



**Corporate Policy and
Resources**

**Thursday, 25 September
2025**

Subject: Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

Report by:

Chief Executive

Contact Officer:

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Purpose / Summary:

To request funding to support the Council's role
in Local Government Reorganisation

RECOMMENDATION(S):

- **Notes the matters set out within this report, specifically acknowledging both the opportunities and challenges that Local Government Reorganisation presents.**
- **Members approve £150,000 from the Project Investment Reserve to support the Council's on-going work in relation to preparing the organisation for Local Government Reorganisation.**

IMPLICATIONS

Legal:

On 16th December 2024, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government presented the English Devolution White Paper to Parliament. The overarching intention of the White Paper is for Devolution to become the universal position across England, accompanied by a large-scale, England wide programme of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). In respect of Devolution, a Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) has already been established in Greater Lincolnshire, with a new Mayor elected in May 2025. The focus of this paper is purely on the Local Government Reorganisation element of the White Paper.

In respect of LGR, the White Paper sets out the intention to facilitate a programme of reorganisation for all two-tier areas in England, and for unitary councils where there is evidence of failure or where the size or boundary may be hindering their ability to deliver sustainable and high-quality public services.

The legal framework for unitarisation is provided by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Under the legislation, the Secretary of State may invite a principal authority to propose single tier local government arrangements and then consult upon these proposals before making a decision under this legislation.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, sets out the various different options for restructuring that can be put forward. The options as drafted in the Act does not currently include a scenario where two existing unitary councils, like North and North East Lincolnshire Councils may be merged together in isolation. This means that currently any proposal that suggests this must instead leave those two councils as separate unitaries.

Any proposal which suggests an existing unitary council merges with a district council is permissible under the current operating legislation and therefore can remain unchanged.

However, some of the proposals previously being promoted by Lincolnshire Councils included proposals to merge the two unitary councils in North Lincolnshire and North-East Lincolnshire. To reflect the legal stipulation of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, these proposals have had to be amended which has resulted in an increase in the number of unitary councils being proposed for Greater Lincolnshire.

Following the publication of the White Paper, on 5th February 2025, the Minister for Local Government and English Devolution issued a statutory invitation to Council Leaders in two-tier areas inviting them to develop proposals for reorganisation. The Council submitted its interim proposal on 21st March 2025, with initial feedback received via a government letter to Lincolnshire Leaders on 3rd June. Any final proposals must be submitted by 28th November 2025.

A period of statutory consultation will follow during the Spring/Summer 2026, prior to a ministerial decision on the future unitary council coverage across Greater Lincolnshire.

On current government timelines, it is expected that new unitary authorities in Greater Lincolnshire will become operational on 1st April 2028, known as Vesting Day. Elections to the new Shadow Authority are expected to take place in May 2027.

Financial : FIN/66/26/CPR/SL

On the 7th July 2025 Council acknowledged that there are resource implications as a result of LGR both in the short and longer term. Due to the scale of evidence, resource and financial implications had not at that time been fully developed and as such it was acknowledged that a sum of up to £50,000 can be drawn down through existing delegation from reserves or contingencies to support and facilitate the Council's involvement during the summer.

A commitment to bring a further paper to Corporate Policy and Resources Committee on 25th September was made.

This paper provides further updates on LGR, resource and financial implications of developing the Council's position in relation to the Governments ambitions for LGR and the implications on West Lindsey of the various proposals being drawn up by other Local Authorities across Greater Lincolnshire.

It is considered that due to the extent and specialist nature of the ongoing work required that a further £100,000, **a total of £150,000**, be approved, with delegated authority to spend on activities relating to LGR, up to the decision by ministers on the final geography.

It is proposed to fund the allocation of £150,000 from the Project Investment Reserve.

It is anticipated that following the decision by Government on the final geography of Greater Lincolnshire that a further paper on broader financial implications in relation to supporting the transformation and transition arrangements into a new unitary Council will be required.

