



GUIDE

GUIDE TO STANDING UP AN LGR IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

INCLUDING LESSONS LEARNT FROM
PREVIOUS LOCAL GOVERNMENT
REORGANISATION



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
PRE-IMPLEMENTATION	4
IMPLEMENTATION PRIMARY CONSIDERATIONS	6
IMPLEMENTATION TEAM KEY ROLES	7
KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL TEAM	11

INTRODUCTION

The Devolution White Paper (December 2024) outlines the UK government's vision for empowering local leaders by transferring powers and responsibilities to local governments, promoting greater regional autonomy, and enhancing service delivery across England. Effective implementation of local government reorganisation will require a dedicated, skilled team that can manage the transition efficiently and effectively.

This template provides an easy-read guide on how to stand up an effective implementation team, including key roles, considerations for success, potential pitfalls, and cost estimates.

Of course, the key consideration here is context. No one size fits all and the individual circumstances involved will impact the decisions you make and the route you ultimately choose in terms of implementation.

This guide has been created using advice from published documents, as well as feedback and lessons learnt from a panel of Chief Executives and senior leaders who have personally led through one or more local government reorganisation processes, as well as a panel of serving Chief Executives facing the LGR process now.

PRE-IMPLEMENTATION

The process of local government reorganisation is complex, time-consuming, and costly and the best way to mitigate the risks involved is to start the engagement process early (with all parties) and do this in a meaningful way, to attempt to facilitate an agreement and process that all stakeholders are bought into where possible. Political consensus on the proposal for devolution and LGR, and the governance of the programme, will help to avoid unnecessary delays and additional complexity, if it can be delivered. Identifying an “honest broker” to facilitate this process may be helpful.

Detailed analysis and research prior to submitting the final business case is essential. You may need to bring in capacity and expertise where needed to ensure that your proposal is credible and has been fully tested and evidenced. Not all types of Devo/LGR are equal in terms of complexity.

Levels of debt and asset holdings will also need careful consideration, in terms of agreeing the proposal to be submitted and planning implementation. Ensure you give due consideration to the different options on the table, including all the related risks and ensure you reality check your option (at the final business case stage). Early consideration of contracts and staff T&Cs etc is also prudent at this stage.

It is also important to observe how the new authority(ies) will align with the Strategic Authority at this stage.

There can be a tendency to prioritise keeping the peace and holding back on “showing your hand”, prior to submitting your interim business case. There is a need for brave and bold decision-making, supported by research and a solid evidence-base.

Whilst the need for a safe, timely and legal transition is paramount, there is also an opportunity for real public service reform. Preparing for a new era, in a new shape with the capability and capacity in the right place, to ensure success as a new organisation. Using the principles of systems leadership there’s an opportunity to apply a holistic, collaborative, and adaptive approach to solving the complex problem of reform. Focusing on understanding and managing the interdependencies within systems (like public services), rather than focusing solely on individual parts, can guide reform efforts, making them more efficient, equitable, and sustainable. Consider at this point strategic partnerships (health, police, fire, VCS, businesses etc) and the importance of engaging *all* stakeholders throughout the process.

Guidance from Government sets an expectation that reorganisation should pay for itself. This is a call to transform services and make savings at the same time as reorganising. This adds another layer of complexity but is critical in terms of designing services that truly reform the sector and meet the needs of residents.

Your business case should satisfy two criteria.

1. What’s in it for the public? (appropriate, modern, efficient, effective services)
2. What’s in it for the organisation (how will it improve the organisation?).

If your business case does not adequately detail how it will benefit residents, it will be difficult to “sell” it to the public and stakeholders.

The Honest-Broker

In some instances, it may be worth considering appointing an individual, to under-take the role of an “honest broker”. This is someone who can, without prejudice, broker relationships across the region and facilitate discussions amongst all stakeholders, to support the process of achieving consensus where possible.

