

## **COUNCIL**

<b>DATE</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> March 2025
<b>REPORT OF</b>	Chief Executive
<b>SUBJECT</b>	Local Government Reorganisation
<b>STATUS</b>	Open
<b>FORWARD PLAN REF NO.</b>	Not applicable

### **CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS**

Good governance arrangements contribute directly to the achievement of the Council's strategic aims.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Council is committed to maintaining high standards of governance as it navigates through the complexities of local government reorganisation. This report outlines preliminary steps and considerations for forming a cohesive strategy to meet government expectations.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Council:

1. Notes the contents of this report, including the contents of Appendix B.
2. Agrees to the formation of a Local Government Re-organisation Working Group, with membership comprised of the four political group leaders, and being supported by appropriate officers.
3. Notes the current position regarding the status and format of the 2026 local election.
4. Authorises the Chief Executive to submit this report to Government by or on the 21st March 2025.
5. Authorises the Chief Executive to engage with Councils across Greater Lincolnshire regarding matters pertinent to Local Government Re-organisation.

### **REASONS FOR DECISION**

The decision to proceed with these recommendations is driven by the need to ensure council wide preparedness to meet the local government reorganisation agenda. The formation of the Local Government Re-organisation Working Group is a critical step in this process, providing a platform for collaboration, engagement and strategic planning.

To support this endeavour, it is also essential that the Council also considers the current position regarding the 2026 local election.

## **1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES**

- 1.1 On 16 December 2024, the Government published the 'English Devolution White Paper', setting out its ambitions to reform public services across England by:
  - widening and broadening devolution across England through the creation of new 'Strategic Authorities', and
  - delivering a programme of local government reorganisation to create new unitary councils across 21 county areas.
- 1.2 The White Paper outlines the Government's intention to work at pace with an ambitious timeframe for the delivery of both devolution and local government reorganisation across the country. Greater Lincolnshire already benefits from a Devolution Deal and the Greater Lincolnshire Combined County Authority has been established. Greater Lincolnshire's first Mayor will be elected on the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2025.
- 1.3 On the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2025 the Leaders of Lincolnshire County Council, North Lincolnshire Council and North East Lincolnshire Council submitted a letter to the Deputy Prime Minister regarding local government reorganisation across Greater Lincolnshire. This matter was debated at the Special Meeting of Council on the 19<sup>th</sup> February 2025, upon which Council resolved to write to the Deputy Prime Minister (the minutes of the Special Meeting set out the Resolution).
- 1.4 On 5th February 2025 the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution wrote to the Leaders of Lincolnshire County Council and the seven District Councils and North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire Councils, formally inviting them to submit proposals for a single tier of local government for the area.
- 1.5 The letter sets out the statutory basis for the invitation and the following criteria against which proposals will be considered
  - i. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.
  - ii. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.
  - iii. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.
  - iv. Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.
  - v. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.
  - vi. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.
- 1.6 Further guidance from the Secretary of State on each criterion is included with the letter attached as Appendix A to the report.

- 1.7 The Government has indicated the following timescales for a programme for local government reorganisation.

<b>Key Dates</b>	<b>Event or action</b>
<b>16 December 2024</b>	White Paper published Letter from Minister outlining proposed reform
<b>5 February 2025</b>	Statutory invitation to submit proposals for a single tier of local government for the area
<b>21 March 2025</b>	Deadline to submit Interim Plan to Government
<b>May to August 2025</b>	Government provides feedback to councils
<b>28 November 2025</b>	Deadline to submit proposals for a single tier of local government for the area
<b>Jan to April 2026</b>	Government consults on proposals
<b>May to August 2026</b>	Draft legislation laid in Parliament
<b>September to December 2026</b>	Parliamentary process completed
<b>May to December 2027</b>	Shadow election to new councils
<b>April 2028</b>	New councils established

- 1.8 Following engagement with the political group leaders, the high-level view of each political group is set out in Appendix B to this report. This does not represent the final or definitive view of any of the political groups - with consensus across the Group Leaders that further discussion, detail, data, deliberation and engagement is required before a more fully developed option or set of options is formally proposed for consideration by this Council. To that end, it is recommended that a Working Group, comprising the four Group Leaders, is established to focus on local government reorganisation and this Council's preparedness for any potential changes in the future, and noting the Government's timetable set out in this report.

