

Report – ED&F PC - Thursday 5th June 2025

1. Local Government Reorganisation

The government wants to reorganise local government so that everyone in East Sussex gets their services from just one council. This could mean East Sussex County Council, Eastbourne Borough Council, Hastings Borough Council, Lewes District Council, Rother District Council and Wealden District Council, would be replaced by a single authority.

Other options could also be considered if they attract wide public support and government backing (but unlikely)

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) is set to be the most radical shake-up of local government in decades and people are being encouraged to have their say.

With a new council expected to be elected in 2027 and start work in 2028, the county council and district and borough councils are working on plans and asking residents for their views.

Councils in East Sussex have been working together to draw up an initial plan for a single local authority for East Sussex that could provide best quality and value for all its 550,000 residents.

A spokesman said “we now need to know what local residents, businesses and the voluntary sector think about this so that we can make a plan which will deliver the greatest benefits to our communities. Final, detailed proposals have to be submitted to the government in September.”

The consultation is now available to complete online

at www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/EastSussexLGR/ until Monday 23 June.

In the interim plan, East Sussex County Council and the five district and borough councils have set out what they believe any new local authority would have to achieve including:

- Improving outcomes for residents and communities
- Making best use of resources now and for the future
- Enhance local democracy, local identity, transparency, accessibility, local decision making and accountability
- Support and drive decision making and public service reform at both Sussex and local level
- Provide a stronger and unified voice to help attract investment and tackle priorities

More information about Local Government Reorganisation in East Sussex can be found at www.eastsussexcouncils.org

2. The creation of dedicated ward budgets for councillors to spend on supporting improvements within their communities has been approved by Wealden District Council.

Each of the 45 councillors will be allocated £10,000 to fund projects and initiatives that directly benefit their wards. The funding, totalling £450,000, will come from General Fund reserves and represents a cost-effective mechanism for addressing local priorities identified by residents and councillors alike.

Councillor ward budgets have been successfully used by councils across the country to support grassroots initiatives that may otherwise lack financial backing. This approach strengthens community engagement and empowers local representatives to drive meaningful change.

Councillors will be able to collaborate within their wards, combining their allocations where appropriate, and will assist community groups in submitting funding applications. They will also be responsible for ensuring that funds are used in accordance with approved projects.

Within Wealden, this scheme will enable members to seek out opportunities quickly and easily to direct funds where they are most needed in their individual wards, places and communities they know best.

Over the next two months, a scheme will be designed to distribute the funding, including agreeing criteria for awarding funds, with the anticipated start date during July 2025.

Ordinarily I would not approve of funds being disposed of in this way but as WDC will be wound up in a couple of years' time with the advent of the new unitary Councils I think it is appropriate for WDC to return some Council Tax payers' money to them through this sort of route. At this time I do not know how the funds are to be distributed (i.e. equally between the 4 Parishes in South Downs Ward, based on a head count). More will be revealed in due course

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3. Wealden District Council's Infrastructure and Community Spaces Grants programme has allocated funding to support 12 impactful projects across the district.

The funding programme was made available through the Government's Rural England Prosperity Fund.

This initiative aims to enhance local infrastructure, improve community spaces, and create more accessible, sustainable environments for residents and visitors alike.

A total of £42,878.86 has been allocated in the second round of the programme to support various projects. These include East Dean and Friston Cricket Club's addition of picnic benches and parasols to a value of £1,254.

The funding programme was made available through the Government's Rural England Prosperity Fund. The England-wide initiative is a new £110m, two-year capital fund from the Department for Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs, complementary to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund – run by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. It has enabled councils to support projects in rural areas of the district.

4. A survey undertaken by Wealden District Council's waste contractor, Biffa, has revealed that 91% of all residents surveyed are satisfied with their waste and recycling collections.

- The aim of the survey was to help Biffa, the council's joint waste partner and Wealden District Council understand the levels of satisfaction with the service and to gain a better picture of how residents dispose of their waste.

- When shown a list of household waste items 94% of respondents are correctly choosing to recycle paper, aluminium cans, cardboard and glass bottles/jars in the recycling bin.
- However, the survey also highlighted some areas for improvement. Most residents are getting it right; however, some are still putting plastic items such as plastic pots, tubs and trays in the rubbish bin instead of recycling them. The survey also showed that items such as textiles and black plastic bags are incorrectly being placed in the recycling bin.
- Whilst textiles can be recycled at some recycling points and at the Household Waste and Recycling Sites in the district, black bags cannot be recycled and must be put
- Statistically Wealden recycles more of its waste than any other authority in East Sussex.
- New Simpler Recycling rules for households are being introduced next April.

