



COUNCIL

Monday, 10th November
2025

Subject: Local Government Reorganisation

Report by:

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Purpose / Summary:

The purpose of this report is to –

1. provide an update to Council on the latest position regarding progress with plans for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR),
2. set out the proposals for LGR that have been developed for Greater Lincolnshire for submission to Government by the deadline of 28th November 2025,
3. set out the options available to Members in response to the Minister's statutory invitation of 5th February 20205 to submit proposals for LGR, and
4. outline the next steps and timeline in connection with LGR

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Council:

1. Notes the matters in this report, and,
2. That having had regard to the options set out in the report, the Council does not express support for any of the proposals for LGR in Greater Lincolnshire that have been developed in the report but does provide a written response to Government setting out the council's position, and

3. That the response to Government be drafted and approved by the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council based on the content of this report, and a copy of the response be sent to all Members of the Council, for information.

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 plan 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.

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.

(N.B.) Where there are legal implications the report MUST be seen by the MO

Financial : FIN/66/26/CL/SL

In June 2025, the Minister announced funding to support the development of final LGR proposals; Greater Lincolnshire's allocation being £357,246. It was agreed by Chief Executives that this funding would be allocated to Lincolnshire County Council who would disseminate the funding to those Councils developing a final proposal as required.

The Interim Plan Feedback letter and the funding allocation letter make it clear that collaboration across areas is required, specifically in relation to information and data sharing. As such, some of this money has been used to develop a shared data baseline, with the remaining monies allocated to specific proposal development. This ensures a fair share of monies and also accounts for any local authorities that have chosen not to engage in the broader LGR programme.

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 further paper was presented to Corporate Policy and Resources Committee on 25th September which provided an overview of the anticipated resource and financial implications of developing the Council's position in relation to LGR in Greater Lincolnshire up to the decision point by Government, anticipated in Autumn 2026.

Based on current information, following the submission of proposals in November 2025 and the Government's statutory consultation and decision-making processes, it is anticipated 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 reorganisation 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 and 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.

LGR will impact on all of the council's workforce. 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.

There are no direct staffing implications arising from this report.

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 the summer, 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](#)

[WLDC LGR Resources Paper to CPR 25.09.25](#)

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 it's preference would be for Councils working together to develop a single proposal for the area although it is recognised that in most areas this will not be possible.

Not engaging in the discussions creates a risk that any future decisions regarding local government structures in Lincolnshire do not represent the best interests of West Lindsey. These risks continue to be mitigated by regular and consistent engagement in LGR discussions at the local, regional and national level by both members and senior officers.

Where agreement has not been possible, government has stipulated that Councils can submit individual proposals if they wish, but a council can only submit or support one proposal.

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

☐

No

☒

1 Introduction

- 1.1 On 5th February 2025, local authorities in all 21 two-tier areas across England received a Statutory Invitation letter from the Minister for Local Government and English Devolution (“the Minister”) inviting proposals for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). 6 areas in the country were included in the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) and had an earlier deadline for submission of proposals. This did not include Greater Lincolnshire.
- 1.2 Following submission of interim proposals in March 2025, local authorities in all 21 two-tier areas continue to prepare for LGR in line with Government timelines. The next key milestone for Greater Lincolnshire and other areas not part of the DPP is 28th November 2025, when councils in each of these areas must submit their final LGR proposals for consideration.
- 1.3 At the Council meeting held on 07th July 2025, it was resolved the Council would 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.
- 1.4 Members received a further update on LGR at Council on 08th September 2025, which provided the latest position on Government guidance, correspondence, timelines and public engagement across Greater Lincolnshire, including early findings from West Lindsey’s engagement exercise.
- 1.5 Officers have acted on the mandate from Council, seeking to proactively engage with other Councils and public sector partners, working collaboratively to progress the work required up to 28th November, and regularly keeping staff and members informed of key developments.
- 1.6 However, members will be aware that whilst the Council has continued to engage and collaborate across Greater Lincolnshire, this has not resulted in the Council having early sight of any of the specific final proposals being worked up by other Councils across the area.
- 1.7 This has meant that officers have been unable to undertake an objective assessment of the bids/proposals to understand which may present the best opportunity for the residents and businesses to continue to thrive across the district, which in turn impacts on the options available to the Council as set out in this report, ahead of the 28th November deadline.

2 Correspondence and Timelines

- 2.1 In updating local authorities on the LGR process and timeline, the Minister set out a seven-stage process which is summarised in fig.1 below. Councils are currently at stage two: submission of formal unitary proposals.

