

COUNCIL
8 OCTOBER 2026

PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The following motion has been submitted, due notice of which has been given in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.

To be moved by Councillor Chris Lucas and seconded by Councillor David Chalmers:

Local Government Reorganisation

This Council welcomes the Government's decision, announced by Angela Rayner MP, on 7 September 2026 to halt implementation of its deeply flawed four-unitary model for Hertfordshire, but condemns the Government's shambolic handling of Local Government Reorganisation and the substantial waste of public money, officer time and resources caused by the process.

Council further calls for full transparency over the costs already incurred and for the Government to ensure that North Hertfordshire taxpayers are not left to pick up the bill for a reorganisation process imposed upon councils and then abruptly halted.

Council notes:

1. That the Government required councils across Hertfordshire to devote substantial political, managerial, financial and officer capacity to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), culminating in its decision on 16 July 2026 to impose a four-unitary model on Hertfordshire, with four new authorities due to take over services from April 2028.
2. That North Hertfordshire District Council established an LGR budget of £2 million across 2026/27 and 2027/28, including provision for county-wide costs, additional staffing, staff backfill and training, with £450,000 allocated to four additional HR and IT posts to deal with LGR workload pressures.
3. That councils, officers and partners were instructed to proceed at pace with preparations for implementation, including transition arrangements and May 2027 shadow authority elections. The Government has now halted this work pending its review, acknowledging the risk of councils undertaking "nugatory work".
4. That the proposed May 2027 elections to the new shadow unitary authorities will consequently not take place, with elections instead proceeding for the existing councils on their existing boundaries. This represents a major reversal of the implementation timetable and creates further disruption and uncertainty for councils, officers, councillors, prospective candidates and residents.
5. That the halt follows a series of legal challenges to LGR decisions elsewhere in Essex, Hampshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Portsmouth. By June, three quarters of the county councils affected by the reorganisation process had signed a letter demanding that the Government disclose the evidence and departmental analysis behind its decisions.

Hertfordshire County Council subsequently issued a Pre-Action Protocol letter seeking disclosure of the evidence, analysis and financial assessments underpinning the Government's decision to impose four unitary authorities in Hertfordshire.

6. That this is particularly significant because published financial modelling indicated that the proposed Central Hertfordshire authority, which would include most of North Hertfordshire, could begin with an estimated £22 million budget deficit in its first year.
7. That Hertfordshire modelling estimated savings of up to £418 million over ten years under the two-unitary model compared with up to £124 million under the four-unitary model.
8. That this Council last year voted against the four-unitary model, which would divide the existing North Hertfordshire district between Central and Eastern Hertfordshire, with Royston and surrounding villages separated from the rest of the district, and removed the Council Leader when he acted against that decision.

Council believes:

1. That the decision to halt implementation of the four-unitary model is welcome, but the Government's handling of LGR has been chaotic and wasteful, creating unnecessary uncertainty for residents and council staff while diverting significant resources and officer time away from frontline services and other council priorities.
2. That abandoning the planned May 2027 shadow authority elections, after councils had already been instructed to prepare for them, demonstrates the scale of the disruption caused by the Government's reversal and raises serious questions about the future viability and timetable of the reorganisation process.
3. That the decision to halt the process only weeks after announcing the four-unitary model, raises serious questions about whether the financial, legal and practical implications were adequately considered before councils were instructed to begin implementation.
4. That council officers should not have been expected to design new structures, recruit, train, procure and prepare for transition, while planning their own futures, without confidence that the Government's decisions were financially sustainable, legally robust and capable of being delivered.
5. That the four-unitary model was the wrong option for North Hertfordshire because of concerns about financial sustainability, the division of existing communities, additional transition costs and the ability of the proposed authorities to protect essential local services.
6. That it is unacceptable for local taxpayers to bear the costs of a process driven forward at speed before the Government had established that its decisions were financially credible, legally robust and deliverable.

Therefore, Council resolves to:

1. Request the Chief Executive of North Hertfordshire District Council to provide a full accounting of the costs already incurred by the Council as a result of LGR, including additional staffing, officer time, consultants' fees, legal advice, recruitment, training, project management and other transition costs.
2. Request the Leader of North Hertfordshire District Council to write to Angela Rayner MP, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to:
 - a) demand publication of the full rationale, evidence, financial assessments and departmental analysis underpinning the decision to select four unitary authorities for Hertfordshire.
 - b) seek an explanation of how ministers assessed the financial sustainability of the four-unitary model, including the projected £22 million first-year deficit for Central Hertfordshire.
 - c) seek a commitment that councils will be fully compensated for reasonable and demonstrable costs incurred as a direct consequence of the Government's LGR programme and its subsequent halt.
 - d) seek immediate clarity and reassurance for council officers whose employment, structures, reporting arrangements and career prospects have been thrown into uncertainty.
 - e) seek clarity on the Government's intentions and timetable for the future of Local Government Reorganisation in Hertfordshire following the cancellation of the May 2027 shadow authority elections; and
 - f) demand that North Hertfordshire District Council is fully consulted before any further decision is taken, with that consultation involving representatives of all political groups on the Council and not solely the administration.
3. Call on the Government to ensure that any future proposals for local government in Hertfordshire put financial sustainability, effective public services, community links and the interests of residents, council taxpayers and frontline staff ahead of arbitrary ministerial timetables.
4. Call on the Government to learn the fundamental lesson from this process: councils should never again be required to spend millions of pounds, consume thousands of hours of officer time and destabilise local government before the Government has established that its proposals are financially credible, legally sound and capable of being delivered.