



Council

Monday, 07th September
2026

Subject: Local Government Reorganisation

Report by:

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Executive Summary:

This report provides an update on the recent decision of the Secretary of State in connection with Local Government Reorganisation.

The report also seeks Full Council approval for the establishment of Voluntary Joint Committees as set out in the report.

Appendices to Report

- Appendix 1 - Secretary of State Decision Letter dated 16th July 2026
 - Appendix 2 - Map of the proposed administrative geographies for Lincolnshire
 - Appendix 3 - Letter from MHCLG to Lincolnshire Chief Executives requesting further information regarding the Structural Changes Order
 - Appendix 4 - Glossary of terms for LGR
 - Appendix 5 – Draft Terms of Reference for the two Voluntary Joint Committees – to follow
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RECOMMENDATION(S):

That Council;

- a) Notes the updates provided in this report, including the Government's decision on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) for Greater Lincolnshire and the implications for West Lindsey;
- b) Approves the establishment of voluntary joint committees for the two new unitary council areas, as set out in the report, to exercise the functions as set out in the Terms of Reference.
- c) Delegates authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to agree the final Terms of Reference for the voluntary joint committees and any ancillary matters
- d) Appoints a Member to serve on each of the two Voluntary Joint Committees referred to in the report.
- e) Approves an increase in the Chief Finance Officer's delegated authority for use of reserves related to LGR expenditure from £50,000 to £100,000, in consultation with the Chief Executive
- f) Notes that a further report on resource and financial implications will be presented to the Thriving Council Committee when transition design and implementation requirements become clear.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Following the statutory invitation issued by the Minister for Local Government and English Devolution on 5 February 2025, on 16 July 2026, the Secretary of State announced the government's intention to proceed with a four-unitary model for Greater Lincolnshire in a letter to Council Leaders on 16th July 2026 (Appendix 1).
- 1.2 The decision means that North Lincolnshire Council and North-East Lincolnshire Council will remain unchanged. Within the current Lincolnshire County area, two new unitary councils will be established: a Lincoln Unitary comprising the City of Lincoln, 12 wards from North Kesteven and seven wards from West Lindsey; and a Lincolnshire Unitary comprising Boston, East Lindsey, South Kesteven, South Holland, the remainder of North Kesteven and the remainder of West Lindsey districts. A map showing the geography of the two new unitary authorities is set out in Appendix 2.
- 1.3 The decision means that the existing and established West Lindsey and North Kesteven districts will be divided between two successor authorities; Additionally, the decision requires the disaggregation of district and county council services, resources and systems.
- 1.4 On 24th August, the Council received written notification that Lincolnshire County Council has issued a pre-action protocol letter to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government in respect of the decision taken to reorganise local government structures in Lincolnshire. The letter seeks clarity on a number of matters, principally the rationale behind the decision that was taken by MHCLG on 16th July 2026. The letter does not amount to a formal Judicial Review at this stage. Whilst the letter has been sent to all Councils in Lincolnshire on an interested party basis, West Lindsey has not been involved in drafting the letter, and the decision to send this letter has been taken by Lincolnshire County Council. West Lindsey does, however, reserve the right to consider legal proceedings, either on a standalone basis, or as part of joint proceedings in the future, should this be deemed necessary and appropriate.
- 1.5 It is important to note that existing services will continue to be delivered by the sovereign Councils until vesting day on 1st April 2028.

2. Arrangements for Creating the Structural Changes Order and Voluntary Joint Committees

- 2.1 Following the Secretary of State's decision, the Government wrote to Lincolnshire Chief Executives to confirm that a Structural Changes Order (SCO) will be laid in Parliament to establish the new councils and transitional arrangements, supported by a single implementation team drawn from affected councils and overseen by two Joint Committees – one for each new authority. To support the It is expected that the SCO will be laid in Parliament in late 2026.

