Cratus group

APPENDIX 6

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Engagement Report on behalf of North Kesteven and South Kesteven District Councils

Executive Summary

The autumn 2025 public engagement exercise on local government reorganisation in Lincolnshire, undertaken on behalf of North and South Kesteven District Councils, generated a total of 5,576 survey responses between 15 September and 15 October 2025.

The survey achieved broad regional participation, with approximately two-thirds of responses coming from residents of North Kesteven (3,012 participants), while South Kesteven contributed 816 responses and Rutland 446. Smaller, but still meaningful numbers were received from Lincoln, South Holland and West Lindsey. This strong overall response demonstrates a significant local interest in how future council arrangements could affect people particularly relating to representation, service delivery, and community identity in Lincolnshire.

The engagement sought to understand residents and local stakeholders' priorities, values, and perceptions of local identity, accessibility, and service quality, and to provide a robust evidence base to inform future consideration of local government structures. It combined a range of engagement techniques, including a digital survey, focus groups to dive deeper into public sentiment, and a series of in-person engagement events, with key stakeholders within the community also invited to share their views.

Overall, the findings reveal communities that are deeply proud of where they live and that place strong emphasis on local connection, responsiveness, and the quality of everyday public services. Across the districts, residents expressed clear expectations that local government should be straightforward, visible, and transparent in how it communicates and delivers. While some participants mentioned that reform could improve coordination and efficiency, others expressed concerns about the potential loss of local voice, representation, and accountability. The responses reveal a balance between openness to improvement and caution about changes that might create distance between councils and the people they serve.

A. Top resident priorities

Reliable frontline services
Residents consistently emphasised the importance of dependable, everyday services that directly affect quality of life. When asked which areas councils should prioritise, the most frequently selected were:

- Roads and pavements (1,644 responses)
- Local economic growth (1,334 responses)
- The environment (1,303 responses)
- Adult and children's social care (874 responses)
- Waste and recycling (778 responses)
- Housing (534 responses)
- Leisure, arts and wellbeing (376 responses)
- Community activities (178 responses)

The immediate and reliable delivery of infrastructure maintenance, particularly roads and pavements, was rated as the highest priority, reflecting residents' focus on tangible improvements that demonstrate effective local management.

At the same time, many participants identified local economic growth as a critical longer-term priority, viewing it as the main driver of employment, prosperity, and community wellbeing. The environment also featured prominently, reflecting widespread interest in green spaces, climate action, and the sustainability of future development.

Local identity and voice
Respondents rated the importance of feeling that their council is local to their area at an average of 83 out of 100, showing a strong sense of attachment to place. Participants often described "local" as meaning accessible, accountable, and visible rather than simply geographical. For many, the idea of "local government" is defined by familiarity, responsiveness, and community presence.

Residents repeatedly emphasised that:

- Decision-making should remain close to the communities it affects.
- Councils should maintain a visible and approachable presence within their local areas.
- Ward-level representation, local forums & Parish Councils play an important role in ensuring accountability and preserving voice.

This feedback reflects a strong belief that democratic representation should remain personal, grounded, and connected to the everyday experience of residents. Maintaining proximity in decision-making is seen as essential to public trust and confidence in local government.

Clarity and accountability
There was strong support for structures that are simpler and easier to navigate, alongside improved communication about who delivers specific services. Respondents consistently called for:

- Clearer lines of responsibility and service ownership.
- More transparent decision-making and spending.
- Better public information on how to access the right service at the right time.

The desire for greater clarity reflects residents' emphasis on practicality and openness. Many expressed the view that being able to understand how decisions are made is as important as the decisions themselves.

Access and wellbeing
When asked what qualities they most value in councils, respondents most often highlighted the importance of having a local voice for residents and accountability and did not see a council's key role as being to support wellbeing.

B. Broader themes

Strong local attachment
 Residents expressed pride in their communities and appreciation for their local environments, amenities, and social connections, which reflect the rural nature of the area. People valued the distinctive character of their towns and villages and want those identities to remain visible and protected in any future changes.

Concerns about scale and centralisation
Many participants voiced apprehension about decision-making becoming more distant under larger structures. Mentions of Lincoln often reflected perceptions that resources and attention could become concentrated in a single area, potentially at the expense of smaller or rural communities.

Mixed views on reorganisation
While some respondents acknowledged that a streamlined structure might reduce duplication and improve efficiency, others were unconvinced that these benefits would be realised in practice. Many wanted to understand how reorganisation would work day-to-day, how services would be delivered, and how local representation would be maintained through councillors and town & parish councils.

Community priorities and daily experience
Across open-text responses, residents repeatedly made very tangible and specific comments around roads, waste and recycling, social care, and council tax. This points towards a need to ensure the basic services and daily touchpoints local people have with local authorities are maintained and re-assured under any new governance model.

C. Challenges and opportunities

The engagement identified a number of issues that would need to be addressed in any future consideration of Local Government Reform:

- **Representation:** Residents want reassurance that local voices will continue to be heard, particularly those from smaller and rural communities.
- **Fairness:** Some participants expressed concern about unequal investment across Lincolnshire, with perceptions that certain areas may receive disproportionate attention or funding.
- **Understanding:** A recurring theme was confusion about how reorganisation might affect taxation, service delivery, or accountability. Clearer information and evidence will be needed to build understanding and trust.
- **Trust:** A degree of scepticism remains about whether structural reform automatically leads to better services or financial savings. Building confidence will require transparency, honest communication, and a realistic discussion of both the benefits and limits of reform in terms local people can understand.

In summary, the engagement presents a consistent picture of residents who value dependable services, open communication, and councils that remain close and responsive to their communities. People are open to the idea of improving coordination and efficiency but want clear reassurance that any future arrangements will protect local character, accessibility, and representation.

The findings provide a comprehensive evidence base to inform future discussions about local government reorganisation in Lincolnshire. They show that any proposed model must balance the practical need for effective service delivery with the emotional and cultural importance of local identity and trust, ensuring that reform strengthens rather than distances the connection between councils and the people they serve.

Introduction

In response to the Government's February 2025 request for councils to submit proposals for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), North and South Kesteven District Councils have worked collaboratively to develop a joint approach for the Greater Lincolnshire LGR invitation area and neighbouring Rutland.

This follows the Government's announcement of a nationwide programme to replace two-tier county and district councils, with fewer, larger unitary authorities each ideally serving populations of at least 500,000.

To inform their final proposal (due 28 November 2025) the two councils commissioned Cratus Group to support a joint public engagement exercise, including a short anonymous survey, to gather views from residents and businesses across the region.

This engagement programme aimed to understand what people value most about their communities, the importance of local identity in council structures, and priorities for future council functions. It complemented face-to-face engagements by the council at a range of events over the summer, and was designed to be inclusive, accessible and easy to engage with.