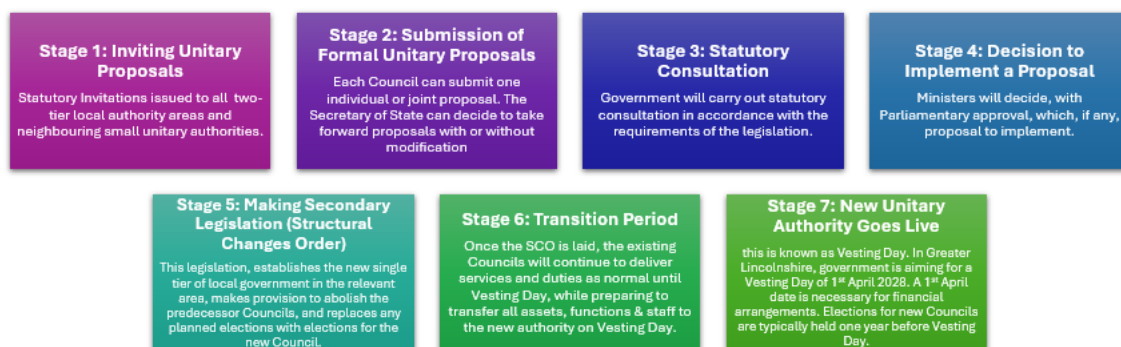


Fig.1 MHCLG Seven Stage LGR Process

2.2 The letter re-stated that Councils may only submit one proposal for unitary local government, which can be either –

- an individual submission or
- a joint submission with other councils that were invited to do so.

Any proposals must be for the whole area concerned, in this case the ten administrative areas covering Greater Lincolnshire, and proposals must meet the criteria set out in the original [Statutory Invitation letter](#). An updated copy of the timeline is included below (fig.2).

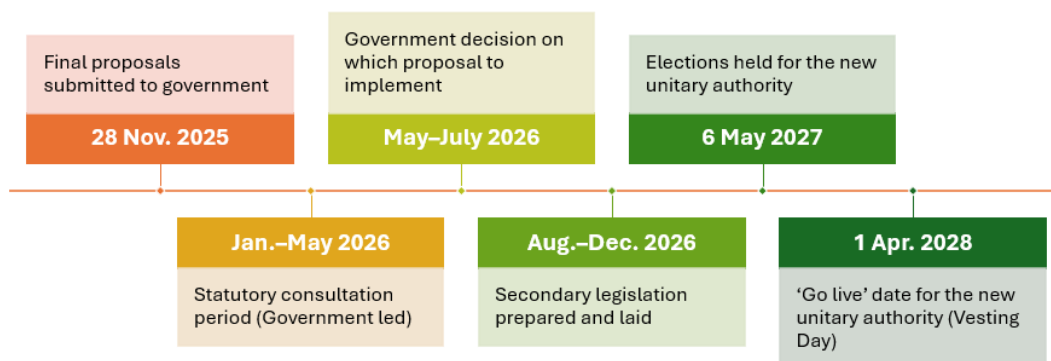


Fig.2
Indicative MHCLG Timeline for LGR Implementation in Greater Lincolnshire

3 Options

3.1 In responding to the statutory invitation to submit LGR proposals referred to earlier in this report, the Council has the following options –

1. To not formally support any proposal
2. Submit a joint proposal with other authorities (i.e. express and indicated the council's support one of the proposals that has been developed across Greater Lincolnshire).

- 3.2 Option 1 accords with the direction of the Council to date and is considered to be the only viable option at this stage due to the inability, as set out, to consider the proposals that have been developed and whether the Council can reasonably support these.
- 3.3 Summary details of each of the proposals, including current publicly available maps showing the proposed geography is shown in Appendix 1.
- 3.4 Whilst agreement had been reached that West Lindsey could be engaged in the development of the various final proposals being developed across Greater Lincolnshire, in reality limited engagement in relation to the detail of the bids has been possible.
- 3.5 It has also recently been confirmed that many of the final proposals won't be published until close to the final submission date of 28th November.
- 3.6 Acknowledging the requirements set out in the Statutory Invitation, and subsequent guidance on formulating a final submission for a geographical area, the Council has, in the spirit of that invitation, sought to engage and work collaboratively with partners across Greater Lincolnshire.
- 3.7 Whilst there has been some collaboration, particularly around Council data and sharing working practices, there has been limited collaboration around the detail relating to the specific geographies being promoted; specifically, how each of the proposals accords with the Government's criteria for proposals set out below and how these proposals will deliver the best possible outcomes for the residents of West Lindsey, or Greater Lincolnshire.
1. The proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government
 2. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks
 3. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high-quality and sustainable public services to citizens
 4. How Councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local need and is informed by local views
 5. Ability of the new unitary structures to unlock devolution
 6. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment.
- 3.8 As these details are not available and the Council will not have advance sight of any of the proposals in prior to final submission, officers are not able to undertake the level of detailed assessment required to understand the risks and opportunities of each proposal, nor how the proposal will continue to promote the interests of West Lindsey in the new Council, and to inform members.
- 3.9 Resultingly, the Council is not considered to be in an informed position to change its position and support any of the final proposals being developed. Despite this, the Council will continue to actively engage in the LGR process and will continue to promote the interests of the Council to partners across the area and in Government.

