

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review

West Lindsey District Council

Tuesday 24 March 2026

Feedback



Corporate Peer Challenge



Contents

- 1. Introduction 3
- 2. Summary of the approach..... 3
- 3. Progress review - feedback 4
- 4. Final thoughts and next steps 17

1. Introduction

The council undertook an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) Tuesday 21 to Friday 24 January 2025 and published the full report with an action plan.

The Progress Review (review) is integral to the CPC process. Usually taking place approximately 10 months after the CPC, it enables the council's senior leadership to:

- receive peer feedback on council progress against the CPC recommendations via the council's RAG (red, amber, green) rated CPC action plan
- consider peers' reflections on new opportunities/challenges that may have arisen since the peer team were previously onsite including any further support needs
- discuss any early impact or learning from the progress made to date.

The LGA would like to thank West Lindsey District Council (West Lindsey) for their commitment to sector-led improvement. This review was the next step in the ongoing, open and close relationship the council has with LGA sector support.

2. Summary of the approach

This review at West Lindsey took place at the council on 24 March 2026.

It focussed on each main recommendation from the CPC, and how ready and fit for purpose West Lindsey's local government reorganisation (LGR) work/progress plans are, to help ensure the council delivers those plans as efficiently as possible.

For this review, the following members of the original CPC team were involved:

- Member (councillor) Peer - Rory Love OBE, former Cabinet Member for Education and Skills at Kent County Council
- Member Peer - Cllr Wendy Fredericks, former Deputy Leader and former Deputy Chair of Cabinet, North Norfolk District Council (DC)
- Chief Executive Officer Peer - Joanne Wagstaffe, Chief Executive, Three Rivers DC
- LGA Peer Challenge Manager – Vicki Goddard
- LGA Programme Support Officer – Suraiya Khatun (offsite).

3. Progress review - feedback

Of the CPC's eight main recommendations, the council's RAG rated action plan reports that 100 per cent of actions are completed/progressed.

The peer team's overall key reflections

The peer team was impressed with the council's successes outlined in this report, as West Lindsey has experienced, managed and progressed significant political and managerial change positively since the CPC in January 2025. This has given rise to a refreshed organisational culture within the council, for which leading councillors and officers should be commended. These changes include:

- the West Lindsey Administration Group - the new ruling political administration (13 Conservatives, 11 Liberal Democrats, three Independents, two Lincolnshire Independents and one Reform UK councillor)
- the West Lindsey Liberal Democrat Group - the new opposition group (five Liberal Democrats and one Independent councillor)
- the council's Liberal Democrat councillors uniquely split between the ruling and opposition groups. The peer team's Liberal Democrat Member Peer, as a Liberal Democrat councillor, has contacted the local party to enable help from the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors for both ruling and opposition councillors from this political party at West Lindsey
- the then chief executive's resignation, followed by interim and permanent chief executive appointments
- the interim then permanent appointment of the Director of Finance and Assets and Section 151 Officer
- planning, approving and progressing its new senior management structure, as recommended by the peer team.

Further changes are also approaching, not least LGR. Nonetheless West Lindsey continues to deliver day to day and strategic work for its residents, businesses and visitors. The council has completed its Levelling Up Programme, including the opening of the new Savoy cinema in Gainsborough. Additionally, the council is

revitalising the West Lindsey Leisure Centre and is working with town and parish councils to support the transfer of assets to local communities. The council has also undertaken LGR work internally and with other Greater Lincolnshire local authorities.

Dealing with much political and senior management change, it would have been understandable if West Lindsey had not progressed the CPC's recommendations as far as the council has. The peer team heard though, unprompted, from a variety of councillors to staff from all levels of the organisation, that the CPC was a timely and appreciated opportunity to allow the council to take stock to address West Lindsey's issues and improve. As a result, this report reflects on the council's key actions to address the CPC's recommendations.

