

Guildhall Gainsborough  
Lincolnshire DN21 2NA  
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**This meeting will be webcast and published on the Council's website**

## AGENDA

Prayers will be conducted prior to the start of the meeting.  
Members are welcome to attend.

**Notice** is hereby given that an Extraordinary meeting of the Council will be held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall, Marshall's Yard, Gainsborough, DN21 2NA, on **Monday, 16th March, 2026 at 7.00 pm**, and your attendance at such meeting is hereby requested to transact the following business.

### **To: Members of West Lindsey District Council**

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
2. MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST  
*Members may make any declarations of interest at this point and may also make them at any point during the meeting.*
3. REPORTS FOR DETERMINATION
  - a. Local Government Reorganisation  
**(PAGES 3 - 22)**
4. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS  
To resolve that under Section 100 (A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

Agendas, Reports and Minutes will be provided upon request in the following formats:

Large Clear Print: Braille: Audio: Native Language

- a. Local Government Re-Organisation - Exempt Appendix - Assessment of Proposals

**(PAGES 23 - 61)**

Paul Burkinshaw  
Head of Paid Service  
The Guildhall  
Gainsborough

Friday, 6 March 2026

Agendas, Reports and Minutes will be provided upon request in the following formats:

Large Clear Print: Braille: Audio: Native Language



**Council**

**Monday, 16 March 2026**

**Subject: Local Government Reorganisation**

Report by:

Chief Executive – Paul Burkinshaw

Contact Officer:

Rachael Hughes  
Head of Policy and Strategy

[rachael.hughes@west-lindsey.gov.uk](mailto:rachael.hughes@west-lindsey.gov.uk)

Purpose / Summary:

The report asks Full Council to consider the proposals for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Greater Lincolnshire that have been included for Statutory Consultation, note the format and deadline set by Government and agree to respond to the consultation.

## **RECOMMENDATION(S):**

That Council:

1. Notes the timeline and requirements of the government's LGR Statutory Consultation exercise, and;
2. Agrees that the Council submits a response based on the assessment of the proposals against the Councils principles and with regards to the statutory questions in the consultation as set out in this report and appendices.
3. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council to finalise and submit the final Statutory Consultation response and that a final copy of the response be circulated to all Members of the Council for information.

**Legal:**

Following publication of the English Devolution White Paper in December 2024; on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2025 Government issued a Statutory Invitation letter inviting all local authorities in two-tier areas to submit proposals for a single-tier of local government in the area. In Greater Lincolnshire, this invitation was issued to all ten local authorities, including West Lindsey District Council (“the Council”).

In November 2025, Government received six final proposals for LGR, three of which were based on the same geographical boundaries.

On 5<sup>th</sup> February 2026, the Government commenced a period of Statutory Consultation running for seven weeks until 26<sup>th</sup> March 2026. As a named consultee, the Council is invited to respond.

Government will use the consultation responses to inform which, if any, of the LGR proposals to implement either with or without modification.

**Financial: FIN/171/26/CL/SL**

This report has no direct financial implications.

There will however be financial implications associated with LGR transition.

Once the Government has made a decision on how LGR will be delivered across Greater Lincolnshire, legislative changes will be enacted, including a Structural Changes Order to create the new unitary authority(s).

Usually, after the Structural Order is laid and the establishment of the shadow authority, a Section 24 notice will come into effect. This places legally binding financial restrictions on existing local authorities involved in Local Government Reorganisation, including the Council.

Specifically, a Section 24 notice means that any land disposals over £100k, entering into any capital contracts over £1million, and entering into any non-capital contracts over £100k will require written consent from the successor Council.

Based on current timelines and information, it can be anticipated that the Structural Changes Order could be drafted as early as Autumn/Winter 2026, with the formation of the shadow authority and Section 24 notice coming into effect following the Local Elections in May 2027.

Government has stated previously that the transition costs associated with LGR must be met by local councils impacted by LGR, however recently Government announced some capacity funding may be available to support the implementation of the new council structures. However, the details and criteria related to this funding remain unknown.

As such, until clarity on the level of funding and associated parameters the Council will need to proceed on the basis that a contribution towards the transition costs of establishing a new unitary authority will be required.

A separate paper will be presented to Corporate Policy and Resources Committee setting out the financial implications of transition arrangements for the Council in due course.