Business-as-usual

During periods of transformation, it is easy for the focus to shift entirely to the future and the new systems being introduced. However, it is crucial that local councils continue to deliver the day-to-day services that communities rely on. Senior leaders are already telling us that LGR discussions are all-encompassing and taking up nearly all bandwidth. The ‘business as usual’ work of local government cannot be neglected, and you may need to consider adding capacity at this point to “keep the show on the road”.

IMPLEMENTATION | PRIMARY CONSIDERATIONS

To advance the initial stages of the Council's reorganisation it is suggested that a number of workstreams would need to be progressed.

1. Governance – identify the appropriate resource to focus on governance and get this right from the very start of the process. The governance element splits into two distinct elements. The first being the “forming” elements where forums are simply created to start discussing the various options and agreeing the methodology to create the business case for change. The more detailed discussions that follow will need to consider drafting the constitution, standing orders, financial regulations and political structures etc. This refers to the governance for the delivery of the change programme and the design of the governance structures for the newly created authority or authorities. The core of this includes the delegation of executive authority and budgets by the councils to a group of SROs and the creation of a programme office.
2. The strategy for implementation will be greatly influenced by whether Members are elected before the new authority is created or after. Typically, a new authority would be created on 1 April and elections in May of the preceding year. However, on occasions Parliament agrees to do it the other way round. If elections take place in the preceding year, the elected members form the Shadow Authority which has powers to appoint senior staff, approve a constitution and set the budget for the ensuing year. In this scenario there is a single group of dedicated Members focusing on setting strategy, budget, constitution etc. for the new authority. If Members are elected after the new authority is created, you will have a much wider group of councillors from the constituent authorities who act as the Shadow Authority. They will be obliged to work together making decisions and attempting to find consensus on a broad range of complex issues.
3. Resourcing – identify sufficient resources to support implementation of the programme and ensure a cost sharing protocol between all the constituent authorities. Joint implementation teams are likely to be a factor here, and the governance of these teams will need to be established. As part of this you will need a skilled and adequately resourced Programme Management Office to support the identified SROs, Project Directors and Project Managers etc. Resources to maintain BAU (e.g back-fill etc) should not be ignored.
4. Decide on style of Political and Executive Leadership – For example, distributed leadership where all Leaders and Chief Executives have a key role to play in driving the reorganisation, usually as Political Lead or Sponsor of one or more of the workstreams (if skillset allows). Where this is not the case, consider how you will maintain focus and retain key staff to see through the process.

IMPLEMENTATION TEAM | KEY ROLES

An effective implementation team will need a variety of roles to manage different aspects of the reorganisation process.

Internal VS External Resource

Whether these posts are appointed internally, seconded or brought in externally will need careful consideration. Internal resource will be more cost effective (although appropriate backfill may need to be sourced to adequately resource LGR and BAU), they will know and understand the context and the stakeholders involved and will have a vested interest in a successful outcome. You will also retain the skills developed once the project is complete. However, the skills required are crucial; the wrong person in a key post could cost all stakeholders dearly. Seek to utilise the skills and experience you have available internally wisely but don't underestimate the level of resource needed and the specialist skills required. Sometimes it will also be appropriate to consider impartiality – particularly in the case where all parties are not in full agreement.

External resource, if required should be brought in on fixed term or interim contract to avoid potential redundancy costs and be reviewed regularly at agreed break points.

The following roles are critical for ensuring a smooth and successful transition.

1. **Executive Lead** – typically this is a Chief Executive from one of the constituent authorities or it can be an independent person who reports into the governance structure.

Responsibilities:

- Act as the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for the whole programme
- Provide overall leadership and strategic direction for the reorganisation process, building strong relationships with statutory officers in all constituent authorities and all stakeholders.
- Convene the CEOs from the constituent authorities and build their commitment to shared goals
- Ensure alignment with the goals and principles outlined in the Devolution White Paper.
- Support the Shadow Authority (or authorities) as and when they are created by Parliament
- Act as primary liaison with senior government officials, regional stakeholders, and political leaders.
- Monitor progress and resolve any issues at the executive level.