Given however the significant change the council has gone through since the CPC, many councillors and officers also wanted to discuss the impacts of those changes with the peer team. Impacts included professional and personal difficulties, as well as how they found solutions. This left less time for the peer team to explore the council's progress against its CPC action plan than planned. These conversations did though provide the team with a fuller understanding of the council's open and honest self-awareness, understanding, support and drive as a self-improving organisation to improve its work through the CPC and review process.

Further to these discussions, the peer team experienced and heard about a far more positive and productive culture at the council since the CPC. Many of West Lindsey's councillors and officers not only recognise and appreciate these changes but have actively driven them. This has enabled them to work more positively together to benefit their residents, businesses and visitors.

The organisation's councillors and staff know there is further work to do but this is natural and okay, as they work together to enhance their culture and practices still further.

The peer team therefore commends and congratulates West Lindsey's political and managerial leadership and staff for together steering the council through these challenges, and driving forward positive, healthy, supportive and honest change.

3.1. Recommendation 1 – review your management structure as a priority

West Lindsey could only best progress this action after appointing a new permanent chief executive and leader of the council. This would ensure the most solid, agreed basis on which to work. So once in post in September 2025, those new leaders together collaborated with the new political administration and others to propose a new senior management structure and arrangements. West Lindsey's Chief Officer Employment Committee then approved the proposals in December 2025.

The council consulted with affected staff between January and February 2026. Using the consultation's results, the chief executive with the people services manager is leading on the development of job descriptions. This work will help appoint staff who can formally start their new senior management roles from 1 May 2026.

As a result of this work, the new structure will help address the following key issues, some of which the peer team identified in their previous CPC report, to:

- clarify each role's skills requirements through new job descriptions, which will help identify and address any skills gaps
- address the career progression gap between some current wider management team and director roles in the current structure, which will help to retain staff
- enable new senior managers to take on more authority and accountability. This will help avoid them deferring decisions to, and seeking advice from, more senior council officers. In turn, the whole senior management structure work will be able to work most effectively to drive work throughout the council.

West Lindsey councillors and officers also shared their knowledge of the new structure with the peer team. This highlighted who they are already approaching or know who to approach regarding issues that need advice or to be sighted on.

Additionally, the chief executive is enabling staff beyond senior managers to attend national local government related events, and enrol on development courses. These include Institute of Leadership and Management leadership, management, coaching and mentoring courses, which East Midland Councils are hosting at West Lindsey. Uptake of these opportunities has been high across all levels of the organisation, empowering staff to take on more responsibilities as part of their career progression -

possibly into senior management roles - and so further assisting staff retention.

3.2. Recommendation 2 - prioritise the filling of your new management structure – especially your head of paid service and section 151 officer

During the CPC, West Lindsey was in the process of recruiting its next Section 151 Officer. The council appointed its Interim Director of Finance and Assets (Section 151 Officer) to this permanent position in May 2025. This has helped progress the council's finances including its balanced budgets for the next three years.

This report's section 3.1 outlines that the council has also since appointed an interim, and subsequently a different permanent chief executive (head of paid service); it is also appointing remaining senior management roles to start on 1 May 2026.

These actions, those for the previous recommendation, along with the new chief executive's and ruling administration's positive ways of working, are enabling a more certain, stable and positive senior management team to drive West Lindsey's work.

Whilst West Lindsey undertakes additional work to implement the new senior structure fully, including recruiting to a director post, it should update its current senior managers regularly with progress and next steps. This will help avoid any unnecessary uncertainty, and help create further trust and collaboration.

The council should also support all managers affected, so that whatever the outcome for each of them, they can best take the organisation forward and/or provide a positive legacy that makes the most of their knowledge, experience and skills.

3.3. Recommendation 3 - continue discussion with the peer team and LGA on the best way to resolve the identified councillor/officer relationships challenges

West Lindsey colleagues told the peer team through the CPC and this review that the overwhelming majority of councillor/officer relationships were, and continue to be, working well. These relationships have strengthened further through the new political administration's and chief executive's general, collaborative ways of working. West Lindsey's councillors now usually work on a cross-party, responsibility-sharing basis but retain the ability to work party politically where appropriate. Its officers also work far more positively, confidently and productively now with councillors than they did at

the time of the peer team's previous CPC visit.

