Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

To inform the local government reorganisation plans in East Sussex, extensive engagement took place

The engagement took three main forms: a residents' survey, a stakeholder engagement and resident focus groups

A separate consultation for Lewes residents also took place, this related to the proposals by Brighton & Hove to extend the authority boundaries. The results of this are included here also

The Resident Survey

Residents were invited to complete the engagement survey which was open for 6-weeks during May & June 2025.

- 5,654 residents from across East Sussex responded This is about 1% of the East Sussex population (555,000).

Area	Responses received	Population of area (2023)	Proportional response
Eastbourne	974	103,796	0.9%
Hastings	633	90,817	0.7%
Lewes	1,294	101,356	1.3%
Rother	1,055	94,862	1.1%
Wealden	1,585	164,653	1.0%
East Sussex	**5,654**	**555,484**	**1.0%**

Demographics

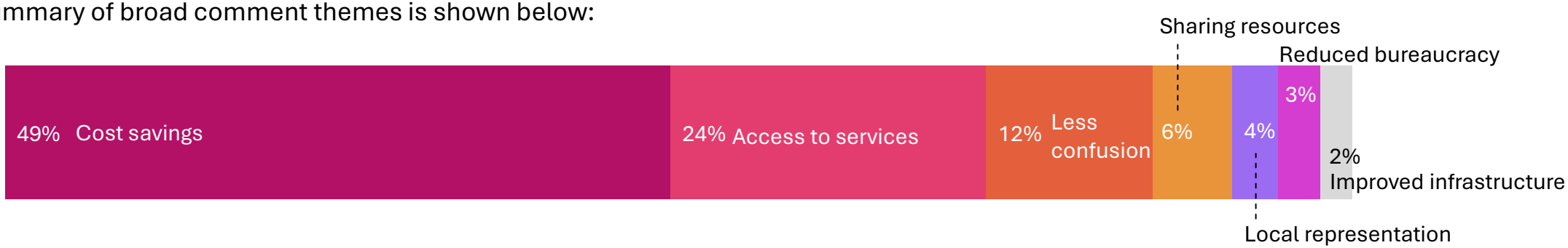
- Responses by gender: 52.8% were females, 41.4% were male.
- The majority of responses were from those aged 45-84 years old. We welcome the increase in responses from younger residents following dedicated promotion to younger audiences to improve proportionality.
- 21.81% of respondents identified themselves as having an impairment or disability. The proportion of the East Sussex population that identify themselves as disabled is 20.3% (2021 Census).

The Resident Survey

Respondents were asked what they thought would be the "good things" and some of the "potential problems" with having just one single council across the area covered by East Sussex County Council and all five District and Borough Councils

91% of respondents wrote at least one good thing with this proposal

- The most common opportunity with the proposal for one council across the East Sussex area was given by residents as cost savings – comments referred to savings made through 'economies of scale', 'greater purchasing power for service contracts' and 'staff reductions'.
- Access to services was also mentioned as a potential opportunity of this option by a quarter of respondents – comments mentioned 'improved services', 'easier access to services', 'consistency in delivery across the county' and 'reduced duplication'.
- A full summary of broad comment themes is shown below:

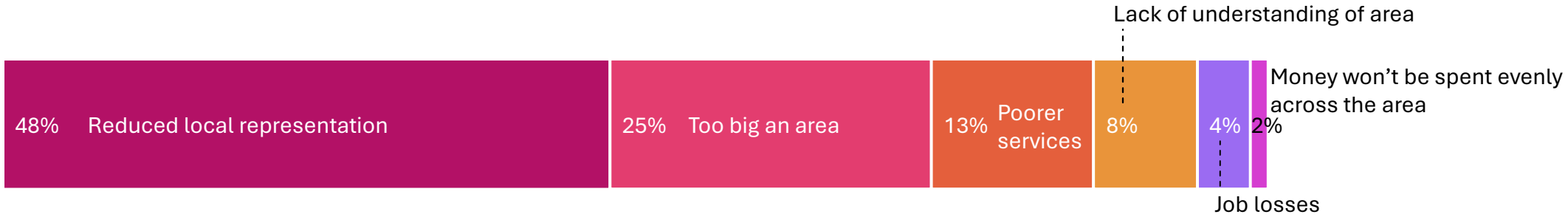


This was a free-text box question, respondents were able to write whatever they wished to. The categories have been created during the analysis stage to allow presentation of the feedback.