Staffing :

LGR is a new priority workstream for all Councils undergoing LGR 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 LGR process. At West Lindsey, this includes, but is not limited to, input from the Policy & Strategy Team, Finance Team, People Services, Change, Performance and Programmes Team, Communications Team, and Senior Management Team.

Whilst the initial allowance of up to £50,000 provides support to enable some work to be carried out over the summer to deliver a position for the Final Submission date of 28th November 2025. Following that date there will be more significant implications for the Council's own resources to facilitate and enable to transition into a new unitary Council.

This will need to be considered as part of the broader staffing structure and considered in a future paper.

However, by approving a fund of £150,000 for the purposes of facilitating the LGR workstream, this allows consultants to continue to support existing staff and mitigates the impact the Council's ability to continue to deliver priorities.

Council staff are being kept informed of key developments relating to LGR via a dedicated page on the Council's intranet, through weekly staff messages, and all staff updates as required. This will continue throughout the next stages of the indicative LGR timeline.

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights :

High-level consideration has been given to Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications and more detailed considerations will be undertaken over the course of this work, as part of the Council's options appraisal of the final proposals that are in development.

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 shared data agreement is in place, facilitated through a secure shared data portal where individual councils can upload their data and information. Much of this is open-source data, however, the data sharing agreement includes provisions to safeguard and ensure handling of data is GDPR compliant and that high standards of data management are adhered to at all times.

A shared financial and demand baseline is also in development which will allow all bids put forward on behalf of Greater Lincolnshire to be based on the same principles, and allowing for alternative forecasting and assumptions to be tested in support of the variety of models being developed.

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](#)

Risk Assessment :

The Government has stated its intention to reorganise all two-tier local authority areas within this Parliament.

Within the criteria, Government has been clear that Councils should work together to develop a single proposal for the area. It is therefore important that all Councils engage in the process to ensure their area is appropriately represented in discussions and decisions.

Not engaging in the discussions creates a risk that any future decisions regarding local government structures in Greater Lincolnshire do not represent the best interests of West Lindsey.

Likewise, not developing a clear position on LGR, including priorities, opportunities and challenges risks West Lindsey's interests not being properly considered during the programme of LGR and reduces the Council's scope of influence across Greater Lincolnshire.

These risks are mitigated by the Council continuing to proactively prepare their position, integrate LGR into day-to-day business and by engaging with competent and experienced consultants who are able to provide advice and resource to respond effectively to the various stages of LGR.

Equally, the Council also undertakes regular and consistent engagement in LGR discussions at the local, regional and national level by both members and senior officers.

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

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No

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Key Decision:

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

Yes

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No

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Executive Summary

In publishing the English Devolution White Paper 2024, the Government set out its intention to redraw the Local Government landscape in England via an enhanced programme of devolution, and the reorganisation of all remaining two-tier local government areas in England. Such change, if delivered, represents the largest reform of the Local Government sector since 1974.

This paper provides an overview on activity over the summer, building on that reported to Council on 07th July and 08th September 2025, in relation to Local Government Reorganisation, specifically the development of key materials and evidence which has been used by the Council to undertake 'Supportive Engagement' with all Greater Lincolnshire authorities.

The paper also provides a forward look at activities required to be undertaken by the Council in preparation for LGR following the Final Submission date in November, the statutory consultation and subsequent decision by Government in early to mid-Spring and beyond to transition and vesting day of the new authority(s).

In acknowledging the scale, complexity, and evolving nature of work related to the LGR programme, it is essential for West Lindsey to stay actively involved, both to meet government requirements and advocate for district interests. This paper requests approval for a budget to support these efforts and achieve the best outcomes for West Lindsey residents after the new unitary authority(s) Vesting Day.

It is considered that due to the extent and specialist nature of the ongoing work required that a total of £150,000, be approved, with delegated authority to spend on activities relating to LGR, up to the decision by ministers on the final geography.

This would consist of a sum of up to £50,000 which can be drawn down through existing delegation, as detailed in the Council report on LGR on 07th July and a further £100,000 from the Project Investment Reserve.

