

Contact us

 **Please contact the office on 01673 866596**

- For general enquiries including internal audit and advice, contact either Katrina – Line 1 (or mobile 07422 963475) or Andrew – Line 3 (or mobile 07549 019842). Flexible Monday - Friday
- For general enquiries including website management service, invoices, training booking enquiries, contact Lindsey – Line 2 on Monday, Tuesday, Friday
- For general enquiries including website/portal updates, e-news items, vacancies, contact Elaine – Line 4 on Fridays

Please note that there may be times when the LALC office is not manned, particularly if staff are out training or attending meetings. If you can't get hold of us by phone, please contact us via one of the methods below.



www.lalc.co.uk/contactus



enquiries@lalc.co.uk



Raise a new Enquiry on the portal (login required)

If any Clerks want to join the Clerks' eGroup, or any councillors want to join the Councillor eGroup, contact enquiries@lalc.co.uk.

This fortnightly newsletter is provided to member councils through the clerk and chair and should be circulated to all councillors. This eNews can also be found on the [LALC website](#) under News (LALC News). Other important information which comes up in between eNews publication dates is also shared on the website under News (Our Blog).

Training courses are available to book via the portal (login required)

The Training Bulletin is issued monthly, and courses are available to book via the portal. If there is any specific training which you feel would be valuable, and we don't currently offer it, please let us know and we will investigate. The Training Bulletin can be found on the LALC website www.lalc.co.uk/training-2-1.

Clerks – when booking training for your councillors, **please ensure that their email address is correct**. If not, they will not receive the booking confirmation or any joining instructions. If you have set up your

councillors on the LALC portal, you will be able to select their correct email address from a drop-down list when booking the training.

If you update your council email and are **already** booked on training, please let us know so that we can update your booking to ensure you receive the automatic reminders.

If one of your councillors resigns, and they were booked on LALC training, **please cancel their place**, so that others can book on. Failure to do so may not only deprive other councils from attending but could result in a non-attendance charge (see below).

Please note our **training cancellation policy**:

- For part day courses – please ensure we receive cancellations at least 48 hours in advance
- For full day events – please ensure we receive cancellations at least 5 working days in advance, as we need to pre-order and pay for lunches

Due to persistent non-attendance at booked events, it is unfortunate that LALC have had to amend the way we impose our cancellation fees. All members are charged 50% of the training cost when insufficient notice is received (as above) for non-attendance at training events. No shows will be charged at 100% of the course fee. All charges are regardless of whether the council is a member of the ATS or not.

Current vacancies	Position	Closing date
Fenton and Torksey Lock Parish Council	Clerk/RFO	No closing date
North Thoresby, Grainsby & Waithe Parish Council	Clerk/RFO	28 th February 2025
Coningsby Town Council	Admin Assistant	No closing date
Leadenham Parish Council	Clerk/RFO	28 th February 2025
Fiskerton Parish Council	Clerk/RFO	14 th February 2025
Brookenby Parish Council	Clerk/RFO	14 th February 2025
Bardney Parish Council	Clerk/RFO	No closing date
Claypole Parish Council	Clerk/RFO	28 th March 2025
Barrowby Parish Council	Clerk	23 rd March 2025
Immingham Town Council	Deputy Clerk/RFO	26 th March 2025
Hundleby Parish Council	Clerk/RFO	No closing date
Nettleham Parish Council	Facilities Manager	7 th April 2025
West Keal and Keal Cotes Parish Council	Clerk/RFO	No closing date
Swineshead Parish Council	Clerk/RFO	24 th April 2025
Carrington and New Bolingbroke Town Council	Clerk/RFO	24 th April 2025
Skegness Town Council	Grounds Team Manager	16 th April 2025

Vacancy advertising

LALC can advertise your vacancy on our website and in the fortnightly eNews. This is a **free** service. If you do not have a pre-prepared advert to send us, please complete our **Vacancy Template**, which can be found in the Members Portal under Document Templates.

We also offer a **paid** advertising service, which ensures that your advert also appears on Lincolnshire County Council's website, Facebook, and LinkedIn (in addition to the LALC website and eNews). The current fee for this is £75. Please complete the Vacancy Template (as above), ensuring that all requested information is completed, and then contact us at enquiries@lalc.co.uk. You will be invoiced for this service.

Please note that Lincolnshire County Council require a closing date on their advert, as well as salary information (these are mandatory fields). LCC will remove your advert once the closing date has passed, so please consider the date carefully as you will have to pay again to re-advertise if your vacancy hasn't been filled by then.

