

# COUNCIL



**FRIDAY, 13 MARCH 2026 - 4.00 PM**

**PRESENT:** Councillor B Barber (Chairman), Councillor S Clark (Vice-Chairman), Councillor I Benney, Councillor C Boden, Councillor A Branton, Councillor J Carney, Councillor G Christy, Councillor J Clark, Councillor D Connor, Councillor D Cutler, Councillor Mrs M Davis, Councillor L Foice-Beard, Councillor Mrs J French, Councillor R Gerstner, Councillor A Hay, Councillor P Hicks, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor S Imafidon, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor A Miscandlon, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor D Oliver, Councillor M Purser, Councillor B Rackley, Councillor D Roy, Councillor C Seaton, Councillor T Taylor, Councillor S Tierney, Councillor S Wallwork and Councillor A Woollard.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor G Booth, Councillor S Count, Councillor K French, Councillor M Humphrey, Councillor C Marks, Councillor N Meekins and Councillor D Patrick.

## **C61/25      LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION - RESPONSE TO STATUTORY CONSULTATION**

Members considered the draft consultation response to be submitted to Government as part of the statutory consultation on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough presented by Councillor Boden.

Members made comments as follows:

- Councillor Tierney likened LGR to the Government passing a new set of legislation that says that in order to pay their bills they were going to take all your personal belongings from your house, which would be criticised and then they might say just to be fair there will be a vote on which room they would “steal” from. He continued that you could take a logical view and say if they “steal” from the hall that is better than letting them “steal” from the kitchen or front room but, in his view, nobody wants them to or believe it is right for them to “steal” anything from your house. He stated that this is where he is with LGR, he does not believe that any of these proposals are good for Fenland, thinks it is democratic vandalism of the worst sort, and it will harm everybody. Councillor Tierney made the point that the public are not too incensed by this as broadly they do not love councils and it is a convenient place to direct blame, but he feels 5 years down the line when the effects begin to set in people will look back on this and say maybe a mistake was made here or maybe they would not even realise, however, councillors will realise and he does not want in 5 years’ time for people to be able to look back on his vote and say well you voted for it. He stated that he is not going to vote for it and is going to vote against it.
- Councillor Hay stated that like Councillor Tierney she does not agree with LGR, but members cannot bury their heads in the sand, it is going to happen whether members agree with it or not. She feels that it is very much damage limitation, picking the option that is going to have the least damage for the people of Fenland, and she believes Option D is that option.
- Councillor J Clark expressed the view that he is sure that some people fear change and LGR may not even happen, but he understands the Council has to make the plans that it will happen. He agrees that it is disruptive to the workforce, with good people moving away from the Council, with some fear of losing their jobs and changing conditions, with councillors also losing their seats, power and allowances. Councillor Clark expressed the view that should LGR go ahead, he supports the two unitary system, making decision making more streamlined, efficient and it would be cheaper than three administration

centres. He stated that he does not buy the argument that electors will get better representation with three unitaries, in his view, that is down to the quality of the councillor. Councillor Clark made the point that as previously said his preference would be to stop with a strong partner which is Cambridge, however, he does not have that choice, therefore, he supports Option B of two unitaries, the only one to be supported by three councils.

