

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of Council held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall, Marshall's Yard, Gainsborough, DN21 2NA on 18 March 2025 at 7.00 pm.

Present: Councillor Stephen Bunney (Chairman)
Councillor Matthew Boles (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Emma Bailey	Councillor John Barrett
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 Paul Howitt-Cowan
Councillor Paul Key	Councillor Mrs Angela Lawrence
Councillor Paul Lee	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 Trevor Young

In Attendance:

Ian Knowles	Chief Executive
Peter Davy	Financial Services Manager (Deputy Section 151 Officer)
Sally Grindrod-Smith	Director Planning, Regeneration & Communities
Nova Roberts	Director of Change Management, ICT & Regulatory Services
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

Apologies

Councillor Eve Bennett
Councillor Liz Clews
Councillor Christopher Darcel
Councillor Sabastian Hague
Councillor Mrs Diana Rodgers
Councillor Moira Westley

74 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

75 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION - OPTIONS

The Chairman explained the item of business for the Extraordinary Meeting was the Local Government Reorganisation options paper, and he invited the Chief Executive to introduce the report.

The Chief Executive explained that the report in front of Members set out the latest position in respect to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), the timeline which local authorities were required to work to, and a proposal that contained six potential options for reorganisation in Lincolnshire, detailed in Appendix A of the report.

There were four recommendations in the report, with the substantive recommendation being Recommendation 2, which covered the proposal that was suggested to be submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) by 21 March 2025. In considering the options presented within the report, Members were reminded that it was important to consider the proposal which had been developed represented a moment in time and Members were not necessarily required, at this stage, to commit to any one particular option.

It was explained that the Minister had stated that the interim submission due on 21 March was a 'temperature check' and there would be time for refinement and further development ahead of the requirements to submit a final proposal on 28 November 2025. As such, by submitting the presented proposal, the Council was not restricted at this stage to those six options, and there would be opportunity to continue working on a final option, both cross party within the Council and with Leaders across Greater Lincolnshire.

The proposal under consideration contained six initial options, and, in the absence of any local consensus on suitable geographies, Officers had drawn up a menu of options presenting a high-level, data-based appraisal of each. The data used reflected the challenges and opportunities presented to West Lindsey from the perspective of people and place, predominantly focused on the economy, deprivation, demographics, health and wellbeing, employment and skills, and housing. From an organisational perspective, the higher-level financial analysis of each of the options was also included. It was explained these were not exhaustive data sets, and further data would be used to help refine the options ready for the submission of any final proposal, based on the direction of the Council, based on the discussions during the current meeting and over the coming months.

Members heard there was no consensus in Greater Lincolnshire around a single model, and a number of proposals had been circulated over the previous days from other councils. All ten Greater Lincolnshire Leaders had committed to work together to develop a final proposal that was in the best interests of the people of Lincolnshire. Whilst there were differing views on boundaries, there was a broad alignment on principles. Similar data sets had been used across each council to assess the merits of each option. Most interim proposals were focused on a place-based approach, and all but two of the interim proposals published favoured a three-unitary model, merging the two unitaries of North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire and dividing the county.

The paper presented was an early consideration of the options proposed for submission to MHCLG as the Council's interim proposal on Local Government Reorganisation. Keeping

the options broad at this stage allowed Members the time and space to work together to refine these over the coming months, supported by officers. The next stage would focus on refining the options presented before aiming to reach a cross-party consensus on the preferred option that would be taken forward for development into West Lindsey's final submission, which was due on 28 November. Members were advised this could include an all Member workshop as a follow-up to the meeting, as well as continued engagement by Greater Lincolnshire Leaders.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive and called on the Leader of the Council to open the debate.

The Leader explained that he had attended the District Council Network conference the previous week, during which the attending Labour Minister had made very clear that LGR would go ahead, whether that involved working with local councils or not. The Leader noted that, given the breadth of options and opinions regarding LGR, he was not expectant of a consensus amongst Council Members at this stage, however he did ask that Members accepted the current position and engaged with the onwards steps. In criticising the timeframes around LGR, and the speed with which it was planned to be implemented, he noted there would be divisions, and in such a large, diverse area as Lincolnshire, it may prove increasingly difficult to find a meaningful solution. He praised the work of Officers over the previous weeks in drawing up the options paper, and highlighted that there was significant work ongoing to meet with the other councils within Greater Lincolnshire.

Members heard details of some of the other proposals which had been put forward in the region, with the Leader noting potential strengths and weaknesses, as well as highlighting areas where there may be scope for further discussions, for example with Lincoln. It was explained that option E contained within the paper had received some consensus of support amongst local Leaders. That option would consist of a north – south divide, with the north area to include West Lindsey, North Lincolnshire, North East Lincolnshire and Lincoln. Those councils which would fall in the south of the region had also expressed support for that option. The Leader concluded by recognising that, whilst the Council was ultimately opposed to LGR, wanting to retain autonomy as West Lindsey District Council, the reality was that there needed to be engagement with the process if there was to be any scope for influencing the outcome. The Leader therefore proposed that option E be supported, whilst work continued around the Central Lincolnshire partnership, ensuring options were kept open.