- 1.9 The status of the Council's 2026 election also merits consideration and clarification. Arising from the publication of the White Paper on English Devolution and the subsequent Ministerial correspondence with councils regarding local government reorganisation, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has decided to pause the North East Lincolnshire boundary review. Legal advice on the status and nature of the 2026 Council election has therefore been sought from leading counsel.
- 1.10 The advice of an eminent King's Counsel (KC) is that the Council (without any regulation made to the contrary in the meantime) must, in the face of the pause from the LGBCE, proceed on the usual election cycle of thirds. With 2025 being a fallow year, it follows that the seats that were up for election in 2022 will be up for re-election in 2026.
- 1.11 Should local government reorganisation proceed across Greater Lincolnshire, the position regarding the status of the 2026 election could change. However, as it currently stands at the time of writing this report, there will be no all-out election in 2026.

## **2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

The risk to the Council if it does not engage in the process and ensure an equal footing and voice with others, is that it will not be an author of its destiny. The indication from Government is that it wishes to move at pace with the local government reorganisation agenda and it is important to the Council, to the workforce, to Place, to residents, to business, and all other stakeholders that the Council fully engages and ensures meaningful and robust engagement and consultation where and when required. This will help shape the ultimate position of the Council.

## **3. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

At the moment there are several options that could emerge, based around the stated expectations of Government. The primary purpose of this report is to set out the high-level (not definitive or final) views of each of the Council's political groups.

## **4. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS**

There are both positive and negative reputational issues generally arising out of local government reorganisation agenda. At the moment the Council is cautiously proceeding with an incremental approach so as to ensure that all such issues are punctually recognised and mitigated where appropriate.

## **5. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The financial impacts of local government reorganisation are significant and wide reaching. At this stage it is not possible to quantify or estimate either the costs or benefits. Should proposals develop, they will be subject to detailed analysis and due diligence.

In the event that local government reorganisation is approved for Greater

Lincolnshire, each authority will need to consider the cost impact of implementing any proposal, and it is prudent to set aside funds to enable activity associated with preparing for and implementing such large scale changes.

Additionally, a detailed options appraisal for each model being developed will be required. This will require all councils to commit to sharing information, data and capacity.

Where options include proposals to disaggregate services (principally Adults and Children's services), this will require a thorough and detailed review of the complexities associated with relative needs, complexity and care models, along with costs within each locality.

Options for the whole of the Greater Lincolnshire geography will need to be considered together, rather than individual proposals for new unitaries, to ensure that new unitaries are financially resilient and sustainable in future.

## **6. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS**

There are no such implications arising at this early stage.

## **7. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no such implications arising at this early stage.

## **8. CONSULTATION WITH SCRUTINY**

There has been no consultation with scrutiny at this stage.

## **9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

While there are no financial implications arising directly from this report, should local government reorganisation proposals go forward, they will be significant and long term. Any proposal would need to ensure the financial resilience and sustainability of all new organisations within the Greater Lincolnshire footprint to ensure that they can deliver high quality public services. Careful consideration should be given as to the value for money implications of new proposals to the local tax payer.

## **10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 Whilst the White Paper referenced in the report does not have the force of law, the statutory powers enabling local government reorganisation are set out in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. This is referenced at Appendix A to this report. This act permits the Secretary of State to invite proposals, as has been done.

10.2 The invitation is therefore lawful. At the moment the Council is not making a decision, other than as laid out in the above recommendations, and therefore there are no significant legal implications arising. Council is setting out the options and noting the preferred positions across the Chamber and enabling the Chief Executive (if supported) to submit this report and appendices to

Government. All steps outlined are preparatory in nature and do not bind the Council. As set out in the above report, in time the Council will be provided with feedback from government which, in turn, will shape the next stage.

- 10.3 The references to the election arrangements for 2026 are adequately laid out above and, unless varied by formal regulation in the meantime, will proceed on the basis of the Council's established election cycle of thirds.

