

Proposal for a Single-Tier of Local Government in Lincolnshire

By: East Lindsey District Council & South Holland
District Council

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Lincolnshire: An Overview

Lincolnshire is the second largest county in the country by area - home to many rural towns and villages and the city of Lincoln. It boasts over 50 miles of coastline, stretching from the Humber in the north to the Wash in the south, along with vast expanses of beautiful countryside, including the Lincolnshire Wolds, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

It is geographically vast, but in many areas is sparsely populated. Despite being the second largest county by area, it is only the eighteenth most populated, home to around 1.1 million people.

Lincolnshire's most nationally significant industries are farming, fishing and tourism. Lincolnshire is responsible for growing 30% of England's vegetables and producing 18% of our poultry. Lincolnshire's totally agricultural output is over £2bn a year, representing around 12% of England's total food production.

It is currently served by 10 principal authorities. These are:

District and Borough Councils:

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

County Council:

- Lincolnshire County Council

Unitary Councils:

- North Lincolnshire Council
- North East Lincolnshire Council

Across Lincolnshire, councils have worked together positively for many years. This has included the development of the Lincolnshire 2050 Vision and negotiation with government on a Devolution Deal for Greater Lincolnshire.

Three councils, Boston, East Lindsey and South Holland, are currently working together in the largest cross-council partnership in the country – the award-winning South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership. This sub-regional partnership is delivering services more efficiently, increasing regional influence and delivering for its communities.

Summary of Proposal

In response to the government's invitation to submit proposals for a single tier of local government in Lincolnshire, this proposal is brought forward by East Lindsey District Council and South Holland District Council.

This proposal seeks two unitary authorities for the Greater Lincolnshire region. These would cover the following areas:

Northern Lincolnshire Unitary Council: Covering the areas of North Lincolnshire Unitary Council (170,000), North East Lincolnshire Unitary Council (160,000), West Lindsey District Council (97,000) and City of Lincoln Council (104,000).

Total population size = 531,000

Southern Lincolnshire Unitary Council: Covering the areas of North Kesteven District Council (120,000), South Kesteven District Council (144,000), Boston Borough Council (70,000), East Lindsey District Council (145,000) and South Holland District Council (95,000).

Total population size= 574,000

Those authorities submitting this proposal would also support splitting East Lindsey District Council according to the parliamentary boundary. This would place part of the area covered by East Lindsey District Council into the Northern unitary and part into the Southern authority. In this scenario, the population would be:

