

# District Councillor's Report July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2025 - Cllr Tom Bygott

## Local Government Reorganisation consultation

The Local Government Reorganisation currently underway across England is the biggest change to local government since 1974. Rather than separate county, city and district councils, services like bin collections, roads, education and social care will all be under the umbrella of one unitary council.

Although it appears that it is possible to streamline services to save money - false efficiencies, short-termism and the "race to the bottom" are the guiding principles of our civilisation in decline - many of us are concerned that the government's proposed size for these unitary councils (with populations of at least 500,000 people) threaten to lose the local democratic representation that we hold so dear. Also, apart from its traditional counties, many of which date to Saxon times, England has no stable, historically enduring internal borders, so any reorganisation will only be temporary. Local authorities have no long term incentive to manage their affairs properly, because any that succeed in doing so will eventually be wiped away by the tide of central government tinkering.

My group is continuing to meet with officers to ensure we have the information we need to get the best outcome for residents, with the best possible services and the best possible representation by your local councillors.

Whatever your views on Local Government Reorganisation, it's really important that you have your say in the consultation, which can be accessed online via the council's webpage or by collecting a hard copy from the council office or libraries. While Local Government Reorganisation may seem distant from day to day life, council services that are performed in the background – such as collecting your bins, allocating school places and maintaining the roads – affect us all.

All seven of the councils in the ceremonial county of Cambridgeshire, including Peterborough, have been working together to discuss potential options for a new arrangement of councils. Three options based on existing Council boundaries are currently on the table. More information can be found at: <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/news/three-options-announced-for-council-reorganisation-plans>

### Proposal A - A North-West/South-East Option

Unitary 1: Peterborough City Council, Huntingdonshire and Fenland District Councils - along with County Council functions.

Unitary 2: Cambridge City Council, East Cambridgeshire and South Cambridgeshire District Councils - along with County Council functions.

### Proposal B - A North/South Option

Unitary 1: Peterborough City Council, East Cambridgeshire, Fenland and Huntingdonshire District Councils - along with County Council functions.

Unitary 2: Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District - along with County Council functions

### Proposal C - An East/West Option

Unitary 1: Peterborough City Council, East Cambridgeshire and Fenland District Councils - along with County Council functions.

Unitary 2: Cambridge City Council, Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire District Councils - along with County Council functions.

Before these proposals for potential new structures are submitted to Government in November, they would like to hear what local people think. You can complete a public survey that runs until the end of the day on Sunday 20 July 2025, at: <https://can-campaigns.co.uk/local-councils-in-cambridgeshire-and-peterborough-are-changing>

Ultimately, it will be for central government to decide on any new local council structures. Britain has one of the most centralised national governments in the world, with little if any powers in England residing outside London.

## National Emergency Alert test to be held on 7 September

On 7 July, the government announced that mobile phones in the UK will be sent a test Emergency Alert at around 3:00pm on Sunday 7 September 2025, as part of plans to strengthen the country's preparedness. The Emergency Alerts system is used to warn if there's a danger to life nearby, including extreme weather. It allows vital information and advice to be sent to people rapidly in an emergency.

During the test, mobile phones will vibrate and make a loud siren sound for roughly ten seconds, even if they are set to silent. A message will also appear on phone screens, making it clear the alert is only a test. There are approximately 87 million mobile phones in the UK. The test will be the second of its kind and follows a government commitment to test the system regularly to make sure it works optimally and familiarise the public with the alerts. Ahead of the national test, the government will be running a public information campaign to notify people that the test is taking place, including communications targeted at vulnerable groups, such as victims of domestic abuse. The campaign will also feature products in British Sign Language.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster unveiled a new Resilience Action Plan in early July to improve the way the government prepares for and responds to emergencies. The Resilience Action Plan sets out: The government will raise awareness of <https://prepare.campaign.gov.uk> which gives information on simple and effective steps people can take to be more prepared for an emergency. The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology is investing £370 million to better secure the UK's telecommunications networks through research and investment in new technology and infrastructure. The National Situation Centre and the Devolved Governments are going to sign a data sharing memorandum of understanding (MOU) to ensure that every nation in the UK has the best available data to prepare and respond to crises.