- 2.2 To support the preparation of the SCO, Lincolnshire councils were required to clarify a number of points relating to the names of the two new authorities, warding arrangements, Councillor numbers, and matters relating to the Implementation Team and Returning Officer. A copy of this letter is attached as Appendix 3. A joint Lincolnshire response was submitted on 17th August 2026 and a response on the issues covered and draft Structural Changes Order is now awaited.
- 2.3 The SCO will provide the statutory framework for transition. Before the May 2027 elections, one Joint Committee will need to be established for each new unitary area. The SCO is likely to require that these are established within 14 days of the SCO coming into force. Each Joint Committee will be a time-limited member body bringing together representatives of the affected councils to oversee preparations, provide political direction, approve key transition proposals within its remit and assure progress towards safe and legal shadow arrangements. Proposed representation on the Joint Committees is set out in the letter included as Appendix 3, with West Lindsey District Council being allocated one seat on each Joint Committee.
- 2.4 Recognising the timeline for the establishment of statutory joint committees required by the SCO and the significant amount of work that will need to be undertaken, the Government encourages areas to establish voluntary joint committees. Whilst the decision-making powers of these voluntary joint committees will be limited, they will be beneficial in progressing relevant issues for subsequent approval by the statutory joint committees. The draft Terms of Reference are attached as Appendix 5 (to follow).

Greater Lincolnshire Leaders have committed to establishing the two Voluntary Joint Committees under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 by early autumn, ahead of the SCO where practicable, so that member oversight and preparatory activity can develop at pace. Composition of the Voluntary Joint Committees shall be the same as is anticipated on the formal Joint Committees to be established post the SCO and as such, West Lindsey District Council shall have one seat on each of the two Voluntary Joint Committees.

Following the 2027 local elections, the Joint Committees will be replaced by the respective shadow authorities, which will prepare the first budget, appoint senior officers and take the decisions required for vesting day.

- 2.5 The Head of Paid Service of Lincolnshire County Council, has been confirmed by Government as the Senior Responsible Officer for Local Government Reorganisation in Lincolnshire and will lead establishment of the single, central implementation team. The implementation team will draw officers from all affected councils to implement transition arrangements for both new unitary areas. Details on roles, resources, workstreams and governance for the central implementation team are currently being finalised by Lincolnshire Chief Executives. A further paper will be presented to Thriving Council Committee at the

appropriate time in respect of financial considerations and decisions related to implementation and transition.

3. 2027 Elections to the new Shadow Authorities

- 3.1 Elections to the new shadow authorities will take place in May 2027, subject to Parliamentary approval of the Structural Changes Order. The first term of office for elected members will be five years, with the first year served as members of the shadow authority. During the first shadow year, responsibilities for elected members will include appointing statutory and senior officers, agreeing the first budget and establishing the governance and service arrangements required for vesting day. Thereafter, the next ordinary elections are currently scheduled for May 2032, at which point members will be elected for a four-year term.
- 3.3 West Lindsey District Council remains a sovereign council until Vesting Day on 1st April 2028 and existing members of WLDC will continue to attend Council meetings and conduct Council business in the usual way. The two new shadow authorities will not assume responsibility for any sovereign council services during this time.
- 3.3 On 1st April 2028, existing sovereign councils in Lincolnshire will cease to operate and the two new unitary authorities will take full responsibility for all local government services. Members elected to the two shadow authorities in May 2027 will continue to serve their term of office as Councillors of the new unitary authorities until May 2032. As required by legislation, all new unitary authorities will be governed by an Executive or Cabinet model following the government's decision to end the committee system model of governance.