3.10 We recognise the importance of West Lindsey in Greater Lincolnshire and the key strategic role both the district and the Council continue to play in a successful Local Government Reorganisation programme for its residents and delivering the ambitious devolution vision for Greater Lincolnshire.

3.11 It should be noted that in addition to the above options, the Council could have developed its own proposal for LGR however there is clearly not sufficient time for that to be done and is therefore not a viable option.

4 Update on Public Engagement in West Lindsey and Across Greater Lincolnshire

4.1 In developing any final proposal, one of the key requirements is for public engagement across the whole area concerned. Whilst West Lindsey has not developed its own LGR proposal, at a meeting of Corporate Policy & Resources Committee on 24th July 2025, members approved a West Lindsey engagement exercise to run alongside the Council's Budget Consultation over a six-week period between 25th July and 15th September. The results of the public engagement exercise undertaken by the council, and details of public engagement undertaken by other authorities across Greater Lincolnshire are set out in Appendix 2.

4.2 Elsewhere in Greater Lincolnshire, there have been a number of separate engagement activities taking place on the other proposals that are in development. These have all now closed, and whilst the results have not yet been made publicly available, a summary and links of these can be found below.

- East Lindsey and South Holland, backed by Boston, ran public events across the area under the banner ["A Greater Lincolnshire for All."](#)
- Lincolnshire County Council ran an online survey called ["Your Lincolnshire: Strengthen. Simplify. Save"](#) supplemented with public events across the County.
- North Lincolnshire distributed a survey to all households, businesses and voluntary organisations called ["Your Services, Your Say, Your Future"](#)
- North Kesteven and South Kesteven were running an [online survey](#) and again did some local public engagement.
- Finally, North East Lincolnshire have a webpage [Your Council, Your Future](#) which also includes an online survey.

5 West Lindsey Principles for Local Government Reorganisation in Greater Lincolnshire

5.1 Whilst the Council has not developed a final LGR proposal, it remains actively engaged in the process. The Council is committed to influencing the development of future governance arrangements and effective transition to any new unitary authority

to ensure that the distinct needs, strengths, and aspirations of Our Council, Our People and Our Place are fully recognised and reflected.

- 5.2 In recognition of the council's position, this report recommends that the Council does write to the Minister to advise of its rationale for not supporting any of the proposals that have been submitted to the Government and setting out the key issues from West Lindsey District Council's perspective, based on a number of principles.
- 5.3 Each principle, as set out below, will outline the Council's position within each of the six criteria for LGR proposals, and highlight the key place-based challenges, opportunities, and expectations of LGR proposals both for West Lindsey and Greater Lincolnshire based on evidence and experience.
- 5.4 It is proposed that the principles presented, as an early draft, in paragraphs 5.4..1 – 5.4..11 of this report are used as the basis for the Council's letter to the Minister referenced in paragraph 5.2 to set out the outcomes West Lindsey District Council would like to see from any local government reorganisation and to support continued engagement with partners through the next stages of the LGR process.
- 5.5 These principles will also be used as the basis of the framework for the Council to carry out a full options assessment of all final LGR proposals submitted for Greater Lincolnshire, in order to understand the risks and opportunities of each proposal and help to inform the Council's position and response to future Statutory Consultation(s).

5.5..1 Sensible economic area

- Proposals reflect the economic priorities of the council and the regional opportunities relating to our places and established economic drivers, such as agri-tech, security and defence and clean energy.
- Proposals recognise the needs relating to the rurality and sparsity of West Lindsey within transport and infrastructure planning.
- Proposals identify local skills gaps and respond with targeted investment in training and education that meets community needs.

