study, shop and access services across local boundaries every day. The economies of coastal communities, rural villages and larger urban centres are linked in practice, and local government structures should reflect that reality rather than fragment it. A single authority would be better placed to coordinate transport, plan housing and infrastructure strategically, attract investment and speak with one voice when dealing with central government.

Second, a single authority would provide greater protection for vital public services, particularly adult social care and children’s services. These are currently delivered on a county-wide basis and support some of the most vulnerable residents in West Sussex. Dividing them between two new councils would introduce avoidable disruption, administrative complexity and operational risk. Reform UK Worthing Group believes that any reorganisation of local government must strengthen essential services rather than create uncertainty in areas where stability, continuity and sound long-term planning are critical. More broadly, many of the most pressing issues facing West Sussex, including housing affordability, NHS coordination, climate resilience, coastal erosion, rural deprivation and

economic inequality, do not stop at district boundaries. They require coherent county-wide solutions rather than disconnected local policies which may conflict with one another.

Third, one unitary authority would create a clearer and more accountable structure for residents. A single council for West Sussex would make it far easier for the public to understand who is responsible for decisions, spending and service delivery. It would also provide stronger county-wide capacity for strategic planning in transport, infrastructure, housing, economic development and public service reform. Road congestion, rail reliability, bus networks, flood prevention and coastal protection do not respect district boundaries, and they cannot be addressed effectively through piecemeal local schemes alone. A single authority would be better placed to integrate transport planning, coordinate infrastructure investment, improve connectivity between communities and speak with greater authority when negotiating with Westminster and competing for devolved powers or national funding. In political as well as administrative terms, larger and better-organised authorities tend to carry greater weight than fragmented local structures.

We recognise the argument that a single authority could feel less local in nature. However, Reform UK Worthing Group does not accept that creating two councils is the only means of preserving local identity or responsiveness. West Sussex has a strong and recognisable identity, rooted in its history, communities and place within the wider historic county of Sussex. That shared identity is an asset, not a weakness, and it can support stronger civic pride, tourism, heritage promotion and cultural investment. At the same time, local distinctiveness can and should be maintained through robust area-based working, meaningful engagement with town and parish councils, and service delivery that reflects the differing needs of coastal towns, rural communities and growing urban centres. One council for West Sussex need not mean one uniform approach, and local identity should not be used as a justification for a less efficient and potentially less sustainable structure.

Reform UK Worthing Group is also concerned that the currently modified two-unitary proposal could create a structural imbalance between the two new councils, particularly if a smaller coastal authority were expected to manage comparatively high levels of demand for social care and other costly statutory services. That raises serious questions about long-term financial sustainability and resilience. It would be a serious mistake to replace one system with another that embeds imbalance, competition and uncertainty from the outset. Fragmented councils too often end up competing against one another for resources, investment and influence instead of planning in the broader public interest. If there is doubt about the viability of one of the proposed authorities from the outset, that should weigh heavily against adopting the two-unitary model.

For these reasons, Reform UK Worthing Group urges the government to support a single unitary authority for West Sussex. In our view, it is the option that best delivers financial resilience, lower administrative duplication, stronger economic coordination, clearer democratic accountability and more coherent public services. It would provide a more effective basis for strategic planning, stronger representation in dealings with central government and a more stable long-term structure for residents across the county. If local government is to be reorganised, it must be done in a way that protects essential services,

ensures better value for taxpayers and reflects the way West Sussex actually functions in practice.”