

EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on WEDNESDAY, 19 MARCH 2025 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor M Foley (Chair)
Councillors M Ahmed, H Asker, N Church, A Coote, C Criscione, A Dean, B Donald, G Driscoll, J Emanuel, J Evans, C Fiddy, R Freeman, R Gooding, N Gregory, N Hargreaves, R Haynes, P Lees, M Lemon, J Loughlin, S Luck, D McBirnie, J Moran, E Oliver, R Pavitt, A Reeve, N Reeve, B Regan, G Sell, R Silcock, M Sutton and M Tayler

Officers in attendance: P Holt (Chief Executive), B Ferguson (Democratic Services Manager) and Carolyn Forster (Legal - Solicitor)

C78 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bagnall, Armstrong, and Barker.

No declarations of interest were made.

C79 SUBMISSION OF INITIAL PROPOSALS TO GOVERNMENT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

The Leader presented the report regarding the submission of initial proposals to Government on Local Government Reform (LGR), and spoke to the recommendation, which asked whether she should sign the joint proposals on behalf of the Council. She highlighted the importance of Uttlesford District Council (UDC) being involved in discussions on LGR, and that the submission was consistent with the approach agreed at the extraordinary meeting in January. She said it was vital that she was given a mandate by Council and, in the event the recommendation was defeated, the letter would still be sent but without UDC's signature. This would lead to less influence and impact future discussions on LGR. She urged members to support the proposal.

Councillor Driscoll seconded the proposal.

Councillor Moran said he was grateful for cross-party meetings with the Leader and stressed the importance of the Council maintaining a strong voice in LGR discussions, particularly in regards to championing its rural communities and market towns. He said the district had a lot to offer.

Councillor Fiddy said residents needed elected officials with detailed local knowledge of the area they represented. She urged members to support the proposal.

Councillor Sell said he was concerned that LGR would cause unnecessary upheaval and criticised the rushed timeline and lack of public consultation on the matter. He said the Liberal Democrat's Group support for the proposal was not required.

Councillor Neil Reeve said UDC was currently punching above its weight and that while the reform process was imperfect, the Council needed to participate to protect residents' interests. He urged members to support the proposal by a large majority.

Councillor Emmanuel said she had no qualms with the letter but she did have problems with the overall project, as an artificial timeline had been imposed on LGR. She said such a rushed timescale would come at a price, either in terms of quality or financial cost to the taxpayer.

Councillor Asker said she agreed the timeline was rushed and asked for clarification regarding proposed partnerships with other councils and the input from local MPs. She said she would support the recommendation.

Councillor Coote said there were flaws in the process but urged councillors to support the proposal for strategic purposes; local was better but the Council had to be part of the ongoing negotiations.

Councillor Dean said he would abstain due to concerns over insufficient communication and lack of information. He said there were better ways to bring people with you.

Councillor Pavitt said the Council needed to be at the table in order to protect the district's interests but the proposals were not good. He warned of potential democratic deficits and that parish councils would struggle to fill the gap.

Councillor Gooding said he would support the recommendation but noted the financial challenges facing councils across the country. He said he had concerns regarding the viability of the tax base if the unitary councils were too small.

Councillor Hargreaves said there had been an overwhelming majority at the previous meeting regarding LGR and urged members not to abstain. He said that abstentions would weaken UDC's ability to influence negotiations and he urged members to support the proposal.

Councillor Driscoll said he shared concerns but reinforced the need for the Council to be in the strongest possible position at the negotiating table. He said it was not the time to follow the party line, or express disappointment with the process, as LGR would happen in any case. It was important for the Council to be heavily involved in order to get the best result for residents. He called for a recorded vote.

The Leader was asked to summarise before going to a vote. She reiterated that the decision before members was about securing influence in negotiations, rather than endorsing a specific unitary model. She added that opposition Group

Leaders had been regularly briefed and it was for the opposition leaders to cascade this information down to their members.

The Chair called for a recorded vote; the proposal was approved with 28 votes for, 0 against and 4 abstentions.

COUNCILLOR	FOR / AGAINST / ABSTAIN
Cllr Ahmed	For
Cllr Asker	For
Cllr Church	For
Cllr Coote	For
Cllr Criscione	For
Cllr Dean	Abstain
Cllr Donald	For
Cllr Driscoll	For
Cllr Emanuel	For
Cllr Evans	For
Cllr Fiddy	For
Cllr Freeman	For
Cllr Gooding	For
Cllr Gregory	For
Cllr Hargreaves	For
Cllr Haynes	For
Cllr Lees	For
Cllr Lemon	For
Cllr Loughlin	Abstain
Cllr Luck	For

COUNCILLOR	FOR / AGAINST / ABSTAIN
Cllr McBirnie	For
Cllr Moran	For
Cllr Oliver	For
Cllr Pavitt	For
Cllr Alex Reeve	For
Cllr Neil Reeve	For
Cllr Regan	For
Cllr Sell	Abstain
Cllr Silcock	For
Cllr Sutton	For
Cllr Tayler	For
Chair (Cllr Foley)	Abstain

RESOLVED to agree that the Leader of the Council should add her name to this submission of Initial Proposals on Local Government Reform to send to Government by their 21st March deadline, as per Appendix A.

The meeting was closed at 8.55pm.