The engagement process did not ask participants to select a preferred model of reorganisation, in line with Government guidance. Instead, it focused on understanding community priorities, values, and concerns, and how these relate to policy themes underpinning LGR and devolution. The feedback gathered will form part of the essential evidence base for the councils' submission, alongside demographic data and strategic analysis.

Potential options under consideration include the creation of one large unitary council for Lincolnshire, the expansion of Lincoln City, or the formation of two or three new councils, possibly involving mergers between North Kesteven, South Kesteven, South Holland, and Rutland. The final decision will be made by the Government, with outcomes expected in Summer 2026.

Methodology

A hybrid engagement approach was adopted, combining digital and in-person activity to ensure the survey reached a broad cross-section of residents, businesses, and community stakeholders across North and South Kesteven and the wider Greater Lincolnshire and Rutland area. In line with the principle of "meeting people where they are," the engagement process was designed to be inclusive, accessible, and transparent, offering both online and face-to-face opportunities for participation.

The engagement ran from 15 September to 15 October 2025, following early outreach activity during the summer. The survey and engagement materials were produced jointly by North Kesteven and South Kesteven District Councils, supported by Cratus Group, and hosted on the Give My View platform as the main digital tool to conduct the survey.

Events and engagement

To complement the online engagement and ensure the survey reached a wide and representative audience, a programme of in-person events and local briefings was undertaken across the two districts. These were held at accessible, high-footfall locations and designed to encourage informal, open conversations with residents about the future of local government in Lincolnshire.

Engagement activity began in July at the Heckington Show, the largest village show in England, attracting more than 30,000 visitors. The councils hosted an engagement stand throughout the two-day event, which provided an opportunity to raise early awareness of the engagement and discuss the LGR process directly with residents. Feedback from the show helped inform the tone and focus of later engagement, particularly the emphasis on local identity and service accessibility.

During the formal engagement period in autumn 2025, several community engagement sessions were delivered across South Kesteven:

- 24 September 2025 – Deepings Community Centre – approximately 15 conversations
- 26 September 2025 – Stamford Market – approximately 90 conversations
- 29 September 2025 – Grantham (SK House) – approximately 5 conversations.
- 2 October 2025 – Bourne Market – approximately 50 conversations.
- 6 October 2025 – Stamford Arts Centre - approximately 20 conversations.
- 11 October 2025 – Grantham Market – approximately 60 conversations.

Key outcomes from events:

- Direct face-to-face engagement with circa 250 residents across North and South Kesteven.
- Feedback gathered at each session informed later communication and targeting activity.

Parish Councils

Both councils engaged extensively with parish and town councils. A series of briefings were held for local representatives, while individual district councillors also discussed reorganisation at their own local parish meetings.

In addition, North and South Kesteven jointly promoted the public engagement on LGR at the Lincolnshire Association of Local Councils (LALC) Conference, held at the Lincolnshire Showground on 16 July 2025. Officers held detailed discussions with a wide range of parish clerks and councillors, reinforcing the importance of local voice in any future governance model.

Student Councils

To capture younger perspectives, both councils hosted LGR sessions with their respective Student Councils, attended by young people from local secondary schools and sixth forms. The discussions explored what young residents value most about their communities and what they expect from local government in the future.

This engagement provided valuable insight into the views of a demographic often underrepresented in traditional consultations, highlighting the importance of accessibility, fairness, and environmental sustainability in shaping future council structures.

Community and partner engagement

The councils also engaged with key local networks through the North Kesteven District Council Community Development Partnership. A dedicated LGR engagement session was held on 16 July 2025, attended by representatives from major local institutions and organisations, including:

- Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership
- Robert Carre Trust (local secondary schools' Academy Trust)
- The Hub (formerly the National Centre for Craft & Design)
- Lincolnshire Police (local division)
- We Are Bridge
- Hill Holt Wood
- Lincolnshire Community Foundation
- Alive Church
- Grantham College
- Voluntary Centre Services
- Citizen's Advice Mid-Lincs
- Lincs YMCA
- New Life Church
- Lincolnshire Co-op

This event enabled the councils to hear directly from community, education, business, faith, and voluntary sector partners. Conversations centred on the importance of maintaining local representation, ensuring equitable access to services, and protecting community partnerships during any potential reorganisation process.

Outreach and engagement also took place with all local councils, MPs, businesses, schools, NHS, policing bodies, RAF sites, Anglian Water, faith groups and charities.

Focus groups

Two focus group discussions were held with residents from across Lincolnshire and Rutland to explore awareness, priorities, and opinions regarding the potential reorganisation of local government. Using a professional recruitment company, six participants were selected for each group. The groups were designed to have people from different districts across the area and to have a mix of demographics in terms of age, employment type, household income, and to come from a mix of urban and rural parts of the county.

The discussion guide is provided in Appendix A.

Survey

The primary mechanism for engagement was an online survey, open between 15 September and 15 October 2025, hosted on the Give My View platform. The survey included a mixture of closed and open-ended questions, enabling participants to provide both quantitative and qualitative feedback on priorities, values, and perceptions of local government.

Questions explored local identity, service priorities, accountability, and perceptions of what it means for a council to feel "local". Demographic and location-based questions, including full postcodes, enabled detailed geographic analysis of responses across both districts and the wider area.

To ensure strong participation across all communities, a coordinated promotional strategy was implemented:

- **Targeted social media advertising** directed respondents to the survey, with live adjustments in focus of marketing budgets to boost participation in lower-responding areas.
- **Council websites, press releases, and newsletters** provided background information and linked directly to the online platform.
- **Local and stakeholder networks**—including parish councils, community groups, and local businesses—were used to share the survey and encourage participation.

By the close of the survey 5,556 responses had been received, demonstrating a high level of engagement for a district-level exercise.

The survey was also published on both websites for North and South Kesteven respectively, with an accompanying press release to provide context to residents.

Data collection

Data was securely stored and analysed, with weekly snapshot reports provided throughout the engagement process and a comprehensive final report delivered in October 2025. All this data has been considered in the conclusions of this report.

Questions

The survey featured a blend of question styles to capture both quantitative and qualitative insights. It began with simple location-based questions to establish where respondents live and work, followed by postcode entry to link answers to specific areas.

Multiple-choice and image-based questions explored feelings of belonging and local connection, while a slider scale measured how important it is for residents that their council feels local. Ranking and average-scoring questions assessed the perceived importance of different council functions and services, helping to identify overall priorities.

Open-ended questions invited respondents to describe what they value about their area, suggest additional service priorities, and provide broader reflections on local government reorganisation in their own words.

The questions are available at Appendix B.

