

The Case for Unitary Authorities in Lincolnshire

For the Boundaries Commission Consultation

July 2015

Summary

This consultation document outlines the need and case for major changes in local governance for Lincolnshire. A possible single unitary covering the existing districts is rejected as an authority which would be too large both geographically, democratically and promulgating an authority already unfit for purpose.

This consultation document recommends four unitary authorities from the Humber to the Wash, to include the existing District Councils and the two unitary authorities that were formed out of the disbanded County of Humberside. These four unitary authorities would be viable in area and population and also have identities linked to their economic profiles. The creation of unitary authorities from the wash to the Humber would also remove the distortion of parts of Lincolnshire being incorporated in Yorkshire for current regional governance.

The projected savings are £47 million per annum with an estimated capital saving of around £34 million in the first year. The elimination of Humberside Police and Fire and Rescue Services cost savings are included.

In conclusion I would like to thank my colleague, Cllr John Marriott of the Lincolnshire County Council for his assistance and advice in putting this submission together and for allowing me to use and develop some of the information that he and I gathered for a report on the same subject that we jointly published in 2012.

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A Discussion Document

1. Why Unitary?

In the context of Lincolnshire, a unitary authority is an authority that combines the functions of a County and District Council. All changes in local governance since the original 1972 act which created the two tiered district and county structures have been to create new unitary bodies. Their attraction in many cases is that they produce greater efficiencies through larger populations (Wiltshire, Shropshire, County Durham, and Northumberland) and in all cases have an elected body directly responsible for all services thereby promoting local democracy and eliminating confusion in Councillor representation and which Council is responsible for various functions of local authorities. This confusion is particularly evident in the shire county structure of local government. Voters are very confused about which authority is responsible for a service and even more confused for areas such as waste management where one authority collects the waste (district) and another processes it (county).

2. The Case for Change

2.1 Finances under huge pressure

Local Government is under attack. The Leader of Birmingham Council was quoted recently as saying that local government as we know it will disappear in the next few years unless it receives greater investment. The Local Government Association (LGA) recently published a report which reckoned that local authorities could be in the red to the tune of over £19 BILLION by 2020 unless something is done. This situation is now very evident in Lincolnshire where all district councils and the County Council face very large budget cuts. The County Council alone has reduced staffing levels by 40% in the past four years **The** district councils have attempted to share some services across boundaries with varying degrees of success and problems.

2.2 Too many authorities

Lincolnshire has 8 Councils, 8 chief executives and corresponding senior executives. If historic Lincolnshire is included, there are a further 2 chief executives and their establishments plus an additional police and fire and rescue service. With a population of more than 1,000,000 for historic Lincolnshire no more than 4 unitary authorities are necessary serving 4 populations of around 250,000 each. From personal experience, most electors have little knowledge of the responsibilities of the Councils they elect and pay for.

Excluding North and North East Lincolnshire, there are 7 district Councils and 1 County Council – a total of 364 Councillors. This represents 1 Councillor for every 1600 people, probably less than 700 voters. Historic Lincolnshire has 449 Councillors in total with 7 District Councils, 1 County Council and 2 Unitary Authorities. Population sizes per district are from 66,000 in Boston to 137,000 in East Lindsey. The two existing Lincolnshire unitary authorities have around 160,000 people each.

Existing Councils (including Unitary) in Greater Lincolnshire. There is also the County Council area which excludes North and North East Lincolnshire



2.3 Councillors costs are too costly and are duplicated in too many cases.

The historic Lincolnshire Councillors totalling 449 incur costs (total, including basic allowances, additional allowances and expenses) of £4,018,539. Excluding the unitary authorities, costs are £2,959,363. 40% of County Councillors are also District Councillors drawing two Council allowances. This proportion has dropped a few percentage points since the last elections due to the success of independents and particularly UKIP.

2.4 The existence of the County Council has been detrimental to the strategic development of the important urban areas of the County.

