



Midlands Highway Alliance Plus

Highways & Transport: The Future

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Local Government Reorganisation

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION – The present, the past and the future, what next?



Government Pauses LGR

7th September - Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government Angela Rayner made the statement in Parliament pausing LGR.

Reason: Updated legal advice regarding the lawfulness and robustness of the process, alongside alignment with wider government devolution and state reform plans.

Paused/withdrawn areas: Proposals and decisions across 14 areas (including Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland, Devon, Lancashire, and others) are paused during the review. Four withdrawn and two areas where decisions are still to be made.

Elections: Local elections scheduled for May 2027 will go ahead under existing council boundaries.



What happens next? A Government review. What will the review process look like?

The Government has asked the Minister for Local Government, Devolution and Regional Growth to undertake a rapid evaluation of the local government reorganisation programme. This will consider the four withdrawn decisions, the decisions for 14 areas taken in July, and the further two areas where decisions have yet to be taken. Government are working at pace to consider these decisions.



Experiences of Local Government Reorganisation

Nick Henstock
Service Director Highways and Transport
West Northamptonshire Council



Introduction

WNC was formed by splitting Northamptonshire County Council and merging it with South Northamptonshire Council, Daventry District Council and Northampton Borough Council

The remainder of NCC merged with the remaining 4 district and boroughs

Vesting day was 1st April 2021



People

How do you decide who will work for which future council?

- Unhappy staff
- Imbalance in the team
- Lack of required skills and knowledge

Recruitment – lack of suitable candidates



Politics

We want our 'own Trainset'

- Need for new councils to be seen to be different
- Politicians less keen to co-operate cross border with other new unitaries
- New policies? Continue with the existing ones?



Contracts: Continuing past vesting day?

Split

- Creates the same people issues for your contractor/consultants
- What mechanism – Deed of variation? Is it legally possible?
- Potentially increase costs due to larger percentage overheads and lower purchasing power

Maintain and manage on behalf of

- Requires Inter Authority Agreements,
- Management of the contract managers
- Politicians don't have their own trainsets, do not feel in control etc



Contracts: Ending before / close to vesting day?

Do you have authority to procure on behalf of the future authorities?

What do you procure?

How do you gain agreement from the future authorities?

How do you try to retain economies of scale in those contracts?

Will you have capacity to manage those new contracts at vesting day bearing in mind the staffing issues you may have?



What did WNC do?

In general County Council staff were allotted their new authority based on their home postcode, District/Borough staff moved to the relevant unitary

WNC continued to act as LHA for Northamptonshire until September 2022 – Highways Disaggregation was delayed until then

Some team members were not happy with where they were to be working and the balance between the teams in each council was not great

Some volunteered to go to the “other side” as there was opportunity for progression



What did WNC do?

WNC managed the existing maintenance contract for both authorities for the first 18 months

Recruitment was difficult – new authorities had no track record – Northamptonshire was the 114 county

WNC Highways did not have a full management team until Spring 2023



What did WNC do?

Politically – kept apart, but worked together as officers under IAAs

Continued with our existing policies, but created a programme to deliver new LTP etc



What did WNC do?

Highways Maintenance Contract

NCC and then WNC procured 2 new identical contracts – one for each new authority

Procurement was complicated as it included the option for savings if a single contractor won both contracts

Incumbent had a poor reputation with politicians who were keen to ensure incumbent did not win the new contracts - Incumbent won both the new contracts

Highway service disaggregated at the same time as the new highway maintenance contracts commenced



What did WNC do?

Street Lighting PFI Contract

- WNC continue to manage this contract on behalf of both Authorities

On-Street Enforcement Contract

WNC continued with the NCC setup, NNC chose to utilise their existing wardens for the on-street presence



Questions & Discussion



The Future for LGR

Is this the end of local government reorganisation?

No, according to the LGA the Government wants to pause and reflect before implementing final decisions, and to ensure the programme is aligned with its wider ambitions to reform the state and devolve power to local communities. The Government remains committed to strong and sustainable local government, and to reorganisation where it can help simplify structures, strengthen local leadership and create councils that are better placed to deliver for their communities.

Single tier unitary authorities are the foundation for devolution and best placed to be partners with mayors and strategic authorities.

What does this mean for the devolution timetable and for councils, who cannot establish a combined Strategic Authority until after reorganisation completes?

This does not impact Government's timetable for devolution.

Unitary local government can help with the smooth functioning of strategic authorities, but it is not a prerequisite.

The Government's ambition is to ensure every area in England has, or is in the process of establishing, a strategic authority by the end of 2027, with strategic authorities in place everywhere by the end of 2028.



ADEPT LGR Toolkit document:

Navigating highway services through Local Government Reorganisation



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LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS with ADEPT

Navigating highway services through LGR