We recommend all councils advertise their vacancy, job details, method of application and up to date contact details **on their own website** too.

Please let us know when the vacancy has been filled, so that we can remove it from our website/eNews. If your vacancy has not yet been filled and you are continuing to advertise, please let us know of any revised closing date. **If you no longer specify a closing date, please let us know so that we can update the vacancy adverts.**

The NALC Recruitment Manual (developed as part of the Civility & Respect project) is now available via the portal. Go into Knowledgebase and click on 'Recruitment Manual' in the 'Employment' menu area.

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Sign up to the LCC Town and Parishes newsletter – email:

lcctownandparishnews@lincolnshire.gov.uk

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Latest News

To see the latest NALC news (NALC login required): <https://www.nalc.gov.uk/news>

To see the latest SLCC news (No SLCC login required): <https://www.slcc.co.uk/news-publications/>

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SAPPP (Formerly JPAG) Practitioners' Guide 2025 Available Now!

The Smaller Authorities' Proper Practices Panel (SAPPP), formally the Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance (JPAG), has issued its 2025 edition of the Practitioners' Guide.

Please note that the guide applies to Annual Governance and Accountability Returns (AGARs) in respect of the financial year commencing on or after 1 April 2025 and ending on 31 March 2026, although councils may choose to adopt it earlier.

The most notable changes to the Practitioners' Guide this year are:

- Email management — Every authority must now have a generic email account hosted on an authority-owned domain, for example, clerk@abcparishcouncil.gov.uk or clerk@abcparishcouncil.org.uk rather than abcparishclerk@gmail.com or abcparishclerk@outlook.com.
- New Assertion — A new Assertion 10 has been added to clarify data compliance, previously covered under Assertion 3.
- Updated Assertion — Guidance on Assertion 9 (Trust Funds) has been updated to reflect changes to the AGAR for 2025/26 when Cell 11a and Cell 11b will be replaced with a single Cell 11.

These updates streamline processes, enhance transparency, and improve governance standards to help ensure your authority is ready for these changes.

The 2025 Practitioners' Guide, along with a note regarding the changes for the 2025-26 financial year, can be downloaded from the LALC website (no login required):

<https://www.lalc.co.uk/jpag-practitioners-guide?#scrollTop=0>

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LALC Summer Conference - 16 July 2025

Booking is now open for the 2025 LALC Summer Conference - taking place at the Epic Centre at Lincolnshire Showground.

Come along for an interesting and enjoyable day: meet old friends, network, and make new friends and contacts.

The day will start with a Welcome & Introduction from our guest speaker.

There will be a varied selection of Talking Tables on different topics. These will be interactive sessions using discussion, scenarios, case studies, and shared problem solving.

Delegates will have the opportunity to attend 5 of these tables during the day, selecting topics which are of specific interest to your council.

Talking tables to include: Clear Councils (insurance), Worknest (Health & Safety/HR), Unity Trust, CCLA, Andrew Towlerton (Planning), Breakthrough Communications, Lincolnshire Armed Forces Community Covenant Officer, Fire & Rescue, plus others to be announced.

*Do you have news to share?
Get in touch via our website.*

LALC will provide links but is not responsible for the content of external websites.

There will also be various Trade Stands to peruse.

More detail to be announced later.

This is a new style of conference for LALC, and we hope you find the day interesting and informative.

See you there.

Cost is £45 per head plus VAT.

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PLACES AVAILABLE: Worknest H&S/Risk Assessments for Councils

When: 29th May 2025, 9:30 – 15:30

Where: Great Gonerby Memorial Hall, Belton Lane, Great Gonerby, Grantham, NG31 8NB

Following on from the successful event held last year at Kirton-in-Lindsey, our H&S partners Worknest will once again be delivering on 'Health & Safety Awareness for Councils', followed in the afternoon by Health & Safety Awareness workshops which will allow delegates to produce their own Risk Assessments with guidance from Worknest.

The session will cover risk assessing meeting venues and events such as Remembrance and Christmas events as well as some of the employer duties that may face councils ensuring that employees and volunteers are safe.

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NALC Legal bulletin

New procurement legislation

The Procurement Act 2023 and the Procurement Regulations 2024 came into force on 24 February 2025. Schedule 1 of the 2023 Act contains the thresholds for contracts for the supply of goods, services and the provision of works. The new legislation replaces previous legislation, such as the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. We will update Model Standing Orders later this month. We worked with Parkinson Partnership LLP to update the Model Financial Regulations. The Parkinson Partnership LLP will also update the procurement advice note.

