

Imminent Changes to Local Governance: How Can Our Voices Be Heard?

Notes from Brighton & Hove Compass Coffee Morning
10 May, 2025

**Dr Matthew Fright, Senior Researcher, Institute for Government,
Devolution Team**

**Councillor John Hewitt, Cabinet Adviser for Devolution and Local
Government Reorganisation, B&H City Council**

What are the local government reforms currently under way in Sussex and will we the citizens have a greater or lesser voice once these are implemented? These were the questions that brought a keenly interested and lively audience to the Cornerstone Community Centre in search of answers from Dr Matthew Fright (Institute for Government) and Councillor John Hewitt (Brighton & Hove Council).

Dr. Fright explained how the government's [White Paper](#) promotes devolution to foster economic growth and local innovation. The independent Institute for Government is broadly supportive. In Sussex, there will be a newly created Mayoral Authority for the whole county, presided over by a directly elected mayor. While 90% of journeys stay within Sussex, questions remain about whether we have a sufficient shared regional identity to make devolution work for us. Alongside the creation of the Mayoral Authority, local government in Sussex is being reorganised into 3-5 single tier Unitary Authorities, each with a population of around 500,000. Whereas Brighton & Hove is already a unitary authority, for the county council areas this means dismantling the current two-tier system, a task which poses logistical and democratic challenges.

Councillor Hewitt stressed the importance of citizens' input into the changes in local government. Government's tight consultation timeline drew criticism, with only 500 public responses to Brighton and Hove Council's initial consultation about a possible revised 'footprint' for the B&H unitary authority. There will be further consultation about these proposals over the summer. Key concerns about the creation of a Sussex Mayoral Authority include fair representation from diverse Sussex communities with differing problems, such as in Brighton the high rate of children in care.

Janet Hewson (Chair) shared Compass' priorities for devolution: fiscal reform, constitutional status for local government, and enhanced democratic participation. Discussion highlighted the need for better consultation methods, like citizens' juries, and stronger community involvement in shaping the future devolved structure.

You can read a fuller report of the event [here](#).