Focus Group Findings

Key Themes

Awareness and local identity

Most participants admitted limited understanding of how local government is structured or which council serves them. People tended to identify more with their immediate town or village than with the county or district but mentioned travelling across district and county boundaries a lot for leisure or work:

- *"I wouldn't say that I even know where any of the county boundaries are – it all feels kind of as one."*
- *"I've lived here 40 years, but I still identify more as a Yorkshire person."*
- *"I love the countryside and the sense of community."*
- *"It feels very rural, but I can get to London in an hour"*

However, there was a clear sense of community pride and attachment to local surroundings, particularly among those in smaller or rural areas.

Experiences with councils

Participants' direct experiences of councils varied widely. Parish or town councillors were often praised for visibility and responsiveness, while district and county-level services felt more distant:

- *"Our parish councillor is brilliant – he's really active on social media so we always know what's going on."*
- *"I report fly-tipping all the time. To their credit, the council are very good at clearing it."*
- *"I was quite impressed with the County Council when we needed support for an elderly family member."*
- *"The local tip is really well run; the staff are friendly and helpful."*

Positive experiences were most common where residents could see prompt, visible outcomes.

Service priorities

When asked to choose two priorities from a list of eight key services, residents most frequently highlighted. Adult and children's social care, Roads, transport, and infrastructure, Environmental protection and Local economic growth

- *"Adult social care is something everybody will rely on at some point."*
- *"We should be investing more in local people who want to start their own businesses."*
- *"There's been so much road work done recently, really improving the area."*
- *"You can see grants being given to local shops to make them look better, that's positive."*

One person raised the point that some services that were previously council-run were no longer such as community libraries. The groups then had a chance to add items to the list of things councils should prioritise. Specific access to services in rural areas and a decline in public transport links were raised, as was an increase in policing.

Council tax and value for money

Most residents said they would accept modest increases in Council Tax if spending were transparent and fair. Several criticised perceived inequalities between regions and outdated property banding:

- *"Happy to pay more if it's fair and efficiently spent."*
- *"It feels like the system hasn't moved with the modern world. We're paying the same as people in central London."*

Some acknowledged improvements or fairness in particular services, while others questioned why rural areas pay the same or more yet receive fewer services. One said that some elements seen as essential would be worth extra funding such as policing or waste collection, but leisure and arts were not essential and would not be worth spending extra on. (ACKNOWLEDGE THIS WERE VIEWS FROM ONE PARTICIPANT FROM FOCUS GROUP)

Views on reorganisation

The proposed creation of a single county-wide council was met with some scepticism. Participants feared that local voices would be lost, rural areas overlooked, and costs would outweigh benefits.

A few saw potential advantages in simplicity and reduced duplication, but most doubted real savings would be achieved.

- *"Having one council might make it clearer who to contact, one place to go rather than several."*
- *"It potentially could save money."*
- *"If they can make it simpler and still keep it local, that would be a good thing."*
- *"It's a terrible idea; Lincolnshire is too big and too different."*
- *"All the money would end up in Lincoln; everywhere else would lose out."*
- *"My concern was the cost of changing all of this"*

A representative from Rutland said they leaned towards Rutland joining a South Lincolnshire grouping rather than a wider Lincolnshire group.

Alternative proposals for smaller unitary councils were met with a better reception, albeit with continued scepticism about any reorganisation at all. There were concerns about smaller councils meaning disruption to existing county council services.

- *"We are the biggest county. It probably would make sense to split it into two to make it more manageable."*
- *"It will lead to service disruption and fragmentation of the existing services like adult and children's services, education."*
- *"There probably would be some short-term disruption, but at the end of the day, it might be less than the problems caused by having one enormous council."*

Communication and Trust

Residents emphasised poor communication from councils and indicated a low trust in both local and national decision-making.

- *"If communication is poor now, how will it work on a bigger scale?"*

- *"I'd like the council to really slow down and involve residents properly before making any big decisions."*
- *"It's nice to actually be asked, usually we just hear about it after it's decided."*
- *"I'm a bit of a cynic and I have the feeling that nothing that we say is going to make an awful lot of difference"*

Some stressed the need for resident involvement and expressed cynicism about whether public views would influence the outcome at all.

Overall Summary

While not particularly invested in their individual councils, participants were wary of the reorganisation, especially seeing Lincolnshire as too big an area to be effective. This was raised with concern over a rural urban divide.

They prioritised visible, everyday service delivery over efficiency and money saving. They called for clearer information, transparency in spending, and genuine opportunities to shape future decisions.

Survey Results

Demographics

The opening questions of the survey were designed to build up a basic demographic profile of respondents, with questions on geography and connection to the area through work or residency.

Do you live in Greater Lincolnshire or Rutland?

Total responses: 5,575

- **Yes:** 5,117
- **No:** 458

This question aimed to qualify whether respondents lived within the Greater Lincolnshire and Rutland area, helping to verify the geographical focus of the engagement and ensure that local voices were well represented in the findings.
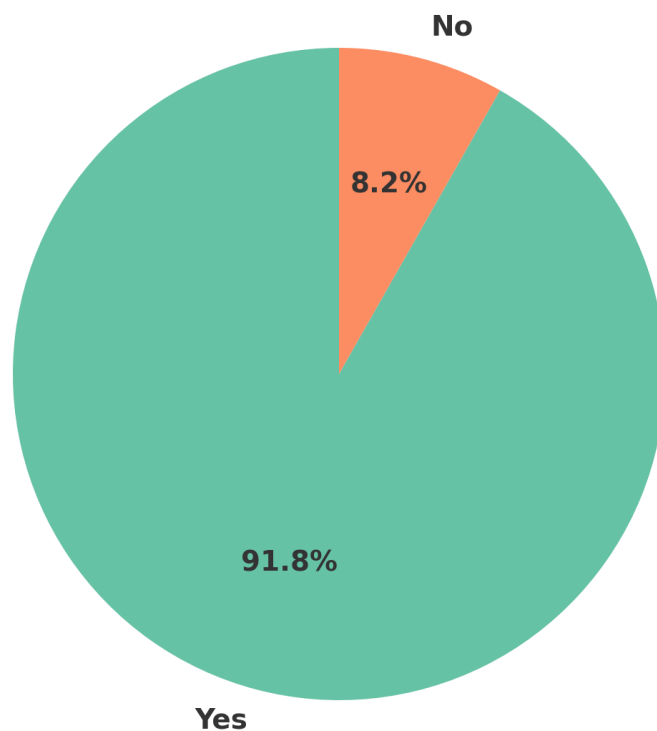

Figure 1

This demonstrates that the engagement successfully reached its target audience and that the results largely reflect the views of residents who are directly affected by potential local government reorganisation.

