

Collaborative Working

The County Council refutes the claim by the district councils and Rutland that it would not pursue a “collaborative process” on local government reorganisation. Regrettably this has been constrained by the initial approach taken by the district councils and Rutland and subsequently maintained.

In January 2025, a meeting was held, hosted by Melton Borough Council, involving the district councils, Rutland Council, the City Council and the County Council (at Leader and Chief Executive level) to discuss a way forward on reorganisation following the publication of the White Paper. At the start of the meeting it was clear that a position had been reached following pre-meetings which had excluded the County Council; the districts, Rutland and the City Council were all of the view that the way forward was to extend the City Council’s boundaries and split the remaining County into two, i.e. three unitary authorities. The Acting Leader of the County Council said that she was unable to accept that proposal and would likely reconsider the County Council’s preference from the 2019 discussions on reorganisation, i.e. a preferred option for a single unitary for the County, possibly now to include Rutland. She confirmed to the district Leaders, the Leader of Rutland and the City Mayor at a meeting she hosted in March that the County Council’s preference was a single unitary for the County.

A request by the County Council to Melton BC for a note of the January meeting was declined, which the County Council interpreted as reluctance to document formally the district councils’ support for a City boundary extension. The County Council retains its own record of the meeting.

Between January and March, there was no change in the position of the district councils and Rutland, apart from a recognition that some districts would lose territory to the City Council, which surprisingly appeared not to have been recognised at the meeting in January. The County Council perceived the approach of the district councils as inflexible (‘take it or leave it’) and not conducive to genuine collaboration. Rutland left its options open. In contrast, the County Council held discussions with the City Council to explore the best options for Leicester and Leicestershire.

When there were approaches from the districts and Rutland to meet with the County Council, it was apparent that their intention was to have pre-meetings to try to agree a position with the City Council before engaging with the County Council.

After the County Council elections in May 2025, the new Leader of the County Council was almost immediately approached by the districts, and on behalf of Rutland, with the same proposal with no flexibility to look at other options, which was rejected to allow time to consider options and for discussions to take place within his minority administration. During the summer and autumn, the Leader participated in debates organised by the business community to consider options for reorganisation with the leader of the group of district councils (also representing Rutland) and the Leicester City Mayor. Requests from the Leader for information to support the districts’ proposal led to a suggestion of a meeting with district and Rutland officers but eventually to the

Leader being referred to a few pages of financial assumptions in their interim plan. The Leader replied that he would prefer to have an independent financial analysis of those assumptions.

Following debate at two County Council meetings in July, a majority of the County Council did not support the proposal for reorganisation from the district councils and Rutland, but there was no consensus on a preferred County Council proposal. Accordingly, after discussion with the political group leaders and to inform the County Council's position on a preferred proposal, agreement was reached with the City Council to do some joint financial modelling, which concluded in September 2025, and informed the County Council's position. The County Council was disappointed that the district councils chose not to be part of the joint financial modelling.

The only change in the position of the district councils and Rutland since January 2025 has been to move from supporting a City boundary extension to opposing it. There has been no change in their proposal to split the remaining County into two, which was not supported by the County Council's administration prior to the County Council elections and is not supported by the current administration.

The criticism of the County Council by the district councils and Rutland seems to be based entirely on their failure to accept the fact that the County Council before and after the May elections has not supported their proposal to split the County into two, from which the district councils, if not Rutland (who have wanted to keep their options open, including merging with parts of Lincolnshire), have never been prepared to move. It is also worth noting that up to October 2025 there had been much more debate in Cabinet and full Council on local government reorganisation in the County Council than in any district council.