Skills Needed: Leadership, gravitas, strategic planning, government relations, negotiation, influencing, decision-making.

2. Programme Director

Responsibilities:

- Set the overall vision and strategy for the programme, ensuring that it aligns with organisational goals and overseeing its progress towards achieving those goals
- Set up and manage the PMO, defining its purpose, structure and governance
- Define key workstreams and ensure appropriate leadership and resourcing
- Articulate programme issues and ensure their resolution
- Articulate key risks and ensure their mitigation is in place
- Allocate resources to deliver the programme including backfill arrangements for seconded staff
- Ensure alignment with the broader vision for devolution.

Skills needed: Programme management, leadership, risk management, decision making, completer/finisher

3. Programme Manager(s)

Responsibilities:

- Oversee day-to-day operations of the implementation project.
- Manage the project timelines, milestones, risks, and resource allocation.
- Coordinate between internal teams, councils, and external partners.
- One option is to have a suite of project managers who each lead on specific workstreams / service focus
- Skills Needed: Project management, risk management, cross-functional team coordination.

4. Stakeholder Engagement & Public Relations Lead

Responsibilities:

- Lead tailored communication efforts with key stakeholders (e.g., local authorities, public service organisations, residents, and MPs).
 - Develop a transparent, inclusive stakeholder engagement and comms strategy.
 - Organise public consultations, information sessions, and feedback mechanisms.
 - Manage media relations and ensure effective public communication to foster trust.
 - Keep employees informed and engaged. They can be great advocates / champions.
- Skills Needed: Public relations, community engagement and liaison, communication strategy, stakeholder management, crisis communication.

5. Legal & Governance Advisor

Responsibilities:

- Provide legal counsel on governance structure changes, compliance, and regulations.
- Ensure that the reorganisation process aligns with national legislation, including devolution agreements.
- Draft and review new legal frameworks, contracts (inc. existing), and agreements as needed.

Skills Needed: Legal expertise, public administration law, governance frameworks, compliance.

6. Finance & Budgeting Lead

Responsibilities:

- Develop and manage the financial plan for reorganisation.
- Consider HRA.
- Monitor costs, allocate funding, and ensure efficient use of resources.
- Work with government bodies to secure funding, including potential devolution grants.
- Ensure financial sustainability post-reorganisation.
- Skills Needed: Financial planning, budget management, public sector finance, s151 experience

7. HR/OD & Change Management Lead

Responsibilities:

- Oversee the human resources aspects of the reorganisation, including staff transitions, TUPE, redundancies, and redeployment. Top tip...don't leave the PAs until last in the structure. Get them on board early and they will help to smooth the process!
- Ensure all HR policies around well-being, diversity etc are being adhered to.
- Lead OD and change management efforts to ensure smooth adaptation to the new structure.
- Develop training and upskilling programs to equip local government employees for new roles.
- Manage union negotiations where relevant.
- Skills Needed: HR management, organisational change, negotiation, employee engagement.

8. Data & IT Integration Lead

Responsibilities:

- Manage the integration of IT systems, data infrastructure, and digital tools necessary for the new governance structure.
- Consider shared service.
- Ensure that local authorities' databases and systems are aligned and can efficiently share data.
- Implement cybersecurity and data protection measures.
- Address IT challenges, ensuring that the transition is seamless and secure.
- Top Tip – do not underestimate the volume of work to integrate IT systems / build new ones etc, build in contingency timescales as it will be more complex/time consuming than anticipated AND available skill sets are at a premium
- Skills Needed: IT management, systems integration, data governance, cybersecurity.

9. Policy & Strategy Advisor

Responsibilities:

- Ensure that the reorganisation is aligned with the strategic goals outlined in the Devolution White Paper.
- Develop specific policy proposals and frameworks that support devolution and local empowerment.
- Monitor progress on the implementation of policies that support regional growth and service delivery.
- Skills Needed: Public policy, strategic planning, regional development.