Do you work in Greater Lincolnshire or Rutland?

The second demographic question was asked to qualify whether a participant who didn't live in the area worked there instead. This helped to validate their stake within the region and unlock the remainder of the survey, ensuring that responses represented people with a genuine local connection.

A total of 443 responses were recorded for this question. Of these, 24.8% (110 people) reported that they work within Greater Lincolnshire or Rutland, while 75.2% (333 people) said they do not.

The lower number of responses reflects the survey's design, where only those who lived outside the area were shown this question. This means the results represent a smaller subset of participants with employment or professional links to the region, complementing the much larger group of resident respondents.

Together, these questions confirm that the engagement reached a predominantly local audience, with most participants living in the Greater Lincolnshire or Rutland area and a smaller, relevant group contributing from a workplace or professional connection within the region.

What is your full postcode?

As a final demographic capture, we collected postcode data to identify where respondents live so that feedback could be accurately linked to specific local areas. Collecting postcode data allowed the analysis to map responses geographically, showing how views and priorities differed across North Kesteven, South Kesteven, and neighbouring districts.

4,556 people shared their postcodes, although not all gave the full postcode and so could not be directly allocated to the individual districts. Below is a breakdown of numbers of postcodes from each area, as best deduced from the information given.

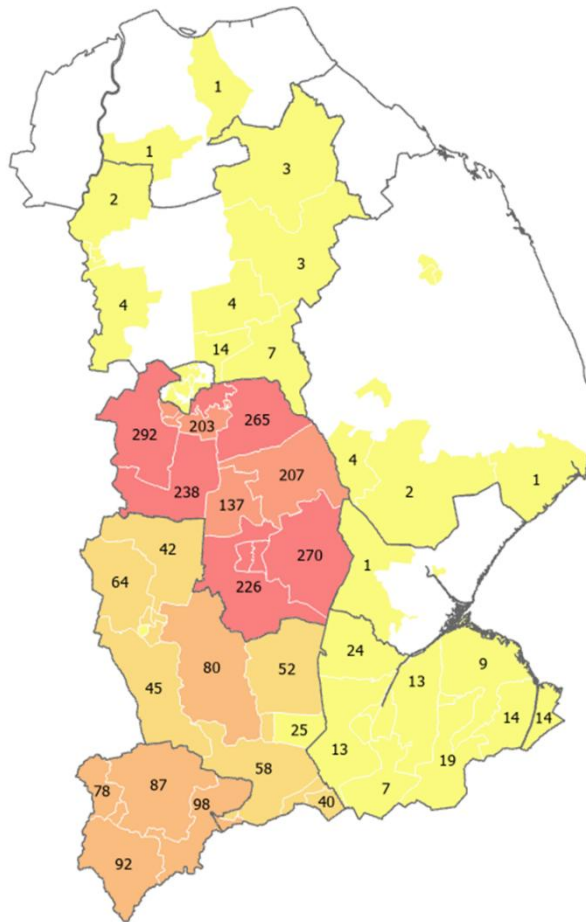| Area	Count
North Kesteven	3012
South Kesteven	816
Rutland	446
South Holland	171
West Lindsey	40
Lincolnshire	25
Lincoln	18
East Lindsey	14
Neighbouring Counties	14
Total	**4556**

Figure 2

The postcode data shows that participation was concentrated in North Kesteven, which accounted for 3,012 responses (around two-thirds of the total).

South Kesteven provided the second-largest number of responses, with 816 submissions (18%), while Rutland contributed 446 (10%). Smaller numbers came from South Holland (171 responses) and West Lindsey (40), alongside a small number of entries from Lincoln, East Lindsey, and surrounding authorities such as Melton and Harborough.

Overall, the data indicates that the engagement reached a broad geographic spread but was heavily weighted toward the two partner districts North and South Kesteven, which together made up over 80% of all responses. This strong representation from the target areas provides a reliable basis for understanding local priorities while also capturing useful insight from neighbouring districts.

Local area and community

What do you value most about your area?

This open text question sought to understand what residents most appreciate about their local area, revealing the qualities, values, and experiences that define their sense of place and community.

Figure 3

3,662 answered this question, and the most frequently mentioned terms are detailed in the above wordcloud. The feedback from residents clearly highlights the deep connection people feel to their local environment and community.

Countryside, green space and nature was the top highlighted theme (1,645 comments). The most frequently mentioned words countryside, local, community, rural, and quiet show that residents strongly value the natural landscape, open green spaces, and the peaceful, rural character of their area.

A second major theme identified was the importance of community and belonging (784 comments), with words like village, friendly, people, and local indicate that residents appreciate the more rural nature of the area, and sense of neighbourliness and social cohesion within their towns and parishes.

Lesser mentioned but still important points mentioned reliable local services such as shops and councils and good connectivity and access to other areas.

Which of these most make you feel part of your community?

The question aimed to understand what helps residents feel connected to their community by identifying the people, activities, and networks that contribute to a sense of belonging. It explored whether residents find connection mainly through personal relationships and social interaction or through participation in local events, groups, and community life. People had a chance to select two options, and the number of people who chose each option as one of their choices are shown in the figure below.
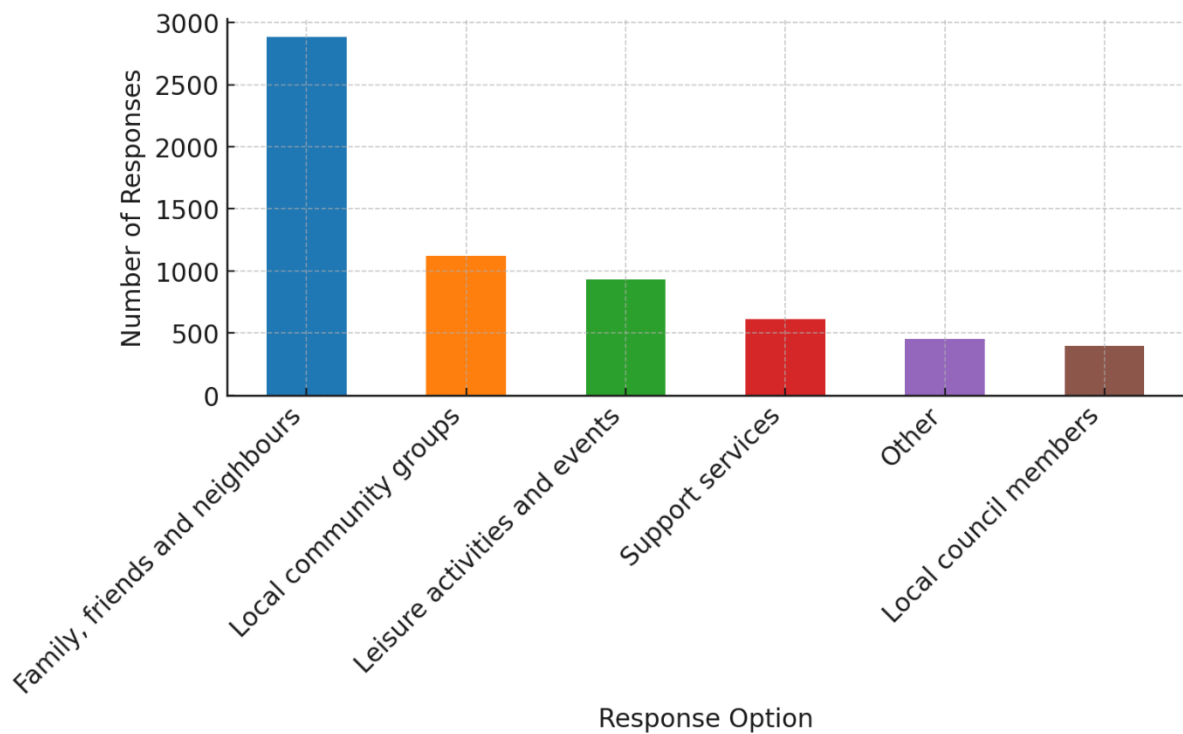
Figure 4