## **11. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS**

Whilst there are no people implications arising directly from this report, should local government reorganisation proposals go forward, there will significant people implications. Any proposals would need specific HR advice to be provided in respect of process, contractual obligations and to ensure that the Council follows employment legislation as well as Council policy and procedures being taken into consideration,

## **12. WARD IMPLICATIONS**

Local government reorganisation would affect all wards within the borough

## **13. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None save that set out at Annex A.

## **14. CONTACT OFFICER(S)**

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Chief Executive  
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**R. G. WALSH**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

**Jim McMahon OBE MP**

*Minister of State for Local Government and  
English Devolution*  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

Your reference:

Our reference:

To: Leaders of two-tier councils and  
unitary councils in Lincolnshire

Boston Borough Council  
City of Lincoln Council  
East Lindsey District Council  
Lincolnshire County Council  
North Kesteven District Council  
South Holland District Council  
South Kesteven District Council  
West Lindsey District Council  
North East Lincolnshire Council  
North Lincolnshire Council

5 February 2025

Dear Leaders

This Government has been clear on our vision for simpler, more sustainable, local government structures, alongside a transfer of power out of Westminster through devolution. We know that councils of all political stripes are in crisis after a decade of decline and instability. Indeed, a record number of councils asked the government for support this year to help them set their budgets.

This new government will not waste this opportunity to build empowered, simplified, resilient and sustainable local government for your area that will increase value for money for council taxpayers. Local leaders are central to our mission to deliver change for hard-working people in every corner of the country through our Plan for Change, and our councils are doing everything they can to stay afloat and provide for their communities day in, day out. The Government will work closely with you to deliver these aims to the most ambitious timeline.

I am writing to you now to formally invite you to work with other council leaders in your area to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation, and to set out further detail on the criteria, guidance for the development of proposals, and the timeline for this process. A formal invitation with guidance for the development of your proposals is attached at Annex A. This invitation sets out the criteria against which proposals will be assessed.

### **Developing proposals for reorganisation**

We expect there to be different views on the best structures for an area, and indeed there may be merits to a variety of approaches. Nevertheless, it is not in council taxpayers' interest to devote public funds and your valuable time and effort into the development of multiple proposals which unnecessarily fragment services, compete against one another, require lengthy implementation periods or which do not sufficiently address local interests and identities.

The public will rightly expect us to deliver on our shared responsibility to design and implement the best local government structures for efficient and high-quality public service delivery. We therefore expect local leaders to work collaboratively and proactively, including by sharing information, to develop robust and sustainable unitary proposals that are in the best interests of the whole area to which this invitation is issued, rather than developing competing proposals.

This will mean making every effort to work together to develop and jointly submit one proposal for unitary local government across the whole of your area. The proposal that is developed for the whole of your area may be for one or more new unitary councils and should be complementary to devolution plans. It is open to you to explore options with neighbouring councils in addition to those included in this invitation, particularly where this helps those councils to address concerns about their sustainability or limitations arising from their size or boundaries or where you are working together across a wider geography within a strategic authority.

I understand there will be some cases when it is not possible for all councils in an area to jointly develop and submit a proposal, despite their best efforts. This will not be a barrier to progress, and the Government will consider any suitable proposals submitted by the relevant local authorities.

### **Supporting places through change**

It is essential that councils continue to deliver their business-as-usual services and duties, which remain unchanged until reorganisation is complete. This includes progress towards the Government's ambition of universal coverage of up-to-date local plans as quickly as possible. To support with capacity, I intend to provide some funds for preparing to take forward any proposal, and I will share further information later in the process.

Considering the efficiencies that are possible through reorganisation, we expect that areas will be able to meet transition costs over time from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects.

The default position is that assets and liabilities remain locally managed by councils, but we acknowledge that there are exceptional circumstances where there has been failure linked to capital practices. Where that is the case, proposals should reflect the extent to which the implications of this can be managed locally, including as part of efficiencies possible through reorganisation, and Commissioners should be engaged in these discussions. We will continue to discuss the approach that is proposed with the area.

I welcome the partnership approach that is being taken across the sector to respond to the ambitious plans set out in the White Paper. My department will continue to work closely with the Local Government Association (LGA), the District Councils Network, the County Councils Network and other local government partners to plan how best to support councils through this process. We envisage that practical support will be needed to understand and address the key thematic issues that will arise through reorganisation, including managing service impacts and opportunities for the workforce, digital and IT systems, and leadership support.

### **Timelines and next steps for interim plans and full proposals**

We ask for an interim plan to be submitted on or before 21 March 2025, in line with the guidance set out in the attached Annex. My officials will provide feedback on your plan to help support you to develop final proposals.