The County Council is responsible for transport infrastructure. With 40% of Councillors also members of District Councillors and almost all of the duplicated posts occupied outside the City of

Lincoln has resulted in the most appalling transport infrastructure for the City that is rapidly developing. The City is unique in the UK, having no “ring road” or bypass roads so that through traffic can travel around the City, not through it. Yet nearly all District centres have well developed road systems. Most of the existing bypass road around the east and north of the City is not within the City boundary and the City has little or no influence on its own traffic. Within the Lincoln conurbation area are the busiest roads in the County and traffic queues are common place. The position is exacerbated by numerous rail crossings, even extending to High street where barriers can be “down” for more than 50% of the time. With the exception of a very questionable east-west relief road which does not create another road crossing over the railway, but simply pushes additional traffic onto already overstretched bridges, The County has done very little to attempt to ease these problems because most of its members have no relationship with them – they are too distant.

The controversy over Libraries with a second judicial review perhaps pending and the proposed eastern bypass still under Government review after failed planning processes might, for some people, raise the serious question over whether the County Council is “fit for purpose”.

2.5 A confusion of duties and responsibilities

As discussed in 1 above, the electorate is totally confused as to the responsibilities for providing local services between district and county authorities. In Lincoln, the closeness of three districts can also result in 3 waste collection services within yards of the City boundary, all with different bins and recycling requirements. Although the county has theoretical responsibility for the provision of education, in Lincolnshire almost every secondary school has academy status and is effectively independent of the county. The disparity between social services (county run) and housing needs (district run) is another area of confusion for those in need of social housing and support.

2.6 The Greater Lincolnshire LEP leads the way.

The Greater Lincolnshire LEP leads the way to a Lincolnshire based on historic boundaries. Gone are the pretences of old unloved Humberside (yet there still remain the Police and Fire and Rescue services). The LEP recognises the divergence of the Greater County with a focus on engineering and manufacturing in the east, particularly around Lincoln and Scunthorpe, and a focus on agriculture and food processing in the west that is not found in County Council actions. Their own “communities map” in the 2014 Strategic Economic Plan shows 6 distinct areas of Greater Lincolnshire – North, North East, Central, East (Lindsey) and 2 in the South Kesteven and a new South East Lincolnshire). The LEP recognises the need to simplify the geography and structure of Lincolnshire through the plan. One key statistic in the plan refers to housing development. Out of 113,000 houses planned for Greater Lincolnshire, 43,000 are designated for Central Lincolnshire, centred on the City of Lincoln – almost 40% of the total. This illustrates the unbalanced growth in the urban areas compared with the rural areas of the greater County.

3. COMPARATIVE UNITARY MODELS

In this section, it is assumed that every effort should be made to maintain current parish and district boundaries so that any move to unitary government will be made as simple as possible. It also assumes that a Unitary Authority population would need to be around 250,000 or more, to generate sufficient income to provide adequate public services.

3.1 A Single Authority

The County Council will probably opt for a single authority. This would create the biggest County Unitary authority in the country. There would be a continuation of concentration of members' interests in rural areas to the detriment of needed urban development and the creation of a Council that is currently not succeeding in its role. **The single authority Council would simply be too big – too many members based on current district levels and too big geographically. It would simply need to regionalise its functions to make it work which would then effectively lead to new districts within the County.**

Current membership of 77 Councillors carried into a new County unitary would result in a massive democratic deficit of representation, but increasing membership to take account of that problem would result in a council membership that would be enormous and unmanageable. New wards/divisions would be needed and a huge effort to change boundaries required. To add the existing Unitary Authorities to a new Greater Lincolnshire single council would be even more unmanageable.

A SINGLE UNITARY AUTHORITY FOR EITHER CURRENT OR GREATER LINCOLNSHIRE IS NOT RECOMMENDED.

