

COLNEY HEATH PARISH COUNCIL

- ✉ **Postal Address:** Highfield Park Visitor Centre, Hill End Lane AL4 0RA
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24/25 Item 98

Information Document for Parish Councillors

Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution in Hertfordshire

This document provides an overview of the government's invitation for local government reorganisation in Hertfordshire, highlighting key proposals, responsibilities, and anticipated challenges for parish councils. It is essential that Colney Heath Parish Council and other parish councils within the county remain informed and proactive in response to these developments.

Key Government Proposals

1. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)
The government has invited councils in Hertfordshire to develop proposals for a unitary local government structure.
Any proposal must meet key criteria, including efficiency, financial sustainability, and strong local representation.
Councils are encouraged to work collaboratively to develop a single proposal that best serves the region.

Impact on Parish Councils:

- Potential restructuring may influence funding streams, service delivery, and local governance roles.
- Parish councils may need to engage more actively with principal authorities to ensure local needs are considered.

2. Devolution and Local Authority Collaboration
The government is shifting towards larger, more sustainable governance structures with greater devolved powers
Hertfordshire County Council and district/borough councils are expected to collaborate on a response to the government's request.

Impact on Parish Councils:

- Increased need for engagement with borough/district councils to safeguard local representation.
- Parish councils may see new responsibilities delegated to them as part of the devolution process.

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3. Financial and Administrative Changes
Proposed multi-year financial settlements to enhance stability in local government funding.
Changes to funding mechanisms, including the discontinuation of the Community Ownership Fund.
The expectation that transition costs for reorganisation will be met through existing council budgets.

Impact on Parish Councils:

- Financial planning will need to account for changes in funding availability and grant structures.
- Parish councils may need to explore alternative funding mechanisms and budget for increased responsibilities.

4. Governance and Standards Reforms
Strengthened standards for councillor conduct, including the introduction of a mandatory code of conduct.
Remote attendance at council meetings to be permitted, but proxy voting will not be allowed.

Impact on Parish Councils:

- Councillors must adhere to stricter conduct regulations and transparency measures.
- Parish councils will need to update meeting procedures and governance policies accordingly.

5. Timeline for Local Government Reorganisation

Date	Event
21 March 2025	Deadline for submission of interim reorganisation plans
28 November 2025	Deadline for final unitary authority proposals
Early 2026	Government consideration and legislative process
May 2026	Potential elections for new shadow authorities
2027–2028	Full implementation of new governance structures

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Next Steps for Colney Heath Parish Council

a) Engagement with Higher Authorities

- Proactively participate in consultations and discussions with borough/district and county councils.
- Advocate for local interests to ensure fair representation in reorganisation proposals.

b) Community Engagement and Representation

- Increase public consultations to align with the government's emphasis on local engagement.
- Educate the community about the potential changes and encourage resident participation in discussions.

c) Financial Planning and Resource Management

- Assess the impact of funding changes and develop a multi-year financial strategy.
- Explore alternative revenue sources to mitigate the loss of existing grant opportunities.

d) Governance and Compliance Adaptation

- Review and update council meeting procedures to incorporate remote attendance options.
- Ensure compliance with new governance and conduct standards for councillors.

e) Workforce and Training Development

- Participate in sector-wide workforce development programmes.
- Invest in staff training to ensure smooth adaptation to new responsibilities.

6. Conclusion

The proposed local government reorganisation presents both challenges and opportunities for Colney Heath Parish Council. By remaining proactive, engaged, and adaptable, the council can ensure that local interests are protected and that the transition to new governance structures is smooth and beneficial for the community.

For further information, councillors are encouraged to refer to the below, which outlines the formal invitation from the government regarding the reorganisation process.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-reorganisation-invitation-to-local-authorities-in-two-tier-areas/letter-hertfordshire>