

CABINET



FRIDAY, 13 MARCH 2026 - 4.45 PM

PRESENT: Councillor C Boden (Chairman), Councillor Mrs J French (Vice-Chairman), Councillor G Christy, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor S Imafidon, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor C Seaton, Councillor S Tierney and Councillor S Wallwork

APOLOGIES: Councillor S Count

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor B Rackley

CAB61/25 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION - RESPONSE TO STATUTORY CONSULTATION

Cabinet considered Fenland District Council's response to the statutory consultation regarding Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) following the Full Council meeting.

Members commented as follows:

- Councillor Boden said the discussion at Council had shown a clear majority in favour of making this representation. LGR continues to proceed and Government have now produced a new document outlining the implementation process from the time they decide the boundaries up to vesting day itself. On the assumption that LGR will not be derailed, FDC must get the best deal it can from the bad set of options available.
- Councillor Christy said the case for proposal four has been clearly laid out and the points around geography, rural identity and Fenland's position come across loud and clear. Like many others, he shares concerns about LGR and the impact it will have. He would expect the response to set out concerns for services for vulnerable adults and children, which makes up 65% of Cambridgeshire's budget, and members must ensure those services do not fail. Referring to the document mentioned by Councillor Boden he thought it ludicrous that Government are recommending voluntary joint committees be set up before the Structural Change Order (SCO) and he wonders how these can be set up without knowing what the structure will be.
- Councillor Boden agreed that service levels must be maintained for vulnerable adults and children and his view is that having unitary authorities that better reflect the functional and social geographies of an area can achieve far more than disjointed areas joined together artificially and having their different priorities expected to be satisfied by the new unitary authority. He added that it is not being suggested that any committees be established before Government announces the boundaries but that it is expected that the Secretary of State will ask Chief Executives how they believe the voluntary joint committees could be set up. It will be important that all areas get equal representation.
- Councillor Tierney said he will never vote for this; the Government is choosing to direct the Titanic towards the iceberg. He will go down with it but will not vote to go down with it too.
- Councillor Hoy said FDC should not be spending any money or wasting time on this process; there is so much work that the authority could be getting on with, and she is extremely frustrated by this. She thought FDC should not rule out potentially taking legal action in the future because this is not a good process in any way, shape or form for Fenland. LGR is regrettable and although it will be a good outcome if Government changes its mind, a great deal of time and money will already have been wasted which this council cannot afford.
- Councillor Boden said Councillor Hoy is correct; the time and attention afforded LGR means less attention to other matters as officers' time will be taken up increasingly by the process of

transition to the new unitary authority. A host of things will not be happening and at County Council yesterday there was a discussion in the Assets and Procurement Committee that one of the things that will largely not be happening is any movement to change services. If the authority is only going to exist for another two years, then the idea of transformational change, particularly organisational change, is nonsense. If the Council has a short lifespan, why make organisational transformation changes? When members see the SCO, it may be that change in service areas will not be possible without the agreement of the shadow authority which will exist by that time.

- Councillor Mrs Laws said she also agreed with Councillor Hoy; she is very concerned about officers and members' time and the money thrown at LGR. How can Government support this as a money saving exercise? They are trying to brainwash everyone into thinking that LGR will be better. FDC is now losing good officers with great skills that know the local area; residents know their councillors, councillors know their wards, and she cannot see how the representation will be good for the public in the future. What members are voting for today is purely damage limitation.
- Councillor Boden said Councillor Mrs Laws is correct. He would also add that just about all the government ministers involved do not represent the Shire counties, they represent London with its individual boroughs or metropolitan areas with their own district or city councils. They do not understand the need to balance economies of scale, and the situation will be that the more rural areas of England will have larger local authorities with greater population than those of urban areas. They have not got the experience of what the shire counties are about and do not understand the two-tier system.
- Councillor Seaton said he seemed to remember there had been a request for FDC to participate in a fund for this transitional period which members decided not to get involved in. He certainly did not think FDC should voluntarily contribute to this. Councillor Boden responded that someone has been appointed to coordinate the work across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough in preparation for LGR, however that is being funded by the other local authorities and not Fenland as he had thought it would be difficult to get a proposal through Cabinet to fund the post at this time.
- Councillor Wallwork said she did not think there will be a win on this. She can understand the damage limitation route but cannot get over the fact that members are being coerced into making a bad decision.
- Councillor Hoy queried the number of parishes that could be involved and asked how on earth any local authority could manage the number of parishes that various options are showing. Councillor Boden said the idea has been put forward by people who do not have experience of local government in rural areas.
- Councillor Imafidon said rather than it costing FDC money to be part of the LGR process when it is already costing officer time and resources, could the authority not consider billing the Government and if they do not pay up, then consider taking legal action. Councillor Boden said that was a good point. Government did initially provide some money when members were considering various options, and that was shared between councils in the area and some further funds when they backed down on cancelling elections in areas that were due to hold them. However, in answer to questions concerning the costs of setting up the new unitary authorities and trying to make them work, Government have simply said all this will be funded by the savings created by the whole process. Councillor Boden added that he is not making this up and he is not joking. He liked the idea of billing Government but had a feeling it will go into the Council's list of bad debts.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and AGREED to review the feedback from Full Council and FDC's response to the statutory consultation on Local Government Reorganisation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough as set out in Appendix 1, and to delegate to the Leader of the Council to make any final amendments prior to the submission date of 26 March 2026.