

# Report on Local Government Reorganisation & Devolution - to assist authorities in those processes.

Pete Hobley                                      ADEPT RoW Group Chair & SW Group Chair  
 Graham Rusling                                SE Group & IPROW President  
 Richard Cuthbert                              E Group & IPROW Director  
 With thanks to all who have contributed experience and advice.

## INTRODUCTION

On 16 December 2024, the Government published the [English Devolution White Paper](#) with proposals for local government restructuring. The ambition is for all areas of the country to be covered by an elected Mayor (devolution) and all two-tier areas to be reorganised into single tier unitary authorities (local government reorganisation).

ADEPT held a Local Govt Reform (LGR) webinar on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2025 and the slides / notes are available here; [Local government reorganisation – becoming a unitary authority enroute to devolution](#) , with notes also in Appendix 2 below.

A useful summary slide from MHCLG, below, was shared at ADEPT’s Transport & Connectivity Board on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2025 (‘DPP’ = Devolution Priority Programme):

OFFICIAL

### LGR milestones

Different buckets have different milestones, depending on if they’re doing DPP, fast-track LGR or just LGR

|            | Areas doing DPP and LGR  | All other two-tier areas   |   |  |
|------------|--|--|---|--|
| Areas      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greater Essex</li> <li>Hampshire and the Solent</li> <li>Norfolk and Suffolk</li> <li>Sussex and Brighton</li> </ul>                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Surrey (working to an accelerated timeline)</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cambridgeshire</li> <li>Derbyshire</li> <li>Devon</li> <li>Gloucestershire</li> <li>Hertfordshire</li> <li>Kent</li> <li>Lancashire*</li> <li>Leicestershire</li> <li>Lincolnshire</li> <li>Nottinghamshire</li> <li>Oxfordshire</li> <li>Staffordshire</li> <li>Warwickshire</li> <li>Worcestershire</li> </ul> |  |
| Milestones | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interim proposal: 21 <b>March 2025</b></li> <li>Formal proposal due: 26 <b>September</b></li> <li>Go-live for new unitary: <b>2028</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interim proposal due: 21 <b>March 2025</b></li> <li>Formal proposal due: 9 <b>May 2025</b></li> <li>Go-live for new unitary: <b>2027</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interim proposal due: 21 <b>March 2025</b></li> <li>Formal proposal due: 28 <b>November 2025</b></li> <li>Go-live for new unitary: <b>2028</b></li> </ul>  |  |

## **LOCAL GOVT REFORM / CHANGE TO UNITARIES**

### **Concerns –**

- Workload of splitting definitive maps & statements (DM&S) into multiple separate legal documents for each new Unitary Authorities (UA) is unjustifiable & not just splitting the map but also splitting teams, with support networks between experienced and new staff.
- Plus the Commons & Village Greens Registers (CL&VG)
- Loss of economies of scale particularly around niche areas such as common land and village greens. Local Access Forums and RoWIPs duplicating effort.
- Potential years of workloads should be being flagged internally
- Organisational structure – Service Alignment work / staff / budgets
- Job Descriptions & main responsibilities
- Policies (inc. charges) / procedures / application forms, etc
- S257 work focussed into new UA. Doing TCPA orders now is onerous on the definitive map team.
- Suffolk 1996 reorganisation, some authorities are too small so don't have the budget and resource for what they need.
- Relationship with planning department is very important.
- Loss of skill and knowledge base – reflecting the age profile of the workforce.
- Disparities in workload – there are significant differences in caseload across upper tier areas – if subdivided into smaller units.
- Reduced delivery capacity during transition period, as capacity is focussed on making the structural changes.
- Interruption to service delivery due to matters such as the delegation of decision making powers.
- Previous example in Kent with the CC & Medway Council split. Led to loss of economies. There are now two very different DM&Ss. Clear contrast in fortunes post - split reflecting the economies of scale experienced by Kent CC.

