

# Questions that still haven't been answered about proposal to scrap district councils and replace them with single authority

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Eight councils would be reduced to one

It has been seven months since County Hall set out its plans for [a massive shake-up of Leicestershire politics that would see all of the county's eight councils scrapped and an entirely new one formed.](#)

[Leicestershire County Council](#) leader Councillor Nick Rushton has said the move would be the only way the county could deal with the impact of massive government funding cuts, and that it would save tax payers at least £30 million a year.

The plan, if it went ahead, would see the following councils scrapped, and replaced with one, all-encompassing, new authority:

- Leicestershire County Council
- [Harborough District Council](#)
- [Melton Borough Council](#)
- [Charnwood Brough](#) Council
- [North West Leicestershire](#) District Council
- [Hinckley](#) and Bosworth Borough Council
- [Blaby](#) District Council
- [Oadby](#) and [Wigston](#) Borough Council.

Since the controversial plans were announced, hours of meetings have been held and pages of reports produced on the issue.

All of them have been covered by Leicestershire Live, and while much has been revealed and discussed, there are still many important questions that remain unanswered.

Here, we take a look at some of them.

## **How many people would be made redundant?**

Councillors have asked for a figure on several occasions, but as yet there has been no solid answer.

Numbers being bandied about are in the hundreds. Oadby and Wigston Lib Dem councillor Bill Boulter said he reckoned it could be up to 1,000, but as yet officers have said they cannot say.

What we do know is that the functions currently performed by the county would continue to run as they are when the change was first made, and staff would transfer over under TUPE regulations - so their existing terms and conditions of employment would still apply.

However, under the new council many roles would be duplicated, and inevitably some people members of staff would be surplus to requirements. Councillors asked at the latest scrutiny meeting for reassurances that existing employees of the districts and boroughs would be treated equally with those of the county council when applying for positions at the new council when there was duplication.

Councillor Boulter said at the meeting: "The only way we will achieve the savings being talked about is through a great number of staff redundancies.

“It doesn’t look like a new council to me, it looks like a county council takeover.

“Will there be a level playing field? Because I imagine two thirds of the people employed now won’t have a job at the end of it.”

Melton Conservative Councillor Byron Rhodes replied: “You’re right, there will be substantial savings in this area, but we wouldn’t be at two thirds, but it would be some numbers, yes.”

It was also suggested at the scrutiny meeting that an interim management team might be set up ready for when the change is made. Coun Rhodes said details of which would be addressed in the business plan.

## **Where will the new council be based?**

The assumption is that the new council will be largely based at County Hall in Glenfield, but there will be local offices for front-facing services to be delivered.

Leicestershire County Council owns 14 offices. In the past it has operated from 50 offices.

There are issues with County Hall, though. The council rents out 500 desks to public service partners, such as the NHS, generating around £500,000 a year. There are 500 more desk spaces that could be rented out or occupied by new council staff if the change happened, but car parking at the site is already at capacity.

According to council officers, a multi-storey car park would be the only feasible solution to that problem.

However, Coun Rhodes said: “That would be a capital project and it is certainly not one of our current priorities.”

District and borough councils have office space and headquarters across the county, some of which would be surplus to requirements.

### **So would buildings be sold off?**

Yes, but there is no indication as to which ones yet, which is a cause of concern for some.

Councillor Terry Richardson, a Conservative who is also the leader of Blaby District Council, expressed worry at the meeting that taking offices which are staffed by relatively large numbers of people out of county towns and villages could have a negative impact on local economies.

He had a different suggestion, which was not too well received.

County Hall Glenfield (Image: Chris Gordon)

Referring to County Hall, Coun Richardson said: “One of the most valuable assets this council has is this campus. It’s right on the edge of the city and would be perfect for housing.

“We don’t seem to have considered that as an option. There’s just an assumption that people will move here. Why not move them elsewhere?”

Coun Rhodes replied: “It might make a good housing site, but we’ve invested in this building over time.

“The cost of dismantling it wouldn’t be efficient.”

### **Who will decide on planning applications?**

Planning is one of the issues councillors say residents are most concerned about.

They say people who live in the districts do not want planning applications decided in Glenfield.

The proposed solution to this is having an as yet unknown number of local planning committees which could potentially mirror the existing set up and sit in areas where the districts and boroughs sit currently.

This model has been adopted in Wiltshire and Durham, which have both made the switch to unitary authorities.

It is anticipated that planning powers delegated to the districts would remain, so applications of 10 houses or fewer would be decided on by officers.

Bigger applications would be heard by a board made up of local members, and applications for more than 200 homes and major infrastructure projects would be decided higher up the chain (at Glenfield).

## **And what about other local decisions?**

Both Durham and Wiltshire have local bodies set up to decide on smaller local issues and projects.

The idea being floated is that each body would be given an amount of money and allocated decision making powers for things such as traffic regulation orders and smaller highways decisions.

The boards would be made up of town and parish representatives, local police officers and selected councillors for the areas the boards covered.

There would also be scope for representatives of the local clinical commissioning group (CCG), which commissions health services, housing associations, [Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service](#), Healthwatch, which is an independent consumer group for health, and local community groups to have a seat at the table.

Members of the public would be encouraged to attend the meetings.

The number of boards suggested was seven or eight, but some councillors said there would need to be more.

Coun Richardson suggested up to 20 would be required to serve communities properly.

## **When will we know more?**

Scrutiny will now write a report which will go to cabinet.

A full business case will then be drawn up. That will also have to go to cabinet, then scrutiny, then back to cabinet before going before full council.

Coun Rushton said: "We're in no rush. We're doing this piece of work so that when the government asks for proposals there's one on the shelf ready to go."

## **How much is all of this costing?**

This is another question that has been asked several times but still not answered.

The last we heard on this was that the cost was being absorbed by current budgets, and staff were pulling in extra hours to get work on the proposal done.

## **Is there anything else we still don't know?**

Lots!

Issues raised by councillors include parking charges. Currently, the districts and boroughs all operate different systems.

The same applies when it comes to waste collection.

Then there's leisure centres and parks, which are not mentioned in the report.

It is expected that the business case will lay out the plans in a lot more detail than there is currently available.

## **When do residents have their say?**

Public consultation has been promised since Coun Rushton first put the plans on the table.

A lot of emphasis has been placed on the public having their say, and that will come, but not until full council has looked at the business case.

The likelihood is that residents will not have their say on detailed proposals until late this year or even early next year.

But the county council says it is happy to hear from residents throughout the process.

For more information, visit:

[www.futureleicestershire.org](http://www.futureleicestershire.org)