Parish poll thresholds

We considered a recent question on whether the law has changed. Our advice note on meetings of parish meetings says: "A poll may be demanded before the conclusion of an assembly on any question arising at the assembly, but no poll shall be taken unless either (i) the person presiding at the meeting consents or (ii) the poll is demanded by not less than ten, or one-third of the local government electors present at the meeting, whichever is less."

This confirms the wording in Paragraph 18 (4) of Schedule 12 to the Local Government Act 1972. Confusion may have arisen because www.legislation.gov.uk shows changes proposed but not appointed rather than the current version in force. The correct position is in the advice note.

Keeping hens on allotments

A council came to us with a question from an allotment tenant about whether tenants can keep female bird species other than chickens on allotments. There is no definition of "hen" in the Allotments Act 1950. Where an Act does not define a common word, we can turn to dictionary definitions. The Collins English Dictionary defines "hen" as "the female of any bird, especially the adult female of the domestic fowl". The Oxford English Dictionary says, "The female of the domestic chicken, esp. one that lays eggs". It also says, "The female of birds other than chickens". The National Allotment Society guidance says, "When referring to hens, the law means the female of the species and excludes cockerels, which aren't needed for hens to lay eggs". Our general understanding is that it tends to be female chickens, that is, hens, that are kept on allotments, and that is how the term is understood.

New waste duties

From 31 March 2025 (or 31 March 2027 for micro-firms), all workplaces (businesses and non-domestic premises) in England have a legal duty to separate recycling and food waste from their non-recyclable waste. "Micro-firms" are workplaces with fewer than 10 full-time employees in total. Offices and premises used only or mainly for public meetings are included within the relevant non-domestic premises to which the rules apply. We are seeking urgent clarification from the government as to whether parish and town councils are included within the definition and micro-firm definition.

Change of town name mistake

We had an unusual request, where a new council was formed following a community governance review, and after a year or so, the council realised that the order had used a slightly different name. Our advice was that the name in the order was the legal name for the council but that it should put the issue to the principal authority, who had made the error, for them to deal with any associated costs needed. Our view was that any contracts entered into would still be valid.

Recent team activity

In addition to the team's work on procurement, we have reissued the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity and publicity during the pre-election period (England), further to the Local Government Association updating its guidance. We hope to see as many of you as possible at the County Association Staff Day on 23 April 2025.

Disclaimer: Information and commentary on the law contained in this bulletin are provided free of charge for information purposes only. Whilst every reasonable effort is made to make the information and commentary accurate and up to date, no responsibility for its accuracy and correctness, or for any consequences of relying on it, is assumed by any member of NALC's legal team.

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LCC Town and Parish Council Update Newsletter

The latest edition can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/4r3dtkbt>

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NALC update model Standing Orders

NALC have updated Model Standing Order 18 further to the recent changes to procurement legislation and to ensure consistency with NALC's Model Financial Regulations. The changes are to 18.a.v, 18.c, 18.d and 18.f of the 2022 version.

Model Standing Order 14 has also been updated to better reflect Code of Conduct requirements. Model Standing Orders 14.a-c have been removed.

They have also changed the language in the document, so it uses gender-neutral terms. This is in line with NALC policy and the Civility and Respect project.

The new model Standing Orders document is **now available** in the LALC portal (Document Templates).

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NALC recognised in a significant report on public sector standards

We are delighted to welcome the publication of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) report on Recognising and Responding to Early Warning Signs in Public Sector Bodies. This critical report highlights proactive measures to prevent corporate governance failures, an issue at the heart of our mission. We contributed to CSPL's consultation on early warning signs and are proud to be cited in the final report (page 19). Our contributions emphasise the Principles of Public Life as fundamental to the Civility and Respect Project, a collaborative initiative led by NALC, One Voice Wales, and the Society of Local Council Clerks. The report also highlights the Civility and Respect Pledge, which makes it easy for parish and town councils to commit to tackling poor behaviour and fostering positive, respectful environments across the sector. We look forward to continuing this vital conversation and championing higher standards in local governance.

Read the CSPL report [here](#):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/the-committee-on-standards-in-public-life>

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Worknest Webinar: Employment Law Update - key rights, reforms and compliance risks

April brings a wave of new statutory changes, including new laws affecting neonatal leave and pay. Join WorkNest's Employment Law expert on 10th of April at 2pm as they break down everything you need to stay compliant with the latest legal updates.

They'll also cover nine key amendments to the Employment Rights Bill and their potential impact on your business. This live webinar will be packed with practical advice for business owners and HR professionals.