The Resident Survey

97% of respondents listed a concern with the one East Sussex suggestion

- There were 2,729 comments that thought the proposal for one council across the East Sussex area would result in reduced local representation – comments tended to focus on concern ‘our area would be forgotten’ by a single, county-wide council.
- These comments were similar to the 8% (468) of people who thought a new council wouldn’t ‘understand their area well enough’
- A quarter of responses (1,445) to this question were concerned with the fact they thought East Sussex was too big an area for a single unitary
- A full summary of broad comment themes is shown below:



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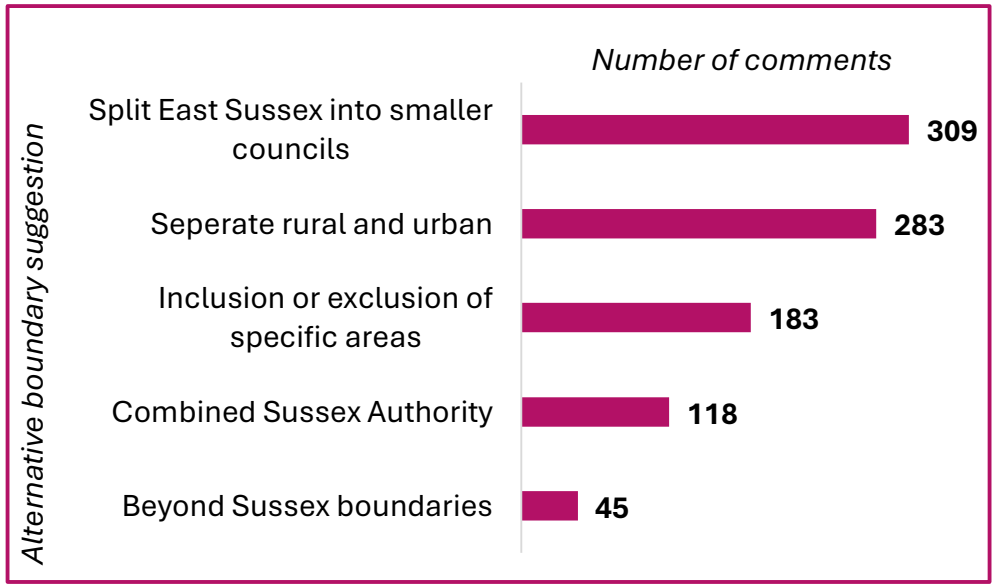
The Resident Survey

- 988 (17.5%) people suggested an alternative geographic boundary from the proposal for one council across the East Sussex area.
- These have been categorised as shown in the chart:



- The potential opportunities for these alternatives were given by residents as:
  - The council would be closer to its residents (enhanced 'local voice')
  - A council over a smaller area would be more responsive and accountable
  - Services would improve if they were tailored to smaller geographies
- There were concerns raised with these alternatives too:
  - A council over a smaller area would have higher costs and funding shortages
  - You would lose the economies of scale
  - If the new authorities are too small, inefficiency can creep in to service delivery and community representation

The Resident Survey

There were some **key themes** emerging from the resident engagement.