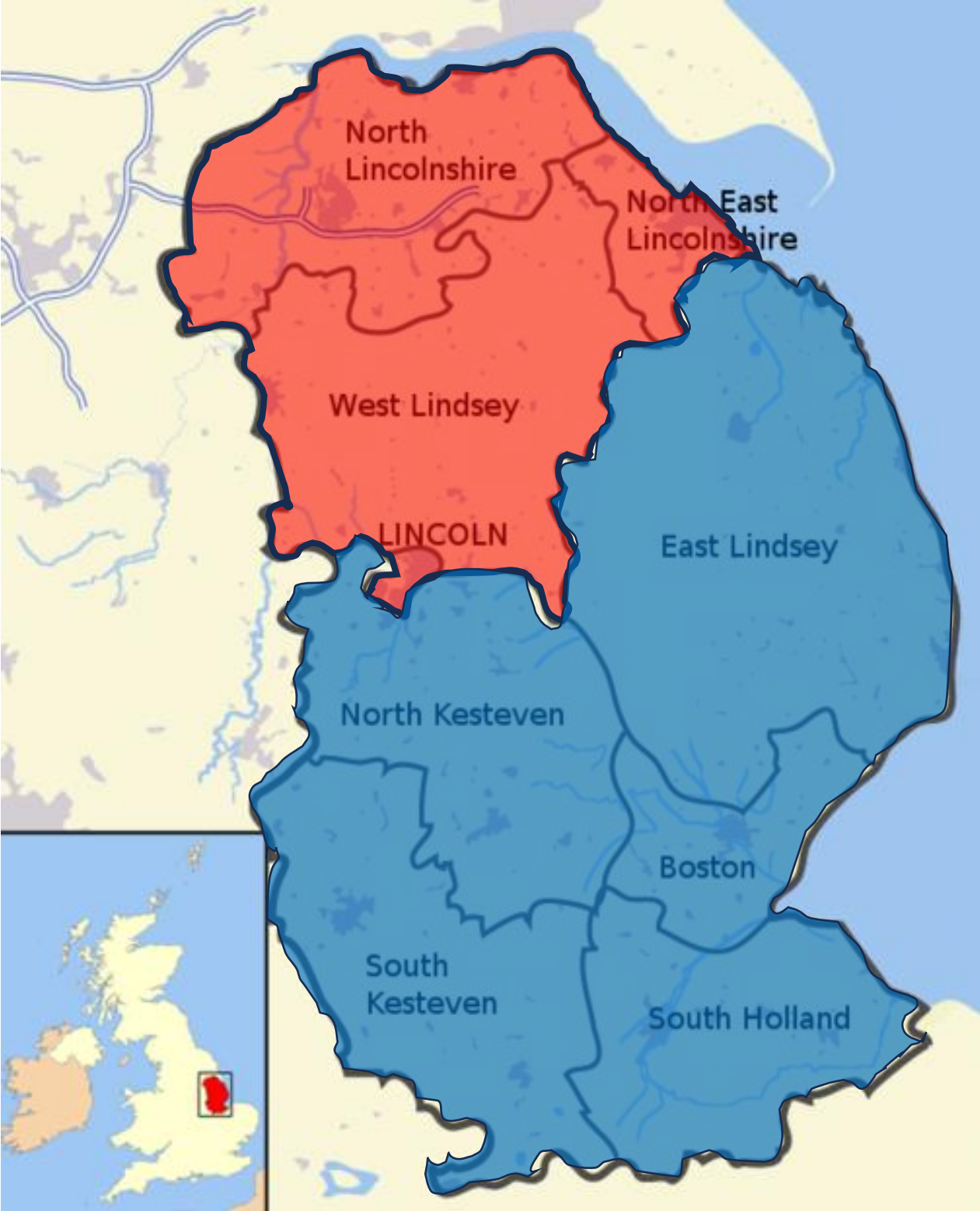
Northern Lincolnshire Unitary Council: Covering the areas of North Lincolnshire Unitary Council (170,000), North East Lincolnshire Unitary Council (160,000), West Lindsey District Council (97,000) and City of Lincoln Council (104,000) and part of East Lindsey District Council (Louth and Horncastle Constituency) (77,000)

Total population size= 608,000

Southern Lincolnshire Unitary Council: Covering the areas of North Kesteven District Council (120,000), South Kesteven District Council (144,000), Boston Borough Council (70,000), South Holland District Council (95,000) and part of East Lindsey District Council (covered by Boston and Skegness Constituency) (68,000)

Total population size: 497,000

This document will summarise how this proposal meets the government's six criteria as outlined in the letter dated 5th February 2025. Full details will be developed to further evidence and support this proposal in line with government timescales.



North
Lincolnshire

North East
Lincolnshire

West Lindsey

LINCOLN

East Lindsey

North Kesteven

Boston

South
Kesteven

South Holland

Criteria 1: A Single Tier of Local Government Across Lincolnshire

1.1 This proposal is for the whole of the Greater Lincolnshire region, and proposes two unitary authorities to replace the existing local authorities already in place.

1.2 The two authorities proposed are as follows:

Northern Lincolnshire Unitary Council: Covering the areas of North Lincolnshire Unitary Council (170,000), North East Lincolnshire Unitary Council (160,000), West Lindsey District Council (97,000) and City of Lincoln Council (104,000).