Register now: <https://worknest.com/training/employment-law-update-key-rights-reforms-and-compliance-risks-partners/?v=LALC>

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Rural Funding Digest

The latest list of available rural funding can be found here:
<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/rural-funding-digest-april-2025>

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NALC: Inquiry on local government financial sustainability

We have urged the government to give parish and town councils their fair share of funding. In our response to the Public Accounts Committee inquiry on local government financial sustainability, we urged the government to require principal authorities to pass on an appropriate share of the New Homes Bonus to communities that have been required to accept new homes and called for rate relief to be extended to all parish and town council-owned buildings, including libraries and museums. We also pushed for parish and town councils to receive an appropriate share of the business rates collected in their area to enable them to fund additional unfunded services. In addition, we lobbied for the removal of double taxation where possible, equal rights for parish and town councils to apply for all relevant government funding on the same basis as principal authorities, and for data collected by local government agencies to include parish and town councils to provide early warning signs of councils getting into financial difficulty.

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NALC Management Board

The Management Board, which oversees our work, bringing together 10 councillors elected by the National Assembly, met on 25 March 2025. It focussed on devolution and local government reorganisation, noting that proposals from 21 areas for creating unitary councils had been submitted to the government. The board highlighted the importance of our work complementing that of county associations on reorganisation. That sight was not lost on the bigger devolution picture, including how parish and town councils could influence strategic authorities and support the government's missions. The board also received an update on the Improvement and Development Board (IDB)'s review of the sector's job evaluation process, welcoming its work and recognising that further consideration and testing were necessary. Our partner, Connect Public Affairs, briefed the board on its support for our public affairs work

engaging with the government and Parliament, including through setting up our new Westminster Parliamentary Forum.

NALC appointed to the Canal & River Trust's Council

We have been added as a nominating organisation to the Canal & River Trust's Council to represent the interests of local government. Our chair, Cllr Keith Stevens, attended his first meeting on 19 March 2025. Founded in 2012, the Canal & River Trust is the UK's largest canal charity, caring for a 2,000-mile network of stunning canals and navigable rivers across England and Wales. Its purpose is to achieve a sustainable future for the nation's canal network, keeping it open and alive, making it resilient and safe, and maximising its value for people, nature and the economy.

NALC: Civility and Respect task force

The work of the Civility and Respect Task Force reinforces the good work recognised in the latest CSPL report. It has had approval from IDB to produce a video promoting the Civility and Respect Pledge. Over 17% of parish and town councils have signed up for the pledge, which is excellent news, but the task force is confident in increasing that number. The task force was delighted to learn that the work done on the pledge in parish and town councils has influenced the recent promotion by Compassion in Politics of a pledge for MPs. The intent is to have two video versions – one short for social media and council meetings and the second longer for websites and training. The IDB also approved the proposal from the task force that individual parish and town councils be encouraged to adopt the practice of individual councillors signing up for a Councillor Statement of Assurance, which confirms that individual councillors understand their obligations and the behaviour expected of them whenever acting as a councillor. Advice on this will be made available to all parish and town councils based on the work done in Cornwall.

LALC at the Lincolnshire Show

LALC and our colleagues at ERNLLCA (East Riding and Northern Lincolnshire Local Councils Association) will be attending the Lincolnshire Show this year, on 18th and 19th June.

Look out for the “Greater Lincolnshire Association of Local Councils” marquee.

New SLCC podcast: 'Martyn's Law and Local Councils: The Road Ahead'

In this episode (*16:31 duration*), our podcast host Michael King, Head of Policy and External Communications, is joined by Kevin Roberts, Consultant in Security Licensing and Events Management, and

Helen Ball FSLCC, Clerk to Shrewsbury Town Council and SLCC Board Director, to discuss Martyn's Law. They explore how the law will impact local councils, what clerks need to be aware of, and the guidance available to help them navigate these changes.

Tune in for an insightful conversation on the future of Martyn's Law and the role of clerks in its delivery:
<https://www.slcc.co.uk/news-publications/slcc-podcasts/>

SLCC - Practitioners' Guide 2025: Demonstrating Best Practice When Working Online

Article by The Parish Council Domains Helper Service Team, Government Digital Service (GDS)

The Practitioners' Guide 2025 has important updates in the 'Digital and data compliance' section. Your community expects you to have a trusted online presence so it is important that you act in line with the guidance. This article explains the things you need to do and shows you where to get support.

Emails

The Practitioners' Guide now states that every authority must have a role-based email account hosted on an authority owned domain. For example, clerk@abcparishcouncil.gov.uk or clerk@abcparishcouncil.org.uk.