**Staffing: HR255-03-06**

This report has no direct staffing implications.

There will however be staffing implications associated with LGR transition.

LGR is a new priority workstream for all councils undergoing reorganisation which will, by its nature, put pressure on the capacity and resources of some corporate and other service areas who will be required to respond to the different elements of the transition process at the same time as continuing to provide well-managed services and delivering the Council's priorities.

LGR will impact on all of the council's workforce. Council staff continue to be kept regularly informed and involved at every stage of the process.

**Equality and Diversity including Human Rights:**

In appraising the final LGR proposals, consideration has been given to Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications.

**Data Protection Implications:**

Effective collaboration through the development of shared assumptions and datasets is a key requirement within the government's assessment criteria. It is therefore expected that councils will openly and effectively share data and information, with government prepared to intervene where this is not the case.

In Greater Lincolnshire, a data sharing agreement is in place, including provisions to safeguard and ensure handling of data is GDPR compliant and that high standards of data management are adhered to at all times.

This data sharing agreement remains under review to ensure that it remains suitable for each of the stages of LGR and detail and sensitivity of data being shared at any given point during reorganisation.

**Climate Related Risks and Opportunities:**

None arising from this report.

**Section 17 Crime and Disorder Considerations:**

None arising from this report.

**Health Implications:**

None arising from this report.

**Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:**

[English Devolution White Paper 2024](#)

[Statutory Invitation from the Minister for Local Government & English Devolution to Greater Lincolnshire Council Leaders - 05.02.2025.](#)

[Local Government Boundary Commission for England LGR FAQs](#)

[WLDC LGR Interim Proposal Report to Full Council 18.03.2025](#)

[MHCLG: Summary of Feedback on Interim Plans - 03.06.2025](#)

[WLDC LGR Update Paper to Full Council - 07.07.2025](#)

[WLDC LGR Update Paper to Full Council - 08.09.2025](#)

[WLDC LGR Resources Paper to CPR 25.09.25](#)

[WLDC LGR Update Paper to Full Council 10.11.25](#)

[MHCLG Statutory Consultation for Greater Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire & North-East Lincolnshire](#)

**Risk Assessment:**

The Council could choose not to engage with the Statutory Consultation.

As a named consultee representing the interests of residents and businesses in the district, it is considered prudent for the Council to respond to the consultation, having regard to the best interests of the economic, social, and democratic needs of West Lindsey and the Greater Lincolnshire area.

**Call in and Urgency:**

**Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?**

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

Yes

No

**Key Decision:**

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

**Yes**

**No**

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 Following the Statutory Invitation from the Minister for English Devolution and Local Government (“the Minister”), received on 05<sup>th</sup> February 2025, Councils across all 21 two-tier local authority areas in England have now submitted their final proposals for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) to Government.
- 1.2 As part of Government’s decision-making process on which, if any, of the final proposals should be implemented across Greater Lincolnshire, on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2026, a period of Statutory Consultation was launched to allow interested parties to share their views on each of the proposals submitted in their area.
- 1.3 In Greater Lincolnshire, six final proposals were submitted in November 2025, with three of these proposals containing identical options for geographic boundaries. As such, Government has combined these three into one proposal meaning that four unique geographic proposals have been brought forward for consultation.
- 1.4 On 10<sup>th</sup> November 2025, Council resolved to *“undertake an options assessment of all the final Greater Lincolnshire LGR proposals, once these are published, in order to inform the Councils response to the Statutory Consultation.”*
- 1.5 The assessment of each of the proposals is based on principles agreed by Council on 10<sup>th</sup> November and in alignment with the statutory consultation questions prepared by Government.
- 1.6 In the intervening period, the final Greater Lincolnshire proposals have been published in full, thus allowing that assessment to take place.

## **2 The Statutory Consultation Process**

- 2.1 The Government’s Statutory Consultation takes the form of an online survey which is open to named consultees, interested parties, and the general public for a seven-week period between 5<sup>th</sup> February 2026 – 26<sup>th</sup> March 2026. Paper copies of the survey are also available in main Council buildings and some Libraries across Greater Lincolnshire.
- 2.2 As Statutory Consultation, the survey is an important element in the decision-making process on which, if any, of the LGR proposals Government chooses to implement, either with or without modification.
- 2.3 The consultation is led and managed by Government, with local Councils encouraged to promote the survey across the relevant channels. Whilst Councils are encouraged to promote the survey, promoting the benefits or otherwise of the individual LGR proposals themselves is actively discouraged during the seven-week consultation period to ensure fairness.