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5. BT Launches National Campaign for Digital Landline Switch

BT has launched a new campaign to raise awareness of the UK's move from analogue to digital landlines – and to spotlight the help available for customers who may need extra support.

With the full switch to digital landlines due by January 2027, BT is ramping up the rollout of Digital Voice – its new home phone service delivered over broadband, offering crystal-clear calls and built-in protection against scam and nuisance calls. Almost three million customers across the UK have already made the switch to Digital Voice, helping to future-proof their communications and ensure they're ready for a more connected, digital future.

The new campaign is designed to reassure customers that, for most, switching to a digital landline is simple – whilst also helping those with additional needs, or their loved ones, to understand what support is available to them and how they can make the move with confidence.

Publicity is highlighting how Digital Voice features like Enhanced Call Protect – which blocks over 17,000 scam calls every day – can offer extra peace of mind, particularly for older or more vulnerable people.

For most people, it's as easy as plugging your phone into your broadband router, and you're good to go. BT is supporting its customers through the change.

Recognising that some customers may require additional support, BT's latest regional rollout is focused on ensuring help is available for those who need it most. From late-spring, vulnerable customers will begin making the switch to Digital Voice, supported by free in-home visits from engineers and battery backup units to keep them connected during power cuts.

Rollout is scheduled for vulnerable customers during **Autumn 2025** for South East England.

BT is working closely with local authorities, telecare providers and community organisations to deliver the right support, in the right places, at the right time.

For those without broadband, BT will provide a dedicated landline service, requiring no new equipment or engineer visit. This will ensure these customers can continue using their landline in the same way they do today until 2030.

For most households, the switch to Digital Voice is as easy as plugging a phone into the broadband router instead of the wall socket. Over 99% of handsets already work with Digital Voice.

All customers will receive at least four weeks' notice before any change. Those who feel they need extra support are encouraged to register via [BT's Additional Needs webform](#).

To learn more or request support visit bt.com/connected-together or call BT's customer care team.

6. Healthy Heart Grants – Heart Research UK

Healthy Heart Grants of up to £15,000 are available for community projects aimed at supporting adults to reduce their risk of coronary heart disease, helping them to live healthier, happier and longer lives. The grants are available to charities (e.g. ED&F Village Hall Trust) and community interest companies across the UK.

The application windows for 2025 in England are:

- England North: 7 May to 4 June
- England South: 16 July to 13 August

[Link: Healthy Heart Grants - Heart Research UK](#)

7. Postal Votes (information from WDC)

The Electoral Services Team will be sending emails to 15,300 Wealden postal voters over the next few months. The email will be sent via the Gov.UK Notify account. If concerned about this contact the Electoral Services Team (01892 602407 or elections@wealden.gov.uk)

The implementation of the Elections Act 2022 means that a postal vote arrangement cannot last longer than three years. 2025 is a transitional year for the Postal Vote Renewal Process and the majority of our postal voters will fall into the Renewal Process this year. Overall, there are 22,700 postal voters (WDC have email addresses for approx. 15,000) to contact before the end of January'26. If these electors want to continue to vote by post, they will need to reapply by 31 January'26.

To try and 'flatten the peaks' and reduce the number of letters and forms that will need to be sent, returned and manually processed, the Team are hoping that the email will encourage voters to reapply early and online.

The emails will be sent in batches by Ward – the first batch (Arlington Ward) were sent over the weekend of 10/11 May 2025.

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8. Councils Given New Powers to Tackle Fly-Tipping Vehicles

The Government has [announced](#) new powers for councils aimed at tackling the persistent problem of fly-tipping across England's streets, lanes and rural areas. Under the latest measures, local authorities will be able to seize and destroy vehicles involved in waste crime without requiring a conviction, helping to deter illegal dumping and keep communities cleaner.

This change is part of a broader crackdown on environmental crime and follows calls from councils and campaigners for stronger enforcement tools. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) highlighted that waste crime costs the economy an estimated £1 billion per year, placing a significant burden on taxpayers and local services.

Under the new rules, councils can immediately crush or permanently remove vehicles suspected of involvement in fly-tipping, streamlining the process and reducing the resources previously needed to take enforcement action.

Environment Minister Robbie Moore stated that the measures would empower councils to take decisive action against repeat offenders and organised criminal activity linked to illegal waste disposal.

The Government has also committed to supporting councils with guidance on using these new powers effectively. These changes build on other initiatives to tackle waste crime, including increased fines for fly-tipping and further investment in enforcement resources.

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