The Chairman thanked the Leader, and invited Councillor I. Fleetwood, Leader of the Opposition, to speak.

Councillor Fleetwood expressed some support for the views expressed by the Leader, thanking the Officers for the time they had spent on preparing the paper and for the all-Member briefing which had been delivered earlier in the month. He noted his displeasure with the timescales put forward by the government, questioning the realities of achieving LGR within such a short time frame, whilst recognising that it was still necessary to remain engaged with the process.

Members were reminded of the efficiency of West Lindsey District Council, delivering quality services, retaining a stable financial position, employing excellent officers, and benefitting from committed and hardworking Councillors, all of whom had contributed to the success of

the district over the past 14-15 years.

With regard to option C contained within the report, the Leader of the Opposition acknowledged the comments made earlier by the Leader, however voiced his belief that the amalgamation of the district, borough and county councils would facilitate a smooth transition with minimum disruption. He recognised it would not be a perfect situation, with significant consideration required of head office location, office space, number of Councillors to be accommodated in a Council Chamber, however he expressed his opinion that it would negate the concerns of Lincoln fringe areas regarding the creation of a 'Greater Lincoln' area.

The Leader of the Opposition went on to suggest that, if option C were not suitable, the next suggestion he would look to would be option D, to provide a clear-cut area in terms of population and geography, although it would include significant cross-border organisation in terms of being two separate regions. With regard to the six options contained within the report, he expressed a preference for reducing the options to a clear one or two proposals to put forward.

The Chairman thanked the Leader of the Opposition and invited speakers from the floor.

During the ensuing debate, several Councillors voiced their unhappiness with LGR plans, citing the success of West Lindsey District Council and stating a desire to remain autonomous. However, in recognising the inevitability of LGR, support was voiced for option C, in terms of minimal disruption and keeping the county area working together. Members also voiced concern about other proposals put forward, suggesting that West Lindsey needed to be clear about preference at this stage, in the same way other councils were stating their preferences with minimal or no interactions with other areas.

There was also significant support for option E, looking at a north-south divide. It was suggested that this option would open up opportunities for economic growth for West Lindsey in a way other options would not.

Thanks to the Officers involved were expressed across the board, praising the work undertaken behind the scenes to prepare the options under consideration.

As an alternative viewpoint, a Councillor suggested the focus should be on service provision and how to best benefit the residents of all areas, with the opinion voiced that option A would be the preferred proposal. In response to a question as to how LGR would work alongside the new devolved powers to the Mayor of Greater Lincolnshire, it was explained that ideally, the Combined Authority would have had more time in which to become embedded, however the timeframes for LGR had been set by the government and as such, LGR would progress alongside the new Combined Authority.

A Member of Council enquired as to the lack of east-west split options, to which it was explained that with North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire working together in relation to the Humber area, it was unlikely any proposal would include splitting those two authorities.

With further support voiced for option A, accepting that option D could be accepted as the secondary approach, the Chairman invited the Leader of Council to provide closing remarks.

The Leader thanked all Members for their thoughts and input, recognising there was a multitude of considerations to take into account, not least the organisation of adult social care, children's services and highways. He summarised the support which had been provided for options A and E, suggesting that Officers be tasked with undertaking further work on those two options to present to Members by way of an all-Member briefing, or at another meeting of Full Council. He rescinded his previous motion, and instead proposed that option A and E be supported as the two options for Officers to take forward and work on in more detail.

Members were reminded that there was a motion which had been proposed and seconded, that being for options C and D to be the two options to be taken forward. On taking the vote, and no majority in favour, the Chairman declared that the motion was lost.

The Chairman then took the vote for the second motion, that being for options A and E to be taken forward, with a majority vote, the motion was carried.

Members were invited to review the recommendations contained within the report, with it being highlighted that all options would be submitted to the government at this stage, however the carried motion would be used as providing the requested direction. The Leader of the Opposition reiterated his preference for option D to also be included.

With Members indicating clear understanding and agreement that **all** options would be put forward and no options would be removed at this stage, having had the recommendations within the report proposed and seconded, the Chairman took the vote and it was

RESOLVED that

- a) the matters set out in the report be noted, and further updates in respect of Local Government Reorganisation be received in due course; and
- b) the options included as Appendix A be submitted to Government by 21 March 2025 as the Council's interim position on LGR, noting the preferences detailed in the above debate ; and
- c) the requirement by government for councils to work together be noted and work with other Greater Lincolnshire councils to develop proposals for Local Government Reorganisation be agreed; and
- d) officers be supported and provided with further direction for further development of proposals for Local Government Reorganisation, with referral back to Council for any decisions required in accordance with the timeline set out by Government.

The meeting concluded at 8.09 pm.

Chairman

