



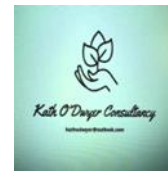
Appendix 8

South Kesteven DC & North Kesteven DC LGR Proposal

The Importance of a Focus on Organisational Culture as Part of the LGR Process

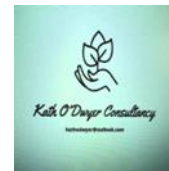
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October 2025**



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1. About the Author

Kath has 42 years of experience in local government, including eight years as a Local Authority Chief Executive.

During this time, Kath successfully led the turnaround and improvement of two failing councils that had been subject to concerns from both the Government and the Local Government Association. Each improvement programme placed a strong emphasis on whole organisation culture change. In one case, this involved addressing a negative organisational culture that had arisen due to a lack of focus on this key issue during a previous Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) process.

Kath has a well-established regional and national profile, having contributed as a conference and podcast speaker, served as a judge for national awards, and acted as a lead for LGA Peer Reviews and a spokesperson for Solace. She is widely recognised for her authentic and effective leadership and currently chairs the SOLACE Group Board.

Kath has a proven track record of integrity, honesty and a clear moral principles. She is deeply passionate about public service, particularly local government, and is committed to improving service delivery to achieve sustainable progress across organisations, services, teams and leadership.



2. The Commission

To provide a summary of research, analysis and learning, together with key considerations and recommendations for the management and development of an effective Organisational Culture Programme for the new Unitary Authorities within Greater Lincolnshire, as part of LGR considerations.

The commission is focused on 3 aspects:

- Why Organisational Culture considerations are important in LGR,
- What can happen if Organisational Culture is overlooked in LGR - learning from others,
- Key considerations / recommendations for action.

3. The Context - LGR Proposals

On 5 February 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, Jim McMahon MP, issued statutory invitations to all Councils in two-tier areas and small neighbouring unitary authorities to work together to develop unitary proposals.

The MHCLG guidance states that this can include:

- A single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned (Type A),
- A single tier of local authority covering an area that is currently a district, or two or more districts (Type B),
- A single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned, or one or more districts in the county; and one or more relevant adjoining areas (Type C),
- A combined proposal – a proposal that consists of two or more Type B proposals, two or more Type C proposals, or one or more Type B proposals and one or more Type C proposals.

The model that South Kesteven DC and North Kesteven DC have proposed is for the creation of two new unitary authorities from the current County Council footprint, as part of a wider set of Greater Lincolnshire proposals.

Unitary 1	Unitary 2	Unitary 3	Unitary 4
South Kesteven DC North Kesteven DC South Holland DC	Boston BC, City of Lincoln C East Lindsey DC West Lindsey DC	North East Lincolnshire (Unitary)	North Lincolnshire (Unitary)

North and North East Lincs are remaining separate for legal compliance with a view to merge in future.

4. Why Organisational Culture is Important in LGR

LGR is not just a merger of existing District Councils and the disaggregation of a County Council. In every respect LGR is the creation of new organisations where the scale of change is significant and all encompassing. The disaggregation of a County Council through LGR is not a situation where the county models can just continue in another form. The change required as part of LGR includes changes to structures, governance, and finances. However, all too often this is the focus, without the necessary concentration and planning required to establish the new organisations culture, expectations and 'rules'.

The creation of entirely new organisations offers an opportunity not only to implement change within existing structures, but also to establish fresh entities with a distinct identity, brand and associated culture. The mindset of creating totally new organisations is essential for the future high performance of the new unitary councils.

What is Organisational Culture?

Organisational culture plays a pivotal role in shaping the attitudes, behaviours, and actions of employees, which, in turn, affects the alignment of individual and collective efforts with the strategic objectives. The presence of a culture that emphasises adaptability, innovation, and a customer-centric approach has been associated with a higher likelihood of successful strategic plan implementation (Maleka, 2023).

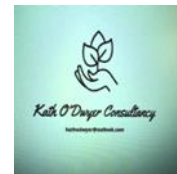
While many factors influence organisational culture, three fundamental components underpin it: how employees behave in the workplace, the attitudes and unity of staff, and the vision and values embraced by both staff and leaders. Organisational culture consists of values, ideals, attitudes and goals that characterise an organisation (Heinz, 2023).

Organisational culture is the underlying beliefs, norms, customs, values, attitudes, and practices of the organisation. It is the established framework that guides workplace behaviour, shaping experiences in the workplace.

Having a healthy and productive organisational culture is important because it:

- Boosts the organisation's long-term objectives,
- Unites members of the organisation by instilling a sense of identity and belonging,
- Gives employees a sense of direction,
- Increases employee satisfaction and engagement levels,
- Guides decision-making processes, reduces disagreements and animosity between team members,
- Helps attract the right employees who are committed and productive,
- Influences organisational effectiveness and success,
- Facilitates open communication, mutual trust, and shared understanding,
- Differentiates one organisation from another,
- Instructs the organisation on how things are done,
- Influences innovation (Dovetail Editorial Team, 2023).

Public service leaders and managers must recognise the pivotal role of culture in strategic planning and take proactive steps to foster a culture that supports the effective execution of strategic plans. The influence of organisational culture on the successful implementation of strategic plans in public service organisations cannot be overstated (Maleka, 2023).