The council has additionally undertaken work with the LGA's principal adviser for the East Midlands. This work was with the new West Lindsey Administration Group leaders to embed their 10 point plan, which outlines 10 commitments/areas of focus for the coming months and years. The plan is enabling collaborative, cross-party power-sharing throughout the council to progress the council's work.

The West Lindsey Administration Group, with the council's chief executive, senior leadership team, policy officers, and input from workshops all West Lindsey's staff and councillors were invited to, has refreshed the council's corporate plan and other corporate developments. As a result, the council has adopted a new, central vision for the organisation to deliver for and with its residents, businesses and visitors.

The new corporate plan incorporates a refreshed values and behaviours framework, which sits alongside a new workforce plan and workforce development procedure. The corporate plan clarifies the new political administration's ambitions, which the council has communicated to all staff. The peer team encourages West Lindsey to now actively share and discuss the new values and behaviours framework and corporate plan with all its councillors. Doing so will help clarify what the council expects in these regards, helping them to lead by positive example and work together to deliver their agreed objectives.

West Lindsey has also revised its member/officer relations protocol, having regard to the LGA's updated guidance, including protocol for resolving concerns and disputes. Once full council has approved the protocol in April 2026, West Lindsey will communicate it to staff and councillors, and engage with them on it. The organisation is additionally planning political awareness refresher training in July 2026 for its new senior management team linked to the new protocol.

At the peer team's suggestion, West Lindsey will consider how to train and develop councillors regarding the protocol, so they also clearly understand their and officers' roles, responsibilities and respective boundaries to ensure they best work together.

The council will additionally need to support colleagues who raise issues through the member/officer relations protocol, and monitor the protocol's and values and behaviours framework's impact. This should include for example how many and what

concerns and disputes colleagues have raised, what colleagues have done to address them, and the impact of those actions. This will ensure these approaches are making a positive difference and preventing further issues.

More meetings between the West Lindsey Administration Group leaders and senior leadership team, and the chief executive regularly meeting the leader of the council, the deputy leader of the council, and opposition group leader, are also enhancing relationships. Through these meetings, all can raise, address and resolve issues requiring attention quickly and appropriately. This is also leading by positive example from the top of, and throughout, the council.

West Lindsey officers at all levels who met the peer team during the review highlighted how much more comfortable and happier they are working with the new administration as a result of the healthy, open and supportive culture they are developing with staff. Officers prepare for and welcome challenge, and are comfortable providing appropriate challenge and advice to councillors. This is enabling the whole council to deliver its agreed corporate plan.

Whilst West Lindsey has undertaken much successful work to address this recommendation, it intends to do more, as ruling administration and opposition group councillors recognise the need to progress this recommendation further. Related to this, the peer team heard several times during its review visit about recent examples of negative behaviour matching that identified in the previous CPC report, but that this was related to an exceptionally small minority of councillors. The peer team emphasises that these examples have significantly reduced and are the exception compared to the peer team's previous visit. This is due to the notable political and managerial change that the council has managed since the CPC itself, which has led to the rapid progress on this recommendation as outlined above. The peer team therefore commends the council for its work and success regarding this recommendation, which has notably and positively transformed councillor/officer relationships and work since. Remaining rare negative examples however have harmed some colleagues' wellbeing and have the potential to harm West Lindsey's reputation, especially if they happen publicly.

The council should therefore continue its already intended work on this

recommendation, so West Lindsey can resolve these issues fully, and progress and promote its wider, successful work even more positively. It should ask the LGA and others for help if required so all West Lindsey councillors, from the ruling and opposition groups, and officers can continue to work together positively.

To further assist, the peer team's Liberal Democrat Member Peer, as a Liberal Democrat councillor, has asked the local party to contact the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors to support West Lindsey's ruling and opposition councillors.