### **Options / opportunities –**

- Merging multiple small councils into one large 'county-sized' one much easier than larger councils to multiple small ones. Some have found it better for planning and diversion orders.
- Could a service level agreement be arranged between two new UAs? – One UA holds the staff, who deliver the PRow service across 2 or more UAs. Potential to pick up specialisms as a shared service e.g: DM&S.
- Opportunities – depots, keep spend within budgets, shared service approach
- Non-RoW routes?
- Previous examples of splitting a DM&S decades ago include; Avon plus a couple of Unitaries into the current Somerset, conveniently followed former RDC boundaries and was relatively easier to split the DM&S given it was also structured by RDC areas. Also Bedfordshire into Central Beds C & Bedford BC, which was able to use the original DM&S in 4 areas to conveniently create the new splits.
- It can be seen to pose a greater task now, with all the legal events that have occurred and whilst they may have had legal Event Modification Orders (LEMOs) done, they won't necessarily have been consolidated into the DM&S.

### **NB:**

- LGR is population driven, large populations e.g. over 1M will not be allowed to form single UAs, so plan for 2 or more UAs to come.
- Smaller pop sizes have successfully gone into one county-sized UA.
- Smaller pop sizes split between 2 or more UAs have really struggled.

### **Current Directions of Travel:**

- Suffolk are pitching a single county-wide UA, with a pop of c750k
- Kent Highways and Transportation have drafted a paper making the case for a county scale service, irrespective of the shape of local Government.
- Focus is on the impacts on operational matters, delegations and the details at risk of being lost in the rush to establish the new authorities.