Organisational Culture refers to shared values, beliefs, behaviours, and norms that shape the working and interaction of employees within an organisation. It influences everything from decision-making and effective communication, to how success is defined and celebrated. A strong culture creates a clear sense of identity and purpose for everyone involved. Core values are the foundation of an organisation's identity, guiding employee behaviour and decision-making. Organisational culture shapes how the organisation lives its purpose and delivers on its promises (The Knowledge Academy, 2025).

By focusing on organisational culture with intention, the organisation will be well-positioned to thrive in an increasingly complex environment. Organisations that invest in resilient, adaptable cultures will be the ones best equipped to navigate change (Lawrence, 2025).

What the Research Tells Us

Below are extracts from a range of published articles, hypothesis and views:

West Midlands Employers state that:

LGR challenges councils to lead through complexity, not just restructure. By investing in people, behaviours, and shared values from day one, councils can turn disruption into opportunity. With the right support, LGR becomes a catalyst for leadership growth, stronger teams, and a more resilient organisation ready to thrive beyond transition.

LGR is not simply a technical or administrative challenge. It is a deeply human one. It tests leadership under pressure, uncovers the cracks in organisational culture, and puts the spotlight on how well-prepared a council is to adapt, not just structurally, but behaviourally. What's often overlooked in these moments is that LGR isn't a one-time event. It is a period of prolonged transition. The question that matters most is how do we sustain our people, our leaders, our teams, and our culture through that uncertainty?

There's a prevailing myth in transformation programmes that if you get the structure right, everything else will follow. But structure alone doesn't change how people behave, how they show up, or how they lead others. We need to think of leadership as infrastructure. Not a role or title, but a capability that, when strengthened, multiplies the organisation's ability to navigate disruption. In the context of LGR, that means investing in the mindset, confidence, and psychological readiness of leaders, not just their ability to follow a plan.

Reorganisations often result in councils with new names, new structures and new reporting lines. But people don't change culture because the org chart does. They change when they feel seen, understood, and part of shaping the future. That's why cultural alignment must be a deliberate priority during LGR. If leaders aren't equipped to nurture a shared sense of purpose, if behaviours and values aren't discussed and agreed, then you don't just risk confusion, you risk fragmentation. Culture work can't wait until things "settle". It must begin alongside structural change and be championed by those with the most influence.

When LGR is done with people at the centre:

- Leaders feel resourced, not burdened,
- Culture becomes a foundation, not a friction point,
- Teams stay engaged and hopeful,
- The new organisation feels coherent, not just combined.



Both the Grant Thornton report and the PPMA/IDeA guidance remind us that managing people and leadership well through major transitions isn't just about preserving morale, it is a fundamental driver of outcomes. Councils that invested in cultural clarity, leadership capability, and robust programme governance emerged stronger and more cohesive; those that didn't often found that 'safe and legal on day one' wasn't enough to deliver real transformation (Hotten, 2025).

The LGA suggest that:

Culture and integration are crucial - bringing together different councils or services doesn't mean their cultures will automatically align. Culture must be intentionally shaped to support the new organisation and communicated using vision and values. Prioritise transparent leadership, shared values, and cross-organisational team building before and after vesting day (LGA, 2025).

Trueman Change proposed that:

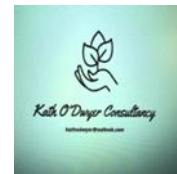
For the councils affected, LGR is a daunting prospect. Whether it's unitarisation, mergers, or a wider reform agenda, the thought of redrawing organisational maps, redefining roles, and rethinking delivery models is enough to send even the most seasoned leader reaching for the comfort of the status quo.

But while structures and services dominate the headlines, it's culture, quietly and invisibly, that will determine whether the new council lands smoothly or flounders under the weight of confusion, resistance, and competing priorities.

The challenge with any reorganisation is that the most important change is the least visible. Systems and governance can be rewritten, but shared values, staff engagement, and organisational identity can't be created overnight. Yet too often, culture is left as an afterthought, something to fix "once the dust has settled" – but by then, it's too late. Culture isn't a final phase of the project, it's the foundation. The way people communicate, collaborate, and respond to change will either accelerate or obstruct your progress. If you wait to address it until your new council is up and running, you'll find yourself playing catch-up at the very moment you need to hit the ground running.

Three things to understand before LGR

1. *You already have multiple cultures - don't assume they'll blend*
Every council involved in a reorganisation brings its own way of working: values, norms, decision-making styles. When you merge authorities, you don't start from a blank page, you inherit differences. Without early intervention, these differences can turn into tension. Taking the time now to map organisational cultures, identify potential friction points, and co-create shared values will save months, if not years, of confusion and misalignment later.
2. *Staff uncertainty is unavoidable - but it can be managed*
People want clarity. They want to know where they'll sit, what their job will be, and who they'll report to. But during LGR, certainty is in short supply. While you can't provide all the answers up front, you can provide a process. A transparent change roadmap, consistent internal communications, and regular staff engagement all help build trust. So even when things feel uncertain, people feel informed and valued.
3. *Leadership behaviours matter more than job titles*
In a time of transition, people look to leaders not just for decisions but for emotional cues. Do you model openness, respect, collaboration? Or are you broadcasting messages from above and hoping they land? LGR needs visible, values-led leadership at all levels. A change management



approach helps develop leadership alignment, giving senior teams a shared understanding of their role - not just in governance, but in culture.