The peer team additionally advises that should there be any significant misalignment with West Lindsey's values and behaviour framework that may yet possibly occur by councillors or officers, the chief executive, leader and deputy leader of the council must be vigilant, robust and swift in tackling it. This will enhance West Lindsey's significant progress that it has already achieved in regard to this recommendation to ensure the best councillor/officer relationships and work at West Lindsey.

In discussing this recommendation from other angles, many West Lindsey councillors and officers were surprised and enthused by the range of LGA training and development available that the peer team mentioned. This support includes for example mentoring, top team work for political and managerial leaders, which the council is already taking up, and LGR support via [the LGA's devolution and LGR hub](#). With the West Lindsey Administration Group still relatively new, and the council still recruiting to its new senior management structure, the council should particularly consider taking up the LGA's councillor and officer mentoring offer, which the LGA can tailor per individual.

West Lindsey officers already regularly circulate: LGA and other LGR resources to councillors and staff electronically, and a monthly councillor newsletter including LGA and other events and training opportunities. They also share opportunities more widely and frequently through staff updates and 1:1 meetings. The council's Member Training and Development Group also meets bi-annually to review its training and development programme including [LGA opportunities](#).

Despite the sharing of these resources and activities, knowledge and take up of them are limited, which the chief executive wants to address. This will enable councillors and officers to fully benefit from these resources. The council should therefore ask its

councillors and officers how to improve the sharing of these resources to increase take-up and utilisation by all.

The Peer Challenge Manager is also working with West Lindsey to ensure the LGA sends related communications to as many relevant council colleagues as possible to further increase this knowledge and take up.

Officers can access development opportunities through the LGA's [website](#). The council can also contact the council's LGA Principal Adviser as outlined in section 4 of this report or the Peer Challenge Manager for further support.

Whilst the council should undertake the above suggested work to further address this recommendation, the peer team was impressed and greatly reassured by West Lindsey's progress on this, as also summarised above. This is because when its councillors and officers disagree, or misinterpret one another - a natural part of council proceedings - they can now – and indeed do - discuss, resolve and progress issues together calmly, openly and supportively to work towards their shared, refreshed corporate plan.

3.4. Recommendation 4 - refresh your business planning

West Lindsey has undertaken various work on this recommendation to align the new ruling administration's key priorities via the council's corporate and business (action) plans. This includes:

- adopting a new corporate plan, as this report has previously mentioned, helping West Lindsey's councillors and officers deliver these priorities together
- replacing the former executive business (action) plan and business planning process with three adopted new business plans. These new plans align with the new corporate plan's three main themes – thriving: people, places and council – so it is clear to all what the council needs to deliver
- replacing previous programme boards with three new full council approved strategic delivery panels, one for each of the three main corporate plan themes. These panels incorporate remaining projects from the previous boards, relevant committee chair oversight, have met in shadow form since January 2026 to design and scope key corporate plan deliverables, and went live in April 2026

- planning to replace the council's two policy committees with three new ones – one for each of the corporate plan's main themes. This is to align the council's decision-making with its work related strategic delivery panel per theme
- plans to ensure the appropriate policy committee receives the thematic business plan progress reports to regularly monitor performance and address strategic risks
- plans to present an annual corporate plan progress report to full council so councillors receive a holistic overview of the council's progress against its key priorities.

The peer team congratulates the council's senior leadership team and policy officers for driving this strategic, collaborative work with West Lindsey's councillors and officers. This is because they have only been able to drive much of this work since September 2025, when the new ruling administration and chief executive formally commenced their roles.

To make the most of this work, the council should reflect on, and save, its learning from these successful business planning change processes, so it can most easily undertake such further work as and when required, for example in the event that the council experiences any change of political control. This includes project planning and communications with councillors and staff, to involve them, update them on progress, and manage everyone's expectations.