5.5..2 Areas of inequality and considerations

- Proposals should target areas of deprivation in West Lindsey, embedding equity into service design and delivery.
- Proposals must include place-based, integrated service models that respond to the distinct needs of local communities.
- Community investment decisions should be data-driven and built on genuine partnership with residents and local organisations

5.5..3 Local identity, culture & heritage

- Proposals recognise culture as a driver of regeneration, wellbeing, and local pride, which is then embedded in service design.
- Community engagement plans should include support for grassroots and volunteer-led cultural initiatives.
- Cultural planning should be integrated into wider strategic frameworks, including regeneration, health, and education.

5.5..4 Housing supply

- Build on the success of coordinated housing delivery across the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan area, using proven models and partnerships.
- Ensure strategic housing and regeneration sites in West Lindsey are fully reflected in future growth plans.
- Reference devolution powers to unlock funding and accelerate housing delivery, especially in areas with viability challenges

5.5..5 Effective democratic representation

- Ensure strong county-level representation for West Lindsey residents, on par with other areas.
- Strengthen local governance arrangements to empower Parish Councils in representing their communities.
- Embed mechanisms that ensure the resident voice is clearly heard in decision-making at both local and unitary levels.

5.5..6 Models for effective engagement

- Establish Neighbourhood Area Committees that reflect existing communities and are embedded within the new unitary framework.
- Propose to maintain and strengthen relationships with parish councils as key partners in community engagement, in light of demand on capacity.
- Identify proposals to support VCSE organisations with the resources and capacity needed to play a central role in delivering community engagement models.

5.5..7 Neighbourhood working model

- Recognise the importance of place-based provision which is tailored to the specific populations and geographies of West Lindsey.
- Provide dedicated support for VCSE organisations to co-design and deliver neighbourhood services, ensuring long-term sustainability, inclusivity, and community ownership.
- Address rural challenges by identifying investment required in connectivity to enable effective neighbourhood working.
- Respond to, and recognise the important role of Parish and Town Councils, providing a clear plan for long-term support and capacity building.

5.5..8 Opportunities to improve service delivery

- Ensure funding and service models reflect the higher costs and access challenges of delivering services in rural areas like West Lindsey.
- Ensure service design builds on WLDC's transformation work by expanding digital access and data-led service design.
- For the new unitary to explore delivering pilot programmes which have been successful in addressing West Lindsey's specific challenges.

5.5..9 Opportunities for public service reform

- Proposals to commit to engaging with districts to learn 'what works' in their areas, committing to developing this into a practical deliverable model.

- Public service reform proposals should address flexible service models that respond to the distinct needs of urban centres, market towns, and rural communities.
- Proposals must prioritise investment and service delivery in areas facing deprivation, ensuring equitable access and improved outcomes.

5.5..10 Impact on statutory public services

- Commitment to integrated service planning across health, housing, education, and transport.
- Proposals should address rural service delivery challenges by investing in infrastructure, digital connectivity, and transport to ensure all residents, regardless of location, can access statutory services effectively.
- Proposals should support a positive and inclusive culture, including a commitment to workforce development and retention in key service areas to ensure organisational memory isn't lost.

5.5..11 Considerations for devolution

- Proposals should show how the local voice will be heard in regional decision-making through deep community engagement.
- Proposals must commit to cross-boundary collaboration and shared evidence bases, building on successful models like the Central Lincolnshire Partnership.
- Proposals should show how they can build on existing national and regional strategies and identify how they can be leveraged locally.

6 Next Seps and Conclusions

- 6.1 The Council is eager to ensure that its strategic priorities are central to any future governance and service models within a new unitary covering the existing West Lindsey geography. A commitment to inclusive growth, local voice, and strategic alignment with regional and national reforms is of paramount importance to the future success of Greater Lincolnshire.
- 6.2 These principles make clear the Council's vision for place-based transformation, rooted in strong local partnerships, data-driven decision-making, and tailored service delivery across its diverse geographies.
- 6.3 The Council is clear that the distinct needs of West Lindsey's rural, urban, and fringe areas must be served through effective neighbourhood working, multi-agency collaboration, including with Parish and Town Councils, and community engagement to build resilient, empowered communities and deliver sustainable public services.
- 6.4 In order to continue to promote the Council's position in the LGR process, these broad principles will be worked into a final document to be approved by the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, which will be used initially to provide a clear position of the Council to send to Government by 28th November. A copy of the letter will be sent to all Members of the Council for their information.
- 6.5 Post the 28th November the principles will provide a framework for the assessment of submitted proposals, response to the statutory consultation and ultimately used as a

basis for negotiation and transformation once the final decision on geography has been made by government.