- 2.4 As required, an impartial Greater Lincolnshire online hub has been established containing links to each of the six final proposals promoting the four geographic areas. Factual information about LGR, an indicative timeline and a link to the Government's consultation page is included on the hub.
- 2.5 The site is being promoted on all relevant channels across the area throughout the consultation period and can also be accessed here [Local government changes in Greater Lincolnshire | Greater Lincolnshire LGR Hub](#)
- 2.6 The survey itself takes the form of eight questions, with options ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" for each question, repeated for each of the four proposals. Additionally, two free-text boxes are included for respondents to add any additional supporting comments or information.
- 2.7 It is important to note that one question, question 9 and one free-text box, question 10, only relates to the City of Lincoln proposal, specifically the boundary changes. The full list of questions can be found at appendix 1 of this report.
- 2.8 As a named consultee, West Lindsey District Council has been invited to respond. Information has been shared by the Council with Parish and Town Councils in the district in addition to an online information session hosted by the Council on 2<sup>nd</sup> February to which all Parish and Town Councils were invited. This event was well attended, with further engagement planned during spring 2026.
- 2.9 Upon conclusion of the consultation, the Government will use the responses to inform its decision on implementing a proposal. Based on current information, it is expected that a decision will be made and communicated to Councils before the Parliamentary summer recess in July.

### **3 Assessing the Final Greater Lincolnshire LGR Proposals**

- 3.1 This paper presents the Council's approach and high-level findings of the assessment of each of the proposals against the principles which Council approved at the meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2025. In considering the assessments as set out in appendix 2, Members are asked to consider how these will shape and influence the Council's final response to the Statutory Consultation.
- 3.2 The 10 statutory consultation questions relate closely to the original six criteria as set out in the Statutory Invitation and whilst there is flexibility to strongly agree to strongly disagree with statements against each proposal, there is no requirement to rank the proposals or overtly support one over another. Essentially, each proposal is considered on its own merits.

- 3.3 When considering the Red, Amber, Green rated assessment (RAG) summary of principles, against each of the consultation questions, and associated narrative in appendix 2, it is clear that there isn't one proposal that obviously stands out, which promotes wholly the best interests of West Lindsey against the agreed principles.

#### **4 LGR Timeline and Next Steps**

- 4.1 Following the end of the Statutory Consultation, Government will consider all of the responses and undertake their own assessment of each proposal against their six criteria. This was originally detailed within the Statutory Invitation issued to all local authorities in two tier areas across the country. The letter including the original criteria can be found in appendix 3 of this report.
- 4.2 A decision is expected to be made and communicated by Government on LGR in Greater Lincolnshire before the Parliamentary summer recess in July.
- 4.3 Following that decision during Autumn/Winter 2026 Government will enact legislative changes, including the Structural Changes Order to create the new Unitary Authority(s) serving Greater Lincolnshire and provide arrangements to support effective transition.
- 4.4 Subject to those timelines being met, elections planned for 06<sup>th</sup> May 2027 will be held to elect Councillors to the new shadow Unitary Authority(s) across Greater Lincolnshire.
- 4.5 The appointment of key officers to the new authority will also take place through 2027 and into early 2028 to support the new organisation(s) governance and structure set up, including transition management and engagement and ultimately that the new Council(s) are operationally ready for Vesting Day on 01<sup>st</sup> April 2028. A presentation of the breakdown of the timeline and associated activities from the close of the statutory consultation to Vesting Day was shared with all members following an all-member briefing on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2026.

#### **5 Summary**

- 5.1 In response to the government's Statutory Consultation, the Council has undertaken an assessment of the Greater Lincolnshire LGR final proposals submitted to Government. This has been done using the principles agreed at Council in November and in alignment with Government's statutory consultation framework.
- 5.2 The assessment indicates that there is no single proposal which fully accords with all of the Council's principles. In some instances, this is due to the geographic areas being proposed breaking up existing established partnerships, economic areas and shared industries and housing markets. In others it is due to a lack of information or evidence to support the proposal in line with the principles important to the Council and the area it serves.

5.3 The Council remains committed to ensuring that its response to the Statutory Consultation is robust, impartial, and reflective of the community's best interests to inform and support the next steps of LGR in Greater Lincolnshire.