3.2. Multiple Unitary Authorities

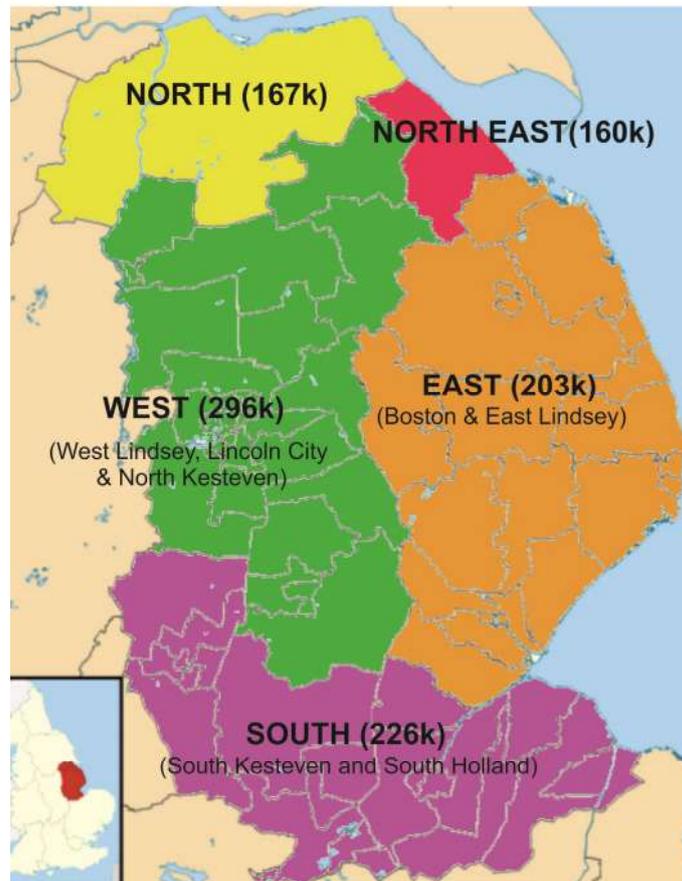
With a population of almost 725,000, a maximum of 3 unitary authorities is recommended. This model would retain the existing unitary authorities of North and North East Lincolnshire.

The superior model envisages a Greater Lincolnshire from the Humber to the Wash with a population of around 1, 050,000 which would provide 4 recommended unitary authorities each with very identifiable profiles.

3.2.1 Retain the existing unitary authorities and create 3 new unitary authorities

The 3 unitary authority model creates 3 unitary authorities based on existing districts. The West unitary encompasses West Lindsey, North Kesteven and the City of Lincoln. It has a large population of around 290,000. The South unitary encompasses South Kesteven and South Holland and the East unitary encompasses Boston and East Lindsey districts. The East unitary is perhaps under populated for a working unitary but covers a large very rural area.

POSSIBLE 3 UNITARY AUTHORITIES retaining North & North East Lincolnshire



3.2.2. Create 4 new unitary authorities and a Greater Lincolnshire from the Humber to the Wash.

THE PREFERRED RESTRUCTURE OF LINCOLNSHIRE LOCAL GOVERNMENT

North unitary is largely an industrial area, particularly near the Humber estuary. Commuter villages lie to the south of this area. Gainsborough has an industrial history and sits at the crossroads of industrial South Yorkshire and the industry of North Lincolnshire.

West Lindsey district would be split along parish boundaries between Central and North to permit a greater populated North and move the Gainsborough town area into north because there are greater links to Scunthorpe than to Lincoln conurbation to the south.