Reorganisation is always going to be complex - but it doesn't have to be chaotic. If you start from a place of culture, clarity and communication, you won't need to retrofit a change strategy after the fact. You'll build your new council on solid ground, not shaky assumptions. Let's stop scrambling to fix culture after the reorganisation. Let's build it in from the start (Trueman Change, 2025).

Trueman Change also suggests that:

Far more than just an admin exercise, LGR is probably the largest transformation an authority will go through - full of difficult decisions, emotional strain, and competing priorities. But on the flip side, it also brings an abundance of opportunities. At the heart of LGR are three distinct stages and the key to thriving throughout (and beyond) the changes, is understanding them. The impact on people in each of those three stages is different.

- Stage 1: The Political Battleground

The first stage of LGR is dominated by politics. This is the phase where key decisions are debated and finalised. Boundaries, responsibilities, and the overarching structural framework of the new arrangements are determined.

- Stage 2: The Task-Driven Sprint

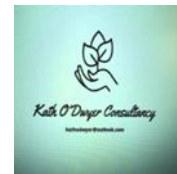
After the key decisions of Stage 1 are made, the focus shifts to implementation. This stage is task-heavy, with teams working on achieving a smooth transition. The process requires lots of effort, meticulous planning, and high-pressure project management.

- Stage 3: The Aftermath and Real Work

The final stage begins after the reorganisation goes live. While reaching this point is a significant milestone, the challenges aren't over just yet. Instead, we start to see hidden issues and where long-term adjustments are needed. By now, individuals and teams may be running on empty, having poured their energy into the previous stages. This depletion can exacerbate the challenges of reconciling differences in organisational culture, values, and identity. There may also be a feeling of "them-and-us" among teams, particularly if one council feels its ways of working are being favoured. Although challenging, this phase presents an opportunity for organisations to rebuild cohesion, promote collaboration, and realign around shared goals and aspirations. Key Characteristics of Stage 3 include cultural reconciliation and realignment of teams take priority as teams must rebuild trust, bridge cultural divides, and establish a sense of unity.

The key to supporting your teams throughout LGR is focusing on the human impact. While organisational targets are important, your people must be your priority and being able to anticipate and address the effect change can will have on them is crucial. Each stage needs a different approach:

- During Stage 1: Open and transparent communication is essential. Regular updates help reduce speculation and build trust, even in the face of uncertainty.



- During Stage 2: Leaders should support staff well-being and mental health. Recognising the heavy workload and encouraging collaboration can alleviate some of that pressure.
- During Stage 3: Cultural challenges must be addressed directly. Encouraging dialogue about values, rebuilding trust, and providing platforms for raising concerns are critical steps in uniting teams (Trueman Change, 2025).

In addition, [Local Partnerships](#) propose that:

The phrase 'culture eats strategy for breakfast', attributed to management guru Peter Drucker, stresses the importance of organisational culture in achieving strategic goals. As England embarks on significant local government reform, this adage is particularly relevant. The reform aims to streamline local government structures, enhance accountability and improve service delivery. However, the success of these reforms hinges not just on strategic planning but on cultivating and maintaining a positive organisational culture — a critical but often overlooked element in any successful LGR programme.

Effective leadership is crucial. LGR and leadership go hand in hand. Leaders must articulate a sharp vision for the reform and inspire confidence among employees. This involves transparent communication about the goals, benefits and challenges of the reform process. Style and substance are needed in equal measure, and personality and dynamism really matters.

Engaging employees at all levels throughout the LGR transition lifecycle is essential. This can be achieved through regular consultations, feedback mechanisms and involving staff in decision making processes. When employees feel valued and heard, they are more likely to embrace change - a cornerstone of successful organisational change in local government.

Mode matters: mix digital engagement with in-person activity. Ensure all employees are aware of the engagement plan, and select key people from all parts of the organisation to co-create the plan. Organisation-wide buy-in is key, as is having key employee champions of change.

Reform brings change, and inevitably will also bring uncertainty. Offering relevant training helps staff navigate this with confidence and gives them the tools to adapt and shape the journey, making training for LGR transition a vital part of the process.

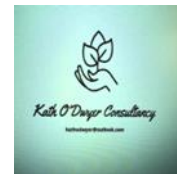
Reform lives or dies in the day to day. So build your strategy but feed the culture. A strong organisational culture is the glue that holds the local authority transformation journey together. Without it, even the best-laid plans can falter (Gritten, 2025).

An [LGIU](#) article by Jane Eaton, Chief Executive at Horsham District Council, suggests that:

If we're trying to change culture, we must give people as much choice as possible and reduce the impact on them personally, because my organisational culture, despite our shared basic assumptions, isn't theirs. Let the professional teams from across the new organisation write the procedures for their service, I'd let them design the layout of our new headquarters and local offices where most of them will work, I'll tell them lots of positive stories about their new colleagues, and I'd even let them choose the name of the new organisation (Eaton, 2025).

