

Present: Councillor Naomi Tweddle (*in the Chair*),
Councillor Rebecca Longbottom and Councillor
Joshua Wells

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Donald Nannestad and Councillor Bob Bushell

99. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

100. Local Government Reorganisation

Purpose of Report

To seek Executive approval of the response to the Government's invitation to submit a proposal/interim plan for Local Government Reorganisation as detailed in Appendix 1.

Decision

That the response to the Government's invitation to submit a proposal/interim plan for Local Government Reorganisation as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

Alternative Options Considered

All options must be presented against the criteria set out by the Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) and this included local proposals in the context of a wider geography, within a strategic authority area. For Lincolnshire, this meant two-tier councils, seven district councils, Lincolnshire County Council, unitary councils, North East Lincolnshire Council and North Lincolnshire Council. MHCLG expected that proposals for the whole area could be for one or more new unitary councils and should be complementary to devolution plans.

There had been several meetings of council Leaders and Chief Executives to review approaches to developing proposals. It was accepted that at this moment in time, only six weeks after the receipt of the Minister's letter it was unlikely that all 10 councils would reach a consensus on the best future model for unitary councils across Lincolnshire. There was a broad sense that the future model of delivery for local government would encompass two or three unitary councils across Greater Lincolnshire.

It was expected that there would be several different proposals submitted from Lincolnshire councils to Government that could be further discussed prior to the final November submission. This was likely to be the case in many two tier areas across the country.

Reasons for the Decision

The English Devolution White Paper published on the 16 December 2024 and the accompanying correspondence written on the same day, made clear the

Government's intention to devolve power from Westminster to strategic authorities across the whole of England. In addition, the White Paper outlined the requirement for all two-tier local authority areas, as well as smaller unitary authorities and failing unitary authorities, to reorganise to form new unitary authorities.

The White paper argued that the current system of local government was overly complex and fragmented and argued that any reorganisation would reduce fragmentation and duplication and enabled economies of scale to be realised. This placed the sector on a financially firmer footing to improve service delivery and outcomes.

The new system was envisaged to consist of two local authorities 'layers':

- *Strategic Authorities* – the product of a devolution agreement led by mayors, which in Lincolnshire would be the Greater Lincolnshire Combined County Authority
- *Principal Authorities* – any unitary authority.

On the 5 February 2025, Greater Lincolnshire authorities were informed by the MHCLG that they were not on the local government priority programme, therefore Lincolnshire County Council elections would be going ahead this May.

On the 5 February 2025, MHCLG wrote to all Greater Lincolnshire authorities formally issuing statutory invitations inviting them to work with other council leaders in the area to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation.

The letter asked for an interim plan to be submitted on or before the 21 March 2025, with the expectation that any full proposal would be submitted by the 28 November 2025. The letter gave guidance on what any proposal should consider including size, how efficiencies would be achieved, how capacity would improve and the ability to withstand financial shocks.

Council had no decision-making role as far as devolution and local government reorganisation was concerned since this was an Executive function, however as this was a subject matter of significant public interest, it was considered important to give all Members the ability to consider and debate the matter. On 4 March, Members debated Local Government Reorganisation at Council and views had been considered in the development of the proposed response. An Extraordinary Meeting of Council was scheduled for 6.30pm on 20 March ahead of this Extraordinary Executive meeting this evening.

(Members commended officers for their excellent work on the proposal/interim plan for Local Government Reorganisation).