

GREATER LINCOLNSHIRE
JOINT STRATEGIC OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

**Proposed merger of the Grimsby and North Lincolnshire Coroners Area with
the Lincolnshire Coroners Area to create a Greater Lincolnshire Coroners Area**

1. OBJECTIVE AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

1.1 This report provides the background and supporting information to enable a decision on whether to support the submission of an agreed joint business case from Lincolnshire County Council, North Lincolnshire Council and North East Lincolnshire Council to the HM Chief Coroner. The business case proposes the merger of the two existing coronial areas to create a single area, to be named Greater Lincolnshire which would be coterminous with the three authorities. The business case proposes a model on how the service would be structured, financed and governed by the three authorities.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 There are currently 88 coroner areas in England and Wales. The Chief Coroner and the Ministry of Justice have a joint long-term plan to reduce this to around 75. On the retirement of the Senior Coroner for Grimsby and North Lincolnshire in December 2018, North and North East Lincolnshire Councils were informed their area was too small to be maintained as a separate area and they should seek to merge with another area. Discussions have been on-going since this date, delays have occurred due to the Coronavirus pandemic. An alternative business case was submitted to the Chief Coroner by Hull and East Riding to create a Humberside Coroners Area in 2019.
- 2.2 The Chief Coroner has been informed of the collaborative approach to developing a Greater Lincolnshire option and therefore has currently stayed the decision process, prior to receiving the proposal attached, in summer 2021. Mergers are made by Statutory Instrument; the process is shown as appendix 1
- 2.3 This proposal has been developed with these underpinning principles -
1. No increase in cost to any of the three authorities

2. Phased approach to cost sharing to ensure 1.
3. Staff and service delivery (inquests) retained in current localities to ensure communities are served appropriately
4. Shared governance through committee and operational board. Including decisions on moving to next phase
5. Adoption of relevant IT and technological solutions to improve service to the public and drive efficiencies.

3. **DETAILS OF PROPOSAL**

3.1 The business case proforma has been provided by the Ministry of Justice. The draft business case is currently a working document. Key areas are drawn out as follows:

3.2 OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE

As well as the formal merger of the jurisdictions the three constituent authorities need to consider how they will fund, govern and operate a Coroners Service across the Greater Lincolnshire area. A number of proposals were examined:

A. Grimsby and North Lincolnshire coroner service merges with Hull and East Riding coroner service.

B. Sharing of Coronial Team only with Officers remaining under employ of North East Lincolnshire Council - this option would not gain any efficiencies and gain inefficiencies of two systems and processes. The Acting Senior Coroner for Lincolnshire is concerned about the viability of this option.

C. Lincolnshire CC becomes the lead authority with North East Lincolnshire Council staff transferred across to Lincolnshire CC and a phased approach to cost sharing is adopted, especially around contracts. The revised service would adopt a single operating process supported by a single software program. Governance of the merger would sit with the Joint Strategic Oversight Committee with a possible operational board with officers from all three authorities reporting to it.

It is recommended that option C is adopted; the following elements of this paper are based on option C.

3.3 FINANCE

A detailed breakdown of current and future financing has been analysed in preparation for this report, which shows that whilst combining the staff structures but sharing a Senior Coroner a small total saving (£52,000) will be made. Any savings will be shared on a per capita basis. The existing and proposed staff structures are shown in Appendix 2. Due to the disparity between current funding and contractual models it is recommended that a phased approach to shared financing is taken with oversight from the governance boards advising on readiness to move to next phase.

Phase 1

- All staffing (Coroners and officers) costs to be covered as per current split 76% /24% to ensure no party pays more than currently.
- Contracted services (PM, Removals, Transfers and Storage) to remain as is.

Phase 2

- Move to a per capita split for all staffing costs
- Contracted services (PM, Removals, Transfers and Storage) to remain as is.

Phase 3

- Per capita split for all staffing costs and contracted services. Contracted services to have been fully reviewed and re tendered.
-

4. **RESOURCE AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Resources as described above

4.2 Legal aspects of the merger are covered by parliamentary process. However once agreed a form of "shared service agreement" will be utilised across the three councils.

5. **RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES (INCLUDE EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT IF RELEVANT)**

5.1 There is a need to ensure that any cost pressures on any both of the services are identified and accounted for in a final cost share agreement.

5.2 This is a formal merger that is not easily dissolved.

5.3 Time taken to appoint permanent Senior Coroner is putting pressure on both services.

5.4 Both current areas dealing with backlog of jury inquests due to Covid.

5.5 There may be some significant service changes up to the point of merger, such as the current tendering exercise being carried out by Lincolnshire County Council for its post mortem services.

6. CONSULTATION/ENGAGEMENT

6.1 Informal consultation with key stakeholders will form the next part of this process. It is proposed that a short consultation by letter will be carried out with key stakeholders, to gather their views on the Greater Lincolnshire proposal. Wording of letter to be agreed to ensure the matter is not construed as a predetermination of any formal decision. Once a business case has been agreed with the Chief Coroner his office conducts a formal consultation.

7. GOVERNANCE – DECISION(S) FOR MEMBER COUNCIL'S REQUIRED (in accordance with the Joint Committee's Terms of Reference).

7.1 This proposal meets the terms of reference set for the Joint Committee in that it promotes greater levels of collaboration, alignment and integration of upper tier services for the benefit of Greater Lincolnshire.

7.2 Once consensus has been reached then the decision to submit the proposal in the agreed format should be taken through formal decision and scrutiny processes in each council.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

1) To adopt Option C as to a preferred model for a merged coronial service for Lincolnshire County Council, North Lincolnshire Council and North East Lincolnshire Council

2) To agree to jointly submit the merger business case to HM Chief Coroner for England and Wales on this basis including the model and phasing of shared financial arrangements.