You must stop using personal email accounts, for example Gmail or other free addresses. When choosing a new email for your council, it is best practice to have a .gov.uk email address. This will mean your emails are easily recognised as coming from a legitimate government organisation. Using a .gov.uk email also means your communications are transparent and you will be able to respond to Data Subject Access and Freedom of Information requests.

Website

Parish councils are obliged to have a council owned website that complies with the accessibility guidelines. To help you maintain a consistent and professional image, the Practitioners' Guide recommends councils use .gov.uk domains. Anyone visiting a .gov.uk website will know it is legitimate and can be trusted. This is increasingly important as cyber scams are on the rise. Moving to .gov.uk does not have to be a big change, in many cases you can keep your existing website and website provider.

Moving to .gov.uk

The Parish Council Domain Helper Service has helped over 1,000 parish councils move to a .gov.uk domain, and are on hand to help you take action. You can:

- Read guidance on moving your parish council to a .gov.uk domain on the .gov.uk website, to go through each step in the process, including how to write an accessibility statement and IT policy

*Do you have news to share?
Get in touch via our website.*

LALC will provide links but is not responsible for the content of external websites.

- Sign up to a 60 minute virtual workshop, if you need more advice or have questions about moving to a .gov.uk domain
- Email parish-helper@domains.gov.uk if you have any questions

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New statutory right to neonatal care leave and pay

On 6 April 2025, a new statutory right to neonatal care leave and pay will come into effect for babies born on or after that date.

Where an employee's child receives a full continuous week or more of neonatal care which starts within 28 days of birth, they will be entitled to take up to 12 weeks' neonatal care leave. It is in addition to other forms of statutory leave and comes with various requirements and timeframes for notification. Statutory neonatal care pay will also be available to those who meet the continuity of service requirements and minimum earnings threshold.

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NALC: Local government reorganisation

On 24 March 2025, the Minister for Local Government and English Devolution, Jim McMahon MP, updated parliament on local government reorganisation. The written statement followed the 21 March 2025 deadline for principal authorities in two-tier areas to submit reorganisation plans. 21 areas have put forward interim proposals, with the government announcing £7.6 million in funding to support proposal development. The statement confirms that the government will “follow up with areas to discuss their interim plans, provide feedback and understand the collaboration and information sharing arrangements”.

Our colleagues at the Local Government Information Unit have published a helpful resource of documents and information, including all the interim proposals: <https://tinyurl.com/4824t2kv>

Interim proposals from the **Lincolnshire councils** can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/bdhvstms>

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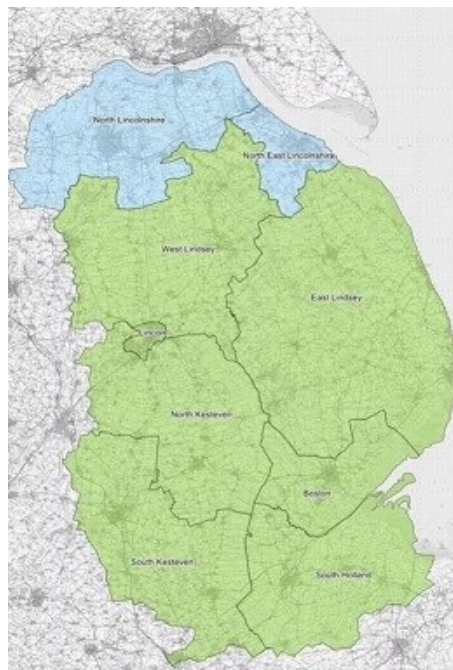
Summary of the eight options submitted for council reorganisation

Eight different proposals have been submitted outlining how Greater Lincolnshire should be divided, in what has been described as the most significant shake-up to local government in half a century. This is part of the devolution plan for the area.

The reorganisation aims to merge councils into bigger unitary authorities, expected to be established in 2028, with projected savings of £2bn nationwide.

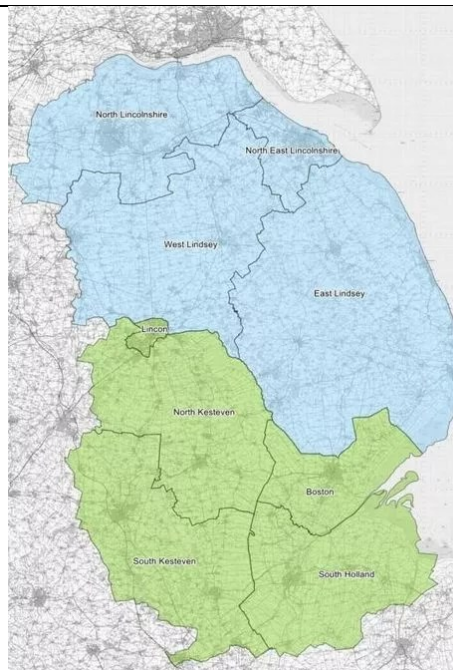
Feedback from government is expected by 28 April with final proposals due by 28 November.