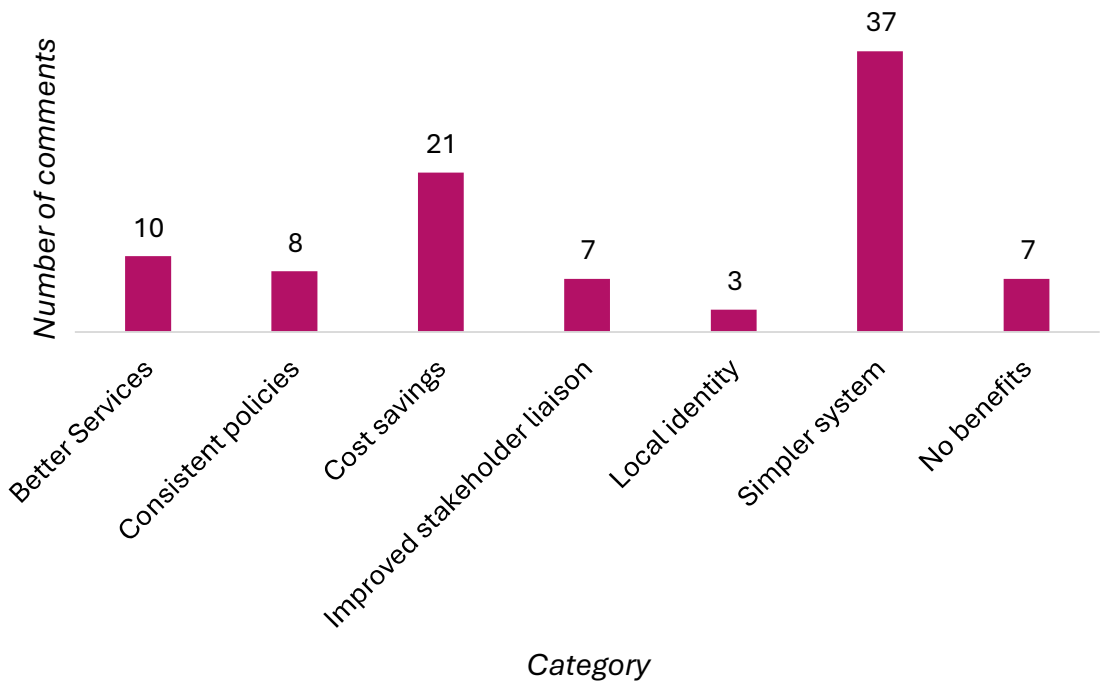
- **Loss of local representation**: Larger governance structures could lead to a loss of local representation and control, making it harder for residents to have their voices heard.
- **Impact on services**: proposed changes could negatively impact local services.
- **Desire for consultation**: Respondents express a desire for more consultation and involvement in the decision-making process to ensure that any changes reflect the needs and preferences of local communities.
- **Protection of natural areas**: Respondents emphasised the need to protect natural areas such as national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty, regardless of any boundary changes.
- **Addressing deprivation**: There are specific socio-economic challenges that need to be addressed, and any changes should ensure that these areas receive adequate support.

Stakeholder engagement

Professional partners and stakeholders across the county were invited to contribute to our engagement – 89 responded

- 37 were Town or Parish councils
- 18 charities
- We also heard from all three main emergency services and 1 Member of Parliament

- We asked stakeholders what they thought would be the “benefits” of the proposal for one council across the East Sussex area, their comments have been categorised as follows:

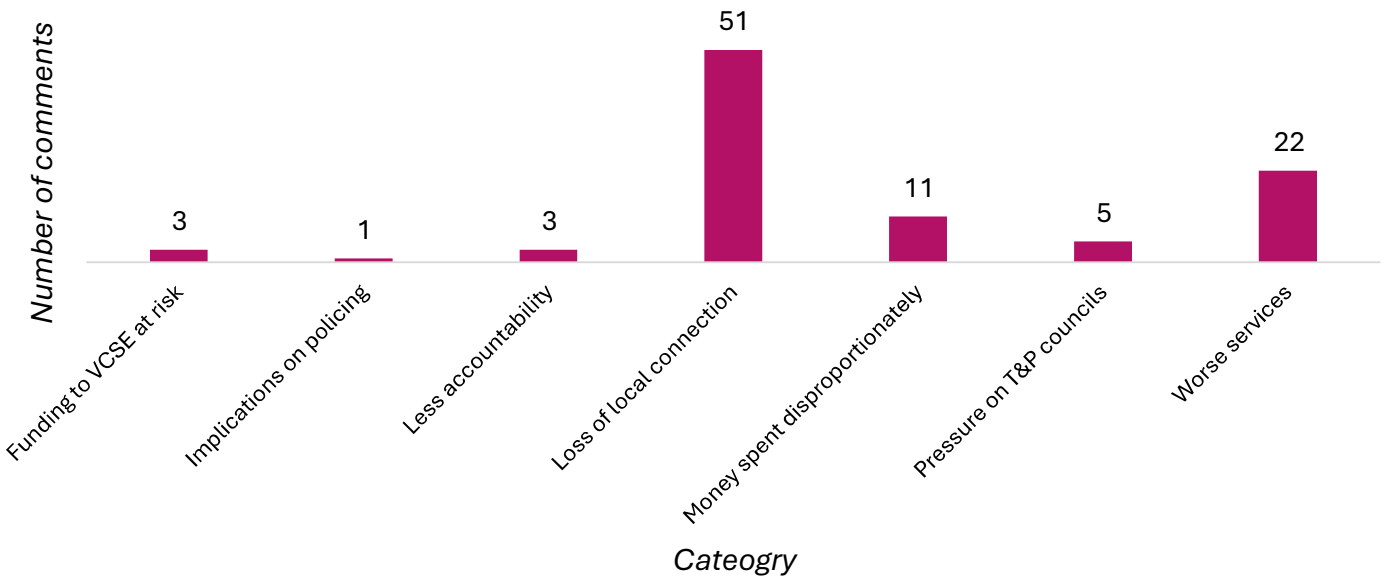


- Comments that mentioned a single unitary authority being ‘simpler or less confusing’ for residents and professional partners was the most popular - 37 out of 86 comments.
- There were a notable amount (21) of comments that mentioned LGR would ‘result in cost savings’ for the new authority.

This was a free-text box question, respondents were able to write whatever they wished to. The categories have been created during the analysis stage to allow presentation of the feedback.

Stakeholder engagement

- Similarly, stakeholders were asked to comment on “any problems” they could see with one unitary council across East Sussex. The comments have been categorised and presented below:



- Much like the concerns shared by residents, stakeholders are also worried about a ‘loss of local connection and understanding of their place’ from a new authority - 51 out of 83 comments related to loss of local connection/identity.
- There were 22 comments that had concerns about council services worsening, particularly during the first few years as we transition from two-tier to unitary.

This was a free-text box question, respondents were able to write whatever they wished to. The categories have been created during the analysis stage to allow presentation of the feedback.

Stakeholder engagement

- Received from stakeholders were 20 specific descriptions of an alternative geography to the proposal for one council across the East Sussex area, meaning less than a quarter of participating organisations opted to suggest something.
- The suggestions we did receive were very mixed and only one – 'a coastal/rural split' – was in a notable quantity, with seven comments about this alternative. No other suggestions received more than two.

- Summary of comments in response to benefits and problems from those suggesting the coastal/rural alternative.

Benefits with coastal/rural	Any problems with coastal/rural
Better understanding of the needs in each area	Less funding reaching rural areas
Improved targeted support for residents	New geographies could cause a lack of understanding from new council

Stakeholder engagement

Notable contributions

- Crime and disorder is significantly important to a vast number of people. Often, these problems are solved by joint action and partnership working at the district/borough level. It is imperative that partnership working, and joint funding arrangements continue and any local government services seek to enhance the well-established track record of joint problem-solving to continue to combat local issues proactively and preventatively.
- LGR proposals should focus on how they contribute to bringing investment, will empower local leaders and communities, and positive community outcomes to our area.
- Town and Parish councils being expected to take on additional services with no additional funding or manage assets that don't generate income
- Health needs vary significantly across East Sussex. It will be essential to maintain strong local engagement mechanisms to ensure services remain responsive to the distinct needs of everyone

Resident Focus Groups

A resident focus group took place in each of the five district and borough areas across East Sussex, these were facilitated and documented by a consultant and the key themes that emerged from the conversations are summarised here.

There were many conversations about the opportunities these changes may bring about,

- Most participants were open-minded to the idea of a unitary council model in East Sussex, one of the benefits was seen as reducing confusion about which council is responsible for which services.
- There was hope that the creation of a unitary council(s) would result in cost savings as a result of functions that exist across all councils combining e.g. finance, human resources.
- Residents thought this change created an opportunity for services to become more joined-up, for example: adult social care and housing.
- Thinking about local democracy, residents felt optimistic that more people might be attracted to the role of being a local councillor as they would have more power in a unitary authority.

