

West Sussex County Council – Full Council Meeting 12th December 2025

A Bitesize summary Update for Parish Councils and Residents Chichester West Ward

Prepared by Cllr Julian Joy

WHAT WAS THIS MEETING ABOUT?

This Full Council meeting brought councillors from across West Sussex together to talk through some of the bigger issues facing the county, hear directly from residents, and check how key services are performing. Alongside this, the Council dealt with its usual governance business to keep things running smoothly.

KEY DISCUSSIONS AND DECISIONS

Smartphones in Primary Schools

Councillors spent time discussing growing concerns about smartphones in primary schools. Many felt that phones can distract children from learning, affect behaviour, and expose them to online content that is not always age appropriate. Others stressed the importance of common sense and flexibility, particularly for children with special educational needs who may rely on digital devices for communication or reassurance.

The discussion focused on whether this is something individual schools should manage themselves or whether clearer national guidance would help. This was a formal motion, meaning councillors debated it fully and voted to express the Council's view.

Palestine and Pension Investments

Residents presented a petition asking the Council to remove certain pension investments and review procurement arrangements on ethical grounds. Councillors acknowledged the strength of feeling behind the petition and the concerns raised.

Some members also explained that local authority pension funds are governed by national law and must be managed primarily in the financial interests of scheme members. Because of this, the debate did not result in an immediate change to pension policy. This item was a public petition rather than a motion. There was a vote to this motion and you can see more detail on the WSCC website [Choose agenda document pack - County Council 12 December 2025](#)

DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION (LGR) – INCLUDING ELECTION TIMING AND RATIONALE

Councillors discussed proposals that could significantly change how local government is structured in Sussex over the next few years. These proposals are being driven by central government and involve both devolution of powers and possible reorganisation of councils.

- In November 2025, Government opened a formal consultation on Local Government Reorganisation, seeking views on how councils could be reorganised to improve efficiency, accountability and service delivery.
- Work is continuing on proposals for a Sussex Combined Authority, which could bring additional powers and funding to Sussex in areas such as transport, skills, housing and economic growth.

During the meeting, the Leader addressed questions about the West Sussex County Council elections currently scheduled for May 2026. He explained that, in law, these elections are still due to take place. However, he also set out why their timing is being carefully reviewed in the context of wider reform.

The key issue is that, if Local Government Reorganisation proceeds, any new unitary councils could be elected as early as 2027. This creates a potential situation where:

- County councillors elected in May 2026 might serve for only around one year
- A further set of elections could then take place for new unitary authorities shortly afterwards
- Residents would be asked to vote in two major local elections in quick succession

The Leader explained that Government is therefore weighing up whether:

- Holding full county elections for a very short term represents good value for money
- It risks confusion for voters and instability for councils and services
- A short extension of existing terms might provide greater continuity during transition

At the same time, he stressed several important safeguards:

- No decision has been taken to cancel or delay the May 2026 elections
- Any change would require a formal decision by Government and Parliament
- Democratic accountability must be maintained
- Councillors and residents would be clearly informed well in advance

Alongside election timing, councillors are preparing for possible Local Government Reorganisation. This could mean moving from the current county and district structure to fewer, larger councils with broader responsibilities.

Councillors emphasised that:

- Final decisions have not yet been made
- Further consultation is expected during 2026
- Parish and town councils must be fully involved
- Local identity, representation and service continuity must be protected

This is expected to be a staged, multi-year process, rather than an abrupt change.

UPDATES FROM COUNCIL SERVICES

Adult Social Care

Discussion focused on improving the quality of care and support for older residents and

vulnerable adults, with an emphasis on prevention and helping people remain independent for as long as possible.

Children, Young People and Education

Updates were given on support for children in care, emotional wellbeing services, and ongoing pressures around school places, SEND provision and school transport.

Fire and Rescue

Emergency response standards were discussed, with reassurance that performance is closely monitored and regularly reviewed by councillors.

Environment and Climate

Work continues on flood prevention, nature recovery and preparing communities for the impacts of climate change.

Transport and Highways

Councillors discussed road safety, public transport, school crossings and seasonal maintenance, including winter readiness.

Public Health and Wellbeing

The Council continues to focus on prevention, early support and working with NHS and community partners to improve health and wellbeing.

ROUTINE COUNCIL BUSINESS

The meeting also included approval of committee membership changes, confirmation of previous minutes and other necessary procedural decisions.

NEXT STEPS FOR PARISH COUNCILS AND RESIDENTS

Parish councils can help residents understand:

- That May 2026 elections are still scheduled, but under review due to potential reorganisation
- Why Government is considering whether a one-year county council term would make sense
- That no decisions have been made, and democratic safeguards remain in place

Parishes should also:

- Engage with consultations during 2025–26
- Raise local priorities, boundaries and identity issues early
- Share local concerns to help ensure continuity of services

Staying informed and involved remains the best way to shape how these changes affect local communities.

I hope and wish everyone a happy Christmas and New Year – kindest regards

Cllr Julian Joy