Updates on the work being undertaken and activity against spend will be reported to Council as part of the on-going decision-making process relating to wider LGR programme of work and timeframes established by Government.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 In publishing the English Devolution White Paper 2024, the Government set out its intention to redraw the Local Government landscape in England via an enhanced programme of devolution, and the reorganisation of all remaining two-tier local government areas in England. Such change, if delivered, represents the largest reform of the Local Government sector since 1974.
- 1.2 This paper provides an update on activity over the summer in relation to Local Government Reorganisation, specifically the development of key materials and evidence which has been used by the Council to undertake 'Supportive Engagement' with all Greater Lincolnshire authorities.
- 1.3 The paper also provides a forward look at activities required to be undertaken by the Council in preparation for LGR following the Final Submission date in November, the statutory consultation and subsequent decision by Government in early to mid-Spring and beyond to transition and vesting day of the new authority(s).

2 Background

- 2.1 Following the Statutory Invitation, appendix 1, issued on 5th February 2025, the Minister for Local Government and English Devolution ("the Minister"), Jim McMahon OBE MP wrote to all council Leaders in remaining two-tier areas formally inviting the submission of proposals for LGR.
- 2.2 The letter set out the process for LGR and a series of milestones for key activities to ensure that the timelines for reorganisation would be met, as can be seen in Fig. 1 below.

Fig. 1 LGR timelines for reorganisation



- 2.3 In acknowledging that LGR represents the largest reform of the Local Government sector since 1974, the Council, has worked with consultants to support the development of our response to Government requirements with the focus of ensuring that the outcome of LGR meets the needs of West Lindsey residents, businesses and stakeholders.

3 Activity to Date

- 3.1 In line with the Statutory Invitation and timelines set out by Government, Council have considered the requirements and implications of LGR at three Council meetings this year.
- 3.2 At Council on 18th March, prior to the Interim Submission deadline of 21st March Council considered the data and information presented to them which considered 6 options for LGR across Greater Lincolnshire.
- 3.3 Each option was supported by a comprehensive assessment of data and strategic fit of West Lindsey priorities.
- 3.4 At that meeting Council resolved the following and an Interim Submission which detailed all 6 options was submitted to Government.
 - 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.
- 3.5 Following the submission and in acknowledgement of Council resolution officers continued to work on LGR, working with Greater Lincolnshire Councils, formalising relationships in relation to this workstream and sharing data and information.
- 3.6 Government provided feedback on the Interim Submissions made by Greater Lincolnshire authorities on 03rd June. The feedback provided set out 6 guiding principles for the Final Submission for LGR proposals on 28 November 2025. These guiding principles are summarised as follows:

1. Collaboration and Evidence Base

- The Government welcomes interim planning efforts and intentions for future joint working.
- Councils are encouraged to strengthen collaboration, particularly around data sharing, to support a robust shared evidence base.
- Final proposals should:
 - i. Use consistent assumptions and datasets.
 - ii. Clearly demonstrate how data supports proposed outcomes and aligns with assessment criteria.

- iii. Include an options appraisal to justify the preferred approach.

2. Proposal Structure and Coordination

- Each council may submit one Final Proposal with a clear single option and defined geography.
- Joint Final Proposals are encouraged to reduce duplication and resource strain.
- Proposals should aim to consolidate differing views into fewer, well-supported submissions.

3. Geographic Scope and Neighbouring Areas

- Acknowledge that some Interim Proposals included areas like Rutland, which lies outside the GLCCA invitation area.
- Confirms Councils may explore cross-boundary options but must:
 - i. Assess impacts on the entire neighbouring area.
 - ii. Engage and share data with affected councils.
 - iii. Reflect any cross-boundary support in both sets of proposals.

4. Population Considerations

- While a population of 500,000+ is a guiding principle, flexibility is allowed.
- All proposals should clearly justify their population rationale, whether above or below the guideline.