Most residents feel most connected to their community through personal relationships family, friends, and neighbours while community groups and local events also play a significant role in fostering belonging. Engagement through support services and council members is less common, suggesting that formal or institutional ties are secondary to social and community-based connections.

Residents also had the option to select "Other" and describe additional elements that help them feel part of their community which 391 people chose to do. These responses mainly comprised further details on options in the questions, with specific comments on things like neighbours or specific local groups and clubs. Others highlighted factors such as workplace connections, volunteering, local businesses, and informal networks, with a few noting feelings of disconnection or limited sense of community.

This suggests that while most people find belonging through family, friends, and local groups, others draw their sense of community from different social or professional connections within Lincolnshire.

Where do you feel most connected to?

The question was designed to understand the geographical level at which residents feel the strongest sense of identity and belonging. It aimed to reveal whether people identify most with their immediate neighbourhood, their town or village, their wider district, or the county as a whole.

This helps indicate how "local" people's sense of community truly is, which is particularly relevant when considering the potential impacts of local government reorganisation on representation and identity.
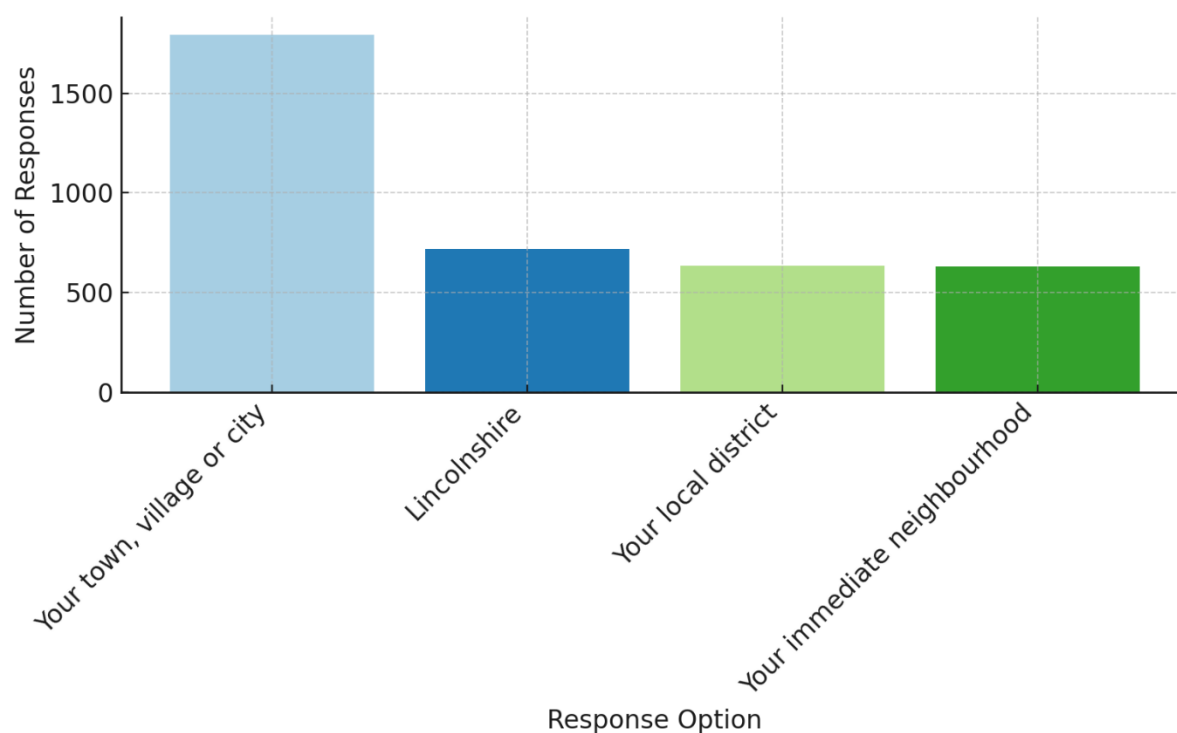
Figure 5

The results show that 1,792 respondents (57%) feel most connected to their town, village, or city, highlighting the importance of place-based identity at a local level. A smaller proportion, 718 people (23%), identify most with Lincolnshire, while 636 (10%) feel most connected to their district, and 632 (10%) to their immediate neighbourhood.

The data points towards a suggests a strong attachment to local places, with many identifying more with their town, village, or parish than within Lincolnshire.

These figures suggest that residents' sense of belonging is strongest within recognisable local communities rather than larger administrative areas. While some connection to the county level exists, most people associate community and identity with the places where they live and interact daily.

Local Councils

How important is it to feel that your council is local to your area?

This question was designed to measure how strongly residents value a sense of locality in their relationship with local government. It aimed to capture the importance people place on having a council that feels close, accessible, and representative of their community.

