

Informal Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting (English Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Notes – 6 November 2025

Attendees:

Councillors:

Jim Brown (Chair)
Andy McGuinness (Vice-Chair)
Phil Bibby
Stephen Booth
Robert Boyle
Kamal Choudhury
Peter Clark
Akin Elekolusi
Alistair Gordon
Lynda Guy
Ellie Plater
Ceara Roopchand

Loraine Rossati – Cabinet Member for LGR

Item 1 -Apologies for absence and Declarations of Interest.

Apologies were received from Cllrs Sandra Barr and Leanne Brady.

Item 2 – Officer presentation on Local Government Reorganisation.

The Chair reminded scrutiny members that the purpose of the meeting was to provide members with an opportunity to carry out some pre-scrutiny of the item and presentation ahead of the Cabinet making its preference to the secretary of state regarding the Council's submission on the number and boundaries of the possible new authorities covering what it now Hertfordshire

A presentation was given to the Committee on the current position in respect of the English Devolution White Paper and the Local Government Reorganisation vision for Hertfordshire.

The presentation included:

- The options being considered;
- Financial Modelling;
- Electoral Modelling;
- Headline Options Appraisal;
- Details of the Stakeholder engagement programme;
- Devolution ambitions;
- Timeline for key decisions at SBC;

- Government timeline.

The following comments and questions were raised by Members with responses given by Officers:

- Although there were a number of 3 unitary models (UM) originally proposed, this had been narrowed down to one UM following some boundary changes in the west of Hertfordshire;
- The new authorities in the proposed four unitary (4UM) model are provisionally named Central, East, South West and West. Stevenage would be in Central.
- The 4 UM included areas of boundary change with some of North Herts moving into East Herts and an area in Wel Hat moving to Broxbourne. This was to give a more balanced population size;
- Despite changes including the M25 over hundreds of years there was no scope to consider models which crossed the current county boundary;
- Officers had worked as a joint team across Hertfordshire to prepare a single submission. In addition, Herts Leaders Group asked for three sub-proposals to articulate how a 2UM, 3UM and 4UM might work. Some of the SBC team worked on drafting the 4 UM proposal with Watford working the 3UM and the County Council working the 2 UM. This approach was used so that Herts Leaders Group could consider the merits and challenges of different options, with Officers using collaborative approaches to develop the overall proposal and sub-proposals;
- The 4UM proposal resulted in the lowest level of savings;
- The joint proposal would be submitted to the Government from all Hertfordshire Councils with a covering report indicating Council preferences once selected;
- In relation to financial modelling, the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) described the financial model, the limits of the model, and the levers available to reduce spend in the future;
- Members were informed that the HRA was currently outside the scope of the initial modelling;
- In the 4UM the Central authority bears a large share of social care costs, creating a budget gap;
- The presentation included a high level appraisal which would require substantial further work once the final model had been confirmed;
- Additional slides relating to the financial information for all three options would be circulated to Members after the meeting;
- In relation to electoral modelling, a boundary review would be undertaken following vesting day to determine the most suitable electoral arrangements;
- This would mean the initial election being on the current boundaries with unequal numbers of electors to Councillors;
- Officers advised that they would seek clarification and respond in writing to the following questions:
 - Who would be allowed to stand for election;
 - Who would be disqualified in standing for election;
 - Who is allowed to vote;

- What will be the voting format, first past the post or a form of PR;
 - When will information be available in relation to the size of the wards.
- The Portfolio Holder advised that comprehensive stakeholder engagement had been undertaken and responses would be fed into the final submission;
- Foundation Authorities are an option that can be created by current upper tier authorities ahead of the creation of a Strategic Authority but further guidance is expected on this topic;
- In relation to the Strategic Authority, the current proposal was for Hertfordshire to stand alone;
- Members commented on the importance of Devolution, questions on whether LGR is really a form of Devolution. The Chair said that at the first stage this was not in itself devolution. In addition, there was discussion on whether before a point in time such as 2033, would a Mayoralty be in place;
- The Government's policy on town councils was not clear;
- There would be a need to see each legacy authorities assets;
- Members asked if there would be a disaggregation of each authorities debt and assets?;
- In terms of the timeline, a Special Council was scheduled for 17 November where an indicative vote would be taken. This would be followed by Special Cabinet on 18th and Overview and Scrutiny on 19th.

Item 3 – Constitutional Report on Urgency Call-in arrangements

The Chair advised that he would consider his decision to waive the call-in procedure for the item in a timely fashion for the final submission to be submitted to the Secretary of State by the deadline of 28 November 2025.

The Chair thanked officers for their presentation.