



Council

**Monday, 8th September
2025**

**Subject: West Lindsey District Council Corporate Peer Challenge
Progress Report**

Report by:

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Purpose / Summary:

To present an update report on progress against
the recommendations made in the Council's
Corporate Peer Challenge report.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That members:

1. Receive and note the findings and recommendations from the Council's LGA Corporate Peer Challenge 2025 (Appendix 1).
2. Note the progress that has been made to date against the recommendations.
3. Approve the proposal for a Peer Challenge Progress Review to take place in the first half of 2026, subject to agreement with the Local Government Association

IMPLICATIONS

Legal:

There are no legal implications arising from this report. It is a requirement on all Councils under the Best Value Duty to undergo a Corporate Peer Challenge every five years, and to publish the recommendations and action plan. In publishing this report, the Council has fulfilled this requirement.

Financial: FIN/73/26/CL/SL

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

This report contains a number of recommendations, some of which will have financial implications. Where appropriate, proposals to answer specific recommendations will be brought to the appropriate committee for decision where the associated financial implications will be laid out in full.

Staffing:

There are no staffing implications arising from this report.

The report makes recommendations in respect of the organisational structure. Where appropriate, proposals to answer specific recommendations will be brought to the appropriate committee for decision where the associated staffing implications will be laid out in full.

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights:

Not applicable in the context of this report.

Data Protection Implications:

Not applicable in the context of this report.

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities:

Not applicable in the context of this report.

Section 17 Crime and Disorder Considerations:

Not applicable in the context of this report.

Health Implications:

Not applicable in the context of this report.

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

None

Risk Assessment:
Not applicable

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

X

Key Decision:

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

Yes

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No

X

Executive Summary

The Local Government Association (LGA) requires all councils to undertake a full Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) once every five years. West Lindsey District Council's latest CPC took place in January 2025. This report highlights the findings and recommendations of the Peer Team, with a full copy of the LGA's report attached as Appendix 1.

In responding to the findings of the Peer Team, the Council is required to produce an Action Plan setting out how the recommendations will be implemented. This report presents, for information an update on progress to date against the recommendations.

The report focuses particularly on progress in relation to three areas of work, these being:

1. A refreshed Corporate Plan based on the priorities of the Council through the lens of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).
2. Designing a new organisational structure that is aligned to the core themes of the refreshed Corporate Plan; ensuring the Council has the right capacity in the right places to deliver key priorities and prepare for the implementation of LGR.
3. Implementing a new internal governance and monitoring framework that aligns with the new Corporate Plan, streamlines decision-making touch points and empowers both staff and members to focus on delivering the priorities of the Council over the next three years.

It is a requirement on Councils undergoing a Corporate Peer Challenge to take part in a progress review to assess progress against the recommendations. This report also seeks approval from Council to arrange a follow-up review in the first half of 2026.

1 Introduction

1.1 Between 21st and 24th January 2025, the Council participated in its latest full Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC), conducted by an LGA Peer Team who spent three and a half days on site at the Guildhall meeting with a range of members, officers, residents, local businesses, Parish Councils, community groups and other public sector partners in order to build a picture of the Council's effectiveness in five key areas, these being:

- Local Priorities & Outcomes
- Organisational & Place Leadership
- Governance & Culture
- Financial Planning & Management
- Capacity for Improvement

1.2 Additionally, the Council requested that the Peer Team explore the effectiveness of the Council's Together 24 Programme in transforming services; and to explore how the Council as a Local Planning Authority could best work with developers and partners to implement greater consideration of public views.

1.3 In preparing for the Peer Challenge, the Council was required to present a Position Statement (copy attached as Appendix 2) which is a self-assessment of the Council's performance against each of the five themes, and a source of further context and understanding for the Peer Team ahead of their site visit.

2 Positive Findings

2.1 There is much to be proud of in the feedback report, which is a reflection of the commitment, passion and ambition our staff and members have for the existing Corporate Plan themes of Our People, Our Place and Our Council. In particular, the report highlights the following strengths:

Our People and Our Place

- i) The Council is constantly learning and improving, building positive relationships and working well with partner organisations; with one partner describing the Council as 'absolutely phenomenal'.
- ii) We have good strategic relationships with partners including registered housing providers and Central Lincolnshire Local Plan partners. Both this, and the Council's Housing Strategy were cited as examples of good practice.
- iii) We support, work with, and celebrate the diversity of our communities through our approach to consultation and engagement.