5. Boundary Changes

- Boundary changes are permissible with strong justification.
- Proposals must specify the proposed unitary area, using clear identifiers (e.g. parish/ward boundaries or maps).
- Councils may alternatively propose unitary structures using existing boundaries and request a Principal Area Boundary Review (PABR) later.

6. Implications for GLCCA

- Proposals should detail the governance implications for GLCCA and how each option supports local communities.
- Engagement with the new GLCCA Mayor is recommended.
- Proposals involving Rutland should explain the impact on GLCCA and Leicestershire proposals.

3.7 On 07th July, in the light of these guiding principles Council considered the options and next steps in engaging in LGR and ultimately were asked to make a decision on whether to make a Final Submission to government on LGR in November. Members considered 3 options:

1. 'No Engagement' *Do not submit a Final Proposal for LGR in Greater Lincolnshire and do not engage with the development of any other Final Business case's being developed by other authorities in Greater Lincolnshire.*

2. 'Supportive Engagement' *Work across all Final Proposals being developed for Greater Lincolnshire*
3. 'Directive Engagement & Full Submission' The Council develop its own Final Proposal and work up a full business case which accords with the requirements of the Governments criteria.

3.8 At the Council meeting, members resolved that:

- a. The matters set out in this report, including government feedback on the interim proposals submitted by councils in Greater Lincolnshire be noted;
- b. option two be approved as the Council's next course of action, this being to undertake 'Supportive Engagement' working across all Final Proposals being developed for Greater Lincolnshire, with further assessment and decision-making opportunities for members at a future Council meeting; and
- c. the financial and resource implications for the Council in preparing for LGR and the allocation of £50,000, which will be approved in line with financial procedure rules, and which will facilitate the initial preparation of data and evidence to enable the Council to engage effectively with the Final Proposals being worked on across Greater Lincolnshire be noted.

3.9 Following this resolution officers have continued to provide supportive engagement with all Greater Lincolnshire authorities over the course of the summer. As part of this supportive engagement officers have continued to work with consultants to develop the Councils position, hone the areas of influence and positioning.

3.10 A suite of materials are in development to support and promote the Councils position, both in relation to the Final Submission date in November but also beyond this point preparing for transition.

3.11 This includes data led assessment of emerging proposal being promoted across Greater Lincolnshire, development of place profiling and good practice case studies to promote the strengths and achievements of the Council.

3.12 At Corporate Policy and Resources Committee on 24th July, members considered the Budget Consultation and LGR Engagement proposals.

3.13 The Committee resolved that:

- a. the Budget Consultation process for 2025, be agreed; and
- b. b) the intention to run a public engagement exercise on Local Government Reorganisation alongside the 2025 Budget Consultation be noted.
- c. c) the Head of Paid Service be granted delegated authority to agree the final questions prior to launch, in accordance with the Committee's comments.

- 3.14 An overview of submissions to the LGR Engagement survey so far, was reported to Council on 08th September, with the questionnaire having closed on 15th September.
- 3.15 The full and final results will be used to inform the Councils next steps.

4 Next Steps

- 4.1 In acknowledging the close relationship between the Council's current and future priorities and LGR, as well as supporting the transition process, it is important that the Councils priorities are reviewed.
- 4.2 As resolved by Council on 08th September a review of the Corporate Plan was agreed. The Corporate Plan will, as previously, be driven by the priorities of members, which this time will also need to be considered through the lens of LGR.
- 4.3 Staff and member workshops have been taking place in September to explore member priorities within the context of LGR and Government Criteria and how these can be delivered in a financially sustainable way.
- 4.4 In acknowledging that whilst West Lindsey District Council may not be in existence from 01st April 2028, West Lindsey the place and the people certainly will. As such ensuring that priorities and delivery acknowledge this fact but also proactively respond to this.
- 4.5 As such the workshops have been designed to provide an opportunity to explore how the Council can bring together its priorities and assimilate that into its position in respect of LGR and the proposals that are in development, supported by case studies and a robust evidence base.
- 4.6 Establishing a direction of travel which continues the positive delivery to date but also ensures that delivering for West Lindsey the place beyond the life of the Council is a focus of these workshops.
- 4.7 A further update report to Council on LGR will be presented on 10th November. Submission of Final Proposals is 28th November 2025.
- 4.8 It was reported at Council on 08th September that there were currently six proposals being worked on across Greater Lincolnshire. An update from each Council developing a proposal was included in the report. Noting that some proposals were further developed in detail than others.
- 4.9 As shown in figure 1 in this report, whilst the submission deadline is a key milestone in the Government's LGR programme, it is still very early on the programme and much work is needed prior to that date to prepare for the transition to a unitary authority, which ever geography is successful.
- 4.10 Having a clear and data led understanding of what each of the Final Proposals submitted really means for the Council, understanding the

