

September 2026

One voice for Sussex

In this month's edition: a first-of-its-kind meeting between the four Devolution Priority Programme authorities still waiting for a Mayor, our Board visited Shoreham Port, nearly 200 conversations shaping our Prosperity Strategy, a delegation from Shandong, and a very unofficial seat at a very official table.



The SBSA's Board talking to apprentices at Shoreham Port: (l-r) Cllr Tim Rowkins, Deputy Leader of Brighton & Hove City Council (deputising for Cllr Bella Sankey); Cllr Jacob Taylor, Deputy Leader of Brighton & Hove City Council; Cllr Jay Mercer, Joint Vice Chair of the SBSA and Leader of West Sussex County Council; Cllr Andy Woolley, Joint Vice Chair of the SBSA and Leader of East Sussex County Council; Cllr Pete Morley, Deputy Leader of East Sussex County Council; and Cllr Nicholas Russell, Cabinet Member at West Sussex County Council.

From the Chair

Many of you will have seen the Government's announcement pausing local government reorganisation across large parts of Sussex, and I know that for many of my council colleagues the timing could not be more frustrating – eighteen months of hard work and public engagement, and now more uncertainty while Whitehall reviews its own advice. As Leader of Brighton & Hove, I understand exactly how unsettling that is for colleagues and residents alike.

But it's important to note that this latest announcement does not impact our devolution work. The Sussex & Brighton Strategic Authority was established under separate legislation, it already exists and is already at work, and our journey towards welcoming a first Mayor in 2028 continues. If anything, this pause makes the case for what we're building stronger – an Authority that keeps delivering for the region – while the detail of individual councils is worked through – is a good thing to have.

On a related note, on 21 September representatives from the Boards of Sussex & Brighton and three other Devolution Priority Programme authorities – Hampshire and the Solent, Cheshire and Warrington, and Cumbria – will meet for the first time. None of us has an elected Mayor yet, so we're pooling our energy,

our insight and our influence, making sure our four areas get every benefit of devolution that the Mayoral Authorities already enjoy, as quickly as possible.

Speaking of ahead of schedule, our Board met last week at Shoreham Port to make decisions on bus reform, a digital twin bid and some important staffing decisions; more from Mark below. I wanted to host the meeting at Shoreham Port because when we talk about what the Sussex & Brighton Strategic Authority exists to do - to grow our economy, attract investment, create good jobs and connect our communities - Shoreham Port is one of the places that shows what that looks like in practice. The Port has been at the heart of Sussex's economy for more than 260 years. It became a Trust Port in 1760, reinvesting its profits into the continued success and development of the Port.

Today it hosts over 150 businesses, has delivered five consecutive years of record revenue growth, and turned over £22 million last year alone. It is a working port in every sense: cargo, marine services, fishing, freight and a growing business community alongside. It is also an employer, a training ground, and an anchor institution that bridges Brighton and Hove and West Sussex.

Cllr Bella Sankey

Chair, Sussex & Brighton Strategic Authority



From the Chief

Where do I start – it's been busier than The Cure's rehearsal room the week before a tour (fitting, given they started out just up the road in Crawley).

There's plenty going on this month: our Board heads to the coast, our Prosperity Strategy engagement is picking up serious pace, we've welcomed another international delegation, and we've quietly found ourselves a seat at a table we're not even technically allowed near yet. Read on for all of it.

Our Board heads to the coast

Last week, our Board met at Shoreham Port – a working harbour that's been trading with the world since it was established as a Trust Port back in 1760, so no pressure on us to make history of our own. On the agenda: a paper on bus reform, following on from the funding we told you about last month; a bid to build a 'digital twin' of the region – essentially a virtual model of Sussex & Brighton that will let us test and plan infrastructure before a spade goes in the ground; and the appointment of our first permanent Section 73 Officer and Monitoring Officer, two of the most important (and most glamorous) jobs in local government. Getting these roles filled on a permanent basis is a proper milestone for an Authority that, this time last year, didn't exist.

I could hold 200 talks, and I will hold 200 more

Behind the scenes, work on our Prosperity Strategy continues at pace. We've now engaged with almost 200 stakeholders across the region, including more than 50 business representatives and almost 30 from

the voluntary and community sector. Most recently, that's included a series of conversations with cultural bodies from across Sussex, as we start to shape the culture section of the Strategy. None of this reach would have been possible on our own, so thank you to the many people and organisations who have helped us engage further, and with more people, than we could have managed alone. Every one of those conversations is shaping the direction we set, because a strategy for Sussex & Brighton should be built on what the people of Sussex tell us, not just on what looks good on a slide.

A delegation from Shandong

Following July's visit from Malaysia, we've now welcomed a delegation from Shandong Province, China – proof, if any more were needed, that word is getting round about what this region has to offer. Colleagues from Gatwick Diamond Business and the China-UK Business Development Centre hosted a trade delegation visit connected to that developing relationship. No one from the Board would attend as it coincided with our Board meeting, but we're firmly behind the ambitions of the visit. Building two-way trade and investment relationships between Sussex and major international economic regions is entirely in step with our own Prosperity Strategy, and we look forward to seeing what that partnership delivers.

A seat at the table, even without a chair

And finally, Authority officials have now been invited to join Government's meetings for officials ahead of Mayoral Council – the forum where the Mayors who do exist compare notes with Whitehall. We don't have a vote yet, but we've got a seat, and we didn't wait around to be offered one. It's just the latest of a growing list of meetings and forums we've talked, argued and elbowed our way into that, on paper, we're not supposed to have a seat at yet. This is exactly the kind of thing we mean when we say we're not sitting back waiting for Government to hand us things: we're being pushy, making the case at every opportunity, and making sure Sussex & Brighton gets to benefit from devolution just as much as anywhere else that already has a Mayor in place.

Speaking of finding your voice before anyone expects you to: keep an ear out for Sairie, a brilliant Brighton three-piece who released their debut album this month. Not a punk band for once – more 'weird folk' – but Sussex is Sussex, and we'll take the credit for good music however we can get it.

Mark Rogers

Interim Chief Executive



Who's who

Please join us in welcoming:

- **Samantha Hendy, Business Support Officer** – who starts on 14 September, joining on secondment from East Sussex County Council.
- **Kane Tudor, Economic Policy Lead** – who started recently having joined on secondment from East Sussex County Council.

Events and dates for your diary

8 October – Sussex & Brighton Board meeting, West Sussex

10 November – Sussex & Brighton Board meeting, East Sussex

Getting in touch

If you have any questions or know anyone who wants to sign up to our newsletter, get in touch at enquiries@sussexandbrighton-cca.gov.uk

You can also find out more, and keep up with our latest news, on our website at www.sussexandbrighton-cca.gov.uk and follow us on [LinkedIn](#) or befriend us on [Facebook](#)