I will expect any full proposal to be submitted **by 28 November**. If I decide to implement any proposal, and the necessary legislation is agreed by Parliament, we will work with you to move to elections to new 'shadow' unitary councils as soon as possible as is the usual arrangement in the process of local government reorganisation.

Following submission, I will consider any and all proposals carefully before taking decisions on how to proceed. My officials are available throughout to discuss how your reorganisation and devolution aspirations might work together and what support you think you might need to proceed.

This is a once in a generation opportunity to work together to put local government in your area on a more sustainable footing, creating simpler structures for your area that will deliver the services that local people and businesses need and deserve. As set out in the White Paper, my commitment is that clear leadership locally will be met with an active partner nationally.

I am copying this letter to council Chief Executives. I am also copying this letter to local Members of Parliament and to the Police and Crime Commissioners for Lincolnshire and Humberside.

Yours sincerely,



**JIM MCMAHON OBE MP**

Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN HEALTH ACT 2007

### INVITATION FOR PROPOSALS FOR A SINGLE TIER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, in exercise of his powers under Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 ('the 2007 Act'), hereby invites any principal authority in the area of the county of Lincolnshire, to submit a proposal for a single tier of local government.

This may be one of the following types of proposal as set out in the 2007 Act:

- Type A – a single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned
- Type B – a single tier of local authority covering an area that is currently a district, or two or more districts
- Type C – a single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned, or one or more districts in the county; and one or more relevant adjoining areas
- Combined proposal – a proposal that consists of two or more Type B proposals, two or more Type C proposals, or one or more Type B proposals and one or more Type C proposals.

Proposals must be submitted in accordance with paragraphs 1 to 3:

1. Any proposal must be made by **28 November 2025**.
2. In responding to this invitation an authority must have regard to the guidance from the Secretary of State set out in the Schedule to this invitation, and to any further guidance on responding to this invitation received from the Secretary of State.
3. An authority responding to this invitation may either make its own proposal or make a proposal jointly with any of the other authorities invited to respond.

Signed on behalf of the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.



**F KIRWAN**

A senior civil servant in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

5 February 2025

# SCHEDULE

## Guidance from the Secretary of State for proposals for unitary local government.

### Criteria for unitary local government

**1. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.**

- a) Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area.
- b) Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs.
- c) Proposals should be supported by robust evidence and analysis and include an explanation of the outcomes it is expected to achieve, including evidence of estimated costs/benefits and local engagement.
- d) Proposals should describe clearly the single tier local government structures it is putting forward for the whole of the area, and explain how, if implemented, these are expected to achieve the outcomes described.

**2. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.**

- a) As a guiding principle, new councils should aim for a population of 500,000 or more.
- b) There may be certain scenarios in which this 500,000 figure does not make sense for an area, including on devolution, and this rationale should be set out in a proposal.
- c) Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils' finances and make sure that council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money.
- d) Proposals should set out how an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects.
- e) For areas covering councils that are in Best Value intervention and/or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals must additionally demonstrate how reorganisation may contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing and what area-specific arrangements may be necessary to make new structures viable.
- f) In general, as with previous restructures, there is no proposal for council debt to be addressed centrally or written off as part of reorganisation. For areas where there are exceptional circumstances where there has been failure linked to capital practices, proposals should reflect the extent to which the implications of this can be managed locally, including as part of efficiencies possible through reorganisation.

**3. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.**

- a) Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery, and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services.
- b) Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money.
- c) Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety.

**4. Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.**

- a) It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal.
- b) Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance.
- c) Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, an explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed.

**5. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.**

- a) Proposals will need to consider and set out for areas where there is already a Combined Authority (CA) or a Combined County Authority (CCA) established or a decision has been taken by Government to work with the area to establish one, how that institution and its governance arrangements will need to change to continue to function effectively; and set out clearly (where applicable) whether this proposal is supported by the CA/CCA /Mayor.
- b) Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution.
- c) Proposals should ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities.

**6. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.**

- a) Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged.
- b) Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement.

**Developing proposals for unitary local government**

The following matters should be taken into account in formulating a proposal:

### **Boundary Changes**

- a) Existing district areas should be considered the building blocks for your proposals, but where there is a strong justification more complex boundary changes will be considered.
- b) There will need to be a strong public services and financial sustainability related justification for any proposals that involve boundary changes, or that affect wider public services, such as fire and rescue authorities, due to the likely additional costs and complexities of implementation.