Total population size = 531,000

Southern Lincolnshire Unitary Council: Covering the areas of North Kesteven District Council (119,000), South Kesteven District Council (144,000), Boston Borough Council (70,000), East Lindsey District Council (145,000) and South Holland District Council (95,000).

Total population size= 574,000

1.3 The Northern unitary contains the three largest conurbations in the region including the only city, Lincoln, and brings together council areas that naturally look towards the north of the region towards the Humber.

1.4 The Southern unitary contains most of the region's coastline and brings together places towards the south that more naturally look towards Nottingham, Peterborough and Cambridge.

1.5 These two unitary authorities would achieve a single tier of local government across the whole area concerned. They are of a sensible physical and economic size to meet local need whilst being sustainable and meeting the needs of the population both now and as that population grows.

1.6 The Lincolnshire region is geographically vast, with many sparsely populated areas. This arrangement avoids one unitary council which is so large in physical size that it becomes difficult to deliver public services across that area.

1.7 In this scenario, it is anticipated that a Trust would be established to deliver Adults and Children's Social Care services on behalf of the whole of the Greater Lincolnshire area. Delivering social care services through a Trust model would create efficiencies and enable best practice learning to be shared across the whole region. Further detail is provided in section 3.

1.8 This two unitary model presents two councils of fairly equal population size. This means that neither area is significantly over or underrepresented at MCCA level.

- 1.9 The proposed model ensures that both local authorities are of a good size, and neither becomes significantly larger than the other, according to estimates around population growth. For example, between 2011 and 2021, the population of North East Lincolnshire declined by 1.7%, and grew in North Lincolnshire by just 1.3%. By contrast, the population of the city of Lincoln grew by 11% and in West Lindsey by 6.7%. By bringing these areas together, the new unitary authority will grow more in line with average population trends.
- 1.10 The proposed local authorities should help councils work together to deliver the significant housing targets placed upon them. An aggregated figure shows that based on current government targets, the northern unitary would be required to deliver 2160 new homes each year, and the southern unitary 3454. The southern unitary covers a larger geographical area and is slightly larger in population size. These challenging targets will be best delivered at a sub-regional level.
- 1.11 The size of each local authority in this model should allow a sufficient council tax base to be sustainable and does not over concentrate economic deprivation in one part of the region. Although it is acknowledged that the southern unitary would be slightly more affluent, both are of a reasonable size and neither is significantly disadvantaged by the model. Both the northern and the southern unitary would contain one local authority area which is currently ranked in the highest quintile in the indices of multiple deprivation. There is sufficient economic opportunity in the northern unitary, with nationally important ports in the north and the city of Lincoln towards the south. The southern unitary benefits from an extensive coastline and popular tourism industry, as well as strong farming and horticultural industries. The south also benefits from the Food Enterprise Zone, which is a hub for agri-tech and food manufacturing; and the UK Food Valley supports 75,000 jobs, supporting growth and encouraging inward investment through promoting the scale, diversity and importance of the food sector to the area.

Criteria 2: Single-tier local government at the right size and scale

2.1 This proposal is for two single-tier local authorities, one covering 531,000 and the other 574,000 residents. These proposed authorities meet the government's expectations around size and offer the scale needed to deliver efficiencies and value for money.

2.2 These two single-tier authorities would also be a good size to adapt as the local population grows in the coming years. The overall population is expected to continue to grow and the average age expected to increase. Ensuring that the new unitary councils are of the right size to meet the needs of an ageing population is important. This is considered in further detail in section 3.

2.3 Councils across Lincolnshire are already demonstrating a commitment to delivering the best possible value for money and efficiencies, such as through the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership, which is on track to deliver £42m of efficiencies by working together at sub-regional level. These proposals build on the solid foundations of cross-council working in the Lincolnshire region.