An article produced by [The Truth about Local Government](#) proposes that:

While legal compliance is essential, successful LGR demands a broader strategic approach to workforce planning. Key considerations include:



- Talent retention: How do you retain high-performing staff amid uncertainty?
 - Culture integration: How do you merge different organisational cultures into a cohesive whole?
 - Leadership development: How do you equip new leaders to manage change and deliver transformation?
 - Communication and engagement: How do you keep staff informed, motivated, and involved?
- Ultimately, LGR is not just a structural exercise it's a human one. The success of any reorganisation will depend on how well councils manage the transition for their people.
- Establishing the senior management team early is critical. These leaders will shape the new organisational culture and lead change management efforts.

Ultimately, the human dimension of LGR is not just a technical exercise it is central to the long-term success of any new unitary authority. Investing in people, communicating clearly, and leading with empathy will be critical to building resilient, high-performing councils that are fit for the future (Truth about Local Government, 2025).

Summary & view

It is clear from the research and publications identified and discussed above, that the LGR process needs to consider not just structures, finances and governance, but the people who will form part of the new organisations. LGR is not simply a technical or administrative challenge.

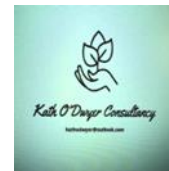
Every council involved in a reorganisation brings its own way of working: values, norms, decision-making styles. When you merge authorities, you don't start from a blank page, you inherit differences, so there needs to be a focus on establishing a new organisational culture for, and with, the new organisation.

Trueman Change suggests that work on the organisational culture should commence once the organisation is live – *'this phase presents an opportunity for organisations to rebuild cohesion, promote collaboration, and realign around shared goals and aspirations. Key Characteristics of Stage 3 include cultural reconciliation and realignment of teams'* (Trueman Change, 2025).

I would disagree, and as others have suggested, the creation of the new organisational culture must begin alongside structural change and be championed by those with the most influence. Culture isn't a final phase of the project, it's the foundation, and culture must be intentionally shaped to support the new organisation and communicated using vision and values.

Key to this is the workforce involvement and engagement in creating the new organisation. This should include encouraging early dialogue about values and behaviours, building trust and creating the identity of the new Unitary Authority.

The success of these reforms hinges not just on strategic planning but on cultivating and maintaining a positive organisational culture.



5. Learning from others

Westmorland & Furness

The learning from Westmorland & Furness and their focus on organisational culture as part of the organisation's creation in LGR, offers the following advice:

Pre-LGR: Getting started

- Build a strong communications team with a **“One Team”** ethos ,
- Connect early with new leaders – they are critical to internal communications success ,
- Develop a clear pre- and post-LGR internal communications and employee engagement strategy, and adapt it based on feedback ,
- Establish organisational building blocks, including core values.

Post LGR: Year 1

Focus on creating a robust communications framework:

- Solid strategy,
- Strong brand identity,
- Tried and tested channels,
- Data and insight-led approach (e.g., surveys, pulse checks),
- Clear narrative: *Together We Are...*,
- Prioritise winning hearts and minds,
- Be bold and innovative.

Post LGR: Year 2, Refresh and Mature

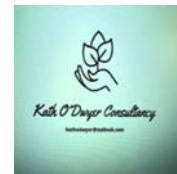
Refresh internal communications and engagement strategy based on feedback. For W&F, this included:

- A subtle narrative shift: *Doing it the W&F Way*,
- Reaffirmed values and operating model.
- Additional focus areas:
 - Building a sense of belonging,
 - Strengthening connections.

Communication and Engagement Principles

Aligned with organisational values:

- Visible leadership – Actively present and value-driven,
- Strategic communications – Supporting key priorities,
- Storytelling – Authentic and consistent narrative,
- Lived experience – Real stories from real staff,
- Culture building – Driving transformation,
- Timely & relevant – Two-way, engaging communication,
- Recognition – Celebrate best practice,
- Employee engagement – Involve colleagues in shaping the future,
- Employee voice – *“You said, we did”*,
- Effective member communications – No surprises, constituency-first,
- Belonging and connection – Foster meaningful relationships,



- Internal networks – Strengthen collaboration.

Staff Conference and Expo

Purpose: Build connection and embed culture

Objectives:

- Bring all employees together within a limited budget,
- Enable staff to learn about the new council and its services,
- Familiarise staff with office buildings and organisational footprint.

Key outcomes:

- Support engagement and leadership visibility,
- Address hybrid working challenges (e.g., isolation, loneliness),
- Complement internal communications strategies,
- Reflect innovation, creativity, and strategic commitment,
- Enhance understanding of organisational footprint.

Core activities:

- Deliver a cost-effective, face-to-face event,
- Engage the workforce in new ways,
- Showcase best practice across the organisation,
- Build a sense of belonging – *One Team, One Culture*,
- Visibly demonstrate the desired organisational culture,
- Embed *Doing it the W&F Way* – a new way of working for a new council.

Do what's right for your organisation

- Feel the heartbeat of your workforce (and your organisation),
- Walk in their shoes,
- Listen to what staff have to say.

