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Town Clerk's comments on Local Government Reorganisation

On Friday 29th May 2026, Lewes District Council (LDC) hosted an Emergency Public Meeting at Community House with regard to the latest consultation on Local Government Reorganisation (for anyone unfamiliar with the subject, it essentially means whether Peacehaven, Telscombe, East Saltdean, and Falmer Village remain in an East Sussex Unitary Authority, or become part of the Brighton & Hove Unitary Authority). The meeting was very well attended, although it was apparent that many attending were hoping more for a hustings between representatives of the different authorities, or a government representative to provide more factual information on the process, which was never really the intent of the meeting.

What this meeting was intended to do, was to share with residents of affected areas the importance of engaging with this round of consultation, which it seems that the minister will be using to make their decision about any prospective boundary changes, and I strongly urge every resident to have their say.

Amongst the public in attendance were Councillors from Brighton & Hove, and from East Sussex, so I sincerely hope that they are now feeding back to their respective authorities the sort of questions that we all want answers to, and that they will push for public comments to be made on them.

However, the meeting itself is not the purpose of my comments today, because in amongst the various questions about planning permissions, housing targets, refuse collections and highways, there was one question that grabbed my attention – What will happen to our Town & Parish Councils? This was followed up by what role they could play and what the public can do to support them?

The first part of this question is simple, what will happen to Town & Parish Councils: nothing! I should add that there is a statutory process called a *Community Governance Review* under which a principal authority could seek to abolish a Town or Parish Council, but it's a fairly complicated and lengthy process that is unlikely to be on the agenda anytime soon for a Unitary Authority.

In response to the next part of the question, what role can Town & Parish Councils play in Local Government Reorganisation? Cllr Zoe Nicholson (Leader of LDC) said that Town & Parish Councils are the most radical part of Local Government, due to the powers that they have.

This is an interesting point, and Cllr Nicholson is absolutely correct in what she's saying here. The reason for this is that the *Localism Act 2011* makes provision for eligible Town & Parish Councils to use the '*General Power of Competence (GPOC)*', this means is that (in addition to specific powers & duties) an eligible Town or Parish Council has the freedom to do anything that individuals generally may do. Quite simply, Town & Parish Councils have very few statutory duties, but extensive powers.

A Town or Parish Council could run the local library, post office, shop, or pub, fund local schools, provide affordable housing, run the local youth club, operate public toilets, set up a business or charity. A Town or Parish Council can take on the running of virtually any amenities that a higher tier authority ordinarily does, so why don't we? Well, the short answer is money, all services cost money, and whereas LDC has a total annual budget of around £47.5m, East Sussex County Council (ESCC) around £637m, Peacehaven Town Council (PTC) has around £1m.

How this relates to Local Government Reorganisation?

We don't know at the moment whether Peacehaven will end up in an East Sussex Unitary or a Brighton & Hove Unitary, what we do know, however, is that LDC will cease to exist, and that PTC will continue to exist. The new Unitary Authorities will, by default 'inherit' the assets owned by the current District & County Councils, therefore Peacehaven has submitted nominations for local control transfers of LDC Assets in the town (essentially meaning that the Town Council would take on the ownership and responsibility for the assets). These assets include:

- Carparks along the South Coast Road (Piddinghoe, Steyning, and Roderick – North & South)
- Meridian Park
- Plots of land in the Valley area
- Roderick Avenue Public Conveniences
- Lake Drive Pond & land.

Whilst the transfers are dependent on LDC agreeing to them, if agreed then PTC could become a safe custodian of these, protecting them from potential cuts or sell-offs by a Unitary Authority. As PTC has an in-house Grounds Team, we're exceptionally well positioned that many of these assets can be managed without any additional budgetary requirements, although others will likely require some increase to the local precept.

Currently, there are 102 Town and Parish Councils in East Sussex, in Brighton there is 1. In either case, when Local Government Reorganisation happens, Towns & Parishes will need to establish new ways of working with their higher tier authority and define their place and relationship within the Local Government structure in order to ensure that however the Unitary Authority engages with us, our local voice is heard and to get the best outcomes for our Town.

PTC, along with Telscombe Town Council, has recently had a Neighbourhood Development Plan adopted through public referendum. This is now a statutory document, providing some protection for ensuring that developments in the Neighbourhood Plan Area align with local needs and wants.

We also have an active Community & Business Plan, which sets out strategic goals for the Town Council, many of which involve some form of engagement or partnership working with the current District or County Council – we are committed to continuing to progress these projects, reflecting local needs, whichever Unitary Authority we end up under.

Regarding what our residents and members of the public can do, the first is simple – please complete the current consultation survey about Local Government Reorganisation. Whatever your views are and whichever way you're leaning, we want to ensure that as many people's opinions are taken into consideration as possible.

Engage with your Town & Parish Council – we welcome members of the public at all of our Council and Committee meetings, and members of the public can also join Council Working Groups – having input from the local residents is essential to the decisions we make, and we often struggle to get engagement with our consultations and surveys. We share information regularly through our website, social media channels, noticeboards around the Town, banners and signs along the Coast Road, and our periodic Peacehaven News (eNewsletter). However, we get regular feedback that people don't see these communications – so please, tell us what more we can do to expand the reach of our information sharing.

Particularly if the Town Council were to look at taking on the running of more services locally, how much local support would there be for this, given that any additional services would almost certainly mean an increase in Council Tax, and given that the Town Council has the smallest tax-base, increases seemingly hit harder locally.

You can find all of your Town Councillor and Council Officer contact details on the PTC website, so please reach out to us with any questions, and the Information Office is open at Community House, 9am – 4pm Monday – Friday, where you can also pick up a paper copy of the current consultation if you cannot access the online version.

I would like to finish by saying that I have tried to remain factual throughout this musing, and where I have expressed opinion, I have tried to do so impartially and based on evidence. I don't know what will happen with regard to the Reorganisation – like most residents I have serious frustrations with ESCC regarding their services and their communication, but I am also yet to see any evidence whether this would or would not improve under Brighton & Hove. I was also extremely disappointed that when Brighton & Hove first proposed this boundary change in September 2025, that they did so without engaging with any other stakeholders and the first we knew of it was when the submission was made to the Government Minister.

Whatever the outcome, I can assure all our residents that Peacehaven Town Council will be working hard to get the best for our town.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Dyson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

George Dyson
Clerk to Peacehaven Town Council