Our Council

- iv) The Peer Team was impressed with the passion and commitment from Council staff who came across as positive, flexible, empowered, committed and enthusiastic.
- v) There is a good programme of training and development available for members.
- vi) Councillor / Officer relationships are generally good. Councillors trust and value their staff.
- vii) The Corporate Plan and strategic business planning is based on robust, intelligent use of local information. Staff understand the priorities of the Administration. This has resulted in successful delivery of projects for local communities.
- viii) The Council is managing its finances well through good financial governance and a comprehensive approach to financial planning and monitoring.
- ix) We have a robust, well communicated and data driven approach to performance management.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 The Peer Team's report makes eight key recommendations for the Council to act on. For context, these recommendations are set out in full below.
- 3.2 **Recommendation One – review your management structure as a priority:** Your Management Team may only comprise of three officers by June 2025 and may not include two of your three statutory roles. Staff are concerned about the impacts this could have on their capacity and increased workloads. A gap in the officer structure between service managers and directors is also causing a few issues. So complete your review of, and agree, your management structure with your administration to enable you to recruit accordingly.
- 3.3 **Recommendation Two – prioritise the filling of your new management structure, especially the Head of Paid Service and Section 151 Officer:** Following on from recommendation one, appoint on an initial interim basis if necessary to ensure your statutory appointments start work as soon as possible. Prioritising recommendations one and two will build your management resilience to maintain 'business as usual' and progress as a council.
- 3.4 **Recommendation Three – continue discussion with the Peer Team and LGA on the best way to resolve the identified councillor / officer relationship challenges:** These challenges are hindering progress and working relationships in some areas. Peer Team members supported some of your colleagues affected by this during their visit and will continue to do so. This will align with work the LGA is already instigating to assist this. Continue these discussions and work with the Peer Team and LGA to best resolve this and progress positively as a council.
- 3.5 **Recommendation Four – refresh your business planning:** Most, but not all, of your administration's top priorities feature clearly in your latest

Corporate Plan and Executive Business Plan. Resultingly, your Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council cannot be sure their priorities are being sufficiently delivered. They should therefore proactively work with officers in your Policy & Strategy team and other officers to fully articulate and align those top priorities throughout your corporate, service and financial planning processes. This will help ensure everyone understands what will be delivered and how.

- 3.6 **Recommendation Five – Develop plans to address the gap in your Medium-Term Financial Plan:** You have identified budget gaps from 2026-2029, recognise the need for a longer-term strategy and plan to address them. Your Together 24 Programme has identified actions that can assist, and your Savings Board is working to identify new income generation and further efficiency savings. Continue all this and any other work possible to balance your future budgets and enhance your financial sustainability.
- 3.7 **Recommendation Six – design and implement a continuous improvement / change programme:** Your Together 24 Programme has delivered positive change and savings and intends to deliver more. You intend to use this work to develop a more ongoing continuous improvement programme. So consider and agree the purpose and / or outcomes of the latter programme at the earliest opportunity, then robustly prioritise and allocate the resources it needs. This will help you develop and deliver and benefit from this approach fully.
- 3.8 **Recommendation Seven – review the number and frequency of your meetings:** The number of committees, boards, meetings and report requirements are increasing. This is negatively impacting on some officer workloads and raising questions about the value of all this work. So review the number and frequency of your meetings to ensure they are as effective as possible. You may also wish to review the purpose, objectives and other issues related to this work to make the most of this opportunity.
- 3.9 **Recommendation Eight – develop your internal communications to address issues raised throughout our findings:** You are facing notable change, including that of your Management Team, the implications of possible Local Government Reorganisation in Lincolnshire, and the need to identify and realise savings. Staff are concerned about issues like this, impacting on their workload and wellbeing. So enhance your internal communications and engagement, to support them, keep them informed, involved and on side.

4 Progress to Date

- 4.1 Since the Corporate Peer Challenge, under the direction of the Interim Chief Executive, Management Team, and Group Leaders, three priority workstreams are being progressed, each one interlinked and designed to address the majority of the recommendations made by the Peer Team. These three workstreams are set out in greater detail below, and

form the focus of this report, which is intended as an interim update ahead of the full action plan being presented to Council in November 2025 by the new permanent Chief Executive who will oversee its implementation and any follow-up actions arising from a Progress Review.

- 4.2 To ensure continuity and a smooth transition period for staff and members alike, the Interim Chief Executive, Bill Cullen, and the new permanent Chief Executive, Paul Burkinshaw, are already working in partnership to ensure progress against the recommendations is maintained, including through regular discussion with Group Leaders and regular communication with staff.