Participants were met with a sliding scale representing the value 0–100 scale, to provide a clear indication of intensity of feeling, with the numbers of people who selected each bracket shown in the figure below.
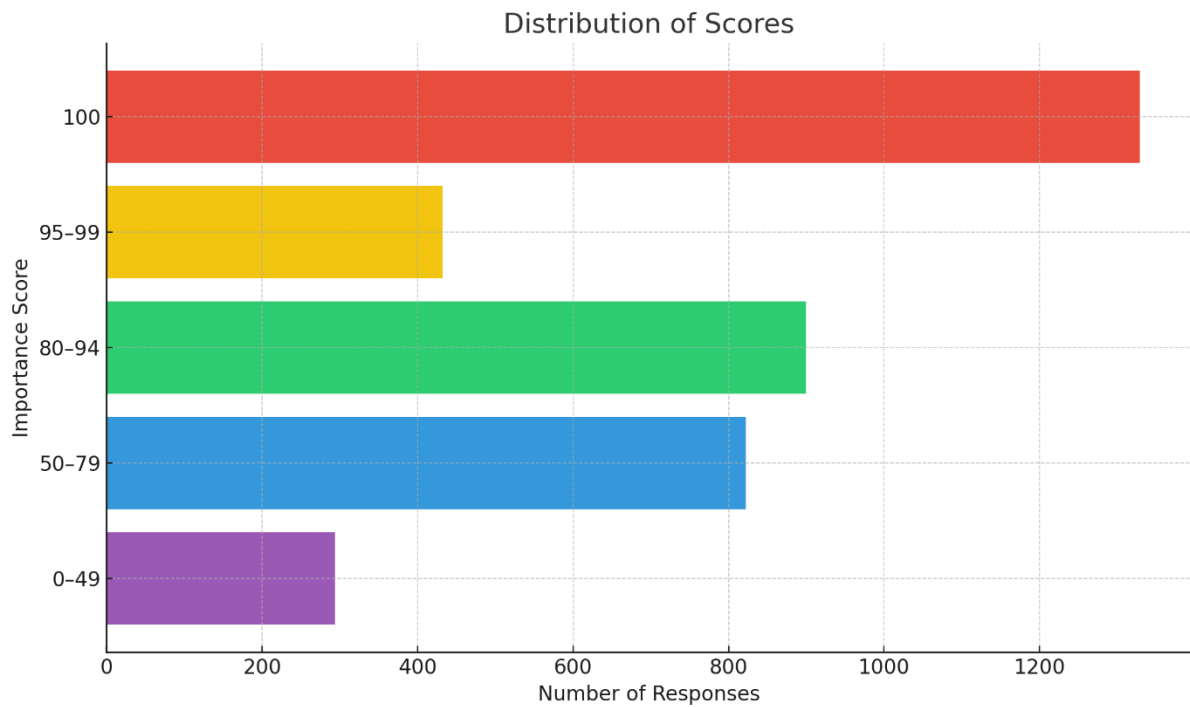
Figure 6

The results show that residents place very high importance on their council feeling local to their area, with an average choice of 83 out of 100 importance. Most responses are clustered at the upper end of the scale, with three-quarters of respondents rating this 75 or above and nearly half giving scores close to 100.

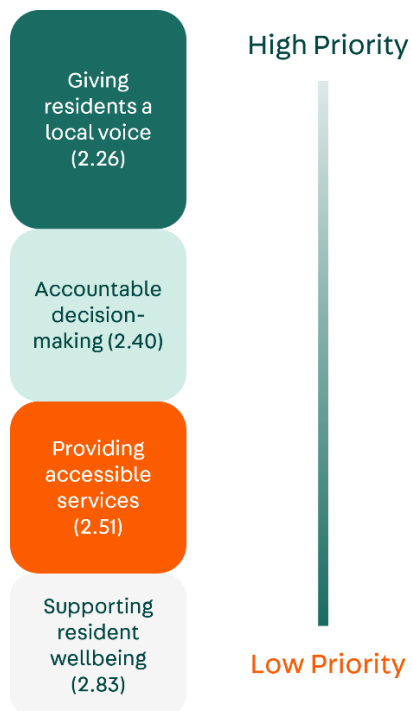Which do you think are the most and least important elements of local councils?

Figure 7

This question was intended to understand which elements of their local council residents consider most important, asking them to rank four options in order of importance.

The overall ratings are shown above, giving each item an average score where the average score given is shown for each choice, where 1 was the highest priority and 4 the lowest. In terms of the top ranking, 1,222 people chose 'local voice' closely followed by 'accountable decision-making' (1,076) while only 486 chose 'resident wellbeing.'

This shows residents want strong councils that advocate for them and act with integrity, rather than focusing on caring for residents.

Which services should future councils prioritise most?

This was a multiple-choice question designed to identify which local services residents believe should be the highest priority for future councils. It aimed to understand which services people view as most essential and that councils must be able to show how LGR will tangibly improve or at least maintain existing levels of service.

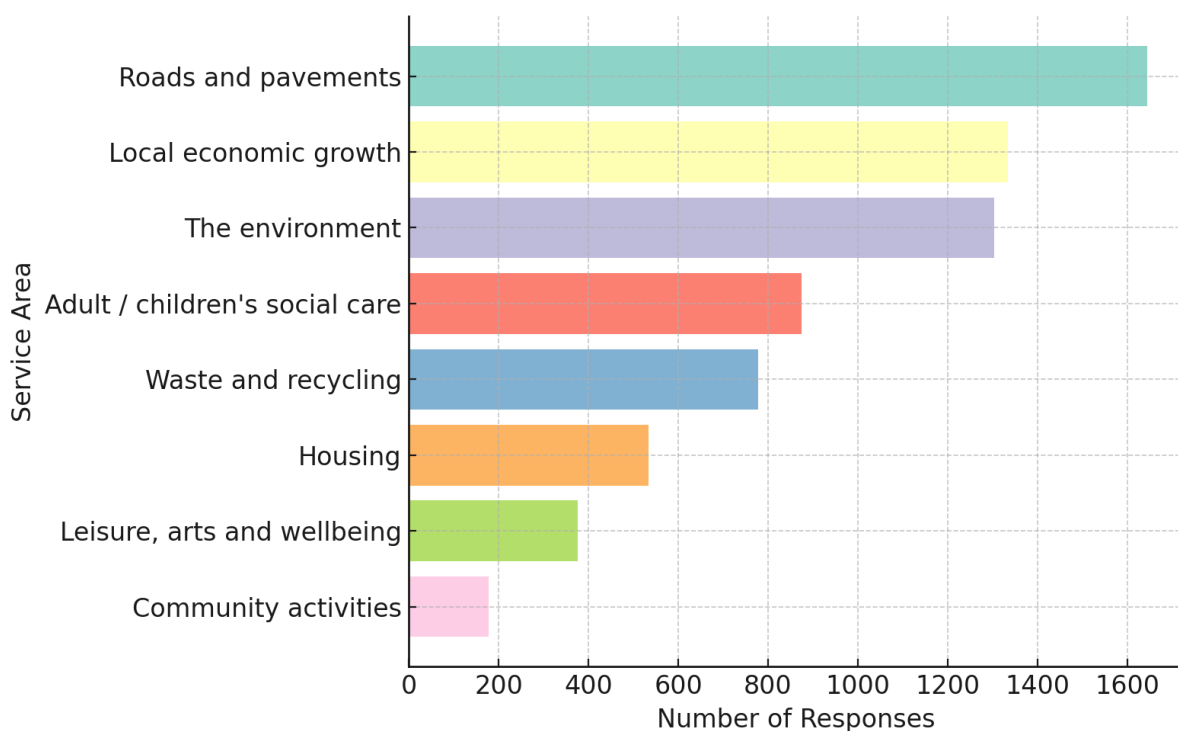The top priorities identified are shown in the chart below.