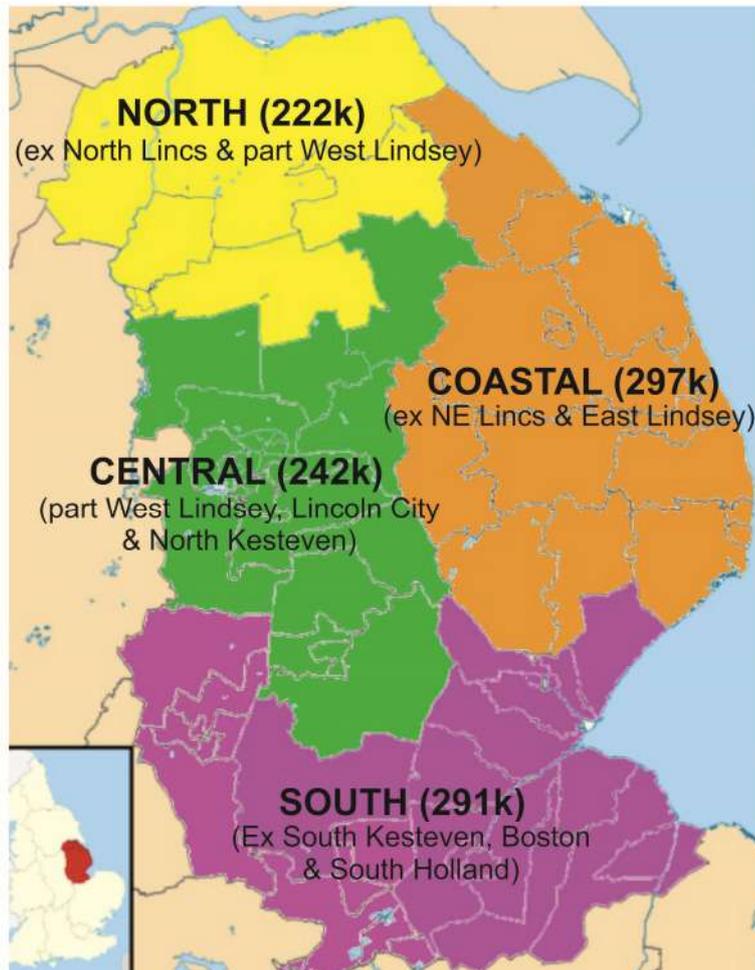
North East Lincolnshire (current unitary) is merged with East Lindsey to recognise the interests of both the rural coast and productive coast (fishing and food). There may be a case to move Boston district into this coastal region to complete the administration to the Wash.

Central unitary, probably renamed as Greater Lincoln, has the space to develop into a major high value industrial, engineering and scientific region.

The south unitary would most likely look towards the south and its affinities with Norfolk and Cambridgeshire. It is primarily a very rural area with strong agricultural base.

PREFERRED 4 UNITARY AUTHORITIES

To include North & North East Lincolnshire



3.3 Town and Parish Councils

They would remain and their role could be enhanced. Towns such as Grantham and Spalding could join the other major towns in Lincolnshire with having a democratically elected Town Council... With the adequate controls and quality measures bestowed on them they could take over more responsibility from any unitary authority. To ensure there is no diminution of democratic accountability this transfer of responsibilities must be effective especially in the new proposed unitary authorities whose Councillor membership will be much smaller than current district councils.

3.4 City of Lincoln

The City of Lincoln is unique in Greater Lincoln in not having parishes. The future of the City lies in the new Central unitary, primarily centred on Lincoln leading to a possible name of Greater Lincoln. The reduction of democratic accountability in the City will need to be addressed.

4. LEADING BY EXAMPLE – OTHER UNITARY CONVERSIONS AND CREATIONS

4.1 Central Bedfordshire Unitary Council – perhaps too small?

Prior to reorganisation, Bedfordshire comprised 3 District Councils and 1 County Council. Out of these was created 3 unitary authorities, Central Bedfordshire Council (pop 269,000) and Bedford Borough Council (pop. 163,000) and Luton Borough Council (pop 211,000). In its first three years of operation, the former has reduced its spending by more than **£40m**. Perhaps saving would have increased if the Councils were smaller in number as Bedfordshire is a relatively small County.

4.2 Cornwall Unitary Council – perhaps geographically too big?

Cornwall has a population of 535,000 in an area half the size of Lincolnshire. Before reorganisation, Cornwall had 6 District and 1 County Council. The combined number of members went down from 300+ to 123, which, in the opinion of some is still a lot. The County Council was in favour and all the districts were opposed. As a result of the change to unitary is thought that this has saved many services. Overall around £140m of cuts needed to be made in four years. Instead, only £70 to £80m was made in the first year, of which only £10m were to front line services. One estimate is that 50% of the rest of the savings are also due to the unitary dividend. Total savings of around **£25m per year** are estimated to have been achieved

4.3 Wiltshire Unitary Council

Population 461,000

Before reorganisation, Wiltshire had one County Council and 5 District Councils. It was decided to create one unitary authority, although many would have preferred two unitary authorities. It is estimated that, in the first year, **around £14m** was saved and many vital services were preserved.