Option 1: North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire councils would merge and Lincolnshire County Council would be combined with all seven district councils.



(Image: WLDC)

Option 2: North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire councils would merge with East Lindsey and West Lindsey. The other new council would combine the county council with the remaining five districts.



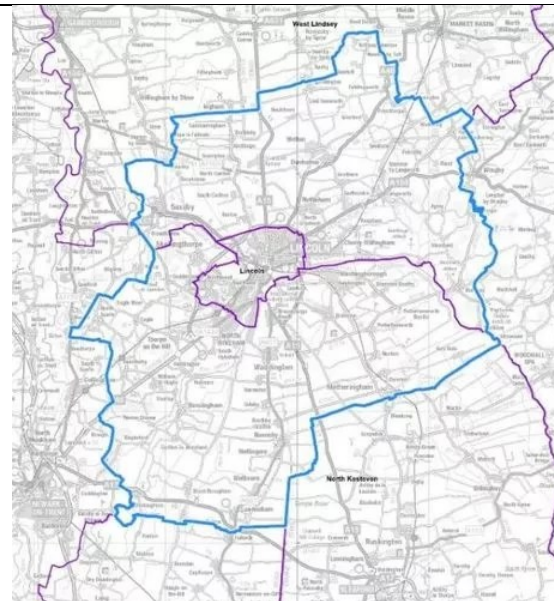
(Image: WLDC)

Option 3: South Kesteven and North Kesteven district councils would merge with South Holland and Rutland. Another unitary authority would combine West Lindsey, East Lindsey, Lincoln, and Boston, while a third would merge North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire councils.



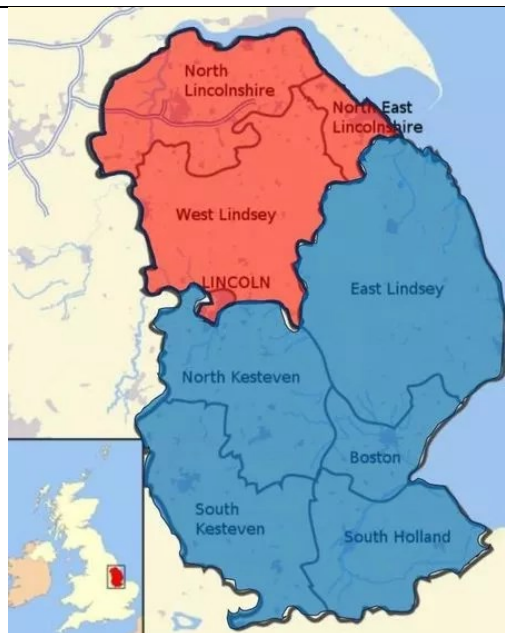
(Image: SKDC)

Option 4: The City of Lincoln Council has put forward a three-unitary model for Greater Lincolnshire, which includes expanding the city's boundaries into parts of North Kesteven and West Lindsey.



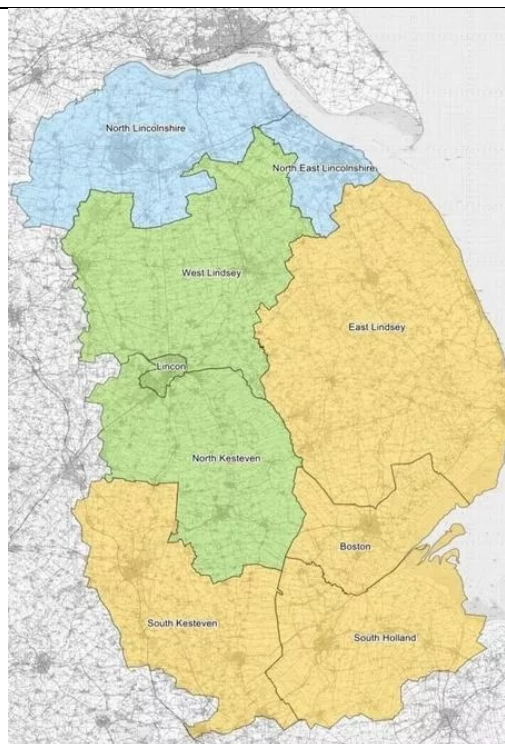
(Image: City of Lincoln Council)

Option 5: A proposed Northern Lincolnshire Unitary Council would include North Lincolnshire, North East Lincolnshire, West Lindsey, and the City of Lincoln. The Southern Lincolnshire Unitary Council would include North Kesteven, South Kesteven, Boston, East Lindsey, and South Holland.