2.4 Councils in Lincolnshire are subject to substantial levies by the Internal Drainage Board. Boston, East Lindsey and South Holland Councils are the biggest levy payers in the country and face significant financial pressure from these charges. Creating two unitary councils according to the proposed model provides sufficient size and scale to meet the current pressure, whilst also offering an opportunity to discuss reforms to this levy.

2.5 There are no councils within the area which are currently subject to Best Value Interventions or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support.

Criteria 3: High quality and sustainable public services

3.1 The proposed configuration gives the opportunity to build on the strengths of existing services within Lincolnshire and to tackle areas of weakness leading to the delivery of poor outcomes. The statutory provision of Children's Services is a mixed picture across the three existing geographies. Provision is rated "Outstanding" in North Lincolnshire and Lincolnshire County Council in contrast to "Inadequate" services in North East Lincolnshire. This variable picture is reflected in other provision including SEND.

3.2 It should be noted that while much of the statutory provision is outstanding, the data from the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) demonstrates that in large parts of the County the outcomes achieved for communities are poor. The development of a new model for delivery provides an opportunity to address these and deliver consistent, excellent outcomes across the region.

3.3 The proposed approach will involve the creation of a "Social Care Trust" which will see the delivery of Children's and Adult social care transfer to a single organisation which will cover Greater Lincolnshire.

3.4 The commissioning and statutory responsibility for these services will remain with the new unitary Councils, with the Director of Adults Services (DAS) and Director of Children's Services (DCS) roles been contained within the new unitary authorities.

3.5 This model provides a vehicle to ensure that best practice is embedded across the Greater Lincolnshire area and provides a formal means of addressing and improving inadequate provision. The model will also include the focus on delivering positive long-term outcomes for younger and older people, which demonstrate a need for improvement across the entire geography.

3.6 The Trust model will work closely with health and education services to ensure it meets the needs of the local population and fits in to other strategic bodies, such as the ICB. This will be set out in full detail in the full proposal.

3.7 The Northern and Southern unitary footprint provides a strong geography to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of existing resources and strategies to tackle and improve performance on homelessness and public safety issues within the unitary authority areas.

3.8 The proposed model of a Northern and Southern unitary ensures that both new councils have a supply of council housing to support them to meet local housing need. Across the existing nine housing authorities, four retain a Housing Revenue Account (HRA), with a total of 21,500 council properties between them. Under the proposal, approximately 40% of the existing council homes would be in the Northern unitary authority and approximately 60% in the Southern unitary authority. (*See 1.10 linkage to housing targets*).

3.9 The proposal includes the creation of two unitary authorities which are of a significant, but not excessive, geographic size. In this model a number of services will be most efficiently delivered on a locality basis, including multiple waste depots, community access hubs in major population areas and an expectation of working with other public and voluntary sector services on a locality basis.

3.10 The proposed model supports a range of council services to become more sustainable and better able to adapt to the future needs of local authorities. This includes ICT. South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership has already delivered significant savings and efficiencies through streamlining its approach to ICT support. The proposed model would learn from this and other good practice and further embed such efficiencies in local public service delivery.

3.10 Local authorities in Greater Lincolnshire pay substantial levies to the Internal Drainage Board (detailed below). These place a significant financial burden on local council tax payers. Local government reform offers the opportunity to explore opportunities for reform, and to increase the scale at which these costs are carried.

Local authority	Amount paid to IDBs 23/24 total	Amount paid to IDBs 24/25	Amount paid to IDBs 25/26
Boston	£2,474,740	£2,824,980	£2,927,049
East Lindsey	£4,980,478	£5,111,086	£5,391,098
Lincoln	£1,081,780	£1,265,704	£1,326,705
North East Lincolnshire	£539,402	£628,279	£653,284
North Kesteven	£805,332	£944,151	£1,034,584
South Holland	£3,167,450	£3,412,790	£3,570,565
South Kesteven	£901,051	£976,051	£1,014,012
West Lindsey	£474,129	£531,129	£552,590
North Lincolnshire Council	£1,645,892	£1,769,004	£1,912,607

Criteria 4: Proposals informed by local views

4.1 The development of the devolution proposal in Lincolnshire involved a level of engagement with the local community, with a particular focus on certain groups, which include the business community. This provides some initial insight on the priorities for the local community but more engagement is needed going forward as we progress the Local Government Re-organisation agenda.