Figure 8

The immediate and visible delivery of services such as roads and pavements was rated as the highest priority, reflecting residents' desire for dependable maintenance and infrastructure that directly supports daily life.

At the same time, local economic growth was recognised a strong driver of long-term wellbeing, underpinning employment, prosperity, and the resilience of local communities being top of council priorities.

The environment also scored very highly in responses, reflecting the importance of the county's rural setting which came up frequently in qualitative responses in other questions.

Are there any other services you feel should be prioritised?

The next question gave participants the opportunity to identify other service areas which they felt should form a priority.

This analysis is from the open-ended question and brings together all mentions of services which residents brought up in their answers. Many of these related to services mentioned in the previous multiple-choice question, showing that these are important enough to residents to warrant extra detail and emphasis.

 The findings reflect a strong focus on essential everyday services alongside wider social and environmental concerns.

Health and social care (1,181 mentions) came up, with specific mentions of local access to GPs and hospitals, and the need for support for older people:

- *"Localised health & social care"*
- *"Doctors and well being for older residents"*

Public Transport was the next most mentioned topic (827 mentions), despite neither bus nor rail being council-led services in Lincolnshire, which shows how residents are not fully aware of where responsibilities lie:

- *"Improved transport links for rural areas"*
- *"If the Mayor goes ahead with her stated aim of bringing in Bus Franchising, I think Local Councils should be involved in this helping to coordinate and facilitate services."*

Leisure and Culture (800 mentions) had people mentioning leisure centres closing down and called for protection of local heritage sites and more community hubs:

- *"Community facilities, such as libraries and leisure centres."*
- *"Leisure, arts, & culture to ensure fair non-commercialised provision"*

Roads and Transport Infrastructure (563 mentions) came up, with road maintenance and potholes, speed limits and traffic safety, parking and congestion and accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists:

- *"Making sure traffic keeps to the speed limits in village and town areas"*
- *"Pot holes!!!!!!!!"*

Planning and Development was a new topic (548 mentions), with discussions on housing growth and design quality, the need for infrastructure to support development, affordable housing and all needing to bear in mind protecting local character and identity. There were some who said they felt there should not be any more housing built.

- *"Ensuring that there is housing to suit all needs"*
- *"Infrastructure of a village following housing developments"*

Another fully new topic was education (451 mentions), with people discussing school funding and capacity, youth services and training opportunities and rural access to schools:

- *"Education - equality of opportunity especially at secondary school level"*

Despite police not being a council-led service, crime and safety was raised as a priority (333 mentions), with issues from speeding and road safety, anti-social behaviour, to the general need for more visible policing and community reassurance being raised:

- "Police presence in residential areas"

Across all responses, residents consistently highlighted the importance of reliable, visible, and practical local services such as health, roads, waste, and transport.

Many of the themes identified extend beyond the direct responsibilities of a future unitary authority. Issues such as healthcare, policing, and some aspects of transport fall under other organisations. This is not uncommon when conducting an engagement on local authorities and highlights a gap in general knowledge of what councils do and don't deliver.

Future communications about any new model of local government will therefore need to clearly explain which services a unitary council would control, and how it would work in partnership with other bodies to deliver on wider community priorities.

Feedback on Local Government Reorganisation

Would you like to share any other thoughts about Local Government Reorganisation?
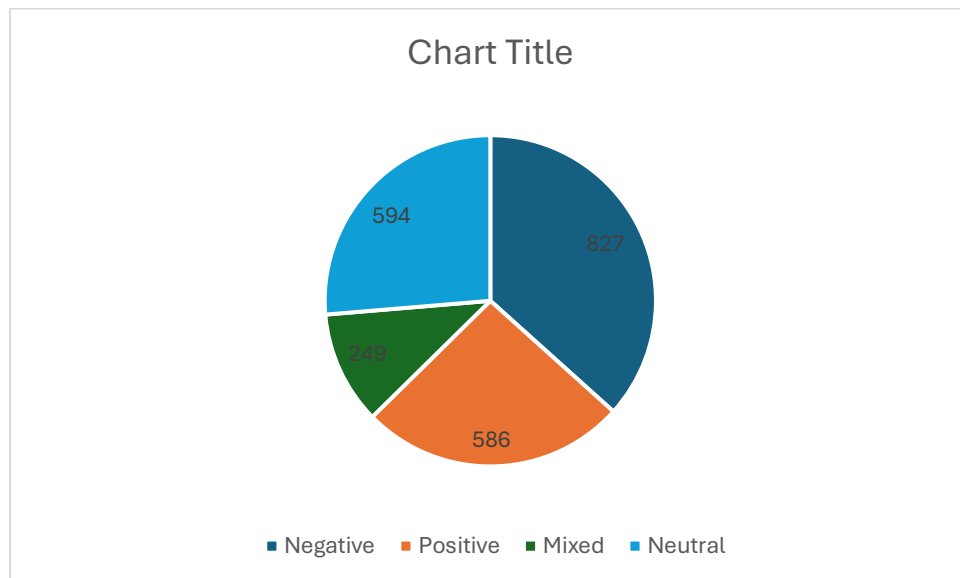

Figure 9

The final question of the survey was an opportunity to give residents a place to express their personal views, concerns, and expectations in their own words, which 2,250 took. Unlike structured survey questions, this free-text prompt aimed to capture the nuances of public feeling, including the reasons behind their support or opposition to change. This has been analysed according to the general sentiment of the comments, organised into negative, positive, neutral and mixed, with the distributions shown below.

Negative sentiment was most common across the responses (37%). Residents expressed concerns about how reorganisation might affect their connection to local decision-making and service quality, and mentioned fear of losing local identity and representation, with decisions being made by a centralised authority with no local knowledge.