3.5. Recommendation 5 - develop plans to address the gap in your medium-term financial plan

West Lindsey's governance arrangements for financing projects are robust. This includes not allowing financially unviable projects to proceed.

The UK Government's multi-year financial settlement has also helped the council balance and approve its budgets for the next three years. West Lindsey lead officers and councillors believe this leaves it financially viable as it heads towards LGR.

Additionally, the council has revised its previous savings board's terms of reference and purpose to become the Member Board for Efficiencies, Income Generation and Savings. This is helping it, as its name suggests, to be more efficient.

Like any council however, West Lindsey must continually monitor, scrutinise and progress its budgets and spending closely. This is especially given global conflicts, LGR, other national and local policy developments and all their repercussions, which could have serious implications for the council's finances as and when they emerge.

The council is considering further financial efficiencies such as digital invoicing, and exploring what other councils are doing. The peer team recommends however the council becomes far more innovative and proactive in this regard, as digital invoicing is not new, and West Lindsey could have arguably transitioned to this previously.

At the same time, the council has key, local opportunities to invest in and benefit from. These include: its plans to redevelop the former Royal Air Force Scampton site; housing, commuting and skills related opportunities from the Spherical Tokamak for Energy Production prototype fusion power plant to be built by 2040 near Gainsborough; and LGR. West Lindsey should therefore proactively consider how it can innovatively enhance its own finances directly through its own corporate priorities, as well as exploring what other councils are doing more generally.

3.6. Recommendation 6 - design and implement a new continuous improvement/change programme

After the peer team's previous CPC visit in January 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution issued a statutory invitation to all councils in two-tier areas and neighbouring small unitary councils to develop proposals for unitary local government. Councils were asked to produce interim plans and submit these to Government by 21 March 2025. West Lindsey understandably moved its focus to LGR implementation, and therefore did not design a new improvement/change programme as per this recommendation.

Section 3.9 of this report outlines how the council has been progressing LGR instead.

3.7. Recommendation 7 - review the number and frequency of your meetings

As partly outlined in section 3.4, and as relevant here, West Lindsey has:

- reduced and replaced previous programme boards with strategic delivery panels
- reviewed its member working groups, approved the review's recommendations,

and reduced these groups down to three, including the Member Board for Efficiencies, Income Generation and Savings mentioned in section 3.5.

The council has additionally changed the format of its monthly updates and weekly messages by the chief executive and senior leadership team to its staff. The monthly updates are now online Microsoft Teams-based calls, which are conversational, two-way and inclusive of all council staff. This compares to the previous, more static PowerPoint presentation format. The weekly messages' format has changed from a lengthy all staff email to a more concise update from the chief executive published as a news item on the staff intranet. These revised formats work well by providing useful updates, showcasing and celebrating individual staff members and their work. This is helping all to know who does what, what further beneficial links can be made between work areas, and further boosts staff morale.

The chief executive also regularly meets the ruling administration political group leaders, as well as the opposition group leader. This is similarly working well, continuing to build positive, open relationships, provide updates and feedback, and progress the council's work at this level.

In progressing these work areas, neither the council nor peer team have seen any detrimental effects. Indeed, these changes appear to be saving time and other resources, and meetings are more effective for being more focused and purposeful.

3.8. Recommendation 8 - develop your internal communications to address issues raised throughout our findings

In reviewing and updating its internal communications, the council has notably improved:

- its approach generally, which is more flexible, responsive and incorporates new important topics such as LGR
- the formatting of, and messaging within staff updates. Staff feedback regularly informs and improves these updates
- its intranet, particularly setting up an LGR information hub for key updates, space to find and raise frequently asked questions and answers, and a document library

- its regular messaging to staff, for example through the chief executive's updates
- wider management team meetings, which discuss updates on LGR, the implementation of the council's senior management structure, and other topics.

The peer team especially heard how internal communications are less 'top down' - from the senior leadership team to staff - and are more 'two-way'/engaging. This therefore, plus all the key developments outlined above, are giving all staff, senior management and councillors more genuine opportunities to know what is happening, feedback and influence how the council works, and best work together.