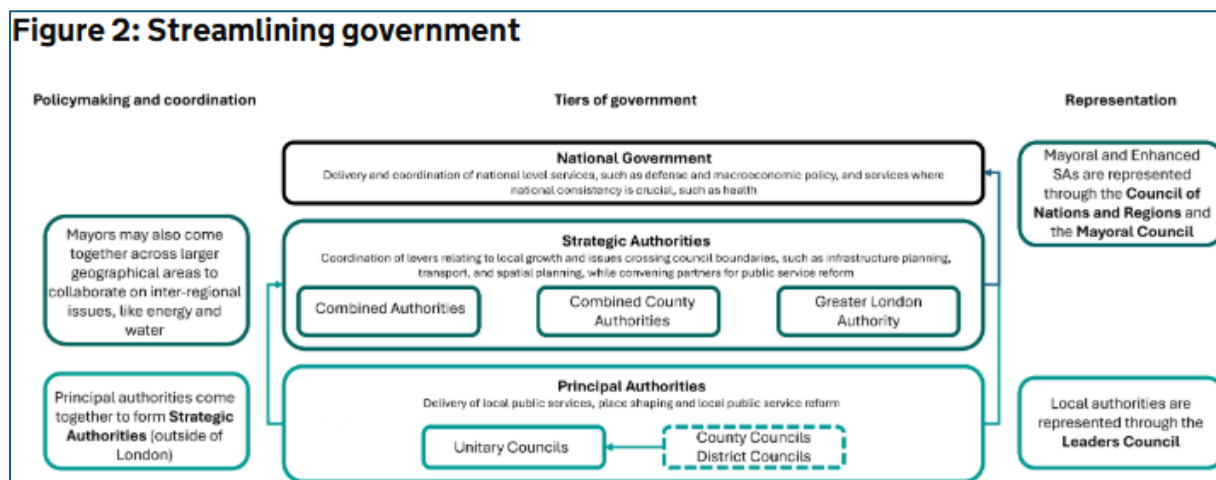
### **Tips:**

- Governance issues for setting-up new UAs – cannot underestimate the amount of time spent on constitution and committee ToR changes, and authorisations / delegations, as this will be significant; i.e: dedicate time to ensuring relevant parts of the constitution align with the proposed changes.
- Get involved in Service Alignment strategic meetings. Be clear on what structure is best for your area, and what directorate is best to be located in and be prepared to evidence why.
- Start as early as possible on service alignment; identify and assign tasks as soon as structure is known. Audit resources such as depots / workshops / materials storage options.
- Chase down budget (staff and non-staff) and make sure you get what is fair - there will often be mixed roles sat under non-RoW teams. This should include management time as well.
- Vesting day is never the end; a lot of further work will be necessary to build relations and educate other teams that will often have undergone a degree of personnel change.
- Not all opportunities will be realised prior to vesting day, so be prepared for and expect further change beyond vesting day.
- Ensure the constitution and delegated powers are right. If they are not sorted adequately, officers will have to refer opposed orders to newly formed committees in need of specialist training; - for decisions on Public Path Order (PPOs), (whether to abandon or not), and for Definitive Map Modification Orders (DMMOs), (whether to conform or submit to PINS).
- Training should be timetabled during Shadow Authority period (offers 11 months). Member and colleague training - emphasise that PProW are highways and carry duties, liabilities, and regulations.
- Ensure records are kept. Audit what files each former authority holds and what needs keeping. Do not disaggregate all PProW documents to multiple new UAs. Experience shows future office and storage space issues causes legal documents to be disposed of (intentionally or accidentally). This cannot happen so documents should be scanned and originals kept together in a single county Archive.
- Push for overtime to help scan orders etc.
- Collaborate with Archive colleagues well in advance to ensure deposits are expected and get properly catalogued.

## **DEVOLUTION - MAYORAL AUTHORITIES**

- Devolution involves powers that currently sit with the Government being given to a local area, allowing local decision-makers to have more of a say in what happens in their area. The Government is keen to achieve this by establishing Strategic Authorities led by elected Mayors in areas that don't currently have one. In future, a new Strategic Authority led by a new Mayor could be created covering an old county area, or counties could join together with neighbours to have a Strategic Authority and Mayor sitting across a larger geography.
- LAs taking into consideration now, how LGR proposals support Gov't plans for future Devolution
- The Government will provide funding to support this project (one e.g. of £378,077).
- Can PRoW Services sit in the Mayoral Authority (MA)? – It has been strongly suggested that MAs are likely to be very small numbers of staff, i.e. at the strategic level, and will therefore delegate operational / delivery work to the UAs with more staff.
- Mayoral Authorities are perhaps seen as the best level for strategy, policy and niche service elements to sit. Eg DM&S, CL&VG, Access Forums? – but will depend on their resources and structure. David Dale leading ADEPT on Devolution & investigating what else might be happening around Devolution.
- Devolution providing opportunity for better focus / funding on rural active travel perhaps?
- S247s – how would this work? – opportunity to improve process and recover costs? and the noted uptick in developers going to DfT for s247s instead of s257s - which still awaits a substantive response / engagement from DfT.
- Opposed Public Path Orders? It would lift the burden on PINS for what are in reality matters of judgement in line with planning matters.

## LGR New Structure ([English Devolution White Paper - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/white-papers/english-devolution-white-paper)):



### LGR Fast-Track Timetable:

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| End September 2025       | Submit full Local Government Reorganisation proposal                    |
| Nov 2025 – New Year 2026 | Consultation  |
| May 2026                 | PERP  |
| March 2026               | Government decision on preferred unitary council model                  |
| Pre summer 2026 recess   | Secondary legislation prepared, to be laid in the House                 |
| Autumn 2026              | Legislation made, subject to Parliamentary approval                     |
| 6 May 2027               | Elections to the new unitary authorities ( <i>Shadow authorities</i> )* |
| 1 April 2028             | Vesting day / 'Go Live' for new unitary authorities                     |

### LGR (non Fast-Track) Timetable:

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| 28 November 2025         | Submit full Local Government Reorganisation proposal  |
| New Year – post May 2026 | Consultation  |
| Spring/Summer 2026       | Government decision on preferred unitary council model - announced before the summer recess |
| Post summer recess       | Secondary legislation prepared, to be laid in the House.                                    |
| “ “ “                    | Legislation made, subject to Parliamentary approval   |
| 6 May 2027               | Elections to new authorities ( <i>Shadow authorities</i> )*                                 |
| 1 April 2028             | Vesting day / 'Go Live' for new unitary authorities   |

\*Shadow authorities are the new unitary council/s prior to them formally taking on all responsibilities.

## ADEPT / LGA - LGR Webinar Notes 04/04/2025

1) LGA - taking the lead with MHCLG as a 'hub' for all LGR info & mention of job descriptions for secondments, from LG into MHCLG...! – suggestion of 2-way street for secondments including MHCLG secondees into LG would be helpful, not just resource into MHCLG.

### Building networks, sharing insights

- Establishing new networks:
  - LGR delivery network
  - Heads of LGR comms and engagement
- A rolling programme of webinars:
  - Communication and engagement
  - Financial planning and transformation

*What else would be helpful?*

### Contact details


- [Claire.Hogan@local.gov.uk](mailto:Claire.Hogan@local.gov.uk)
- [Efa.Gough@local.gov.uk](mailto:Efa.Gough@local.gov.uk)

2) Cumbria LGR = 2,500 requirements on Day 1...!  
 - Governance structures important, esp. for 'Place' services like ours

### Programme Scope

The scope of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) programme was to replace the six District, City and Borough Councils (Carlisle City, Copeland District, Alerdale Borough, Barrow-in-Furness Borough, Eden District and South Lakeland District Councils) and Cumbria County Council with two unitary councils and transfer the Cumbria Fire and Rescue Services to the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.

All seven councils contributed to an implementation reserve of £18.9m to fund the programme.



**The vision for LGR in Cumbria was to:**

- Create two new unitary authorities that are able to operate safely and legally from Day 1 – April 1, 2023.
- Create conditions for the new organisations to transform and improve outcomes for residents, businesses, partners and the environment on a journey which is likely to take five to seven years.
- Create governance structures that enable the two new councils to raise ambitions and become more successful, so the economy is transformed and the opportunities and life chances of all residents are significantly improved.
- Create new ways of working that deliver local, responsive, accessible, high quality services efficiently and in collaboration with our communities and partners.

Table showing the number of Day 1 requirements and milestones by each of the seven Theme Boards

| Theme Board | Core | Customer and Digital | Finance and Commercial | Fire | ICT | People | Place | Total |
|-------------|------|----------------------|------------------------|------|-----|--------|-------|-------|
| Day 1 reqs  | 18   | 10                   | 26                     | 30   | 11  | 26     | 19    | 234   |
| Milestones  | 300  | 47                   | 75                     | 89   | 263 | 85     | 67    | 1,995 |

The Programme was governed by a Programme Board which included all current Chief Executives, the Chief Fire Officer and Programme Director.

The Theme Boards, the Day 1 Board and the Unitary Boards all fed in to the Programme Board, reporting by exception. A Day 1 Board managed the interdependencies across Themes and provided oversight of the whole programme.

When elected, shadow authority members provided guidance and oversight through Joint Members Implementation Board.


### Our Learning

**What worked well throughout the LGR programme**

- Overall collaboration and working together across all organisations to support the programme.
- Dedicated PMO team and allocated Programme and Project Managers to support workstreams.
- Early set up of the Shadow Unitary Boards to support service development.
- Regular monitoring of delivery plans and holding colleagues accountable for delivery through the Day 1 Board.
- Engagement with elected cabinet members or Exec members to understand their priorities.
- Communication and engagement with members, customers and residents throughout the process.

**What's the one piece of advice you would give to another council who is just starting out on a similar journey?**

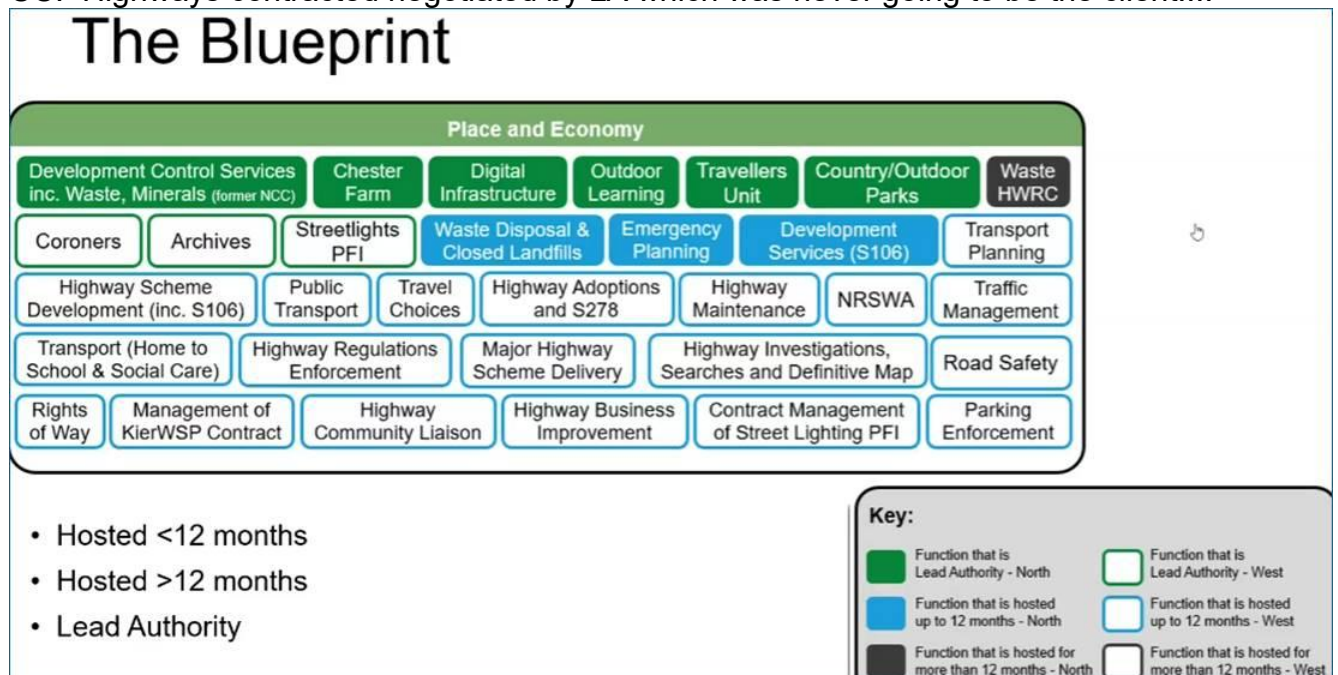
- Embrace the change as soon as you can throughout the organisation.
- Start the process as soon as you can.
- Take the time to do the detail design of the programme of activity upfront – it will save you time later in the process.
- Focus effort from the start on the enabler services – ICT, HR, Customer and Digital.
- Use your Governance model to agree long term hosted/shared services early in the process. If your model is to separate all or majority of services, put all your efforts in to achieving this ahead of Day 1.
- At an early stage identify HR processes for staff allocation, appeals
- You won't have all the answers all the time and that's ok.
- Appoint your chief officers in to their shadow authority roles as soon as you can to allow them to shape and drive future service delivery.
- From a Fire perspective, clarify with the Home Office where you're going to end up and what you will need to get there as soon as you can.
- Prioritise communications across the organisation from the very start and take staff on the journey with you – this will take time, but it's time well spent!



Some shared services not going well so still disaggregating now.  
 Can't "over-communicate"... Be compassionate to all... Substantial resources needed.

3) **N. Yorks** – example of CC being the ‘continuing authority’ emphasis on staff engagement. Resourcing for success & to engage staff to be successful.

4) **North Northamptonshire** – formed 2021 after s115 notices issued by former CC. Highways contracted negotiated by LA which was never going to be the client...!



**Day 1 Challenges** – Leadership capacity: Tier1-3 restructures

New budgets, new systems, inherited budget splits / allocations

Differing cultures need merging

New processes; risk, performance monitoring, budget setting – don't expect to get a perfect process on Day 1, give time to return.

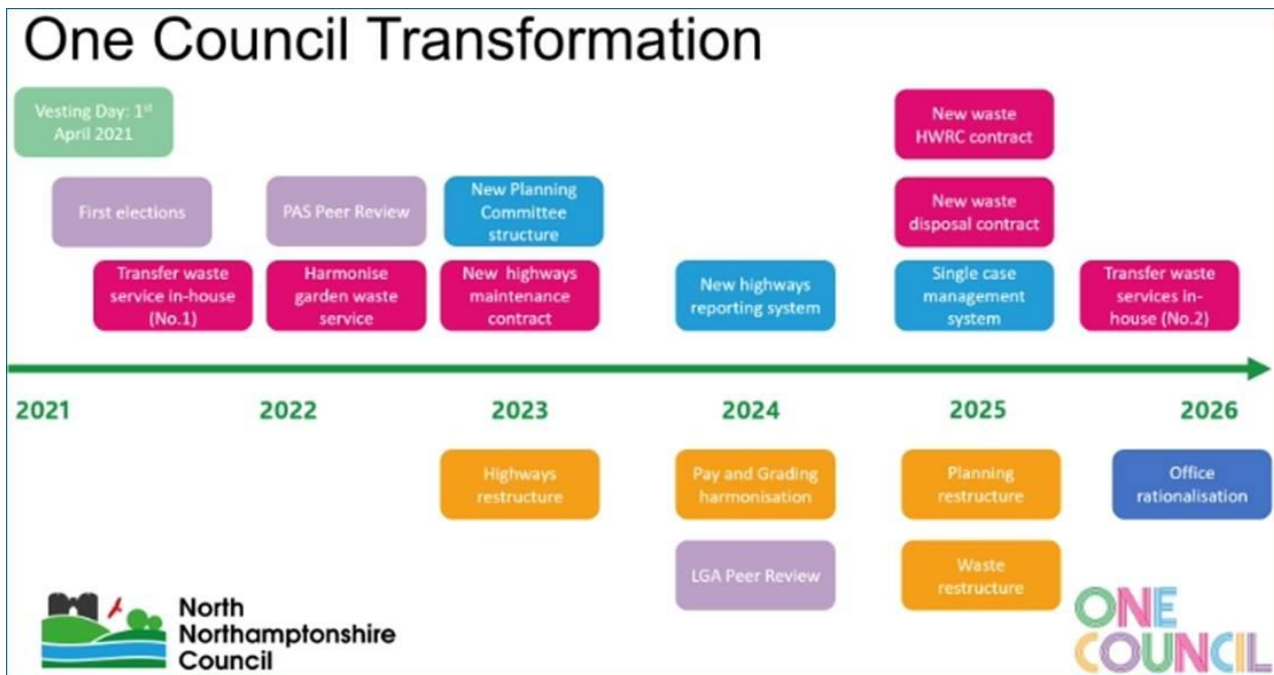
Office space, e.g. central HQ(s)

**Day 2+ challenges**

Match Income to Exp budgets

Merge individuals into single new culture & HR policies & pay structure

Cost of change, yet requirement for savings



## Opportunities are boundless; time is finite.

- Operational demands
- Transformation activity i.e. the opportunities
- Inheriting unfinished business (the knowns)
- Surprises (the unknowns).

### 5) Somerset – DCs merged earlier but processes still split

Clash of desires for 2 not 1 council

Political context really matters and brings differing proposals

People & culture – need compassion and rigorous programme / big resource – loss of identity / attachment

Don't lose the basics, as new teams are formed

Realistic about what is necessary for Day 1 – hold onto critical paths

Get Mgmt tiers appointed so staff have someone to go to & process working

Resource the “doing end” and recognise the workload there

Setting-up clumps of communities networks / parish councils – game changing! 120 PCs and 2 new TCs popped-up, with a mis-match of which have devolved powers for operations like; parking, flower baskets, mowing verges etc...

### Q&A:

Is there a risk of lowest common denominator / default to easiest? -

Think about Policies before creating entities or wait for them to exist?

Culture harmonisation? = before / during / throughout.

Problem solving teams free to rove, for all new entities? – transmission team kept on after Day 1?

4 proposals for Cumbria. CC wanted a single authority pop 500,000. Government decision was to create 2, we haven't realised any direct financial efficiencies yet, we have realised many other benefits of being a unitary and savings will come.

TUPE of over 8649 staff

E.g. of no split of waste disposal contract, as it's a long term PPP 25 year project and therefore was transferred to one authority, with a inter authority agreement.

focus on the real essentials, with culture change etc coming later.

Did you do much though in terms of identifying the 'best' elements of culture of the demising authorities to try to retain then grow them, or just start with a blank sheet once you got through day1 / year 1?

Any experience of shared services across Unitaries?

- Yes - we have long term shared including Adult Skills, Waste Disposal (not collection), Digital Infrastructure, Pensions. Short term hosted/shared - some transport functions, streetworks, Minerals and Waste Planning,
- All short term now have been disaggregated.
  
- Programme board had sponsors and SROs from Districts and County. E.g. co-sponsor of Place Programme with a Chief Exec from a District.
- For shared services we have a Joint Executive Committee and Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Experience of merging districts where you have a mix of DLO/outsourced/TECL Co workforces? - how do new successor authorities decide which model to adopt?

- examples include Allerdale Investment Partnership and Allerdale Waste Services. The Structural Changes Order sets out what contracts, companies etc transfer over.
- For Day 1 most things simply transfer and therefore aggregation/harmonisation takes time. staff still on separate T&Cs etc

Is the LGA / consortium of orgs promoting any agreed standardisation of LGR proposals? (e.g. everyone using same data sources for population, budgets etc)

- we're seeking early sight of government's 'template' for final LGR business cases to ensure this is as straightforward for areas as possible.
- We've raised having a standardised approach to data and evidence with MHCLG - we'll share further info/updates as received.

whether the splitting of former county council contracts (waste, highways etc) has been able to deliver savings or whether disaggregation has added cost?

Was there any challenges around ALMOs and potentially bringing housing management in-house? I know you have to consult the tenants on bringing in an ALMO, doing this across varies districts and boroughs will be expensive and challenging?

- It probably isn't something you would resolve by Day 1. Harmonisation takes time.

How has it worked with national parks or protected landscape partnerships?

- National Parks not directly impacted. All partnership continue, albeit the Council reps have changed.
- We have 2 National Parks / one is within both new unitary areas.

whether the splitting of former county council contracts (waste, highways etc) has been able to deliver savings or whether disaggregation has added cost?

- We haven't split our waste disposal contract. It is a long term PPP 25 year project and therefore it was transferred to one authority with a inter authority agreement.
- E.g. of one waste collection outsourced, but brought it back in last April. All in house now, & made the decision before vesting day.

Do you think you ended up with the best split for efficiency with regards to size? I'm thinking with regards to the 500,000 metric

- 4 proposals for Cumbria. CC wanted a single authority pop 500,000. Government decision was to create 2, we haven't realised any direct financial efficiencies yet, we have realised many other benefits of being a unitary and savings will come.
- We had 2 proposals, a County led one for one council and one led by the Districts for 2 Councils on an east/west split.

Is there any intel to the Central Gov decision making when either there were competing proposals or they selected a different option to the preferred model being put forward?

- Probably not for commenting here as Cumbria County Council tried to JR the decision to have 2 Unitaries based on the argument that N York and Somerset both being a continuing authority. We were not successful.
- This is something the LGA is trying to understand from MHCLG but no updates yet on this

432 parish/town councils and a large number of parish meetings as well. We are about to kick off a governance review. We did a double devo pilot, but not led to much. elections for 2 new town councils in May. Concern that these will think they are districts reincarnated.

Plenty of examples of bringing things in house to get to a standard - has anybody used a wholly owned company as a halfway house? The answer may be as simple as no - although I know of an example where it was going to be used as a compromise in a District aggregation.

- wouldn't be something seen as being viable as a day 1 action though.

Efa Gough (LGA) & Hannah Bartram (ADEPT) - research on the different experiences and outcomes arising depending on whether a continuing authority model or new authority boundaries are utilised.

Pros/cons/ financial implications etc. assuming that there will be differences.

- will take away internally and for discussion with the consortium of sector support with ADEPT colleagues.
- plus we are thinking webinars on planning and environment/climate change.

[The Cumbria \(Structural Changes\) Order 2022](#) - This Order provides for the establishment, on 1st April 2023, of a single tier of local government in Cumbria. Two new councils created; the Cumberland Council, & the Westmorland and Furness Council.

Questions around old organisational relationships (officers and members) through the journey from fighting for survival mode through to Day 1) and how best to go on that journey, all the way through to specifics (potential waste infrastructure in the wrong geographical places/risks around viability of long term waste disposal and treatment contracts with 'new waste commitments/volumes' etc, and how the wider market perceives and maybe loads risks into future procurements whilst organisations go on this journey.

[Exceptional Financial Support for local authorities for 2023-24 - GOV.UK](#)

- Details of support granted to local authorities that have requested Exceptional Financial Support in financial year 2023-24 and the associated external assurance reviews.
- borrow through Government Capitalisation in year 1.

-----