4.2 During the development of the full proposal it is intended to undertake a wider degree of community and stakeholder consultation and engagement across a number of issues – with a focus on how the delivery of public services could work to better meet the long-term needs of local areas. This consultation and engagement will be undertaken independently in a way that presents the various models in a “neutral” way to best understand the views and priorities of local communities. These will be reflected in the full suite of proposals. As well as the local community and local stakeholders, we will ensure a detailed programme of engagement key public sector partners, such as the Police, health and education.

4.3 The proposed model embraces the culture and history of Greater Lincolnshire defined as “a Place of Places” in the co-developed Lincolnshire 2050 Vision. The proposed model enables a focus on growth of the larger urban areas of Lincoln, Scunthorpe and Grimsby in the Northern Unitary Council and a focus on the more rural areas in the Southern Unitary Council.

Criteria 5: Supporting devolution in Lincolnshire

5.1 The proposal will support the existing Devolution Deal for a Mayoral County Combined Authority (MCCA) within Greater Lincolnshire and the transition to a Mayoral Strategic Authority as part of the devolution framework, with the intention of moving to an Established Mayoral Strategic Authority in due course.

5.2 Both Councils would become constituent members of the Strategic Authority, with two votes each, alongside the Mayor who will have one vote, which will support the aims of devolution framework.

5.3 The proposed approach will improve democracy and representation within the Strategic Authority as the constituent authorities will represent much more similar population areas than the existing arrangements. In the current constitution the voting is as follows:

- North Lincolnshire – 2 constituent members – Population 170,000 (85,000 people per constituent member)
- North East Lincolnshire – 2 constituent members – Population 160,000 (80,000 people per constituent member)
- Lincolnshire County Council – 2 constituent members – Population 773,000 (386,500 people per constituent member)

Under the existing arrangement, there is a significant imbalance of representation at MCCA level. This would be addressed by the revised proposals which with existing populations will mean that:

- Northern Council – 2 constituent members – Population 531,000 (265,500 per constituent member)
- Southern Council – 2 constituent members – Population 574,000 (287,000 per constituent member)

5.4 The timeline for implementation proposed are realistic and will represent a transition upon formation of the new structures for local government within Greater Lincolnshire.

Criteria 6: Community Engagement and Neighbourhood Empowerment

6.1 The Lincolnshire 2050 Vision characterised Lincolnshire as a 'place of places'. This proposed model will respect the rich and diverse communities and places which make up the region, supporting individual places to prosper.

6.2 Public services will be delivered through a locality-based model. This will ensure communities are able to influence the delivery of local services and that services reflect the needs of the population, which will differ from one community to another.

6.3 There are over 600 parish councils across the Lincolnshire region. The new unitary authorities would work with parish council representatives through area committees. These forums would act as a springboard for community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment.

6.4 The proposal seeks two unitary councils of a similar size for the region, taking into account the vast geography of Greater Lincolnshire. In order to achieve effective political representation, electoral wards would need to be of a reasonable size. This would mean preventing wards which become physically impossible for an elected member to cover due to scale, and where a sense of identity can be claimed and built. This will support local residents to engage with their elected members and take part in local decision making.

6.5 Across Lincolnshire there are a number of distinct communities and challenges. This includes issues such as physical access due to the remote nature of much of the region. The proposed local authorities would work closely with communities to establish their needs and ensure they are able to support them effectively.

6.6 We will undertake a consultation exercise ahead of submission of our full proposal in the Autumn.