There were also doubts about whether reorganisation would genuinely result in the saving money or improved efficiencies, with people saying they are happy with the current system and expressing concern that services might decline or become harder to access:

- *"I think the whole thing is completely misplaced and ultimately will not save money. It simply will not work. The current structure in South Kesteven is GOOD."*
- *"I remain unconvinced about the benefits and concerned about the potential cost in both financial and loss of focus during a transition."*
- *"Lincolnshire is far too big a geographic area for decisions to be made locally and in an accountable way"*

Neutral sentiment (26% of comments) typically reflected uncertainty or a desire for more information. People were not sure what reorganisation would actually involve and gave a general sense that some residents wanted to understand the practical outcomes before forming an opinion. Others mentioned wider considerations such as town or parish councils, or discussed potential ways they felt the councils should be structured. Feelings were mixed on Rutland's role in LGR, with many saying it felt like a natural fit with North and South Kesteven, and others saying it did not belong with Lincolnshire:

- *"More targeted surveys on each option for reform"*
- *"Rutland and South Kesteven are complementary cultures and economies"*
- *"Concern about the future role of Parish Councils"*
- *"I don't think I fully understand what one council would look and feel like"*

Positive sentiment (also 26% of comments) focused on the potential benefits of reform. Respondents highlighted possible improvements to efficiency and coordination and expressed optimism about the opportunity to modernise local government, reduce duplication and make it more cost-effective. People also felt it would create more equal services across an area:

- *"I consider the unitary model to be far more efficient and effective in decision making and reduces bureaucracy."*
- *"Hopefully one big service will be better value than a number of small ones."*
- *"I hope one of the priorities of the reorganisation will be to improve efficiency, cut out duplication and costs."*
- *"Think it's a good idea silly having one council responsibility for one road and not another."*

Mixed sentiment often combined support for the principle of change with reservations about how it would be implemented, with people saying reorganisation could bring benefits if done carefully and transparently, and if there is still a way for local representation and to keep local identity.

- *"Potentially an exciting opportunity so long as decisions made now are for the long term benefits of the 'new world', and not just short term gains"*
- *"I favour the creation of smaller authorities which can adequately address local issues."*

- *"Whilst they can deliver cost savings, local representation must be paramount, along with ensuring there is not a mass cull of jobs for those employed in providing local services."*
- *"One point of contact for all services does make sense, but taking away decision making from local areas and putting it into the hands of people who may not fully understand those areas feels like a real risk"*

The responses demonstrate a broad range of views on local government reorganisation but lean predominantly toward caution and scepticism. This is reflective of sentiment across the country and within other LGR programmes.

Conclusions

This engagement exercise has given North and South Kesteven District Councils a stronger understanding of the priorities of people in their local area, giving a baseline from which to finalise plans for LGR.

Similar themes emerged from both the survey and the in-person or focus group discussions, from a sense of community and connection to a rural identity, to the desire for councils that deliver good day-to-day services, and a level of scepticism over LGR.

The engagement revealed that infrastructure (particularly roads) and local economic growth are the highest priorities for residents, and so if new systems can demonstrate how they will maintain or improve these areas they're more likely to be viewed positively.

Another theme throughout was how residents are not sure which organisations are responsible for which services, with requests for improved bus, trains and policing.

Residents value the rural environment, community connection, and dependable local services. Any new council structure would need to remain visible and accessible while preserving the distinctive character and sense of belonging that define their communities.

The rural nature of much of Lincolnshire was a constant presence in all elements of discussions, with residents appreciating it currently and hoping that future councils will celebrate this and not allow cities to overshadow rural areas.

Many residents associate good local government with visibility, accessibility, and local accountability, and have fears that these could diminish under a larger authority model.

However, there is also an underlying openness to improvement, particularly if changes can demonstrate clear benefits, efficiency, and fairness. Future communications should therefore focus on clarity, transparency, and reassurance, explaining which functions a new council would oversee, how local voices would be preserved, and how any transition would deliver tangible service improvements for residents.

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group

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Appendices

Appendix A: Focus Group Discussion Guide

1. Introduction

Let's start by introducing ourselves. Could you tell us your first name, where you live, and one thing you most value about living in your local area?

2. Your local area and council

- When you think about your local community - the place you consider "home" - what does that mean to you? Is it your immediate neighbourhood, your local town, or the wider Lincolnshire area? And what makes it feel like your community, is it the people, the local groups, the local council?
- Thinking about day-to-day life: where do you usually go for things like food shopping, healthcare, leisure, or work? Do you tend to stay local, or travel around Lincolnshire or into nearby counties?
- Now let's think about your local councils: what comes to mind when you think about "the council" where you live? Do you know which council provides your bin collection, schools, or roads? Are you aware that Lincolnshire County Council, North Lincolnshire Council, and North East Lincolnshire Council are currently separate? Is it clear who does what, or does it sometimes get confusing?
- Have you ever had to contact your local council? How easy or difficult was that? What would make dealing with the council simpler?

3. Local services and priorities

Looking at this list which two services do you think councils should prioritise and why?

1. Roads and pavements
2. Local economic growth
3. The environment
4. Adult / children's social care
5. Waste and recycling
6. Housing
7. Leisure, arts and wellbeing
8. Community activities

- Which of these services work well locally? Are there any that need more attention or improvement?
- If councils had to make difficult choices, which services should be protected or prioritised most?
- Are there any services not on this list that feel particularly important where you live?
- If keeping services high quality meant paying slightly more in council tax - or vice versa - how would you feel about that?

4. Reorganisation and future structures

One option is creating one single council for Lincolnshire. One Lincolnshire would mean combining all seven districts.

- What's your initial reaction to that idea?
- What might be the benefits of having one council across the whole area?
- What might be the drawbacks or risks?
- Do you think one council would make things simpler for residents?
- Would you expect services to improve, stay the same, or get worse?
- How important is it that local decisions are made by people who understand your community?
- How could a single council make sure local voices are still heard?

Other options on the table are to have two or three smaller (but still larger than the existing borough councils) councils covering the same area.

- Do you think this is a better or a worse idea than one large council?

Appendix B: Survey questions

Do you live in Greater Lincolnshire or Rutland?

- Yes
- No

Do you work in Greater Lincolnshire or Rutland?

- Yes
- No

What is your full postcode?

Open text

What do you value most about your area?

Open text

Which of these most make you feel part of your community?

- Family, friends and neighbours
- Local council members
- Support services
- Leisure activities and events
- Local community groups
- Other

Where do you feel most connected to?

- Your immediate neighbourhood
- Your town, village or city
- Your local district
- Lincolnshire

How important is it to feel that your council is local to your area?

Slider 0–100

Which do you think are the most and least important elements of local councils?

Place in order of importance

- Providing accessible services
- Giving residents a local voice
- Supporting resident wellbeing
- Accountable decision making

Which services should future councils prioritise most?

- Housing
- Roads and pavements

- Waste and recycling
- The environment
- Adult / children's social care
- Community activities
- Leisure, arts and wellbeing
- Local economic growth

Are there any other services you feel should be prioritised?

Open text

Would you like to share any more thoughts about Local Government Reorganisation?

Open text