10. Service Lead Experts

Responsibilities:

- Lead and transition services in the new authorities (eg. Children's and Adult Services, Planning, Waste etc)
- Service design and transformation.
- Skills Needed: Service expertise, service design, transformation, leadership.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL TEAM

Key Considerations for a Successful Implementation Team

(policy, process and people)

1. Clear Vision and Alignment

- The reorganisation process must be guided by a unified vision. All team members should understand the broader objectives set out in the Devolution White Paper, including economic growth, public service reform, and local autonomy.
- Clarity about the “devolution asks” and how these fit into the vision for the area and the LGR proposal is vital. A less than coherent case is likely to undermine the proposal.
- Ensure that the team’s efforts align with the specific needs and challenges of the region(s) undergoing reorganisation.

2. Definition and design of programme aims and workstreams

- These are likely to include, developing the vision, values and strategy for the new authorities, creating the shape and allocation of roles etc and closing down the constituent authorities
- Each workstream will require its own programme plan and Senior Responsible Officer (SRO).

3. Engagement with Political Stakeholders

- Local government reorganisation is a politically sensitive process. Ensure consistent engagement with elected officials (e.g. mayors, local MPs, council leaders) to address concerns, secure buy-in, and resolve any conflicts that may arise.
- The Parliamentary process requires the involvement of local MPs. So, it is essential they are fully engaged in the process. Failure to do so can lead to delays.

4. Continuing authority or new authority

- The decision (by Parliament) to confirm one or none of the constituent authorities as a “continuing authority” is a politically sensitive issue and can be seen as existential. The alternative is that none of the constituent authorities is named as such, and an entirely new authority or authorities are created in statute.

5. Disaggregation of “upper tier” services–

- The disaggregation of services which are the responsibility of county or unitary councils is a complex and, in most reorganisations, essential task
- It requires shared commitment from senior staff particularly from DCSs, DASSs, DPH, MO and S151 Officers.
- Sound understanding of services and robust financial analysis is essential in planning to disaggregate services and the budgets that support them.
- Services for adults, children and young people, transportation, public health, waste disposal and libraries will provide the focus for this work.

- Protocols for this work need to be agreed at an early stage. For example, will you divide Adult Social Care on a per capita or on a case-by-case basis?

6. Stakeholder/Employee Inclusivity and Transparency

- It is crucial to keep residents, businesses, and public sector employees informed and engaged. Regularly seek input from the public/employees and use consultations and surveys to gather feedback on the proposed changes.
- Consider your consultation strategy and how this will be governed.
- Ensure all existing stakeholder panels/forums are considered.
- The more inclusive and transparent the process, the more likely the reorganisation will be successful.

7. Resource Allocation

- Ensure that there are sufficient resources (staff, budget, technology) dedicated to the implementation process, as well as to maintain business-as-usual. Without the proper resources, the project may face delays or fail to meet its objectives.
- It is important to factor in the long-term sustainability of resources post-reorganisation.

8. Cultural and Organisational Change Management

- Address the cultural challenges within local authorities and public sector organisations. Staff may feel uncertain about job security, role changes, or new responsibilities, help them understand the benefits for them.
- Use existing and agreed mechanisms like staff engagement and trade union forums.
- A structured change management strategy is vital to ensuring the smooth adoption of new working practices and governance structures.

9. Legal and Regulatory Compliance

- Make sure the reorganisation complies with all legal frameworks, both in terms of government regulations and public sector obligations. Regular legal reviews will ensure that changes adhere to national standards.

10. Managing External Partnerships

- The reorganisation will likely involve third-party contractors, consultancies, and service providers. Establish clear contracts (or transfer of contracts) and performance metrics to ensure the partners deliver on their obligations.

11. Developing New Skills

- LGR is happening at a time where there is a wider ecosystem of significant policy change which will fundamentally affect how councils will need to deliver services in the future.

