

MINUTES

COUNCIL

TUESDAY, 18 MARCH 2025

2.00 PM



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

PRESENT

Councillor Paul Fellows Chairman
Councillor Ian Selby Vice Chairman

Councillor Matthew Bailey
Councillor Rhys Baker
Councillor Ashley Baxter
Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing
Councillor Pam Bosworth
Councillor Pam Byrd
Councillor Richard Cleaver
Councillor Helen Crawford
Councillor Steven Cunningham
Councillor James Denniston
Councillor Phil Dilks
Councillor Richard Dixon-Warren
Councillor Barry Dobson
Councillor Patsy Ellis
Councillor Tim Harrison
Councillor Graham Jeal
Councillor Gloria Johnson
Councillor Anna Kelly
Councillor Gareth Knight
Councillor Philip Knowles
Councillor Robert Leadenham
Councillor Bridget Ley

Councillor Paul Martin
Councillor Penny Milnes
Councillor Virginia Moran
Councillor Charmaine Morgan
Councillor Chris Noon
Councillor Habibur Rahman
Councillor Rhea Rayside
Councillor Susan Sandall
Councillor Max Sawyer
Councillor Vanessa Smith
Councillor Peter Stephens
Councillor Lee Steptoe
Councillor Ian Stokes
Councillor Paul Stokes
Councillor Elvis Stooke
Councillor Rosemary Trollope-Bellew
Councillor Sarah Trotter
Councillor Murray Turner
Councillor Mark Whittington
Councillor Paul Wood

OFFICERS

Karen Bradford, Chief Executive
Richard Wyles, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer
Alison Hall-Wright, Director of Housing and Projects
Emma Whittaker, Assistant Director (Planning & Growth)
Claire Moses, Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits Customer and Community)
Chris Prime, Communications Manager
James Welbourn, Democratic Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Patrick Astill, Communications Officer

Lucy Bonshor, Democratic Officer
Charles James, Policy Officer
Joshua Mann, Democratic Services Officer

83. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors:

Emma Baker
Phil Gadd
Ben Green
Zoe Lane
Nikki Manterfield
Nick Robins
Penny Robins
Jane Wood
Sue Woolley

Councillor Matt Bailey would join the meeting after the start of proceedings.

84. Disclosure of Interests

No interests were disclosed.

85. Interim Local Government Reorganisation Proposal for South Kesteven

Members considered the interim Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Proposal for South Kesteven.

Following a vote, Council Procedure Rule 11.5 was suspended to allow the Leader of the Council more time to introduce the item.

The following points were highlighted during the presentation:

- The first letter on the subject of LGR from Government was received by the Council on 16 December 2024, followed by a second letter on 5 February 2025. The subject was initially discussed at Full Council on 27 February 2025.
- The deadline for interim LGR proposals was 21 March 2025, with a final deadline for proposals of 28 November 2025. There were no definitive dates yet on when a shadow authority and first meeting of any new organisation would be held, but it was assumed this would take place in 2027, with a first meeting in 2028.
- Additional internal consultation took place with members through two separate member briefings held on 10 March, and discussions at Cabinet. Three staff briefings would take place in the coming weeks.

- External consultation took place with Baroness Taylor, Lincolnshire District Leaders and Chief Executives, Greater Lincolnshire Leaders and Chief Executives, the District Councils Network, local MPs, and neighbouring local councils.
- The core criteria for LGR set by Government included a target population threshold of 500,000, cohesive geography, and a sustainable long-term system settlement to withstand financial shocks with preferably no boundary changes. Whilst the Council may not be in support of devolution, their proposal must support devolution.
- The population threshold of 500,000 was a flexible target – submissions that included a lower number would be considered.
- Several models of reorganisation had been rejected. These included a model based on a ‘Greater Lincoln’ (population level too low), models involving geographic incoherence (such as a coastal ribbon running from the River Humber down to South Kesteven), a merger with Peterborough City area, models involving splitting other counties (such as the inclusion of Melton or Newark) and most models requiring boundary changes (with the exception of Rutland County Council).
- Alternatives included the option favoured by Lincolnshire County Council (LCC). This would keep the LCC boundaries in tact and North and North East Lincolnshire Councils would merge. Another option would be an east/west split in terms of geography, with North and North East Lincolnshire remaining in place in the north of the county. The final alternative was a ‘north/south’ unitary model.
- Optimal solution is ‘Unitary 1’ which included South Holland District Council (SHDC), Rutland County Council (RCC) and both North and South Kesteven District Councils. The solution had other advantages such as reasonable travel time around the district, and a uniform demographic. Unitary 1 included market towns with rural hinterland. The proposal did not include a city, but did include Lincolnshire’s largest town, Grantham, which was on a mainline railway.
- Population numbers for the proposal ‘Unitary 1’ were roughly 400,000.
- There was not scheduled to be any feedback on the submitted proposal from Government until November, although there may be further advice in the intervening period.

The proposal within the reports pack was moved by the Leader of the Council.

The Deputy Leader of the Council seconded the motion. He thanked the Leader who had spent considerable time with colleagues across the county and beyond. This was the opportunity to provide an option for a structure that most suited local residents.

A Councillor present moved a motion to proceed straight to a vote; however, the Chairman of the Council preferred to hear debate before moving to a vote.

Note: Councillor Matt Bailey arrived in the Council Chamber.

An amendment to the proposal was moved as follows:

'Add a Plan B which uses the same layout as the original proposal with the inclusion of Rutland'.

This would be a second resolution which would sit alongside the proposal rather than replacing it.

The amendment was seconded.