Be creative. Be bold. Trust your judgement.

(Local Government Association, 2025).

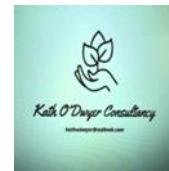
Summary & view

The learning and reflections from Westmorland & Furness acknowledge the importance of focussing on organisational culture, but I would suggest it should have been earlier in the process.

They describe the Pre LGR period as including having a clear pre and post internal communications and employee engagement strategy, getting the organisational building blocks in place – including the values.

However, they left it until Year 1 to focus on a strong brand identity, and winning hearts and minds.

They left it until Year 2 to introduce 'Doing it the W&F way' and reaffirming values and operating model. And it was only at this stage that they identified some extra additional areas of focus for the organisation, building a sense of belonging and connections. However, they do describe their communication and engagement principles as including culture building; involving colleagues in shaping the future; a "You said, we did" approach; building a sense of belonging – one team – one culture; supporting and visibly



demonstrating the culture they aspired to and the mantra of 'doing it the W&F way – a new way of working for a new council'.

I would suggest that organisational culture is something to focus upon in the shadow year before vesting day and continue to build upon and reinforce once the new organisation 'goes live'.

What can happen if this is overlooked

There is also valuable learning in the local government sector from organisations who failed to give due attention or invest in organisational culture as part of an LGR process:

Cheshire East Council

CEC - Local Government Association Culture Review January 2018

A number of people agreed that, from its inception the Council faced two related but separate major challenges with regards to its organisational culture; the first was to bring together the existing cultures from the legacy councils, no small challenge in itself, and the second was to define and shape a new organisational culture for Cheshire East Council. Whilst some progress may have been made on the first challenge there was a shared view amongst many I spoke to that an opportunity was missed at the inception of Cheshire East Council to define a new organisational culture.

The history of Cheshire East since its inception in 2009, suggests that an opportunity was missed at that time to define and establish a positive and respectful organisational culture enjoyed by all. This created a vacuum which was filled by the behaviours of some individuals with power which has resulted in organisational confusion and very different experiences across the workforce some of which can be described as bullying or inappropriate behaviour.

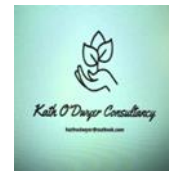
In the absence of a clearly defined organisational culture, agreed ways of working and clarity about the behaviours expected of everyone, the culture has been shaped to some extent by the behaviours of individuals. This is predominantly true of individuals with power (Local Government Association, 2018).

Report in the Public Interest on the impact of the Council's culture and governance arrangements during 2014 – 2018

It stands as a cautionary example of the way in which a profoundly difficult range of factors can give rise to serious distortions as to proper governance at a local authority. Ultimately, this report is about the culture at the Council. Cheshire East Council is a relatively new Unitary Authority created in January 2009. It is a large complex local authority. Whilst this report is essentially concerned with events that took place during 2014 - 2018, and at the time it faced a profound range of difficulties some referable to the fact that it was newly created. In the absence of a clearly defined organisational culture, with a lack of agreed ways of working and clarity as to behaviours expected, the ground was laid for what became a dysfunctional culture. (Cheshire East Council, 2023).

Summary & view

It is clear from the views expressed by both the External Auditors and the LGA Peer Review in 2018, that more should have been done to proactively focus upon creating a new organisational culture for the new Unitary authority, back in 2009.



This was a situation where the County Council was split into two new Unitary Councils, encompassing the existing district councils – very similar to the proposals for the creation of two of the new Unitary Councils in the Greater Lincolnshire proposals.

This lack of focus on creating an organisational culture for the new authority is believed to have been a key factor in the extreme difficulties that the council experienced some years later, which included the suspension of the Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer, and a 3.5 year police investigation into the inappropriate conduct of the Council Leader in council procurement and other matters.

This lack of focus, and lack of actions to create an appropriate organisational culture at the time of LGR is believed to have '*created a vacuum which was filled by .. bullying or inappropriate behaviour*'. In addition, it is proposed that '*the absence of a clearly defined organisational culture, with a lack of agreed ways of working and clarity as to behaviours expected, the ground was laid for what became a dysfunctional culture*'. Clearly this learning and warning should be heeded as we enter a further phase of LGR.

The components of an effective organisational culture – CPC Findings

Despite the difficulties this unitary council experienced, due to a lack of initial focus on creating an appropriate organisational culture as part of LGR, there is real learning for the sector in what actions they took to 'start again' and ensure a proactive approach to creating or resetting a positive organisational culture.

Below is the commentary from the LGA Peer Review undertaken in 2020.

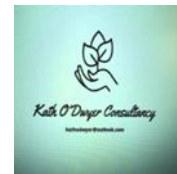
The Peer Team recognise the progress that has been made by the council in addressing historic issues and improving the culture of the organisation. Cheshire East council has made significant improvements in recent years to address issues of misconduct and to transform the culture of the organisation.

