

**COUNCIL**

20 November 2025  
5.30 - 6.45 pm

**Present:** Councillors Ashton, Baigent, Bennett, Bick, Bird, Blackburn-Horgan, Clough, Dalzell, Davey, Divkovic, Flaubert, Gardiner-Smith, Gawthrope Wood, Glasberg, Hauk, Holloway, Hossain, Illingworth, Lee, Lokhmotova, Moore, Nestor, Payne, Porrer, Pounds, Robertson, Sheil, Smart, S. Smith, Swift, Thornburrow, Todd-Jones, Tong, Wade and Young

**FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**

**25/96/CNL Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Councillors Dryden, Griffin, Howard, Martinelli, McPherson, A. Smith and Thittala.

**25/97/CNL Declarations of Interest**

The Mayor informed Members that the Monitoring Officer had granted a dispensation for this meeting for those members who were also members of Cambridgeshire County Council, so they could take part in the debate and vote.

Name	Item	Reason
Sheil	25/101/CNL	Personal: Employed by Cambridgeshire County Council

**25/98/CNL Mayor's announcements**

The Mayor reminded Members that the meeting was to discuss and debate a crucial item on Local Government Reorganisation. This was an important opportunity for Councillors to consider how best to secure effective, efficient, and locally responsive services for the people of an historic city and district as well as all residents who lived, worked and studied in Cambridge.

Whatever the outcome, Members shared priority must be to protect the interests of residents and local identity.

Thanks was given to all Officers and Members who had supported this work.

## **25/99/CNL Minutes**

The minutes of 9 October 2025 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

## **25/100/CNL Public questions time**

### **Question 1**

In Wales, the reorganisation into unitary authorities in the 1990s promised savings and better services but instead delivered higher costs, cuts and weaker accountability. How can the Council claim that this proposal will save money and improve services when these benefits have historically failed to materialise?

The Leader of the Council responded with the following:

- It was true that the 1996 reorganisation in Wales did not deliver the neat package of quick savings and better services that was promised at the time.
- The level of savings achieved would depend on a variety of factors. For example, in the area, there were significant differences between the projected savings from a two-unitary and a three-unitary model.
- The proposal was based on detailed financial data from each of the existing local councils and from s151 officers, whereas the other proposals for the area were based on projections by consultants.
- It could not be claimed that “reorganisation automatically saves money and improves services”
- Using the base case, the financial analysis demonstrated that Option B would generate annual savings by 2032/33 of £42.8m.

### **Supplementary Question**

Will the Council ensure that residents receive honest evidence-based information before claiming that the public supports reorganisation?

The Leader of the Council responded with the following:

- Many services currently run by the County Council would actually come closer to home for Cambridge residents under our proposed model. In the well-chosen words of the Leaders predecessor, decisions about roads, social care or schools in Cambridge would no longer be taken by Fenland councillors sitting in Alconbury.

- Moreover, having ‘the council’ that fixed the potholes and emptied the bins as the same council, rather than two separate ones, could help residents to have clarity on who was responsible for what.
- There should be some helpful, practical benefits for residents from council services being under one organisation rather than two. Housing and health, for example, would now be under one council, and would hopefully be able to work more closely together as a result.
- At one of our public meetings to discuss Local Government Reorganisation, the Leader was struck by a story from one attendee who lived in Waterbeach, but as a result was unable to access council-organised exercise classes in Cambridge, instead having to take a much further journey all the way round the city, just because he was in South Cambridgeshire and not Cambridge.

## Question 2

We hope that our support of Cambs Unitaries Campaign for option B is welcomed.

However, does the Council and Leader feel that having a layer of government between Greater Cambridge and central government add anything? Why does the paper propose this transfer, which will result in less power for Cambridge decision-makers and taking away self-determination on strategic matters, without public consultation or consent?

The Leader of the Council responded with the following:

- Thanked the Cambs Unitaries Campaign for their support for unitarisation and for Option B, and the group’s active engagement in this process.
- There had been a slight misunderstanding -- the paper proposes transfer of the historic, civic Mayoralty of Cambridge and of Cambridge’s city status. This was a very important part of our city’s history and traditions, and it was vital that it was preserved.
- The Mayoralty and city status for Cambridge would not automatically transfer from Cambridge City Council to a Greater Cambridge unitary.
- This proposal recommended that that the Mayoralty was transferred to the successor authority via the Structural Change Order creating that new council. With support from the Crown and Government, Cambridge’s city status could be transferred to the new council through issuance of fresh Royal Letters Patent, which could be resolved as part of the Structural Change Order process.

- On the wider question of the Combined Authority, the Leader had only been involved in the Combined Authority for a short time but thought it did have scope for overseeing strategy for the area.
- He agreed that there could be a tension at times between the needs of the north and south of the area, and in some ways he would hope that our proposal, by creating two areas with similar economic power, could allow two different focuses for the two different unitaries, and the Combined Authority could then focus on more overarching issues.

### **Supplementary Question**

The Cambridgeshire Unitary Campaign is a cross-party organisation with members from all five local parties. Unitarisation would give more clarity for citizens on whole to go to, and bring more accountability.

However, it was felt that to some extent unitization would become a side show to devolution. The devolution Bill, although was predominately about moving strategic decision-making power away from the new council and putting powers in the hands of a single individual likely to be placed 30 to 40 miles away. Therefore, the new council will essentially be a service delivery body and would have little powers to make strategic decisions.

It was felt that the new council should be actively launching discussion about the relevance of having a new layer of government over merely two councils which would be a very strange arrangement especially given the difficulties that Cambridge has. Will the council give thought to this problem.

The Leader of the Council responded:

- Option B did not propose any additional transfer of power from Cambridge (or Greater Cambridge) to the CPCA, beyond that proposed by Government in the White Paper on English Devolution.
- The LGR proposal for Option B would lead to the current 7 constituent local authorities of the CPCA being replaced by two economically balanced new unitary councils (Greater Cambridge and North Cambridgeshire & Peterborough). It was proposed that each new council would have equal representation on the CPCA Board. This would reduce the risk of any potential bias towards either member council in CPCA policy, investment or delivery and it would enable the CPCA to focus on the different strengths and challenges in each council area.

- The Council would be working closely with the CPCA to understand the opportunities and challenges for our working relationship arising from LGR and devolution.

## **25/101/CNL Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Proposal**

Councillor Sheil recused himself from the item and although present for the discussion took no part and did not vote on the matter

Councillor Thornburrow arrived late at the meeting and did not take part in the discussion or vote on the item.

It was moved by the Leader of the Council, Councillor Holloway, and seconded by Councillor Bick, that the recommendations, as set out in the report on the Council agenda, be approved.

**Resolved** (31 votes to 2) to:

- i. Note the report, including the options appraisal which scored Option B the highest against government criteria for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), as well as the annexes which included relevant Council motions
- ii. That the Cabinet be recommended to support the City Council's LGR proposal of Option B.
- iii. Support the submission of Option B to the Secretary of State on behalf of the Council

The meeting ended at 6.45 pm

**MAYOR**