risks and the opportunities will help the Council formulate a position to submit as part of the Statutory Consultation period.

- 4.11 However, understanding this will also allow the Council to prepare robust transition plans, including understanding financial and resource implications, as well as continue to support our communities and businesses prepare for a new local government model in Greater Lincolnshire.
- 4.12 This work will provide stability for the people and the place that make West Lindsey unique and important in the Greater Lincolnshire context.
- 4.13 This work will continue up until the point that a Ministerial decision is made on the final geography. Once the decision on the final geography is made, the focus of the work will shift to implementation, focussing on service transition and transformation and risk management to name but a few activities.
- 4.14 As described at the beginning of this report, the scale and complexity of LGR as a programme of work is substantial. Whilst there are examples of unitarisation across the country, one of the established learning points is, that each area is different, and whilst certain principles may be applied, acknowledging and responding to the specific features and requirements of each area is fundamental.
- 4.15 For the Council to continue to represent West Lindsey's people and unique place effectively in Greater Lincolnshire's LGR journey it is requested that the committee approve a budget specifically for LGR.
- 4.16 This will be used to support the Council continue to actively engage in the LGR programme and respond to both the Governments requirements, but also ensure we are able to effectively promote the districts interest and ultimately deliver the best possible outcome for the resident of West Lindsey beyond the Vesting Day for the new unitary authority.
- 4.17 An initial amount of up to £50,000 was identified to enable works to be undertaken over the summer to facilitate the initial preparation of data and evidence to enable the Council to engage effectively with the Final Proposals.
- 4.18 However, it is considered that due to the extent and specialist nature of the ongoing work required that a further £100,000, in addition to the £50,000 be approved, with delegated authority to spend on activities relating to LGR, up to the decision by ministers on the final geography. It is proposed to fund the additional budget of £100,000 from the Project Investment Reserve – a total of £150,000.
- 4.19 In approving this funding, it ensures that the Council can continue to engage in the process to ensure West Lindsey is appropriately represented in discussions and decisions.

- 4.20 By not having the finances and resources available to actively engage in the discussions and develop evidence to support the Council's position creates a risk that any future decisions regarding local government structures in Greater Lincolnshire will not represent the best interests of West Lindsey.
- 4.21 Likewise, not developing a clear position on LGR, including priorities, opportunities and challenges risks West Lindsey's interests not being properly considered during the programme of LGR and reduces the Council's scope of influence across Greater Lincolnshire.
- 4.22 These risks are mitigated by the Council making available a fund which allows us to continue to proactively prepare a clear position on LGR, integrate this into day-to-day business and decision making and by engaging with competent and experienced consultants who are able to provide advice and resource to respond effectively to the various stages of LGR.
- 4.23 Updates on the work being undertaken and activity against spend will be reported to Council as part of the on-going decision -making process relating to wider LGR programme of work and timeframes established by Government.
- 4.24 The total cost of LGR in Lincolnshire remains unknown at this stage, however other Councils having gone through this process previously have needed to allocate funding in the region of £1.5million to facilitate the transition and integration required.
- 4.25 Therefore, as the process of LGR in Greater Lincolnshire progresses and further information and clarity is given, a future paper on finance and resources for LGR will be coming forward for members to consider.