- Councillor Taylor stated that from the start he has said that he cannot see LGR going ahead, but it is getting nearer and he is now thinking he might be wrong on this. He feels looking at a lot of the social media channels the message has not been put across clearly of how it is to going to affect residents, with this Council having been proud of the fact that it has held Council Tax where it is for so many years and if LGR goes ahead the general public need to know that one of the first things that will happen is Council Tax will increase to pay for a lot of LGR. Councillor Taylor expressed the opinion that more correct information needs to be conveyed to the public to say this is what is thought may happen should this go ahead to try and bring the public back on the Council's side and give the Council a bit more of a louder voice.
- Councillor Hoy made the point that talking about Option B or other options is not helpful because that debate has already taken place and she is personally sad that there was not an Option F, with Huntingdon being bold and going on their own and Fenland could have and should have submitted a Fenland only option. She stated that, when the Council had the debate previously, she said that she supported not doing anything, but she lost the argument and Option D was supported and it cannot be revisited what options to support. Councillor Hoy stated that she will support the consultation response, a lot of councils have undertaken this under delegation, and this Council could have undertaken it under delegation, but she does think it is sometimes nice to have it out in the open.
- Councillor Hicks expressed the view that there is another option to abstain as he feels quite strongly that members should not be voting for any of this and this is his way of saying he does not agree with any of it.
- Councillor Cutler stated that she still supports Option D as the one that will be the least damaging to Fenland for all the reasons previously discussed, therefore, she supports the consultation response that has been prepared.
- Councillor Boden in summing up referred to Councillor Hicks saying he would prefer to abstain as he does not like any of the options but made the point that he does not think any councillor would prefer any of the options to what exists currently and could all think of something which is better than this, but these are the options from which Government will make a choice and this Council has already made its choice for Option D. He referred to Councillor Taylor's comments in that he had diminishing hopes that this was not going to go ahead but there is still a possibility it will not go ahead, the Government has invested an extraordinary amount of political capital into this for reasons which he finds very difficult to understand because they are not going to make any significant savings out of these proposals. Councillor Boden stated that the Government is taking 27 county councils, including Surrey, which have got two tier systems together with six adjacent unitary authorities so 30 plus principal authorities and the proposals will be that they will change this to a new number of principal authorities between 50 and 55 and it is the upper level authorities, the county councils, which are the ones which have the overwhelming majority of local government expenditure. He questioned where the economies of scale will be if the children's and adult services and all of that expenditure instead of being expended by 30 plus councils ends up being expended by 50 plus councils, in his view, it does not make sense from a Government point of view. Councillor Boden stated that the argument that Government ministers are now putting out in the news when being interviewed is it will make savings because it will reduce the number of Chief Executives, Section 151 Officers and Monitoring Officers but the costs involved in this are minimal compared with the billions of pounds for upper tier statutory responsibilities for adults and children, with, in his view, moving from having 30 plus to 50 plus across the country making no economic sense. He feels that Councillor Taylor is absolutely right not to like LGR but the Government has invested a lot of political capital into it and there are two ways he can see that this might not

go ahead, the first being that once the announcements are made about which boundaries they want some of the authorities are going to be so angry and so unhappy they will start submitting judicial reviews and that could delay the whole process, and secondly there may be a change of Prime Minister after May and if there is a change the new Prime Minister can come in with a clean slate and can make some more rational decisions which can differentiate them from their predecessor. Councillor Boden expressed the opinion that these are the two ways he can think there is any possibility that LGR will not go ahead, with both of these being outside the Council's control, but it not being impossible yet that it will not fall down, the Council is effectively preparing for the worst but many are hoping that something will stop what is going to be very detrimental to the interests of local residents. He referred to Councillor Clark mentioning having better representation and Councillor Tierney about democratic vandalism and as far as Fenland is concerned, whilst it is not known which of these options will be chosen, there are currently 43 district councillors and 9 county councillors so 52 principal authority councillors and once these changes go through there will be between 31, which is this Council's suggestions, or if Fenland ends up with Option B there would be 12 councillors so representation would go from 52 councillors to 12 councillors, whilst it might be welcomed by some, the same amount of work still needs to be undertaken and the amount of work that will need to be undertaken after LGR is going to be substantially greater than it is now because trying to knit together different parts of different councils is going to be a horrendous task for the first few years. Councillor Boden continued for that to be undertaken by so many fewer councillors when the same amount of casework is still going to be created will mean that the work that is currently being undertaken by 52 might end up having to be undertaken by 12 and undertaking 4 times as much work as he is currently doing he would find a bit of a challenge, but it is a situation that could occur and members would have little choice about it. He stated that what little influence the Council does have is in submitting the consultation response, which is saying that Fenland would prefer the option that would keep it in the smallest of the options open to it as far as unitary authorities are concerned, the option which would mean Fenland would be in a unitary authority consisting wholly of market towns and their rural surroundings and in a unitary authority which would better represent the feelings of people in the area rather than dominated by one big city. Councillor Boden made the point that the purpose of today is to tell Government ministers the reasons why Fenland's proposal should be supported, which just happens to be the proposal that two Labour MPs also support.

**Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and AGREED to advise Cabinet that the Council's response to the statutory consultation on Local Government Reorganisation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough be as set out in Appendix 1.**

4.32 pm

Chairman