4.4 Northumberland Unitary Council

Population 316,000, area, 70% the size of Lincolnshire

Northumberland is currently the largest unitary authority in England. The presence of metropolitan boroughs such as Newcastle, Gateshead and North and South Tyneside has removed most industry leaving Northumberland as an almost entirely rural economy. Opposed by the 6 District Councils, the unitary quoted saving of **£17m per annum** but these figures have been contested by those opposed to the creation of the unitary authority. The Council has 67 members.

4.5 Shropshire Unitary Council

With a population of 474,000 it is 50% the size of Lincolnshire. Shropshire County has 2 unitary authorities – Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin. The latest conversion to a unitary from 5 district councils was Shropshire in 2009 when 5 districts were abolished. Annual savings estimated at £14m. It has 74 Councillors.

4.6 Cumbria County Council

Cumbria is almost the size of Lincolnshire with almost 500,000 people (50% size of greater Lincolnshire). They are investigating a Unitary solution from 5 district councils and looking at a 2 unitary model because of the prospective area of a single unitary Council. That would result in unitary councils of around 250,000 populations. The Council report indicates savings of £13m pa for a single authority and about £7 pa for two unitary authorities; but recognises a large reduction in democratic representation with the single unitary model.

In summary – there is no Unitary Council representing an area as big as Lincolnshire, nor a population as big as greater Lincolnshire. The nearest in size is Northumberland, serving a population one third of greater Lincolnshire; the nearest in population is Cornwall with just half of greater Lincolnshire's population. The projected savings appear real. However, with large reductions in Government grant support in recent years, these savings have become more difficult to quantify and are disguised by other expenditure cuts which probably would be much greater if the Unitary status had not been achieved.

5. POTENTIAL SAVINGS

These savings are estimated on the four unitary Council model. A single unitary authority would increase savings but not linearly because the size of Lincolnshire would predicate a need to open sub-regional offices to manage the disparate areas of the whole County. Premises saving therefore would probably not increase and service optimisation savings would be severely compromised as a result of widespread operations.

	PA (£m)	one-off (£m)
Councillor cost savings	4	
Senior staff savings	6	
Premises/asset savings	3	30
Staff rationalisation	30	
Police and Fire savings	1	4
Service optimisation savings	3	
TOTAL	£47MILLION	£34MILLION

5.1 Councillor cost savings

On an assumption that 4 Unitary authorities would enjoy one Councillor per ward and the County Council were abolished, there would be a saving of 2/3 existing costs plus county councillor costs every year. This would amount to about £3million. There would election savings to in excess of £1m due to the reduction of the number of Councillors and Councils.

5.2 Senior Council staff savings

2 Unitary, 1 county and 7 district councils would be replaced by 4 unitary authorities. Reductions in 6 groups of senior officers and middle management are estimated at £6million (6 CEO positions alone would account for £1million and each Council has at least 4 executive level directors at around £3million. Assistant Directors and heads of service could account for a further £2million).

5.3 Council premises savings

10 Council office buildings would be reduced to 4 core sites although some ancillary services would need to be run from local offices. 6 complete Council offices will no longer be needed. Total asset value of operational land exceeds £300million. Savings of just 20% in these assets would result in £60million one-off savings. Potentially, there are much greater savings to be achieved. In addition to one-off saving there are savings in service costs for these assets of at least £3m pa. In reality these savings will be much greater.