# Appendix 1.

## How to complete the Consultation

For each question, you can provide the following answer:

- strongly agree
- agree
- neither agree nor disagree
- disagree
- strongly disagree
- don't know

You will also be invited to explain your answers to questions 1 to 7 using a free text box at question 8. If a question on boundary change is included at question 9, like the City of Lincoln proposal, you will be invited to explain your answer in a free text box at question 10.

## Consultation questions

### Question 1

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal suggests councils that are based on sensible geographies and economic areas?

### Question 2

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils will be able to deliver the outcomes they describe in the proposal?

### Question 3

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils are the right size to be efficient, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks?

### Question 4

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils will deliver high quality, sustainable public services?

### Question 5

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal has been informed by local views and will meet local needs?

### Question 6

To what extent do you agree or disagree that establishing the councils in this proposal will support devolution arrangements?

### Question 7

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal enables stronger community engagement and gives the opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment?

### Question 8

If you would like to, please use the free text box to explain the answers you have provided to questions 1-7 referring to the question numbers as part of your answer. You may also use the box to provide any other comments you have on the proposal.

Where a proposal includes a request that the Secretary of State modifies a proposal to achieve boundary change, or the proposal affects wider public services, such as fire and rescue authorities, you will be asked an additional question:

**Question 9**

This is a proposal that is accompanied by a request that the Secretary of State considers boundary change or that affects wider public services. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal sets out a strong public services and financial sustainability justification for boundary change?

**Question 10**

If you would like to, please use this free text box to explain your answer to question 9.



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

**Jim McMahon OBE MP**

*Minister of State for Local Government and  
English Devolution*  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

Your reference:

Our reference:

To: Leaders of two-tier councils and  
unitary councils in Lincolnshire

Boston Borough Council  
City of Lincoln Council  
East Lindsey District Council  
Lincolnshire County Council  
North Kesteven District Council  
South Holland District Council  
South Kesteven District Council  
West Lindsey District Council  
North East Lincolnshire Council  
North Lincolnshire Council

5 February 2025

Dear Leaders

This Government has been clear on our vision for simpler, more sustainable, local government structures, alongside a transfer of power out of Westminster through devolution. We know that councils of all political stripes are in crisis after a decade of decline and instability. Indeed, a record number of councils asked the government for support this year to help them set their budgets.

This new government will not waste this opportunity to build empowered, simplified, resilient and sustainable local government for your area that will increase value for money for council taxpayers. Local leaders are central to our mission to deliver change for hard-working people in every corner of the country through our Plan for Change, and our councils are doing everything they can to stay afloat and provide for their communities day in, day out. The Government will work closely with you to deliver these aims to the most ambitious timeline.

I am writing to you now to formally invite you to work with other council leaders in your area to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation, and to set out further detail on the criteria, guidance for the development of proposals, and the timeline for this process. A formal invitation with guidance for the development of your proposals is attached at Annex A. This invitation sets out the criteria against which proposals will be assessed.

### **Developing proposals for reorganisation**

We expect there to be different views on the best structures for an area, and indeed there may be merits to a variety of approaches. Nevertheless, it is not in council taxpayers' interest to devote public funds and your valuable time and effort into the development of multiple proposals which unnecessarily fragment services, compete against one another, require lengthy implementation periods or which do not sufficiently address local interests and identities.

The public will rightly expect us to deliver on our shared responsibility to design and implement the best local government structures for efficient and high-quality public service delivery. We therefore expect local leaders to work collaboratively and proactively, including by sharing information, to develop robust and sustainable unitary proposals that are in the best interests of the whole area to which this invitation is issued, rather than developing competing proposals.

This will mean making every effort to work together to develop and jointly submit one proposal for unitary local government across the whole of your area. The proposal that is developed for the whole of your area may be for one or more new unitary councils and should be complementary to devolution plans. It is open to you to explore options with neighbouring councils in addition to those included in this invitation, particularly where this helps those councils to address concerns about their sustainability or limitations arising from their size or boundaries or where you are working together across a wider geography within a strategic authority.

I understand there will be some cases when it is not possible for all councils in an area to jointly develop and submit a proposal, despite their best efforts. This will not be a barrier to progress, and the Government will consider any suitable proposals submitted by the relevant local authorities.