- For example, the devolution agenda sees strategic place functions being transferred to mayoral strategic authorities and also reintroduces a statutory role in strategic planning through spatial development strategies (SDS's).
- With a significant focus on integrating these to catalyse investment aligned with Local Growth Plans (LGP's) and through delivery of housing, jobs and growth, which is the responsibility of lower tier councils, means that teams implementing LGR will need to have experience and understanding of how these interdependencies will need to be addressed both operationally and politically during LGR.
- This will have fundamental impacts on the role of new unitaries in how their traditional planning and place departments (including highways, environment and housing) will need to operate and how resources and transition should be planned.
- New skills will need to be developed in the sector around investment, markets and strategic planning and growth.

Potential Pitfalls

1. Political Resistance

- Local government reorganisation often encounters political resistance, especially from those concerned about losing influence or control. Work to address concerns early and keep political leaders on board throughout the process.

2. Lack of Planning

- Don't underestimate the level of planning required to bring people, systems and services together into a new organisation. One small detail missed could cause major problems for years to come.

3. Lack of Communication

- A failure to communicate and engage effectively with key stakeholders, especially staff and local communities, can lead to confusion, mistrust, and opposition. Regular and clear communication and engagement is essential to manage expectations.

4. Budget Overruns

- Failure to accurately forecast costs, or underestimating the resources required for IT, staffing, or legal support, could lead to budget overruns. This is a common pitfall in large-scale public sector reorganisations.

5. Staff Resistance and Attrition

- Employee resistance to change, fear, lack of info/understanding or clarity of future can cause delays and low morale. Lack of training or unclear role definitions could lead to a breakdown in services and staff turnover. Addressing this early with clear communication and support structures is key. Retaining key skills in the sector is vital.

6. Operational Disruptions

- Reorganisations can disrupt service delivery if not managed carefully. Prioritise continuity of essential services during the transition and put contingency plans in place to handle potential operational challenges. Strengthening capacity may be required.
- Throughout the reorganisation process maintain BAU service delivery. Members and the Public will demand this.

7. IT Complexities

- Integrating systems and/or standing up new systems can be technically challenging and outcome critical

Cost Considerations for Personnel

Costs for local government reorganisation can vary depending on the scale of the operation, the number of councils involved, and the complexity of the transition. Given the unique nature of the experience needed, in some cases, supply and demand will also influence cost.

You may need to appoint members of your implementation team (or back-fill leadership roles) externally. If so, for budgeting purposes these are the costs you might expect to see.

Key Posts:

- Honest Broker - £900 – 1,500 per day
- Executive Lead - £120,000 - £200,000 per annum or £900 - £1,200 per day.
- Programme Directors - £70,000–£150,000 per annum or £800 - £1,200 per day.
- Programme Managers - £50,000 - £70,000 per annum or £600 - £800 per day.
- HR, Finance, IT, Legal professionals – Operational staff £50,000- £60,000 per annum or £600 - £800 per day or strategic staff £80,000 – 180,000 per annum or £800 - £1,200 per day.
- Comms and policy professionals - £60,000 - £100,000 per annum or £600 - £900 per day
- Service Lead Experts - £60,000 - £150,000 per annum or £600 - £1,000 per day.

Consultants:

- Critical Friends, Honest Brokers, Legal advisors, financial consultants, and change management experts: £500 – £1,200 per day, depending on expertise.

Depending how you source external resource there may be agency costs, consultancy management fees, VAT and expenses to consider in addition to the costs above.

For further discussion

Solace is impartial, experienced and well-informed, and is therefore able to act with integrity and knowledge to support officers and members through the LGR process.

If you would like to discuss any element of this Guide in more detail, or if you would like to understand more about how Solace can help, please don't hesitate to contact Jessica Mullinger.



Jessica Mullinger

Director of Interim Management
Solace in Business

07796691478

jessica.mullinger@solace.org.uk

Sources

- UK Government, "Devolution White Paper: A New Deal for England's Regions" (December 2024).
- Local Government Association (LGA), "Guidelines on Local Government Restructuring."
- National Audit Office (NAO), "Delivering Local Government Reforms: Lessons Learned from Previous Reorganisations."
- Grant Thornton, "Local Government Reorganisation – Lessons from New Unitaries"