3.9. How ready and fit for purpose West Lindsey's LGR work/progress plans are, to help ensure the council can deliver those plans as efficiently as possible

Whilst West Lindsey developed and submitted an interim plan for unitary local government in Greater Lincolnshire, it subsequently decided not to submit a final proposal. The council is instead progressing its own programme to prepare for whatever decision Government makes on which LGR proposal(s) to implement. West Lindsey's work is therefore focusing on pre-decision, pre-transition and transition stages. Accordingly, the council - alongside other Greater Lincolnshire local authorities - is currently progressing recommended pre-decision 'no-regret' actions. These include for example ensuring contract and asset registers are up to date, and other workforce and human resources actions, to prepare for post-decision steps.

At the same time, Greater Lincolnshire councils' chief executives are leading seven workstreams to align key work across the area. West Lindsey's chief executive co-leads the programme management office (PMO) workstream, and co-leads the contracts and procurement workstream.

Greater Lincolnshire councils were due to complete their no-regret actions by March 2026, through the PMO workstream, which West Lindsey's chief executive co-leads. The councils will then deliver actions to ensure a safe, legal and successful transition to the new authority/ies.

Given the peer team's observations above, West Lindsey has a unique, positive opportunity and strength as a Greater Lincolnshire council that did not submit an

LGR proposal. It could be the neutral council player that positively and effectively co-ordinates and drives progress across the area, the credible voice of reason if needed to facilitate negotiations and address any difficulties between local authorities. If it chooses to take up this role, with Greater Lincolnshire councils' agreement and support, this could potentially benefit all by making the most of:

- West Lindsey's influence, local intelligence, skills and assets among other things, through its councillors, staff and communities, to enhance LGR opportunities throughout the Greater Lincolnshire area
- the Greater Lincolnshire LGR decision and those councils' related work programmes to deliver for West Lindsey and Greater Lincolnshire residents, businesses and visitors
- the legacy all round that West Lindsey could leave as a result of this work.

This role would also offer the council the opportunity to further engage with Greater Lincolnshire local authorities that are understandably currently focusing on their own submitted LGR proposals or could otherwise work more closely with West Lindsey.

Once the Government has announced its decision on which LGR proposal(s) to implement, West Lindsey will need to work at speed for itself and with the other Greater Lincolnshire local authorities to catch up with and drive forward this agenda for West Lindsey's and the wider area's residents, businesses and visitors. All Greater Lincolnshire council chief executives are due to meet to progress this work programme together. As part of this, West Lindsey must ensure it has sufficient officer capacity to deliver this work at both West Lindsey and Greater Lincolnshire levels, and to deliver West Lindsey's own remaining legacy work.

The peer team also recommends that West Lindsey asks the now Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution for a conversation as soon as possible ahead of her Greater Lincolnshire LGR decision. This is to enable West Lindsey to share its views on all the Greater Lincolnshire councils' LGR proposals in the absence of its own proposal to help inform her decision. If this is not possible, West Lindsey can demonstrate its willingness to make the most of its neutral position to inform the outcome. If this conversation is possible, West Lindsey must be prepared to respectively answer and evidence the likely questions of which proposal it prefers

and why. It should also be prepared, if required, to further use its previously submitted and published LGR principles, explanatory covering letter, and full submitted analysis against its principles to help the Minister best consider the proposals from West Lindsey's more neutral position in the Greater Lincolnshire area.

4. Final thoughts and next steps

The LGA thanks West Lindsey for undertaking this CPC review.

We appreciate that the council's senior managerial and political leadership will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions to determine how to take things forward.

Under the umbrella of LGA sector-led improvement, there is an on-going offer of support to councils. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on the areas identified for development and improvement, and we would be happy to discuss this.

Mark Edgell, Principal Adviser, is the main contact between the council and the LGA, and his email address is mark.edgell@local.gov.uk.