The team received a broad range of feedback and were struck by the positivity of the staff working for the organisation, and the remarkable progress that has been made in improving workforce culture in a relatively short space of time. The importance of this work was illustrated by clear leadership and commitment,

These messages were received from multiple levels within the organisation and this improvement has been embedded across multiple teams and locations. These improvements in culture have also supported the council to advance their internal assurance, with officers stating their comfort to 'call out' and 'professionally challenge' practice when appropriate. Alongside this cultural shift, the Team recognised the practical actions that have been taken, including improved management oversight and the development of supporting assurance frameworks and action plans.

These improvements in workforce culture are also reflected in improved relationships between councillors and officers.

Cheshire East has a track record of delivering behaviour and culture change. This has been evidenced through the cultural transformation at the council, and the progress of the Brighter Futures Programme. The network of officers that have been created through the Brighter Futures Champions is a valuable resource, these officers have developed their skills and confidence, and are 'bought-in' to the organisation. This network provides an important tool as capacity for future work in this area.



The transformation of the organisational culture within Cheshire East has been profound. When the LGA undertook a workforce review in 2017 it was clear that there were several staff who had experienced or witnessed bullying, felt unsupported by their line manager, or were fearful of the impact of change. This culminated in an unhealthy working environment, and in some cases, staff saying that they were 'ashamed' to admit they worked for the council.

The challenge of changing an organisational culture cannot be overstated. This process can often be simplified to communication campaigns, relaunched values or training courses. But it is about changing the emotional relationship between the employee and employer, for example how staff feel when they enter the office, their relationship with their manager, and their wider psychological contract. This emotional relationship does not change easily or quickly.

Cheshire East Council understood this and put in place the key ingredients for success by having visible leadership at the top of the organisation modelling the behaviours that they wanted to embed. By encouraging and facilitating people to talk openly and honestly with each other, and equipping managers with the skills and confidence to manage people well, changing policies and procedures to ensure they are fair and easily understood. By seeking feedback and acting on what people say. The views of staff two years later illustrated that they had experienced and felt the difference (Local Government Association, 2020).

Summary & view

The findings of the LGA Peer Review some 2.5 years later described the ingredients of the cultural transformation work undertaken in the council and some of its impacts. This provides valuable learning for the sector.

Ingredients

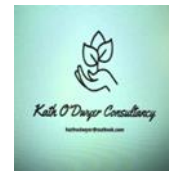
- Clear leadership and commitment,
- Embedding across multiple teams and locations,
- Management oversight,
- The development of supporting assurance frameworks and action plans,
- Brighter Futures Champions - a network of officers as a valuable resource,
- Visible leadership at the top of the organisation,
- Leaders modelling the behaviours that they wanted to embed,
- Encouraging and facilitating people to talk openly and honestly with each other,
- Equipping managers with the skills and confidence to manage people well,
- Changing policies and procedures to ensure they are fair and easily understood,
- Seeking feedback and acting on what people say.

Impacts

- The positivity of staff working for the organisation,
- Advances in internal assurance,
- Officers stating their comfort to 'call out' and 'professionally challenge' practice when appropriate.

I believe it is important to heed the words of the Peer Review Team....

- *The challenge of changing an organisational culture cannot be overstated.*
- *This process can often be simplified to communication campaigns, relaunched values or training.*



- *But it is about changing the emotional relationship between the employee and employer, for example how staff feel when they enter the office, their relationship with their manager, and their wider psychological contract.*
- *This emotional relationship does not change easily or quickly.*

Other examples:

There are other examples of Councils that have worked hard to create an effective and positive organisational culture.

St Helens Council

Creating our culture together

We are passionate about working together and ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to get involved and have their say. That's why we have co-designed a clear vision for workplace culture and worked together with employees to identify values and behaviours for everyone.

These values are at the core of how we work together to deliver our services whilst supporting a culture of continuous improvement and guiding our ways of working. This is what makes us TICK at St Helens Borough Council:

- *Trust*
- *Integrity*
- *Collaborating*
- *Keep Innovating!*

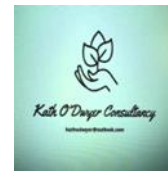
Employee engagement is at the heart of shaping our culture. 150 staff across the organisation volunteer to be part of the Culture Champion community, in addition to their regular role. They support the organisation to effectively communicate, share information and ideas, and seek feedback (St Helens Borough Council, 2025).

Our Cultural Transformation programme was based on the Vision, Values and Behaviours and how all staff can feed into and influence the programme through becoming cultural champions. This project has increased trust in the organisation as staff have seen how they can shape and influence the direction of the organisation. Over 130 staff have volunteered to become Cultural Champions and have started working with their teams to revise the vision, values and behaviours of the organisation. A new BAME staff group has been set up to order staff from these groups have a direct influence on ensuring a fair and equal organisation.

Staff have increased their trust in the organisation and are having a greater level of involvement – for example a recent Wellbeing Pulse survey achieved a response from 636 people (20% of the workforce) within a week. Staff have created “A Day in the Life of ” case studies for over 30 different roles in the council to increase understanding of the roles within the council both internally and externally.

Staff engagement has been conducted in a range of formats including digital surveys, team meeting toolkits, “Chat with” sessions with the Chief Executive, and “Let’s brew” sessions.