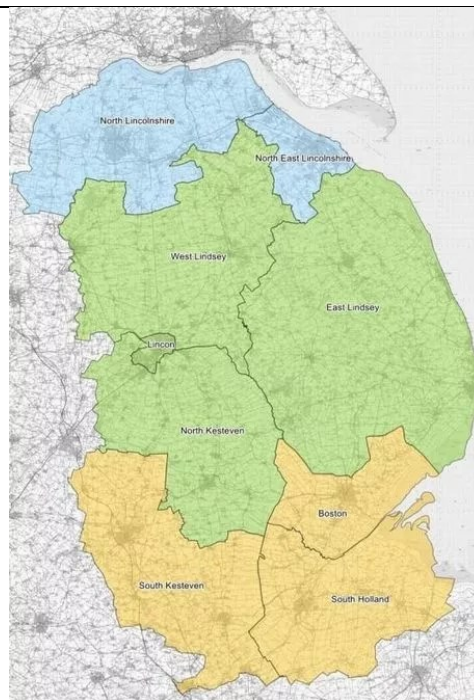
(Image: ELDC)

Option 6: Central Lincolnshire would cover West Lindsey, Lincoln, and North Kesteven. A proposed Southern & Coastal Lincolnshire authority would take in East Lindsey, Boston, South Holland, and South Kesteven, while Northern Lincolnshire would cover North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire.



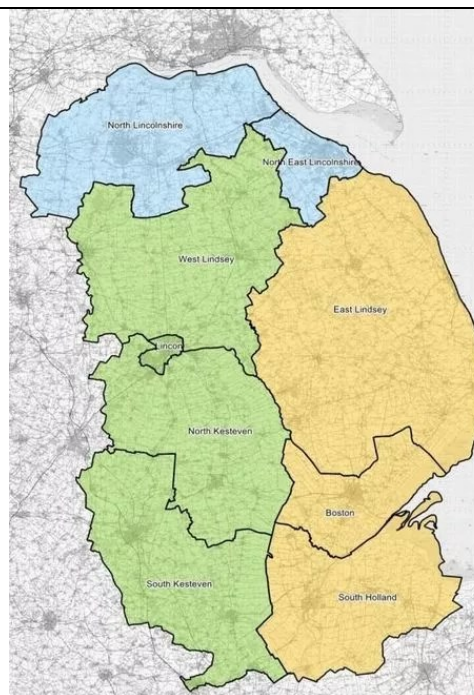
(Image: WLDC)

Option 7: Another three-unitary model would see North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire combining, West Lindsey merging with Lincoln, East Lindsey, and North Kesteven, while South Kesteven, South Holland, and Boston would also merge.



(Image: WLDC)

Option 8: North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire would combine, West Lindsey, Lincoln, North Kesteven, and South Kesteven would merge, and East Lindsey, Boston, and South Holland would also amalgamate.



(Image: WLDC)

Read more: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c2kvd5zj47no>

Read more: https://www.lincolnshirelive.co.uk/news/lincoln-news/eight-different-options-transform-lincolnshire-10070140?int_source=nba

Cllr Martin Hill has stated any changes will not be implemented until 2028.

Beach Nurdles

Our coastline has recently been affected by nurdles – small plastic pellets used in manufacturing that pose a threat to marine life and the environment. The clean-up continues as tides bring in more with each wave. But thanks to the dedication of our teams and volunteers, thousands have already been removed from the sand. If you see any of the pellets, or possible pollution along the coast or surrounding areas, please go to our www.e-lindsey.gov.uk and follow the banner link to complete the form. Please note you will be redirected to the North Norfolk District Council website who are hosting the reporting for this incident.

Please report beach 'nurdle' / 'plastic pellets pollution' at www.north-norfolk.gov.uk/plastic-nurdles this will then be distributed to the relevant authority for clean-up.