### **Engagement and consultation on reorganisation**

- a) We expect local leaders to work collaboratively and proactively, including by sharing information, to develop robust and sustainable unitary proposals that are in the best interests of the whole area to which this invitation is issued, rather than developing competing proposals.
- b) For those areas where Commissioners have been appointed by the Secretary of State as part of the Best Value Intervention, their input will be important in the development of robust unitary proposals.
- c) We also expect local leaders to engage their Members of Parliament, and to ensure there is wide engagement with local partners and stakeholders, residents, workforce and their representatives, and businesses on a proposal.
- d) The engagement that is undertaken should both inform the development of robust proposals and should also build a shared understanding of the improvements you expect to deliver through reorganisation.
- e) The views of other public sector providers will be crucial to understanding the best way to structure local government in your area. This will include the relevant Mayor (if you already have one), Integrated Care Board, Police (Fire) and Crime Commissioner, Fire and Rescue Authority, local Higher Education and Further Education providers, National Park Authorities, and the voluntary and third sector.
- f) Once a proposal has been submitted it will be for the Government to decide on taking a proposal forward and to consult as required by statute. This will be a completely separate process to any consultation undertaken on mayoral devolution in an area, which will be undertaken in some areas early this year, in parallel with this invitation.

## Interim plans

An interim plan should be provided to Government on or before **21 March 2025**. This should set out your progress on developing proposals in line with the criteria and guidance. The level of detail that is possible at this stage may vary from place to place but the expectation is that one interim plan is jointly submitted by all councils in the area. It may be the case that the interim plan describes more than one potential proposal for your area, if there is more than one option under consideration. The interim plan should:

- a) identify any barriers or challenges where further clarity or support would be helpful.
- b) identify the likely options for the size and boundaries of new councils that will offer the best structures for delivery of high-quality and sustainable public services across the area, along with indicative efficiency saving opportunities.
- c) include indicative costs and arrangements in relation to any options including planning for future service transformation opportunities.
- d) include early views as to the councillor numbers that will ensure both effective democratic representation for all parts of the area, and also effective governance and decision-making arrangements which will balance the unique needs of your cities, towns, rural and coastal areas, in line with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England guidance.
- e) include early views on how new structures will support devolution ambitions.
- f) include a summary of local engagement that has been undertaken and any views expressed, along with your further plans for wide local engagement to help shape your developing proposals.
- g) set out indicative costs of preparing proposals and standing up an implementation team as well as any arrangements proposed to coordinate potential capacity funding across the area.
- h) set out any voluntary arrangements that have been agreed to keep all councils involved in discussions as this work moves forward and to help balance the decisions needed now to maintain service delivery and ensure value for money for council taxpayers, with those key decisions that will affect the future success of any new councils in the area.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION**

#### **HIGH LEVEL VIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S POLITICAL GROUPS**

##### **Conservative Group**

The Conservative Group's preference would be to retain the integrity of the current North East Lincolnshire Council. However, if change is inevitable, then our first preference would be for North and North East Lincolnshire to come together to form a single unitary council in the north of the county and the current two-tier Lincolnshire County Council area form a single unitary council in the south of the county. This option would minimise the costs of reorganisation and disruption to the major service areas of children's and adult social care and, in the north, maintain coterminosity with Humberside Police and Humberside Fire and Rescue Service.

However, it is accepted that this option would not, in the north of the county, meet the Government's requirement for a unitary council of at least 500k residents. Therefore, our second option would be for two roughly equal sized unitary councils across the Greater Lincolnshire footprint, with North and North East Lincolnshire and East and West Lindsey coming together in the north of the county, and the remainder forming a single unitary in the south.

##### **Labour Group**

**Option 1** – to remain the same and to ask for just LCC to be part of the reorganisation from 2 tier to unitary authority.

1. Area is already single tier Unitary authority
2. Economically Viable
3. Strong Community Identity
4. Area with strong identifiable heritage

**Option 2** – to create a new Unitary Authority from the existing Unitaries of NEL and NL

1. Both urban areas of high industrialisation
2. Share police and fire services
3. Part of the same ICB footprint
4. Economic sustainability
5. Area of national economic importance

##### **LCC Option**

1. To create 2 further unitary authorities from the current County Council area comprising
  - a. Districts of East Lindsey, South Kesteven, South Holland & Boston – this coastal area has some shared services already and has similar

economic drivers and able to attract coastal communities funding for the area.