More information can be found at:

[www.gov.uk/government/news/national-emergency-alert-test-to-be-held-on-7th-september](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-emergency-alert-test-to-be-held-on-7th-september)

The Cabinet Office has produced a frequently asked questions document about the upcoming test, which can be found at: [www.gov.uk/government/news/emergency-alert-test-frequently-asked-questions](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/emergency-alert-test-frequently-asked-questions).

## Trial version of GOV.UK App launched

The first version of the [GOV.UK App](#) has been launched and is available to download on smartphones: [www.gov.uk/guidance/download-the-govuk-app](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/download-the-govuk-app)

Launching first in "public beta", meaning the technology is still being worked on extensively, the release will allow the public to build the app around their personal circumstances, life events and services. People will be able to choose which topics to prioritise on their home page, based on which government services are most important to them, whether it's 'care', 'travel' or 'business'. A home page will then let people access these services right away, rather than having to scour the internet each time, so they can get information, request support or change their details with the right government service with ease. Today's launch follows the digital blueprint for government which includes a number of tools to make it much easier for people and businesses to interact with the government. Later this year, the UK government will also launch GOV.UK Wallet which will include a pilot digital driving licence, which individuals will be able to easily use from their phone to prove their age when buying age restricted items online and in person. More information is available at: [www.gov.uk/government/news/public-services-put-in-your-pocket-with-trial-govuk-app-launched-today](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/public-services-put-in-your-pocket-with-trial-govuk-app-launched-today)

## Period poverty campaign returns

It's really encouraging to see that the council is re-running its period poverty campaign, which first began last year after my group submitted a motion to council calling for action. Last year, the council helped distribute 407 packs of free, sustainable period products including reusable pads, period pants and menstrual cups to help those in need.

## Four-day week update

South Cambridgeshire District Council will decide this Thursday at its Full Council meeting whether to become a permanent, 32-hour per week, four-day week employer (subject to support from Cambridge City Council at its Full Council meeting on Thursday 24 July 2025). The papers are available on the council's website at: <https://scambs.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=410&MIId=10238&Ver=4>

My group has led the opposition to a four day week, ever since the trial began in January 2023. The council's ruling group says that the main reason for their introducing a four day week is to make it easier to recruit and retain staff. Despite being England's only four-day week council, it was reported in February that SCDC only ranks 28th out of 77 participating councils when it comes to sickness absences for staff. My view is that salaries should be raised for those roles, such as planning officers, where there has been a shortage of staff. After all it is the high cost of housing in the Cambridge area that makes it worthwhile for staff to move to cheaper parts of the country. It is extra income that our staff need rather than more leisure time.

My group has been asking for several years for a full council vote on the four day week, but sadly it is a foregone conclusion that the ruling group will vote to make this happen, regardless of what is said at the debate. The papers have only just become available and my colleagues pushed strongly for these documents to be reviewed by the council's Scrutiny and Overview Committee, but this will only be done on July 14th, a few days before the council meeting, which is an inadequate amount of time before councillors will be required to make a decision.

It had been promised that if there were a deterioration in the council's services, the trial would be stopped. Results have just been published of two public surveys, a Public Consultation that anyone could participate in, and a Representative Survey where about 1,000 individuals and 400 businesses in the District were invited to take part. These are available as Appendices C and D to the report for July 14th's Scrutiny meeting: <https://scambs.moderngov.co.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=102305#mgDocuments>

In the first of these, nine of the 13 services - including Bin collection, Council Tax collection, the Contact Centre, Environmental Health, Licensing and Town Planning, registered a 'statistically significant decrease' and the others showed 'no statistically significant difference'. Not a single one registered an increase in performance. In the residents' section of the second survey, three services - Bin collection, Council Tax collection, the Contact Centre, registered a 'statistically significant decrease' and the others showed 'no statistically significant difference' plus one that had too low a sample size to perform the statistical test on. Not a single service registered an improvement. In every service that showed 'no statistically significant difference', there was a downward trend and, given that the statisticians' report was filled with warnings about low samples sizes and insufficient data, I have concluded that the most likely reason for not registering a 'statistically significant decrease' for every single service was that the Council neglected to collect enough survey responses. In the public consultation that means that it should have advertised the survey more or kept it open longer. In the Representative Survey, it was the Council that decided on the number of people to contact.

Despite the survey data collected being inadequate to support a final decision on making the trial permanent, the Council's ruling group is determined to vote through the change against all opposition.

Cllr Tom Bygott  
cllr@bygott.net  
07765 475 513