ICCM Management of Memorials training

Sutterton Parish Council (near Boston) have arranged with ICCM to host a Management of Memorials Inspection workshop at Sutterton Village Hall on Wednesday 7th May. If you are interested in attending, please see details and booking form on the ICCM website:

<https://www.iccm-uk.com/iccm/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Sutterton-Inspection-Workshop-7-May-2025-flyer-and-booking-form.pdf>

New Document Templates

The following additions have been made to Document Templates on the LALC portal.

- Standing Orders – April 2025
- Information Technology Policy Template provided by Domains Helper Service (March 2025)
- Risk Assessment Form provided by Worknest

Log in to the website and go to 'Document Templates' and search for each item using a single word such as 'Standing' or 'Information' or 'Risk' and you will then be able to download the template in Word format.

Information Commissioner's Office Updates

We've summarised some recent decisions of note below, to help public authorities learn from our decision notices. All of the Commissioner's decisions under FOIA and the EIR can be found on our decision notices pages: <https://ico.org.uk/action-weve-taken/decision-notices/>

Section 3(2) FOIA: WhatsApp messages were held for the purposes of FOIA/the EIR

In case IC-320634-J5F9 (<https://tinyurl.com/bdeenypw>), a parish council considered that group WhatsApp messages weren't held for the purposes of the freedom of information legislation.

The Commissioner found that the messages referred to such matters as planning, meetings and councillors' roles. He determined that the messages were "held" by the parish council and ordered a response to be made under FOIA and/or the EIR as appropriate.

Learning points

- When messages between public authority staff refer to the organisation's functions and operations, you must consider them for disclosure, regardless of whether they're on non-corporate communication channels like WhatsApp.
- This does not mean all messages must be disclosed. You can consider redactions and exemptions if necessary.
- Your records management policy should explain that, as far as reasonably practicable, you will ensure that you use corporate channels for official business. Where this is not possible, information should be transferred onto official systems. See our detailed guidance on official information held in non-corporate communications channels: <https://tinyurl.com/bdf9zeur>

Section 40(2) FOIA: councillors' information could not be withheld

In case IC-289435-S3R2 (<https://tinyurl.com/ygc3zhme>), a council refused a request for information about councillors' non-payment of council tax, saying it was third party personal data, and exempt from disclosure.

The request was for the identity of serving councillors who'd received a court summons, due to the extent of council tax arrears. Noting that there is a high expectation of scrutiny in this situation, the Commissioner ordered the information to be disclosed.

Learning point:

- Where information is third party personal data, the legitimate interests in disclosure can outweigh the individuals' rights and freedoms, where there's a high expectation of scrutiny and accountability.

Section 14(1) vexatious requests: successfully evidencing the inappropriate use of FOIA

In case IC-292879-T4M4 (<https://tinyurl.com/t6nuw8pm>), a council successfully argued that a request for information about a traffic regulation order was vexatious.

The council showed that the request was part of a pattern of behaviour that began with the requester challenging a parking fine. The Commissioner agreed that, dealing with the request would place a disproportionate burden on the council and so the request was vexatious.

Learning points

- Providing evidence to the Commissioner of your position enables us to assess whether a request is vexatious.
- You need to decide whether the burden is disproportionate in the context of four broad themes: burden (on the public authority and its staff), the motive (of the requester), the value or serious purpose (of the request), and any harassment or distress (of and to staff).
- A personal motive does not always mean that a request lacks wider purpose and value. The requested information might still be of wider interest, and you must consider all relevant factors.

SLCC: Martyn's Law Receives Royal Assent

SLCC is pleased to see that the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025, commonly known as Martyn's Law, has received Royal Assent today (3 April). This landmark legislation aims to enhance public safety by mandating improved security measures at public venues and events, thereby reducing the risk of terrorist attacks.

LCC will collaborate with the Security Industry Authority (SIA) to support town, parish, and community councils in implementing the new requirements. This partnership will ensure that local councils are equipped with the necessary tools and knowledge to comply with Martyn's Law, fostering a safer environment for all.

Martyn's Law, named in memory of Martyn Hett, who tragically lost his life in the Manchester Arena bombing in 2017, represents a significant step forward in protecting the public from the threat of terrorism. The Act introduces proportionate and practical measures, including a tiered approach to security based on the size and capacity of venues.

Home Office announcement: <https://www.slcc.co.uk/the-terrorism-protection-of-premises-act-2025/>

Elsewhere in the country: Helmingham Parish Council collapses after mass resignations

An emergency order has been issued following the mass resignation of every councillor in a mid-Suffolk village in what has been called an "unprecedented state of affairs".

Stowmarket Mercury:

<https://www.stowmarketmercury.co.uk/news/25033036.helmingham-parish-council-collapses-mass-resignations/>