Debate ensued on the amendment to the motion:

- Grantham residents would have to pay more Council Tax with RCC within the same authority.
- A democratic deficit would be created by LGR. There was no guarantee that services to residents would be improved.
- North Kesteven were looking at a similar proposal to that of South Kesteven (SKDC). SHDC were due to publish their proposal imminently. RCC looked east for their economics; their local MP was open to working with SKDC.
- Council Tax at RCC was higher than that seen at SKDC. It could result in a situation where residents in SKDC would be subsidising RCC residents. There were higher Council Tax banded houses in RCC than SKDC.
- Whoever SKDC joined as part of proposals had to be geographically close. There would be an option to bring in Boston Borough Council as they were close to an SKDC border.

Note: Councillor Gareth Knight left the Council Chamber and did not return.

Note: The meeting adjourned at 2:57pm and reconvened at 3:11pm

On resuming the meeting Councillor Mark Whittington withdrew comments he had made about the Leader of the Council making deals with Rutland County Council and apologised for the comments.

Debate reconvened on the amendment:

- Deprived wards within SKDC could be asked to subsidise wealthier divisions within RCC.
- This was the start of a conversation. This amendment added an option. These plans were an open proposal; the end detail of the proposal could look very different.
- Grantham had been thought about in the plan for 'Unitary 1' – this had been constructed deliberately so that Grantham remained the largest town.
- District Councillors needed to take the best decision for the district, which included the four main towns and many small villages and parishes.
- There were economic synergies between SKDC and Rutland as it was a rural area with a rural based economy which bordered Stamford.

- The nearer the proposal was to a population target of 400,000 the better the chance it stood of being accepted.
- Rutland spent 23 years as part of Leicestershire, therefore the Government may think that Leicestershire and Rutland was a natural new authority. Jim McMahon MP had written a letter to all Lincolnshire Councils asking them to organise themselves into a new authority area – Councils in Leicestershire (inclusive of Rutland) received the same letter.
- Rutland utilised health authorities, police authorities, and fire and rescue services within Leicestershire.
- There was an argument to accept some parts of Rutland east of the A1 as there would be an impact on housing in Stamford if Rutland were excluded entirely.
- It could be an option for Rutland to absorb Stamford as an area due to their similarities.

The Leader of the Council summed up the amendment. It was certainly an option to include Rutland within proposals. Rutland had previously been part of the Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership so clearly had ties with Lincolnshire. In discussions with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) they said that Rutland being part of the new authority was a possibility.

Following a vote the amendment was **LOST**.

Note: The Leader of the Council confirmed he was happy to amend the submission to Government to reflect that LGR was not the preferred option of the Council.

A further amendment was proposed – *‘Any proposal to involve Rutland in LGR across Lincolnshire is removed and we move to Alternative B- the alternative Unitary model (a two unitary north/south split)’*.

The motion was seconded.

The following information was highlighted during debate on the amendment:

- The preferred LGR model for Lincolnshire County Council would be a two unitary split with North and North East Lincolnshire Councils joining together and Lincolnshire County Council remaining in a similar state, also known as a continuation model. The district councils would disappear.
- Initial information from the Rutland County Council website indicated that the preference across the Leicestershire region was for three unitary authorities, inclusive of Rutland.
- The work of members across the Council on LGR was commended. Whilst there will always be working relationships with neighbouring areas, the reality was that the remit set out by Government was that the ‘north/south’ model was the only one that included that worked alongside the remit of healthcare/police etc.
- There were two PwC reports on LGR costs and impacts produced in 2020 and 2025. The 2020 document (commissioned by the County Council Network)

went into detail about risks and costs. A takeaway from that report was that the more unitaries were created, the greater the disaggregation of services. There would also be more work required in re-negotiating contracts.

- A southern unitary authority including Boston would lead to a dynamic where there were towns of a similar size at opposing geographical ends of the authority. Boston's current Council Tax level was higher than that seen at SKDC.
- If SKDC ceded to LCC at the first opportunity it would be likely that they may not take concerns into account later. SKDC needed to be a credible opposition. SKDC should keep as many options on the table as possible.
- Information Councillors and officers at SKDC had received on LGR had arrived at a different conclusion to that seen in the PwC report.

Note: Councillor Anna Kelly left the Council Chamber and did not return.

- The previous rejected amendment sought to add options to the table, this amendment would completely remove the option to partner with Rutland.
- One Councillor wished to see Grantham at the heart of everything, alongside parity with neighbours. Financial reserves at SKDC belonged to its residents; whilst the reserves should not be spent in advance of LGR similar amounts of money should be kept in each local authority's reserves.
- In another Councillor's view, the most equitable option was that originally put forward by the Leader of the Council.

In summing up, the Leader of the Council acknowledged that the report had been late in being circulated to Councillors, however there had been two briefings for Councillors on 10 March. Also, the late information was partly down to the inclusion of data from the District Council Network Conference. There had only been 27 working days given by Government to prepare the document.

There would likely not be much further information from Government until November. If Rutland were included in plans it meant it could at least be considered as an option; an amendment to create a Plan B to discount Rutland further on in proceedings had previously been lost.

Conservative MPs were interested in including Rutland in the debate, as was the Leader of North Kesteven District Council.

Following a vote the amendment was **LOST**.

A proposal that the substantive motion 'now be put' was moved and seconded, and following a vote this action was **AGREED**.

Having been moved and seconded, and following a vote it was **AGREED**:

DECISION

That Full Council approves the interim Local Government Reorganisation Proposal amendments (Appendix C of the report) with minor textual for submission to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government.

Councillors Matt Bailey, Richard Dixon-Warren, Tim Harrison, Robert Leadenhams, Paul Martin, Lee Steptoe, Sarah Trotter and Mark Whittington requested that their vote against the proposal was recorded.

Councillor Steven Cunningham requested that his abstention be recorded.

86. Close of meeting

The meeting closed at 4:30pm.