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West Lindsey District Council - 16 March 2026

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of Council held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall, Marshall's Yard, Gainsborough, DN21 2NA on 16 March 2026 at 7.00 pm.

Present: Councillor Matthew Boles (Chairman)
Councillor John Barrett (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Stephen Bunney	Councillor Emma Bailey
Councillor Eve Bennett	Councillor Owen Bierley
Councillor Trevor Bridgwood	Councillor Mrs Jackie Brockway
Councillor Frazer Brown	Councillor Karen Carless
Councillor David Dobbie	Councillor Adam Duguid
Councillor Jacob Flear	Councillor Ian Fleetwood
Councillor Sabastian Hague	Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan
Councillor Paul Key	Councillor Mrs Angela Lawrence
Councillor Jeanette McGhee	Councillor Peter Morris
Councillor Lynda Mullally	Councillor Maureen Palmer
Councillor Roger Patterson	Councillor Roger Pilgrim
Councillor Mrs Lesley Rollings	Councillor Tom Smith
Councillor Jim Snee	Councillor Mrs Mandy Snee
Councillor Paul Swift	Councillor Baptiste Velan
Councillor Moira Westley	Councillor Trevor Young

In Attendance:

Paul Burkinshaw	Chief Executive
Peter Davy	Director of Finance and Assets (Section 151 Officer)
Lisa Langdon	Assistant Director People and Democratic (Monitoring Officer)
Rachael Hughes	Head of Policy and Strategy
Ellen King	Policy & Strategy Officer – Corporate Strategy & Business Planning
Katie Storr	Democratic Services & Elections Team Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer)

Also Present: 2 Members of the Public

Apologies

Councillor Liz Clews
Councillor Christopher Darcel
Councillor Paul Lee
Councillor Mrs Diana Rodgers

93 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made at this point in the meeting.

94 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

The Chief Executive introduced the report by outlining the background to the ongoing Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) process across Greater Lincolnshire, reminding Members that, on 5 February, the Minister for English Devolution had issued formal invitation for proposals for new local government structures. This invitation had triggered the statutory consultation process.

Six submissions for Greater Lincolnshire had been made in total, representing four distinct geographical models for potential unitary arrangements. These proposals were now subject to Government consultation, which required all consultee authorities to respond to a prescribed set of questions for each proposal.

The Chief Executive highlighted that, in November 2025, Council resolved not to submit its own proposal but had agreed to contribute fully to the consultation.

Members had also approved assessment criteria to evaluate the proposals, covering service delivery, financial sustainability, representation, and alignment with local geography. Officers had since undertaken a detailed evaluation using these criteria, forming the basis of the recommended response.

Members were reminded that Appendix 2 was deemed exempt and that any detailed discussion of its content would require the meeting to move into closed session.

Members engaged in a wide-ranging discussion reflecting differing perspectives on the potential impacts of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) on West Lindsey and its communities.

In response to a question Officers re-iterated the direction of travel in respect of asset transfers and confirmed the early discussions had commenced with Gainsborough Town Council.

Several Councillors expressed concern about the compressed timescales imposed by Government, noting that the seven-week consultation period was significantly shorter than other major national consultations, such as the recent 13-week National Planning Policy Framework review. Members felt that the speed of the process limited the ability of councils, residents and town/parish councils to fully engage with the technical detail.

A number of Members raised issues relating to planning policy and decision-making, cautioning that re-organisation taking place alongside national reforms to planning policy could leave future authorities vulnerable. It was suggested that if a new unitary body were created before updated local plans were in place, planning decisions could be taken out of local control, increasing the risk of undesirable or speculative development.

The Leader, reflecting on West Lindsey's position and it having not submitted a bid, proposed the following additional recommendation, which was duly seconded.

““that Council delegate authority to the Leader of Council in consultation with the Chief Executive to write to Government in relation to LGR in Greater Lincolnshire, expanding on the following points:

1. Setting out why WDLC didn't submit a final proposal, recognising the political instability in the Council during a key period of the process.
2. Concerns around the extent that any of the proposals have regards to the best interests of West Lindsey residents.
3. Raise the issues around the complexity of public service coverage and geography of Greater Lincolnshire.
4. Request the opportunity to meet with Ministers to discuss these concerns further prior to any decision being made.

Members then debated the amendment and reflected on the process leading up to the consultation, including differing interpretations of how effectively districts across Greater Lincolnshire had collaborated, the political context at the time bids were being formed, and the implications of West Lindsey not submitting a proposal of its own. Members acknowledged the substantial work undertaken by Officers.

The debate also touched on broader concerns about democratic representation, including the likely reduction in the number of Councillors in any new unitary structure. Members noted that significantly larger electoral divisions could dilute representation, place higher demands on Councillors, and make it harder for working-age or younger people to serve in elected roles. Similar concerns were raised about the increasing responsibilities that may fall to parishes and community groups without accompanying resources.

During the debate there were a number of heated political exchanges, warnings issued around conduct and a failure to observe the Chairman's ruling, resulting in the Chairman invoking Procedure Rule 18.2.

With continued disruption a procedural motion, under Procedure Rule 18.3 was moved by the Chairman, namely that Councillor Young not be heard further. With the motion duly seconded, on immediately being put to the vote, the motion was declared carried.

Debate continued with Members continuing to reflect on the merits of sending additional representations.

Bringing comments on the amendment to a conclusion, the amendment was put to the vote, and was declared **CARRIED**.

Note: Councillors Dobbie, Hague, Rollings and Young requested their vote against the amendment be recorded in the minutes.

Permitting further debate, Members again commented on the importance of local identity, geography and community alignment and the advantages and disadvantages each of the proposals posed.

Across the chamber, there was broad agreement that none of the current proposals were ideal, and that the Council needed to focus on securing the “least worst” outcome for residents. Whilst views differed on which geographical model best served local communities,

and opinions continued to differ on the style and level of previous collaboration, there was collective recognition that additional engagement with Government was essential to ensure West Lindsey's concerns were properly understood before any final decision was taken.

With the recommendations moved and seconded, including the additional recommendation supported earlier in the debate, on being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED that:

- (a) the timeline and requirements of the Government's LGR Statutory Consultation exercise be noted;
- (b) the Council submits a response based on the assessment of the proposals against the Council's principles and with regards to the statutory questions in the consultation as set out in this report and appendices;
- (c) authority be delegated, to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to finalise and submit the final Statutory Consultation response and a copy be circulated to all Members of the Council for information; and
- (d) authority be delegated to the Leader of Council, in consultation with the Chief Executive, to write to Government in relation to LGR in Greater Lincolnshire, expanding on the following points:
 - 1. Setting out why WDLC didn't submit a final proposal, recognising the political instability in the Council during a key period of the process.
 - 2. Concerns around the extent that any of the proposals have regards to the best interests of West Lindsey residents.
 - 3. Raise the issues around the complexity of public service coverage and geography of Greater Lincolnshire.
 - 4. Request the opportunity to meet with Ministers to discuss these concerns further prior to any decision being made.

The meeting concluded at 7.45 pm.

Chairman