- b. Districts of West Lindsey, City of Lincoln and North Kesteven – similar economic area with A15 access from industry in the north of area to the A1

**Option 3** – to create new unitary authority from existing Unitaries of NEL, NL and districts of WL and city of Lincoln.

1. Would meet size criteria
2. The A15 corridor to the A1 would create economic viability
3. University city of Lincoln already has presence in NL and NEL

To create second unitary of the remaining district councils of EL, SK, NK, SH & Boston

1. Would meet size criteria
2. Coastal communities of similar demographic and economies

## **Summary**

Option 1 – 3 Unitary authorities – NEL, NL, New authority of LCC area

Option 2 – 3 Unitary Authorities - NEL & NL together,  
Split LCC into two new areas of

1. EL, SK, SH & Boston
2. WL, NK CoL

Option 3 – 2 Unitary authorities

- a. NEL, NL, WL & CoL
- b. EL, NK, SK, SH, Boston

## **Independent Group**

North East Lincolnshire Council (NELC) is a highly efficient unitary authority which has developed exemplary partnership working with local industry and commerce and the third sector over a long period of time.

NELC is a major employer in the area which benefits the local economy and which currently has a stable and highly motivated workforce.

Its relatively small size has helped create a clear local sense of place and identity.

NELC is already undergoing significant change at this time, including a radical overhaul of Children's Services, the bringing back 'in house' of a wide range of other services, the establishment of the local Integrated Care Board and the wider devolution changes caused by the newly created Greater Lincolnshire Combined County Authority. These changes are already stretching NELC resources to the limit of its capacity.

Before formulating any local government reorganisation plans which would seek improvement on what is already in place in North East Lincolnshire (NEL) and which may risk losing many positives, comprehensive research, including independent financial and service modelling is required. It is felt unlikely that significant cost savings

will be apparent for NEL and we are concerned that any cost savings realised would not result in increased spending within the Borough in any event.

Such study outlined above should focus on expanding the existing sharing of services with North Lincolnshire Council with a view to establishing the feasibility of the two unitary councils fully merging in 3-4 years' time.

In addition to the above, no changes should be progressed without first having a thorough and meaningful consultation with residents, council staff and other stakeholders. Such consultation should include the potential impact of any reorganisation on local democracy.

### **Liberal Democrat Group**

The Liberal Democrat Group believes that local government reorganisation is often imposed by Central Government without public support, leading to disruption and inefficiencies. Our own history proves this. The formation of Humberside County Council, a larger authority that failed to meet local needs, was ultimately rejected by local people and led to its abolition. In contrast, North East Lincolnshire Council was welcomed because it strengthened community ties and brought decision making closer to the people. Further reorganisation would repeat past mistakes, creating a larger, more bureaucratic governing body that risks losing touch with local priorities. It would bring disruption, increase costs, and reduce local accountability, which is why we firmly oppose any changes to the current structure.

In addition to our own past experiences, we must also learn from those who have gone through Local Government Reorganisation more recently and take lessons from their experiences. Liberal Democrat leaders who have been through this process firsthand warn of the serious challenges it brings. In Westmorland and Furness, two years after reorganisation, services remain disjointed, struggling to work together efficiently, while costs soared by £30 million, and district councils lost control over local priorities. In Somerset, promised savings failed to materialise, staff morale collapsed, and delays hit key services like Children's Services. In Dorset, councillor numbers were slashed from 220 to 82, leaving representatives overstretched and residents feeling disconnected. The anticipated £96 million savings never materialised, proving that large-scale restructuring often leads to disruption rather than improvement.

Merging into a new mega council would likely force ward boundaries to double in size, increasing councillor workloads and making it harder to recruit candidates. Previous reorganisations have shown that the financial cost can outweigh any efficiency gains, and services - especially Children's Services - could face serious setbacks at a time when North East Lincolnshire is still working to improve them. Our Children's Services have faced significant challenges in recent years, and any disruption caused by reorganisation could undo progress and put vulnerable children at risk. Larger bureaucratic structures often weaken local decision making and risk deteriorating well run services. Given these clear dangers, the Liberal Democrat Group strongly opposes Local Government Reorganisation and stands for keeping governance close to the people.