A key lesson has been to listen to staff feedback and be willing to change and adapt plans based on staff feedback. For example, the original plans for the agile hub had no team areas the idea was that the bookable spaces would be meeting rooms, collaboration spaces and individual desks. However the feedback from staff was that they highly valued time within their teams to work alongside each other. This led to the development of the staff villages, which are dedicated team spaces (iNetwork, 2025).



LGA Peer Review feedback & findings

The organisational values ('TICK': Trust, Integrity, Collaboration, Keep Innovating), which were clearly evident, are underpinning behaviours and attitudes, making for a positive and productive culture.

We experienced a positive organisational culture, where staff feel engaged and talked positively about their senior leaders, particularly chief executive, being highly visible and accessible.

A key part of the WoW programme was building an organisational culture with staff and the establishment of a Culture Champions Network. This group of over 150 employees acts as a forum for engagement, information sharing, providing feedback on a range of topics, and providing the role of a critical friend of the organisation. The Network is a great example of the workforce being involved, engaged, included and listened to, and should be something the council continues to nurture and support.

The peer team experienced a positive organisational culture at St Helens. We met with staff who felt informed and engaged.

The 'TICK' values (Trust, Integrity, Collaboration, Keep Innovating) have been co-produced with staff, and set out behaviours and bonds (a set of employer and employee expectations). The Values, along with the establishment of a Culture Champions Network are a tangible demonstration of building an organisational culture that is inclusive, transparent and supportive (Local Government Association, 2025).

Summary & view

This example further reinforces the key ingredients and positive impact of establishing a positive organisational culture.

Ingredients

- A co-designed vision for workplace culture.
- Working together with employees to identify values and behaviours for everyone.
- A Cultural Transformation programme based on the Vision, Values and Behaviours and how all staff can feed into and influence the programme through becoming cultural champions.
- Organisational values which underpin behaviours and attitudes.
- These values are at the core of how staff work together to deliver services.
- Employee engagement is at the heart of shaping our culture.
- 150 staff across the organisation volunteer to be part of the Culture Champion community, in addition to their regular role. They support the organisation to effectively communicate, share information and ideas, and seek feedback.
- Cultural Champions worked with their teams to revise the vision, values and behaviours of the organisation.
- The Cultural Champions became a forum for engagement, information sharing, providing feedback on a range of topics, and providing the role of a critical friend of the organisation.
- The Cultural Champions Network is a great example of the workforce being involved, engaged, included and listened to.
- Staff engagement in a range of formats including digital surveys, team meeting toolkits, "Chat with" sessions with the Chief Executive, and "Let's brew" sessions.
- The values set out behaviours and bonds (a set of employer and employee expectations).
- A key lesson has been to listen to staff feedback and be willing to change and adapt plans based on staff feedback.



Impact

- A positive and productive organisational culture.
- Increased trust in leadership and the organisation.
- Staff feel engaged and speak positively about senior leaders.
- A culture that is inclusive, transparent, and supportive.

6. Key Considerations

The development of organisational culture for each new unitary council created through the LGR process must be deliberate and well-structured. It should be carefully designed, programme-managed, and driven by senior leadership. Adequate resources must be allocated, and cultural planning should form an integral part of the shadow arrangements and the overall LGR implementation work plan.

Key activity stages

- Begin planning as soon as new unitary footprints are confirmed.
- Develop the creation and implementation plan ahead of shadow arrangements.
- Co-create the plan during the shadow arrangements period, ensuring broad engagement.
- Put mechanisms, building blocks, and foundations in place for vesting day.
- Maintain an ongoing engagement, review, and check-in process for at least the first three years of the new authority.

Preparation activity

- **Cultural Assessment:** Understand existing cultures within merging or disaggregating organisations.
- **Budget:** Allocate resources for cultural programme development, implementation, and supporting materials.
- **Capacity:** Establish a dedicated team and identify cultural champions across the workforce.
- **Engagement:** Design a plan to identify future managers and staff, and outline how to engage and co-produce with them before go-live.

Developing a clear Organisational Culture Plan

- Create the plan collaboratively through communication, engagement, and co-production with the future workforce.
- Base the plan on cultural assessment findings, validated by workforce representatives.
- Ensure clarity on:
 - What
 - Why (objectives)
 - How
 - Who
 - When
 - Success criteria
 - Engagement activity
 - Communications plan
 - Review process
 - Regular check-ins

Key Components of Organisational Culture

- Vision,
- Core values,
- Behaviours.

Additional Organisational Considerations



- Influence on decision-making and communication.
- How success is defined and celebrated.
- Investing in leadership readiness, beyond following a plan.
- Mechanisms for staff to feel seen, understood, and involved in shaping the future.
- Regular consultations, feedback loops, and inclusive decision-making.
- Employee engagement plan with representatives from all areas of the organisation.
- Training and development opportunities during transition to support role adaptation.
- Helping employees understand strategic rationale, cultural importance, and individual contribution to organisational goals.

Post LGR Implementation

There needs to be an ongoing plan of engagement, review and check-ins over, at least, the first 3 years of the new unitary authority.

It is important to establish mechanisms to seek regular feedback from employees and stakeholders:

- Engagement activity,
- Communications plan,
- Review process,
- Regular check-in processes.