5.4 Staff savings.

Staff costs for the 10 Councils exceed £100m. Accepting that many frontline staff will be needed in the new 4 unitary authorities, there is still a huge potential saving. Council tax functions will need fewer personnel, elections office will need fewer personnel, IT and many other Council departments will be severely reduced and saving achieved. A mere 10% rationalisation would achieve saving of £10million pa; 30% £30million pa. 30% should be very easily achievable, which include rationalisation of middle management.

5.5 Humberside police and fire and rescue services savings

The elimination of head office functions for both Humberside police and fire and rescue service should release £1million pa. There may be further one-off savings on head office premises. - say £4million

5.5 Service optimisation savings

There are further savings to be made in professional services (4 contracts in each area instead of 10), IT functionality and elimination of duplication services, pension administration and most other back-office functions. Some of these savings will necessarily offset additional costs of conversion to new systems and training but there should be large overall savings and gains in efficiency. Estimated savings are £3million pa.

Without these savings, the future of local government in Lincolnshire is compromised with spending limits imposed by central government. Large service cuts have already occurred together with large staff reductions. These cuts cannot continue without a severe loss of future services needed in the community. A more rational, lean, efficient local Government for Lincolnshire is urgently needed.

6. LOOKING FORWARD

6.1 Affinities

As discussed in section 3 above, south Lincolnshire looks towards Leicestershire and Cambridgeshire; in the north there is a closer relationship with Yorkshire; in the west to Nottinghamshire. This is largely because there is no great centre of population in Lincolnshire that is the focus. The City of Lincoln provides the historic backdrop to a centre but it is a small City that cannot support the County as a commercial centre.

6.2 Greater Regional Settings

A connection to the north is probably not realistic. Yorkshire is a County with a very specific identity which doesn't include Lincolnshire.

A connection to the south with Cambridgeshire/Peterborough is only a proposition for those living in the 3 southern district council areas. The road and rail links elsewhere are either nonexistent or very poor and travel between Cambridge and most of Lincolnshire almost nonexistent. The Peterborough link is adequate for Lincoln and the west of the County but elsewhere very poor. A further link to Norfolk in the south would leave a possible East Anglia region bereft of a major county and in any event is too remote from most of Lincolnshire.

A connection to the west is more realistic with a possible link-up with Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire. The rail and road links from most parts of Lincolnshire vary from very good to average. This link would enable a reasonable regional population size of about 3 million people and provide 3 cities – Nottingham, Leicester and Lincoln, although there may be some resistance from the larger cities to join a new region having gained their unitary independence.

POSSIBLE EAST MIDLANDS REGION



APPENDICES

1. POPULATIONS OF DISTRICTS/LINCOLNSHIRE UNITARIES AND COUNCILLORS

	population	hectares	Pop density	councillors	allowances	total	per councillor
Lincolnshire	724453	593729	1.22	77	10100	1093336	14199
Boston	65870	36489	1.81	30	4400	180000	6000
East Lindsey	136711	176500	0.77	55	4186	374068	6801
Lincoln	95623	3569	26.79	33	10100	220580	6684
North Kesteven	109906	92247	1.19	43	4500	284898	6626
South Holland	89243	75091	1.19	37	6000 *2015	179785 *2013	4859
South Kesteven	136385	94259	1.45	53	4470	363412	6857
West Lindsey	90715	115573	0.78	36	5151	263884	7330
				364		2959963	8132
North East Lincolnshire	159827	19186	8.33	42	7500	502129	11955
North Lincolnshire	166760	84630	1.97	43	6874	556447	12941
historic Lincolnshire (Humber to Wash)	1051040	697545	1.51	449		4018539	8950

2. COMPARATIVE POPULATION AND COUNCILLOR DATA OF NEW UNITARY AUTHORITIES

LCC comparisons	population	hectares	Pop density	councillors
Cornwall	532273	356300	1.49	123
Durham	510000	233000	2.19	126
Shropshire	308207	319736	0.96	74
Wiltshire	470981	325534	1.45	98
Lincolnshire	724453	593729	1.22	
historic Lincolnshire	1051040	697545	1.51	

Cllr Jim Charters North Hykeham Town Council

Cllr John Marriott Lincolnshire County Council