4 West Lindsey Readiness

- 4.1 Prior to the Government's decision, the Council progressed proportionate "no regrets" activity both internally and through the Greater Lincolnshire LGR Ready Programme. This has included baseline and data work across digital and technology, contracts and procurement, workforce, finance and council tax, assets, legal and governance, supported by programme management arrangements. West Lindsey has played an active role in supporting the system through its Project Management Office function and with representatives across all workstreams.
- 4.2 Internally, an LGR programme structure, workstream leads, risk and issue management, impact assessment tools, a People Change Charter and regular management oversight have been established. Staff and members have received briefings and updates through all-staff sessions, weekly communications, the intranet LGR hub and targeted development opportunities. This activity has sought to maintain business-as-usual delivery while building organisational understanding and readiness.

- 4.3 In looking ahead and ensuring the council is in the best possible position to deliver the scale of change Local Government Reorganisation demands, an independent external health check was commissioned to review the Council's LGR plan and supporting processes.
- 4.4 The review found strong and visible leadership, a well-established commitment to readiness and governance proportionate to the pre-decision phase. It also recognised the energy and willingness of officers to move into delivery.
- 4.5 In conclusion the report has found that the post-decision phase now requires greater strategic clarity, and robust implementation and resource plans. Particular focus is required on the principles and practicalities for disaggregating West Lindsey services between two successor councils, ensuring consistent communications to residents and positive support of members and staff through the process.
- 4.6 An overview of Local Government Reorganisation Transition which will include the report and findings, will be reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 08th September 2026, and officers will progress the work required to implement the recommendations made in the health check.

5 Future Resource Implications

- 5.1 LGR is a significant and complex whole organisation change programme which must be delivered alongside the Council's existing statutory duties, service commitments and corporate priorities. The Council will need sufficient programme leadership, project management, legal, finance, workforce, digital, data, procurement, communications and service expertise to support two transition pathways while protecting service continuity through to 1 April 2028.
- 5.2 Good practice emphasises the importance of a single, clearly governed implementation function, shared plans, defined roles, disciplined critical-path management and early workforce planning. It also recommends that leadership and specialist teams must have capacity to deliver LGR while continuing day-to-day services. For West Lindsey, the split geography increases the likelihood that targeted backfill, temporary capacity and specialist advice will be required.
- 5.3 To enable timely mobilisation, it is recommended that the council's s.151 Officer's existing delegated authority to approve the use of existing earmarked reserves for expenditure on LGR-related project activity be increased from £50,000 to £100,000.
- 5.4 A further, more detailed report on finance and resource implications will be brought to the Thriving Council Committee once there is sufficient clarity on transition design principles, the scope and staffing requirements of the central implementation team, work required specifically of West Lindsey, cost-sharing arrangements and any Government support. That report will set out the proposed resourcing model, governance and funding requirements in greater detail.

ASSOCIATED IMPLICATIONS

Legal:

Following publication of the English Devolution White Paper in December 2024; on 5th February 2025 Government issued a Statutory Invitation letter inviting all local authorities in two-tier areas to submit proposals for a single-tier of local government in the area. In Greater Lincolnshire, this invitation was issued to all ten local authorities, including West Lindsey District Council (“the Council”).

In November 2025, Government received six final proposals for LGR, three of which were based on the same geographical boundaries.

On 5th February 2026, the Government commenced a period of Statutory Consultation running for seven weeks until 26th March 2026. As a named consultee, the Council was invited to respond.

Government has used the consultation responses to inform the decision made on which of the LGR proposals put forward for Greater Lincolnshire to implement.

The decision taken by Government was to implement the proposal put forward by City of Lincoln Council, which was a four-unitary model: North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire remain unchanged, with a new Lincoln unitary comprising the City of Lincoln plus 12 North Kesteven wards and seven West Lindsey wards, and a new Lincolnshire unitary covering the remaining county area.

The Structural Changes Order, once enacted, will form the legislative basis for the new unitary authorities. Section 101 Local Government Act 1972 provides for the establishment of a Joint Committee.

Financial: FIN/73/27/CL/SL

Now the Government has made a decision on how LGR will be delivered across Greater Lincolnshire, legislative changes will be enacted, including a Structural Changes Order to create the new unitary authority(s).