It will be prudent to provide support and resources to employees as they transition to the new culture. This may include training on the new values and norms, as well as support in designing processes and practices that align with the new culture.

Additionally, in order to successfully navigate an organisational culture change, it is important to reward employees who adopt the new culture. This sends a clear message that the organisation is committed to the change and that employees who embrace the new culture will be rewarded e.g. staff awards based on those who model the values and behaviours

Public service leaders and managers must continue to take proactive steps to both model and foster the agreed core values, beliefs and behaviours, and to call out and challenge those that do not.

Wider Issues which Support a Positive Organisational Culture

The following are the wider key issues for consideration in supporting the implementation of a new Organisational Culture:

Organisational identity

- Select a new organisational name and engage staff in the process.
- Decide on HQ and locality office locations, involving staff in layout design.
- Plan and budget for new signage across the unitary footprint.
- Issue new lanyards for all staff.
- Develop new letterheads and templates.
- Launch a new website.
- Create new social media accounts.

Strategy, Policy & Procedures



- Develop a new Council Plan.
- Draft a new Constitution.
- Create a suite of new council strategies.
- Establish new procedures and policies for all aspects of service delivery.
 - Review documents from constituent councils, compare and contrast, and use these to engage professional teams in writing procedures for the new unitary authority.

Communications

- Ensure transparent communication about the goals, benefits, and challenges of the reform process.
- Develop an Internal Communications Plan covering pre-vesting day, first month, and first six months.
- Develop an External Communications Plan for the same timeframes.

By considering the issues outlined above and taking these steps, the new unitary councils can successfully design, implement, navigate and embed a positive organisational culture.

7. Summary and Conclusions

LGR aims to streamline local government structures, enhance accountability and improve service delivery. However, the success of these reforms hinges not just on strategic planning but on cultivating and maintaining a positive organisational culture — a critical but often overlooked element in any successful LGR programme.

The success of these reforms hinges not just on strategic planning but on cultivating and maintaining a positive organisational culture. When LGR is done with people at the centre:

- Leaders feel resourced, not burdened,
- Culture becomes a foundation, not a friction point,
- Teams stay engaged and hopeful,
- The new organisation feels coherent, not just combined.

Core values are the foundation of an organisation's identity, guiding employee behaviour and decision-making. Organisational culture shapes how the organisation lives its purpose and delivers on its promises. By focussing on organisational culture with intention, the organisation will be well-positioned to thrive in an increasingly complex environment. Councils that invested in cultural clarity, leadership capability, and robust programme governance emerged stronger and more cohesive; those that didn't often find that 'safe and legal on day one' was enough to deliver real transformation. Organisations that invest in resilient, adaptable cultures will be the ones best equipped to navigate change.

A positive organisational culture:

- Unites members of the organisation by instilling a sense of identity and belonging,
- Gives employees a sense of direction,
- Increases employee satisfaction and engagement levels,
- Guides decision-making processes and reduces disagreements and animosity between team members,
- Helps attract the right employees who are committed and productive,
- Influences organisational effectiveness and success,
- Facilitates open communication, mutual trust, and shared understanding,
- Differentiates one organisation from another,
- Instructs the organisation on how things are done.

The challenge of changing an organisational culture cannot be overstated. This process can often be simplified to communication campaigns, relaunched values or training. But it is about changing the emotional relationship between the employee and employer, for example how staff feel when they enter the office, their relationship with their manager, and their wider psychological contract.

This emotional relationship does not change easily or quickly.

A strong organisational culture is the glue that holds the local authority transformation journey together and culture must be intentionally shaped to support the new organisation and communicated using vision and values.

It is culture, quietly and invisibly, that will determine whether the new council lands smoothly or flounders under the weight of confusion, resistance, and competing priorities.

Culture isn't a final phase of the project, it's the foundation.

8. Recommendations for action

LGR aims to streamline local government structures, enhance accountability and improve service delivery.

However, the success of these reforms hinges not just on strategic planning but on cultivating and maintaining a positive organisational culture — a critical but often overlooked element in any successful LGR programme.

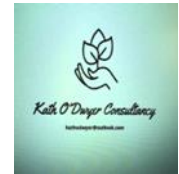
The creation of the new organisational culture must begin alongside structural change and be championed by those with the most influence.

Culture isn't a final phase of the project, it's the foundation, and culture must be intentionally shaped to support the new organisation and communicated using vision and values.

Recommendations:

During the shadow year, within the LGR process:

- a) Establish a plan, and associated resources, to coproduce and deliver an Organisational Culture Programme.**
- b) Create a project team, the budget and a network of champions from across the (to be) workforce.**
- c) Undertake a cultural assessment of the councils who will form part of the new Unitary Council**
- d) Develop an internal communications and engagement plan.**
- e) Develop a co-produced Organisational Culture Strategy which incorporates a vision, values and behaviours.**
- f) Build these into the new Unitary Council Constitution, Strategies, Policies and Procedures.**
- g) Consider the wider issues in Section 6 of this report, to support a positive organisational culture and identity.**
- h) Develop a plan of further staff engagement, development and review, for post Vesting Day.**



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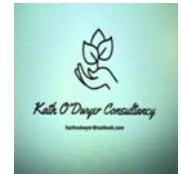
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