5 Priority Workstream 1: Corporate Plan Refresh

- 5.1 Updating and refreshing the existing Corporate Plan addresses a number of recommendations, namely: recommendation three (addressing identified Councillor / Officer relationship issues); recommendation four (refreshing our business and corporate planning); and recommendation five (addressing the gaps in the MTFP). Additionally, refreshing the Corporate Plan now allows members to revisit their strategic priorities through the lens of Local Government Reorganisation, ensuring delivery of West Lindsey priorities will already be in progress and ready to be taken on by the new unitary authority as part of its corporate planning.
- 5.2 The new Corporate Plan will be once again driven by the priorities of members, focusing particularly on the aims and objectives of the Corporate Plan; and developing a new shared Values and Behaviours framework for both staff and members.
- 5.3 The working assumption is that priorities will fit broadly within three themes: 'Our People' and 'Our Place', which are well embedded and familiar to members and staff alike, and an enhanced third theme of 'Our Council, Our Future' which expands on the existing theme to include priorities around LGR and preparing for LGR implementation. These themes will be tested as part of planned member and staff engagement.
- 5.4 Staff and member workshops will take place in September to explore member priorities for the district through the lens of LGR and how these can be delivered in a financially sustainable way. The workshops provide an opportunity to explore how the Council can bring together its offer in respect of LGR and the proposals that are in development, supported by case studies and a robust evidence base. Invitations containing full details of these workshops have already been issued and all members are encouraged to attend.
- 5.5 Officers will use the outcome of these sessions to develop the new Corporate Plan which will be presented to Corporate Policy and Resources Committee in December 2025 and onwards for final adoption by Full Council in January 2026. This timeline ensures members consider the 2026/27 Budget in the context of the new Corporate Plan,

and allows the Council to move quickly into delivery as we transition through the remaining stages of LGR implementation.

- 5.6 To ensure members have regular oversight of Corporate Plan performance, the Council's existing Progress and Delivery (P&D) framework will also be refreshed to include performance indicators and information that give an outcome-based overview of performance against the Corporate Plan priorities. The new set of P&D measures will be developed with the P&D Task and Finish Group and key officers and presented to CP&R committee for approval in February 2026, ready for implementation from 2026/27 onwards.

6 Priority Workstream 2: Implementing a new Organisational Structure

- 6.1 To ensure successful delivery of the Corporate Plan; and to address the capacity issues identified by the Peer Team (recommendations one and two); it is necessary to complete work on a new organisational structure as a priority. Doing so will ensure we have the right capacity, in the right places to deliver members priorities and prepare for the implementation of LGR.
- 6.2 Some progress has already been made to address recommendations one and two of the Peer Challenge. The vacant posts on Management Team have been filled and the new permanent Chief Executive, Paul Burkinshaw will take up his post with the authority on 29th September 2025.
- 6.3 The Interim Chief Executive and new permanent Chief Executive are working together with other officers and East Midlands Councils (EMC) to develop proposals for a new organisational structure which will be presented to Chief Officer Employment Committee for decision. The review of the structure will focus initially on tiers one and two (Chief Officer and Deputy Chief Officer level) with any further reviews to follow.
- 6.4 As well as ensuring the Council has the right capacity to deliver, a review at this stage is necessary to place our staff in the best possible position for the transition to LGR. As such, a review of organisational structures, including Terms and Conditions, is usual practice for Councils undergoing reorganisation and is in line with the work taking place across the 21 local authority areas identified for LGR.

7 Priority Workstream 3: Empowering our Staff and Members through streamlined internal governance arrangements

- 7.1 Key to the successful delivery of a Corporate Plan is having the right internal governance and delivery arrangements in place so that staff and members alike are empowered with the right tools and information to deliver the priorities of the Council. The Peer Challenge acknowledges the robust programme management arrangements already in place and makes recommendations for improving these. Further recommendations are made in respect of reducing the number of committees, boards,

meetings and reporting requirements, which have grown in number in recent years. This final priority workstream seeks to address these recommendations, streamlining these requirements to free up capacity for both members and staff to focus on value added work.

- 7.2 In tandem with the Corporate Plan refresh, a review of Programme Boards is currently underway. This will ensure the number of Boards is streamlined and focused on the three key themes of the Corporate Plan and including LGR implementation. A review of current projects is also underway to ensure these are also aligned to delivery of any new Corporate Plan priorities.
- 7.3 Additionally, a review of existing Member Working Groups is taking place to ensure any such group is operating with clear purpose and that the work of these groups is of value to the Council. A review of committee meetings has already taken place which resulted in a more streamlined committee timetable for 2025/26.
- 7.4 These reviews, run in parallel will result in a more streamlined operation for both members and officers, with fewer reporting requirements, improved governance, and greater member oversight of Corporate Plan delivery.

8 Requirement for a Peer Challenge Progress Review

- 8.1 In undertaking the Peer Challenge, it is expected that the Council will commit to a progress review so that the Peer Team can check progress against the recommendations. A Progress Review typically takes the form of a one or two day site visit by members of the original Peer Team, usually the Lead Member Peer and the Chief Executive Peer. An updated Position Statement will be provided to the team who will have the opportunity to meet with a range of staff, members and key partners.
- 8.2 Members are asked to agree for the Council to undertake its Progress Review in the first half of 2026. By this time, the new permanent Chief Executive will be in post, familiar with the organisation and focused on driving forward the priority workstreams set out in this report. Additionally, a new Corporate Plan will be adopted and in delivery; and the new organisational structure will be in place. If members approve this recommendation, officers will begin work with the LGA, Group Leaders and the Management Team to make the necessary arrangements for the Progress Review.