After the Structural Order is laid, a Section 24 notice will come into effect. This places legally binding financial restrictions on existing local authorities involved in Local Government Reorganisation, including the Council.

Specifically, a Structural Changes Order will mean that any land disposals over £100k, entering into any capital contracts over £1million, and entering into any non-capital contracts over £100k will require written consent from the successor Council.

Based on current timelines and information, it can be anticipated that the Structural Changes Order will be laid in winter 2026, with the Section 24 notice coming into effect shortly after the elections to the new shadow authorities in May 2027.

The decision letter issued to leaders on 16 July 2026 confirmed a £63 million national capacity fund for local government reorganisation. This includes £900,000 in transition support for each new unitary authority, up to a further £150,000 per new unitary to support leadership capacity and continuity in children's services, adult social care and public health, and up to £1 million nationally for areas with complex fire and rescue authority transitions.

Taken together, the Government expects each new unitary authority to receive more than £1 million in capacity funding, with detailed allocations to be confirmed in due course.

Further details of the financial and resource implications for the Council will be presented to the Thriving Council Committee as transition arrangements and implementation requirements become clearer.

Staffing:

LGR is a significant, whole-council change programme which will place additional demands on staff capacity and resources across corporate and service areas. This work must be delivered alongside the Council's statutory duties, existing service commitments and corporate priorities, requiring careful management to maintain business-as-usual delivery and service continuity through to vesting day on 1 April 2028.

The Government's decision creates particular workforce implications for West Lindsey because the current district will be divided between two successor authorities. Officers will need to support two transition pathways and contribute to the single implementation team, including work on service disaggregation, workforce information, finance, legal and governance, digital and data, contracts, assets, communications and service design. This is likely to require prioritisation of activity and, where necessary, targeted backfill, temporary capacity and specialist advice to ensure that staff are able to support transition without compromising current services.

The decision will affect the whole workforce and it will be important that staff continue to be kept informed, involved and supported throughout the transition. Existing arrangements, including the People Change Charter, staff briefings, regular communications and targeted development opportunities, provide a basis for this work. As further information becomes available on transition design, implementation requirements and the roles expected of West Lindsey, detailed capacity and resource plans, together with workforce development and support plans, will be developed and reported through the appropriate governance arrangements.

LGR implications:

This paper deals specifically with LGR and as such implications are considered and assessed throughout the paper, removing the need to include specific implications in this section.

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights:

In appraising the final LGR proposals, consideration has been given to Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications by Government. However, it is acknowledged that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion will be a key consideration as part of the development of the LGR programme and implementation.

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 data sharing agreement is in place, including provisions to safeguard and ensure handling of data is GDPR compliant and that high standards of data management are adhered to at all times.

This data sharing agreement remains under review to ensure that it remains suitable for each of the stages of LGR and detail and sensitivity of data being shared at any given point during reorganisation.

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.

Risk Assessment:

The principal risks arise from the scale, pace and complexity of implementing Local Government Reorganisation while maintaining statutory services and business-as-usual delivery.

In particular, if the Council does not engage effectively in the two transition pathways, establish clear governance and implementation arrangements, and secure sufficient programme and specialist capacity, it may have reduced influence over decisions affecting the disaggregation of West Lindsey's services, assets, systems, contracts, workforce and finances.

This could result in service disruption, additional or unplanned costs, loss of organisational knowledge and adverse impacts on residents, communities and staff. These risks will be managed through active participation in the Joint Committees and implementation team, delivery of the Council's readiness programme and health check actions, robust risk and financial controls, workforce and communications planning, and regular reporting through the appropriate governance arrangements.

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](#)

[MHCLG Statutory Consultation for Greater Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire & North-East Lincolnshire](#)

[WLDC LGR Consultation Response to Full Council 16.03.26](#)

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

X

Key Decision:

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

Yes

X

No

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