### **Supporting places through change**

It is essential that councils continue to deliver their business-as-usual services and duties, which remain unchanged until reorganisation is complete. This includes progress towards the Government's ambition of universal coverage of up-to-date local plans as quickly as possible. To support with capacity, I intend to provide some funds for preparing to take forward any proposal, and I will share further information later in the process.

Considering the efficiencies that are possible through reorganisation, we expect that areas will be able to meet transition costs over time from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects.

The default position is that assets and liabilities remain locally managed by councils, but we acknowledge that there are exceptional circumstances where there has been failure linked to capital practices. Where that is the case, proposals should reflect the extent to which the implications of this can be managed locally, including as part of efficiencies possible through reorganisation, and Commissioners should be engaged in these discussions. We will continue to discuss the approach that is proposed with the area.

I welcome the partnership approach that is being taken across the sector to respond to the ambitious plans set out in the White Paper. My department will continue to work closely with the Local Government Association (LGA), the District Councils Network, the County Councils Network and other local government partners to plan how best to support councils through this process. We envisage that practical support will be needed to understand and address the key thematic issues that will arise through reorganisation, including managing service impacts and opportunities for the workforce, digital and IT systems, and leadership support.

### **Timelines and next steps for interim plans and full proposals**

We ask for an interim plan to be submitted on or before 21 March 2025, in line with the guidance set out in the attached Annex. My officials will provide feedback on your plan to help support you to develop final proposals.

I will expect any full proposal to be submitted **by 28 November**. If I decide to implement any proposal, and the necessary legislation is agreed by Parliament, we will work with you to move to elections to new 'shadow' unitary councils as soon as possible as is the usual arrangement in the process of local government reorganisation.

Following submission, I will consider any and all proposals carefully before taking decisions on how to proceed. My officials are available throughout to discuss how your reorganisation and devolution aspirations might work together and what support you think you might need to proceed.

This is a once in a generation opportunity to work together to put local government in your area on a more sustainable footing, creating simpler structures for your area that will deliver the services that local people and businesses need and deserve. As set out in the White Paper, my commitment is that clear leadership locally will be met with an active partner nationally.

I am copying this letter to council Chief Executives. I am also copying this letter to local Members of Parliament and to the Police and Crime Commissioners for Lincolnshire and Humberside.

Yours sincerely,



**JIM MCMAHON OBE MP**

Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN HEALTH ACT 2007

### INVITATION FOR PROPOSALS FOR A SINGLE TIER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, in exercise of his powers under Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 ('the 2007 Act'), hereby invites any principal authority in the area of the county of Lincolnshire, to submit a proposal for a single tier of local government.

This may be one of the following types of proposal as set out in the 2007 Act:

- Type A – a single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned
- Type B – a single tier of local authority covering an area that is currently a district, or two or more districts
- Type C – a single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned, or one or more districts in the county; and one or more relevant adjoining areas
- Combined proposal – a proposal that consists of two or more Type B proposals, two or more Type C proposals, or one or more Type B proposals and one or more Type C proposals.

Proposals must be submitted in accordance with paragraphs 1 to 3:

1. Any proposal must be made by **28 November 2025**.
2. In responding to this invitation an authority must have regard to the guidance from the Secretary of State set out in the Schedule to this invitation, and to any further guidance on responding to this invitation received from the Secretary of State.
3. An authority responding to this invitation may either make its own proposal or make a proposal jointly with any of the other authorities invited to respond.

Signed on behalf of the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.



**F KIRWAN**

A senior civil servant in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

5 February 2025

## **SCHEDULE**

### **Guidance from the Secretary of State for proposals for unitary local government.**

#### **Criteria for unitary local government**

- 1. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.**
  - a) Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area.
  - b) Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs.
  - c) Proposals should be supported by robust evidence and analysis and include an explanation of the outcomes it is expected to achieve, including evidence of estimated costs/benefits and local engagement.
  - d) Proposals should describe clearly the single tier local government structures it is putting forward for the whole of the area, and explain how, if implemented, these are expected to achieve the outcomes described.
  