3) To agree that the Joint Oversight Committee oversees the governance of this merger supported by an operational board.

Reasons for recommendations

1) The recommendations meet the requirements that the Chief Coroner placed on North and North East Lincolnshire in 2018 to merge with another area.

2) The proposal provides a workable and sustainable option to serve the duties placed on each local authority by section 24 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: RESOURCES LINCOLNSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Address:

Lincolnshire County Council,

County Offices, Newland,

Lincoln,

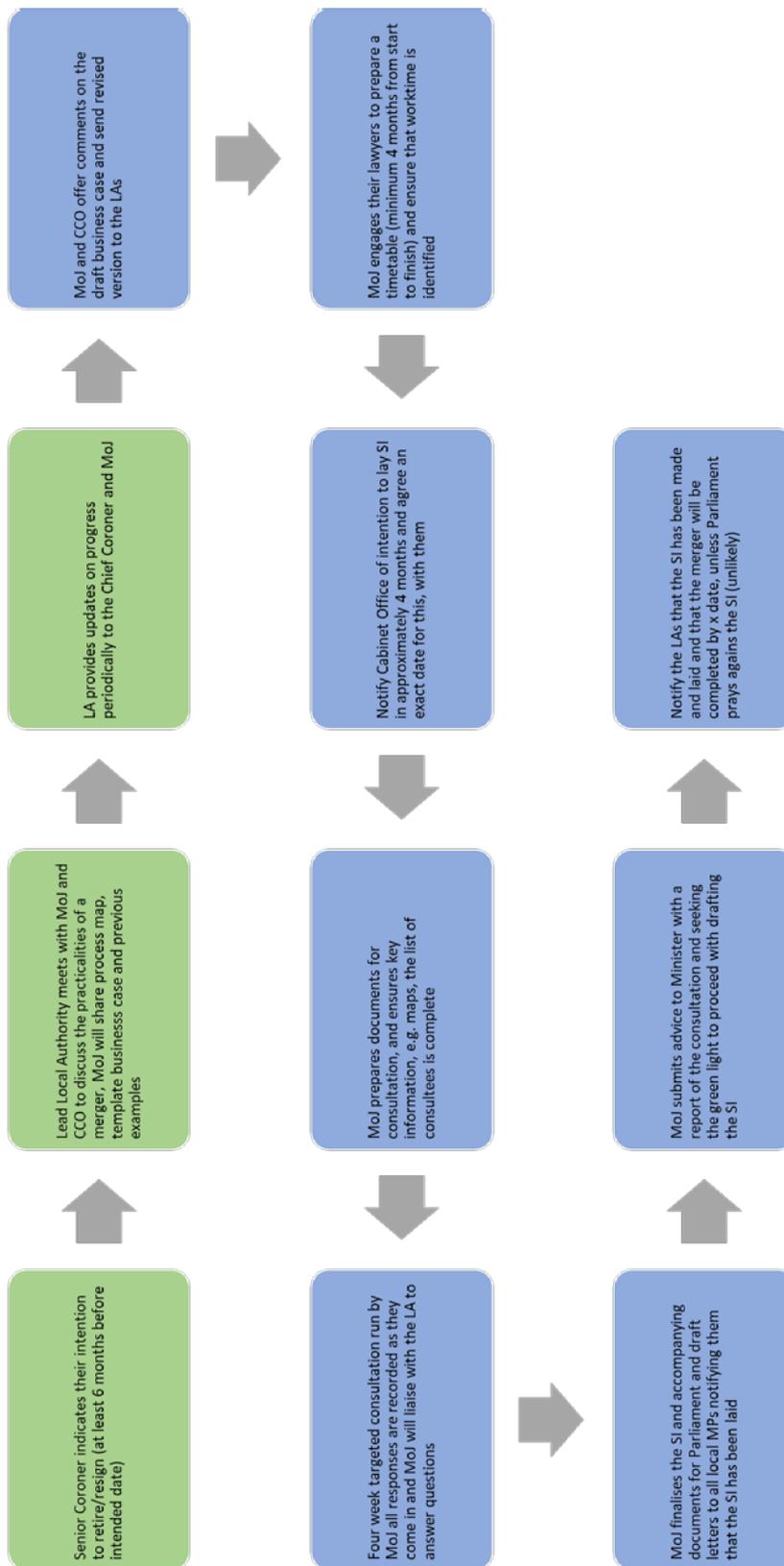
Post Code: LN1 1YL

Author: Sara Barry

Date: 8/6/2021

Background Papers used in the preparation of this report - Nil

Appendix 1 Step by Step Guide to Coronial Merger Process



Appendix 2 Staffing structure current and proposed

NE Lincs & Grimsby	Lincolnshire	Proposed Greater Lincolnshire
1 x Acting Senior Coroner PT 0.5fte	1 x Senior Coroner	1 x Senior Coroner
	1 x Area Coroner	1 x Area Coroner
2 x Assistant Coroner PT 12 days pa (1 vacancy)	4 x Assistant Coroners (1 vacancy)	6 x Assistant Coroners
	1 x Coroners Manager	1 x Coroners Manager
		1 x Senior Coroners Officer
3.05 fte Coroners Officers	7.5 fte Coroners Officers	9.5 x Coroners Officers
	0.8 x Coroners Development Officer	0.8 x Coroners Development Officer
1 x Coroners Administrator FT	4 x Business Support	5 x Business Support