Resident Focus Groups

There were of course, concerns too about this change to local government,

- Residents felt unsure about how any new unitary council could work with the Mayoral Strategic Authority, more detail is needed to help understand how the two will complement each other
- From a financial point of view, while many recognised LGR could bring about cost savings, others thought the cost of the change itself would be high and prevent future cost savings. Concerns were also raised that even more money will go to the statutory services meaning some of the 'nice to dos' miss out.
- People were worried that a larger organisation would be less responsive and accessible, there were worries they might not be able to walk into the council offices anymore.
- Concern about local representation was raised by some who felt that their current district and borough councillors are local people who have connections to their area, if this change results in councillors representing larger areas it might make them more remote and less accessible to residents.
- Similarly, people were worried about being joined with larger areas. Those in the more rural areas/villages want their voices heard and not lost to the larger towns.

Resident Focus Groups

Suitable geographies for the reorganisation was also discussed, just like it was asked as part of both the resident survey and stakeholder engagement. All the options mentioned here were discussed in at least one of the five focus groups.

Option	Perceived benefits	Perceived drawbacks
Current East Sussex County Council boundary	Less disruptive than other options	Current setup doesn't work for some people and keeping the current boundary will lead to more of the same
Rural/Costal split of East Sussex	Smaller areas with shared identities and challenges	Concern residents wouldn't get a say in other area. People living on coast valued rural areas and vice versa.
Split East and West Sussex in three i.e. East, Central and West.	It was felt not many people identify with "mid-Sussex" so it gives a chance to improve local identity	It feels like a random boundary suggestion, lacks justification.

Lewes district boundary consultation

During July & August, Lewes District Council (LDC) and East Sussex County Council (ESCC) carried out a public consultation over Brighton & Hove City Council's proposals to expand the city boundaries into areas of Lewes district.

- 7,472 residents have responded to the Lewes consultation survey
- 86% of those did not want to make a change to the Lewes district boundary

Respondent type	Responses	Percentage of responses
Lewes resident	6,568	88%
Resident of elsewhere	527	7%
A business or organisation	43	0.5%
Councillor or MP	34	0.5%

Where in Lewes?

- The most common area for responses to come from was Newhaven with 1,512 (23% of total).
- Peacehaven, Seaford and Lewes town were the other most represented areas

Lewes district boundary consultation

Preferred boundary options beyond 2028

- “No change to the current Lewes district boundary” was the most common preference from residents – 86% of all respondents opted for no change
- The second most popular option was for “Brighton & Hove to include East Saltdean, Telscombe Cliffs and Peacehaven” however, this was only the preference for 8% of respondents. All other options received less than 3% of the vote.

Reasons for preference, each respondent was asked to write why they had chosen the option they did, the most common themes within these comments is summarised below

- Respondents saying they “wanted to keep the current Lewes district boundary” was the most common with over 3,000 comments saying this.
- Again, over 3,000 comments were made that referred to “not wanting to be part of Brighton & Hove”.
- There were 2,243 comments from respondents who felt their area “is better within Lewes district”.
- Other comments referred to things such as “I’m worried my area will be negatively impacted by joining Brighton”, “Brighton has financial issues”, and “our small town/village isn’t suitable to join a large urban area like Brighton”.

Lewes district boundary consultation

Specific responses were received from many of the town or parish councils within the areas affected by the consultation. The key points within their submissions are summarised here:

- There was concern the distinct identity of these places, and the connections they have with the surrounding geography, will be lost e.g. connection to the Ouse Valley and the South Downs creating an eastward orientation.
- Infrastructure and service concerns were raised, particularly in some of the areas vulnerable flood risk it was felt these places are best served by the current East Sussex structures and expertise as this is lacking in Brighton & Hove. Accessibility of services (tailored to rural needs) was also a concern as the BHCC offices would mean residents having to travel 5 times the distance the council office.
- Also, despite some socio-economic challenges in these areas, there was feeling that recent regeneration attempts are beginning to show results and a change in council boundaries may disrupt this.
- There is opposition from the communities involved as they feel they would be overlooked in favour of urban priorities if their areas were to be brought within any reorganised Brighton & Hove authority boundary.