- 2. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.**
  - a) As a guiding principle, new councils should aim for a population of 500,000 or more.
  - b) There may be certain scenarios in which this 500,000 figure does not make sense for an area, including on devolution, and this rationale should be set out in a proposal.
  - c) Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils' finances and make sure that council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money.
  - d) Proposals should set out how an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects.
  - e) For areas covering councils that are in Best Value intervention and/or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals must additionally demonstrate how reorganisation may contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing and what area-specific arrangements may be necessary to make new structures viable.
  - f) In general, as with previous restructures, there is no proposal for council debt to be addressed centrally or written off as part of reorganisation. For areas where there are exceptional circumstances where there has been failure linked to capital practices, proposals should reflect the extent to which the implications of this can be managed locally, including as part of efficiencies possible through reorganisation.

**3. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.**

- a) Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery, and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services.
- b) Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money.
- c) Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety.

**4. Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.**

- a) It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal.
- b) Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance.
- c) Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, an explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed.

**5. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.**

- a) Proposals will need to consider and set out for areas where there is already a Combined Authority (CA) or a Combined County Authority (CCA) established or a decision has been taken by Government to work with the area to establish one, how that institution and its governance arrangements will need to change to continue to function effectively; and set out clearly (where applicable) whether this proposal is supported by the CA/CCA /Mayor.
- b) Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution.
- c) Proposals should ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities.

**6. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.**

- a) Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged.
- b) Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement.

**Developing proposals for unitary local government**

The following matters should be taken into account in formulating a proposal:

### **Boundary Changes**

- a) Existing district areas should be considered the building blocks for your proposals, but where there is a strong justification more complex boundary changes will be considered.
- b) There will need to be a strong public services and financial sustainability related justification for any proposals that involve boundary changes, or that affect wider public services, such as fire and rescue authorities, due to the likely additional costs and complexities of implementation.

### **Engagement and consultation on reorganisation**

- a) We expect local leaders to work collaboratively and proactively, including by sharing information, to develop robust and sustainable unitary proposals that are in the best interests of the whole area to which this invitation is issued, rather than developing competing proposals.
- b) For those areas where Commissioners have been appointed by the Secretary of State as part of the Best Value Intervention, their input will be important in the development of robust unitary proposals.
- c) We also expect local leaders to engage their Members of Parliament, and to ensure there is wide engagement with local partners and stakeholders, residents, workforce and their representatives, and businesses on a proposal.
- d) The engagement that is undertaken should both inform the development of robust proposals and should also build a shared understanding of the improvements you expect to deliver through reorganisation.
- e) The views of other public sector providers will be crucial to understanding the best way to structure local government in your area. This will include the relevant Mayor (if you already have one), Integrated Care Board, Police (Fire) and Crime Commissioner, Fire and Rescue Authority, local Higher Education and Further Education providers, National Park Authorities, and the voluntary and third sector.
- f) Once a proposal has been submitted it will be for the Government to decide on taking a proposal forward and to consult as required by statute. This will be a completely separate process to any consultation undertaken on mayoral devolution in an area, which will be undertaken in some areas early this year, in parallel with this invitation.

## Interim plans

An interim plan should be provided to Government on or before **21 March 2025**. This should set out your progress on developing proposals in line with the criteria and guidance. The level of detail that is possible at this stage may vary from place to place but the expectation is that one interim plan is jointly submitted by all councils in the area. It may be the case that the interim plan describes more than one potential proposal for your area, if there is more than one option under consideration. The interim plan should:

- a) identify any barriers or challenges where further clarity or support would be helpful.
- b) identify the likely options for the size and boundaries of new councils that will offer the best structures for delivery of high-quality and sustainable public services across the area, along with indicative efficiency saving opportunities.
- c) include indicative costs and arrangements in relation to any options including planning for future service transformation opportunities.
- d) include early views as to the councillor numbers that will ensure both effective democratic representation for all parts of the area, and also effective governance and decision-making arrangements which will balance the unique needs of your cities, towns, rural and coastal areas, in line with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England guidance.
- e) include early views on how new structures will support devolution ambitions.
- f) include a summary of local engagement that has been undertaken and any views expressed, along with your further plans for wide local engagement to help shape your developing proposals.
- g) set out indicative costs of preparing proposals and standing up an implementation team as well as any arrangements proposed to coordinate potential capacity funding across the area.
- h) set out any voluntary arrangements that have been agreed to keep all councils involved in discussions as this work moves forward and to help balance the decisions needed now to maintain service delivery and ensure value for money for council taxpayers, with those key decisions that will affect the future success of any new councils in the area.

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A  
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted