



**General Meeting
10.00am, Friday 27th February 2026**

Civic Suite, Newark & Sherwood District Council

9.00am Registration

9.30am Political Group Meetings

Conservative Group

Independent Group

Labour Group

Liberal Democrat Group

Reform UK Group

10.00am General Meeting

1. Apologies
2. Declarations of Interest
3. Minutes of EMC Meeting held on 11th July 2025 *
4. Asylum and Refugee Resettlement in the East Midlands *
 - Alex Norris MP, Nottingham North and Kimberley, Minister of State (Minister for Border Security and Asylum) at the Home Office.
 - Cllr John Doddy, Chair of Regional Migration Board
5. Local Government Reorganisation – From Now to Vesting Day
Tony McArdle, MHCLG Senior Sector Advisor *
6. Chair's Report *
7. Motion(s) to East Midlands Councils
8. Local Government Workforce and Development - Regional Employers' Board Report *
9. Regional Infrastructure and Investment*

*attached

Minutes of the East Midlands Councils General Meeting

Friday 11th July 2025

(Newark & Sherwood District Council)

Cllr Tricia Gilby chaired and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Members placed on record their thanks to Cllr Martin Hill for his service as Chair of EMC over the last 10 years.

Members also formally thanked Cllr Sarah Russell who stood down as Vice Chair of EMC after 4 years, and all members who have served on EMC. Stuart Young was asked to write a letter of thanks to all those members.

1. Apologies

Cllr Ashley Baxter, Cllr James Berresford, Cllr Stuart Bray, Cllr James Dawson, Cllr Peter Dobbs, Cllr Chris Emmas-Williams, Cllr Corall Jenkins, Cllr Julie Leigh, Cllr Michale Mullaney, Cllr Laurie Needham, Cllr Rosemary Powell, Cllr Claire Rylott, Cllr Jonathan Slater, Cllr Naomi Tweddle

2. Declarations of Interest

2.1 Cllr Martin Hill declared an interest in land on the edge of Melton Mowbray.

3. Minutes of EMC AGM held on 31st January 2025

3.1 These were agreed as a true and accurate record. All action points have been completed.

4. Presentation of the Annual Report 2024/25

4.1 Stuart Young presented to members the Annual Report for 2024/25.

4.2 He highlighted work from the last 12 months. Almost £500,000 of savings have been delivered to member councils.

- 4.3 Stuart highlighted the CPD Programme and also the ASDO National programme delivered by EMC local government services.
- 4.4 In relation to transport and growth the A46 Newark Bypass work should commence soon, subject to Government funding.
- 4.5 The APPG has now been established, and this is chaired by James Naish MP (Rushcliffe).
- 4.6 In relation to wider policy, LGR and devolution proposals will likely have a significant impact upon EMC as a membership body, and the implications will be worked through in the next 12-18 months.

Questions/Comments

- 4.7 Cllr John Clarke asked how the organisation will be shaped for the future in light of the LGR and devolution proposals.
- 4.8 Stuart Young confirmed that scenario planning is being undertaken. Once the local government structure becomes clearer, then plans will be further developed. It was confirmed that EMC budgets are largely secure for the next 12-18 months.
- 4.9 Cllr John Clarke asked that this is discussed in detail at the next meeting when more is known.
- 4.10 Cllr Phil King highlighted the pause of Midland Mainline Electrification and asked whether EMC can issue a response in relation to this to express disappointment.
- 4.11 Cllr John Doddy highlighted the Independent Review Panel and lack of uniformity and feels EMC could help with arranging a consistent review for all councils.
- 4.12 Cllr Martin Griffiths confirmed that a set allowance is not being suggested, but to establish common practices in order to provide for greater consistency.
- 4.13 Resolution

Members of East Midlands Councils:

- Considered progress of EMC in meeting the priorities set by its Members and endorsed the Annual Report 2024/25.

5. EMC Governance and Amendment to Constitution

5.1 Cllr Tricia Gilby introduced this report that details the recent election results and proposed changes to EMC governance.

5.2 Stuart Young informed Members of the changes to the region's political balance as a result of the recent local elections and provided detail on the proposed amendments to the constitution specifically that a political group is recognised once a 5% threshold is reached (this threshold aligns with the LGA). Cllr Gilby confirmed this has been agreed by political group leaders at the recent Management Group meeting.

5.3 Resolution

Members of East Midlands Councils:

- Noted the changes of leadership and political control in the region.
- Endorsed the proposals for the introduction of a 5% threshold for the recognition of political groups that once met, the political party should be offered status as a separate political group within EMC's governance.

6. Political Appointments

Stuart Young, Executive Director East Midlands Councils, took the Chair for this section of the meeting.

a) Political Group Leaders

6.1 The following were appointed as Group Leaders:

- Conservative – Cllr Phil King
- Independent/Other – Cllr Ashley Baxter
- Labour - Cllr Jewel Miah
- Liberal Democrat – Cllr Gale Waller
- Reform UK – Cllr Martin Griffiths

b) Vice Chairs of East Midlands Councils

- 6.2 Cllr Elly Cutkelvin (Leicester City Council) was appointed as Principal Vice Chair of East Midlands Councils and Cllr Tricia Gilby (Chesterfield Borough Council) was appointed as District-Vice Chair.

c) Chair of East Midlands Councils

- 6.3 Cllr Sean Matthews (Lincolnshire County Council) was appointed as Chair.

Cllr Sean Matthews took the chair for the remainder of the meeting.

Cllr Sean Matthews thanked Members for their nomination and looked forward to his term of office, working collectively on behalf of local government in the East Midlands.

He also thanked Members for their work over the past 12 months, and their continued support over the coming year.

7. Motion(s) to East Midlands Councils

- 7.1 None submitted.

8. Regional Investment, Infrastructure and Growth

- 8.1 Andrew Pritchard introduced this report and highlighted the key issues to members.

- 8.2 He stated that the regional economy has been growing at or around the UK average for the last 20 years, but productivity has been below the UK average and falling. Levels of public investment in the East Midlands are very much below UK average.

- 8.3 Housing delivery over the past 20 years has generally been consistent with government expectations.

- 8.4 New towns taskforce is due to be published in autumn of this year.
- 8.5 Andrew highlighted flood risk and the East Midlands has suffered a number of flood events in recent years.
- 8.6 The pause of Midland Mainline electrification will have significant implications for the East Midlands.
- 8.7 Andrew confirmed that work has now started on regional energy strategic plans and NESO are to be invited to the next Executive Board meeting.

Comments/Questions

- 8.8 Cllr Martin Hill stated that flooding is becoming an increasing issue across the East Midlands. The lack of investment was highlighted as a significant factor. Flood defence assets are crumbling and without investment flooding events will continue to happen.
- 8.9 Cllr Phil King expressed concerns in relation to A5 being missed off government funding.
- 8.10 He is also concerned with the response from the Environment Agency in relation to smaller flooding incidents.
- 8.11 Cllr Neil Clarke stated that water is travelling too fast into the river systems, and surrounding flood plains are unable to cope. There are ways to mitigate this by investing in improved flood mitigation.
- 8.12 He suggested an additional bullet point be added under recommendations:
- 8.13 Cllr Craig Leyland highlighted the backlog and prioritisation of the Environment Agency's infrastructure and flood defence programme. He also expressed concern in relation to the condition of flood defences and how this is managed in the future.
- 8.14 Members expressed extreme disappointment at the pause of Midland Mainline electrification north of Wigston and EMC should escalate efforts and

- the lobbying of central government to reinstate this investment to support economic growth in the East Midlands.
- 8.15 Cllr Martin Griffiths asked that EMC also lobby government and Network Rail to get faster trains from London-Sheffield.
- 8.16 Cllr Jewel Miah feels that the Mayor is the route where funding is coming through for the region. He also feels the frequency of trains and rolling stock are the main issue which needs to be addressed.
- 8.17 Cllr Miah wished to nominate Cllr Nadine Peatfield to the position of flood lead.
- 8.18 Cllr Steve Flitter expressed concerns in relation to flooding and mitigation which does not work. He feels there is a bigger voice needed in the East Midlands.
- 8.19 Cllr Sean Matthews extended an open invitation for him to visit County areas.
- 8.20 Stuart Young summarised from the points raised by members.
- 8.21 There are key issues that need to be picked up by NESO and will be in contact with officers prior to their attendance at the EMC Executive Board.
- 8.22 In relation to flooding there is a draft response which will be shared with members and officers and will be signed off by EMC Chair.
- 8.23 In relation to rail, Andrew Pritchard will continue to make the case for the electrification of Midland Mainline and EMC will do what we can to mitigate the impact.
- 8.24 Cllr Craig Leyland, Cllr Danny Brooks also expressed an interest to provide leadership and oversight on flood related work.
- 8.25 It was agreed that this could be a politically represented group and Cllr Waller suggested liaising with political group leaders for representation.

Resolution

Members of East Midlands Councils:

- Endorsed the proposed EMC consultation response on the funding of flood defences set out in the Appendix to the report.
- Considered the proposal for nominating a lead member to provide leadership and oversight on flood related work.
- Endorsed the work of the TfEM Board.
- Expressed extreme disappointment at the pause of Midland Mainline electrification north of Wigston and therefore EMC to escalate campaign and lobbying of central government to reinstate the electrification project to support investment in the economic growth of the East Midlands region.

9. Asylum and Refugee Resettlement in the East Midlands

- 9.1 Cllr Alex Dale, Chair Regional Migration Board, introduced this report and highlighted the various Government asylum and refugee resettlement programmes.
- 9.2 He updated in terms of schemes which are currently ongoing.
- 9.3 The Full Asylum dispersal model is implemented in order to have a more balanced approach.
- 9.4 In relation to UASC, regularly feeding back around age assessment process and arrivals through adult hotels. UASC care leavers are significantly underfunded.
- 9.5 Cllr Deborah Taylor highlighted the size of houses needed for Afghan families and she flagged the risk of very large families becoming homeless.
- 9.6 Cllr Phil King stated that authorities do not have sufficient resource and there is a need to stop people presenting at port to limit numbers arriving in local communities for accommodation and wider support.
- 9.7 Cllr John Doddy stated that if there is no overall assessment of cost to schools, crimes, neighbourhoods., authorities cannot determine specific impacts.

9.8 Cllr Dale expressed frustration in the lack of a joined-up approach from Government departments across all asylum and resettlement schemes.

9.9 Resolution

Members of East Midlands Councils:

- Considered the impact of asylum and refugee resettlement programmes and provided advice in relation to the on-going work of EMC in addressing the concerns of local authorities.
- Advised on the impact of the Full Asylum Dispersal Plan in Local Authority areas.
- Advised on the impact of the Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP).

10. Local Authority Workforce and Pay – Regional Employers’ Board

10.1 Cllr Gale Waller, Vice-Chair Regional Employers’ Board introduced this report which highlights a number of significant issues for local authorities as employers.

10.2 A great deal of work has been undertaken with the LGA on developing and retaining staff.

10.3 In relation to pay, the employers’ side have made a full and final offer and are waiting for unions to respond.

10.4 There are various CPD opportunities which are provided for staff and members to learn about different roles. There are also a number of networks which are held.

10.5 Resolution

Members of East Midlands Councils:

- Considered the issues raised within this report.
- Raised awareness of the councillor development programme amongst Member colleagues.

Cllr Sean Matthews closed the meeting at 12.45pm



General Meeting

27th February 2026

Asylum and Refugee Resettlement Report

Summary

This report updates Members on the key issues for the region in the delivery of national asylum and refugee resettlement policy and programmes. The report further outlines the matters relating to asylum dispersal, UASC and the Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP).

Please note that this report remains confidential due to the inclusion of sensitive data.

Recommendations

Members of East Midlands Councils are invited to:

- Consider the impact of asylum and refugee resettlement programmes and provide advice in relation to the on-going work of EMC in addressing the concerns of local authorities.
- Advise on the impact of the Full Dispersal plan in Local Authority areas.
- Advise on impact of the Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP).

1. Introduction

- 1.1 EMC provides leadership and coordination on migration (asylum and refugee resettlement matters) through its Government funded Strategic Migration Partnership (SMP).
- 1.2 EMC provides a 'critical friend and challenge' role to Government to support the effective development and cost-effective delivery of programmes and is the central point for collaboration between national government, local government and other key partner organisations on asylum and refugee resettlement matters.

2. Asylum Dispersal

- 2.1 Office for National Statistics (ONS) data show that, by the end of September 2025, around 104,400 asylum seekers were being supported nationally in contingency (hotel), initial, and dispersal accommodation. In the East Midlands, 7,574 asylum seekers were accommodated, with numbers increasing by 1,200 people between April - September (representing a 16% increase). Increases during these months are linked to favourable crossing conditions. Updated data up until December 2025 will be published end-February 2026. These figures highlight the continuing scale of demand on local services and communities across the region.
- 2.2 Asylum seekers are currently accommodated across 29 local authority areas in the East Midlands. Since the introduction of the full dispersal model in April 2023, more councils now participate, helping to share responsibility more evenly across the region. Early and meaningful engagement with councils remains essential when decisions are being considered on new or closing sites. In the East Midlands, the Home Office has improved its practice of involving local authorities at an early stage. This approach has supported effective local planning, strong partnership working, and better outcomes for communities.
- 2.3 ONS figures show that 42,405 migrants arrived on 687 small boats along the Kent coast between 1st February 2025 and 31st January 2026. A further 933 arrivals were recorded between 1st January and 2nd February 2026, while 1,149 people were prevented from crossing. These numbers demonstrate that irregular migration continues at scale and remains a major driver of pressure on the asylum system. Further information is available at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/migrants-detected-crossing-the-english-channel-in-small-boats>

Contingency Accommodation

- 2.4 Ongoing small boat arrivals, combined with limited long-term accommodation, has led to the continued use of hotels and other contingency sites across the UK, including in the East Midlands. The Government has committed to ending the use of hotels by the end of this Parliament and to accelerating closures. However, achieving this will require sustained reductions in arrivals and/or significant expansion of the dispersal estate, including larger-scale sites.
- 2.5 The Home Office states it regularly reviews asylum accommodation and makes decisions on hotel closures based on operational, financial, community, and regional considerations. These reviews are intended to support a transition towards more sustainable and cost-effective provision. EMC is not aware of any plans to close further hotels in the East Midlands.
- 2.6 By the end of September 2025, approximately 36,300 asylum seekers were living in contingency accommodation nationally. In the East Midlands, 1,872 bed spaces were provided in 13 hotels, approximately 5% of the national total. These hotels are located in Charnwood, Chesterfield, Derby, East Lindsey, Erewash, Leicester, West Northants and Nottingham. This reflects a significant contribution made by the region and its local authorities.
- 2.7 At the same time, 62,171 cases, involving 80,841 people, were awaiting an initial decision. Although this represents a 36% reduction compared with the previous year, delays in decision-making continue to contribute to longer stays in temporary accommodation and increased system costs.
- 2.8 Current accommodation capacity remains sufficient in the short term, partly due to seasonal reductions in crossings. However, pressures are expected to increase as arrivals rise. Progress is being made in securing additional dispersal accommodation, with the East Midlands currently at 64% of planned provision.
- 2.9 EMC is not aware of any large sites or additional hotels being considered in the East Midlands although the Home Office are continuing to explore large sites in other regions. Continued investment and delivery will be essential to avoid renewed reliance on emergency accommodation.

Funding

- 2.10 The Home Office provides funding to councils to assist with the costs of accommodating asylum seekers. This includes £1,200 per individual across all

accommodation types, and £100 per month for each occupied dispersal bed space. While this funding is important, councils continue to report that it does not fully reflect the wider pressures placed on housing, health, education, and community services.

56-Day Pilot Evaluation

- 2.11 The Home Office is currently evaluating the 56 Day Move-On Pilot and has been reviewing stakeholder feedback since December 2025. The extended support period remains in place for vulnerable individuals, including families with children, pregnant women, older people, and those with disabilities. The current arrangements will continue until 28th February 2026, when a decision on longer-term implementation is expected.
- 2.12 The reinstatement of the 28 day move-on period for single asylum seekers has created significant operational and welfare challenges. Local authorities consistently report that this timeframe is insufficient to secure housing, establish benefit claims, and obtain essential documentation. Delays in issuing e-visas and processing Universal Credit frequently exceed the 28 day limit, leaving individuals without income or accommodation and increasing the risk of homelessness. These pressures have placed growing strain on temporary accommodation budgets and frontline services. Limited coordination between the Home Office, the Department for Work and Pensions, and local housing teams, together with fragmented data systems, continues to undermine effective support and integration.
- 2.13 In response, EMC and local authorities continue to push for extending the move-on period to at least 56 days, reflecting homelessness prevention legislation and lessons learned from the pilot. They have also highlighted the need for stronger joint working, improved data-sharing arrangements, and earlier readiness assessments within asylum accommodation.

3. Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP)

- 3.1 The Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP) brings together existing Afghan resettlement schemes into a single scheme. This new policy was confirmed on 19th December 2024 with the plan to further resettle approximately 6,000 Eligible Persons to the UK by 2029.
- 3.2 From 1st March 2025, all arrivals under the ARP are provided with transitional accommodation (TA) for up to a maximum of 9 months. At the end of this period,

unless alternative accommodation is found, they are served notice to leave and face potential homelessness. TA included a mix of MoD serviced accommodation and RSOM sites (Reception, Onward Staging and Movement sites), and hotels. Settled accommodation includes MoD procured accommodation through the private rented sector, Local Authority Housing Fund and Serviced Families Accommodation properties.

- 3.3 Local Authorities were encouraged to support the delivery of the programme through providing transitional accommodation and/or helping to resettle and integrate newly arrived Afghans into accommodation within their local areas.
- 3.4 In the East Midlands, 2 RSOM sites (Beckingham and Garat's Hay) used as transitional accommodation have been reverted to their previous use by the MoD. MoD contracted Mears to provide Housing Advisors on site to source settled accommodation for those accommodated there.
- 3.5 In March 2025, the UK Government initiated efforts to promote a more equitable distribution of Afghan arrivals under the ARP, with all local authorities across the regions and nations contributing through regionally led plans. The East Midlands was allocated 390 individuals for 2025/2026. A new regional allocation for the next financial year is currently awaited. Once this is received, discussions with local authorities will resume to progress the East Midlands ARP pilot for transitional accommodation.

Funding Package for ARP

- 3.6 LA funding for integration will be streamlined into a single tariff of £24,110 (per individual) over 3 years and will replace existing funding streams. The first-year funding is split into three tranches to be claimed by the transitional or resettling authority, depending on where the family resides at the point of claim.
- 3.7 There is additional funding for education of £5,130 per child aged 5-18 and up to £2,965 per child aged 3-4 is available in first year only. The Healthcare Tariff is £2,600 per person, split into two tranches to be claimed by the relevant Integrated Care Board.
- 3.8 EM LAs are currently awaiting payments concerning the ARP cohort received after 1 March. The Home Office payments team has advised that there are delays in processing the relevant claims and has confirmed that work is ongoing to resolve these issues.

Afghan Resettlement Numbers

- 3.9 At end-September 2025, since the first arrivals in 2021, 31,944 Afghan nationals have been resettled through the ARP, ACRS and ARP nationally.
- 3.10 Of these, 1,226 individuals arriving through the ARP, ACRS and ARP schemes have been accommodated across the East Midlands since 2021.
- 3.11 In 2025, local authorities in the East Midlands resettled 347 Afghan individuals, in 70 households. A total of 66 properties were occupied, comprising 37 Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) properties, 15 properties within the Private Rented Sector (PRS), 9 Mears contracted properties, 4 social housing properties, and 1 Service Family Accommodation (SFA) property.

4. Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, the National Transfer Scheme and Spontaneous Arrivals

- 4.1 The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) was introduced on 1 July 2016 as part of a suite of measures included in the Immigration Act 2016. At that stage, the NTS was a voluntary agreement between local authorities to ensure a more equitable distribution of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children across local authorities.
- 4.2 The voluntary model was not able to sufficiently keep pace with the intake into the asylum system. Consequently, under existing powers in the 2016 Act, the government made participation in the NTS mandatory for all local authorities with Children's Services across the UK from February 2022. However, no council with levels of UASC in care at or above 0.1% of its general child population is required to accept NTS transfers while they remain above that threshold.
- 4.3 In 2023, the High Court stated that the NTS is enforceable by the Home Secretary by judicial review: a local authority that is under its 0.1% quota must accept children allocated by the NTS within the timescales prescribed (10 working days).
- 4.4 EMC takes the lead role on influencing government in relation to UASC policy. In collaboration with all upper tier authorities in the region, EMC has successfully lobbied government over the past few years to make changes to the national UASC funding tariff, initially equating to an annual increase of over £3m to Children's Services in the region at the time of the increase, and last year a further annual increase in UASC funding to the region of £2.2m.

- 4.5 Influencing by EMC has also seen changes to the funding of the National Transfer Scheme, with the introduction by the Home Office of incentivised funding for timely transfers in 2023. In 2025, this equated to an additional £1.7m funding to the region's Children's Services.

East Midlands Position

- 4.6 Transfers from November 2021 are counted towards mandated NTS allocations. To date, under the mandated NTS, the region has received 1,091 transfers.
- 4.7 The total number of unaccompanied children looked after by East Midlands authorities was 596 at the end of December 2025, and with only a 0.2% reduction from the levels in December 2025. However, the number of former UASC care leavers in the region is currently 1,497, a year-on-year increase of 182 individuals.

Regional Approach to UASC Programme

- 4.8 In light of the expectations of the mandatory NTS on local authorities in the East Midlands, and in order to deliver cost-efficient and effective services, as well as significant cost savings, the Regional Migration Board has asked EMC to consider further development of the regional UASC strategy and explore possible innovative approaches to the care of unaccompanied children. This collaborative approach, comprising a regional work programme and legal service, is being delivered by EMC in partnership with local authorities and is overseen by East Midlands Directors of Children's Services Group. To support this, the regional UASC programme has been advancing across three workstreams:
- Workstream 1 – recruitment of additional UASC foster carers and supported lodgings providers.
 - Workstream 2 – joint regional programme to improve efficacy of local authority age assessments, particularly in response to referrals from asylum contingency hotels.
 - Workstream 3 – regional strategic needs analysis of further efficiencies that may be secured in the joint delivery of NTS responsibilities.
- 4.9 The jointly-procured Regional Immigration Advice Service provides expert, strategic legal advice and training to upper tier local authorities across the East Midlands on complex matters involving immigration law and child protection, in relation to children in care, care leavers, and families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF). This is a highly specialised service, unique within the UK, and delivers cost savings and operational benefits to participating local authorities in the region.

5. Recommendations

Members of East Midlands Councils are invited to:

- 5.1 Consider the impact of asylum and refugee resettlement programmes and provide advice in relation to the on-going work of EMC in addressing the concerns of local authorities.
- 5.2 Advise on the impact of the Full Dispersal plan in Local Authority areas.
- 5.3 Advise on impact of the Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP).

Cllr John Doddy
Chair
Regional Migration Board



General Meeting

27th February 2026

Local Government Reorganisation

Summary

The following report provides a summary information on recent developments relating to proposed Local Government Reorganisation and devolution.

Tony McArdle is MHCLG Senior Sector Advisor and a member of the Local Government Reorganisation Advisory Group. Mr McArdle is welcomed to this meeting to discuss developments regarding LGR and to advise on next steps, including on the range of issues that should be considered in preparation for, and implementation of, agreed propositions.

Recommendation

Members of East Midlands Councils are invited to consider the range of LGR proposals from councils in the East Midlands, including issues relating to the preparation for, and implementation of, agreed propositions and wider developments relating to devolution.

1. Local Government Reorganisation

- 1.1 The deadline for local authorities in the East Midlands to submit their full proposals for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) was 28th November 2025.
- 1.2 The East Midlands is one of the most 2 tier regions, with a local government structure comprising 4 county councils, 6 unitary councils, 29 district/borough councils and 1 National Park Authority. The implementation of LGR has a greater impact on this region than many other parts of the country.
- 1.3 While exact structures are not yet determined, it is likely that there may be 10/12 local authorities in the region once LGR is implemented. A summary of recently submitted proposals for LGR is provided in section 2 of this report.
- 1.4 Members previously requested information on the LGR process and related timetable. A summary note is thus provided and attached as Appendix 5(a).
- 1.5 Members may be aware of recent concerns regarding the funding arrangements for future unitary authorities. As individual council's funding will be fixed for the next 3 years, councils will be asked to agree themselves how new funding will be divided between areas where authorities such as county councils are split as a result of reorganisation.
- 1.6 MHCLG confirmed that they will look to provide local authorities with guidance, but that if councils are not able to agree apportionment, then the Government will put in place a 'backstop' – in effect, making the decision itself 'to ensure any division of funding is made on a rational basis'. In many ways, this is similar to the LGR process itself, where councils were asked to come up with plans, and if they could not agree, then Ministers would have the final say.
- 1.7 It is worth reflecting that not a single county area within the region has unanimously agreed LGR proposals for their local area. This is perhaps not surprising, and not unique to the East Midlands because nationally, not one of the 21 areas invited to submit proposals had consensus support for a single option.

2. Summary of Proposals for Local Government Reorganisation in the East Midlands

- 2.1 The following report provides a summary of LGR proposals from councils in the East Midlands. In total, 15 proposals were submitted: 5 from Derbyshire, 3 from Leicestershire, 3 from Nottinghamshire, and 4 from councils in Lincolnshire.

a) Derbyshire

Derbyshire County Council

The county council's preferred option is for a single unitary council for all of Derbyshire including Derby City.

Derby City and District Councils

- Derby City Council and the 8 District Councils propose establishing 2 unitary councils for the Derbyshire area; a council for northern Derbyshire and a council for southern Derbyshire with Amber Valley council area being split between the northern and southern councils, albeit that councils have indicated different preferences for how the Amber Valley area should be allocated:
- Derby City, Chesterfield Borough, Erewash Borough and High Peak Borough support an option that divides Amber Valley between the two new authorities.
- North East Derbyshire District, Bolsover District and Derbyshire Dales District support a similar north–south structure but placing more of Amber Valley in the north.
- South Derbyshire District Council supports an option that places the whole Amber Valley area in the south.
- Amber Valley Borough Council supports Option A, which places the entire district within the new North Derbyshire authority.

b) Leicestershire

Leicestershire County Council

Leicestershire County Council proposes a single Leicestershire and Rutland unitary, with the city boundary unchanged.

Leicester City Council

The city council's proposal would establish two unitary councils for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Under the city council's preferred proposal, Leicester's boundary would expand to include parts of Blaby, Charnwood, and Harborough councils and all of Oadby & Wigston, and a second unitary authority would bring together the rest of the county area.

Leicestershire Districts and Rutland

- The 7 Leicestershire districts and Rutland County Council propose the 'North, City, South' model, advocating a 3 unitary council structure comprising North Leicestershire and Rutland, South Leicestershire, and Leicester City.

- The North Leicestershire and Rutland unitary would include the districts and borough areas of North West Leicestershire, Charnwood and Melton, and Rutland. The South Leicestershire unitary would include the district and borough areas of Hinckley & Bosworth, Blaby, Oadby & Wigston, and Harborough. Leicester City Council's boundary would remain unchanged.

c) Lincolnshire

Lincoln City

City of Lincoln Council proposes an expanded Lincoln City Unitary (City of Lincoln and wards from North Kesteven and West Lindsey and a Rural Lincolnshire Unitary covering the remaining county districts (West Lindsey, East Lindsey, Boston, South Holland, North Kesteven and South Kesteven).

South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership

- East Lindsey, South Holland and Boston borough and district councils propose 2 new unitaries covering the entire GLCCA area, preserving existing boundaries and including both North and North East Lincolnshire Councils.
- The North Lincolnshire unitary includes the areas covered by North Lincolnshire, North East Lincolnshire, West Lindsey, Lincoln City.
- The South Lincolnshire unitary includes the areas covered by North Kesteven, South Kesteven, Boston, South Holland and East Lindsey.

Lincolnshire County Council

Lincolnshire County Council has submitted a single county-wide unitary proposal that covers the county and district councils and preserving the existing boundaries. This option is supported by North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire Councils.

North Kesteven and South Kesteven

North Kesteven and South Kesteven District Councils proposal is for 2 unitaries that preserve existing boundaries; a Southern Lincolnshire Unitary (North Kesteven, South Kesteven, South Holland), and a Central and Coastal Lincolnshire Unitary (City of Lincoln, West Lindsey, East Lindsey, Boston), alongside the existing northern unitaries.

d) Nottinghamshire

Nottingham City

- Nottingham City Council proposes a 2 unitary model, 1 for the North and East serving the more rural areas, and 1 for the Southwest based on the urban

conurbation. The proposals are aligned to ward boundaries rather than those of districts.

- The North and East unitary with a population of 561,200 would include Ashfield, Bassetlaw, Mansfield, Newark & Sherwood, and parts of Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe. The Southwest unitary, with a population of 612,500, would cover Nottingham City, parts of Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe.

Nottinghamshire County Council and Rushcliffe Borough Council

The county council and Rushcliffe propose a unitary covering Nottingham City, Broxtowe and Gedling Borough Council areas, with a second unitary council covering the Bassetlaw, Mansfield, Newark and Sherwood and Rushcliffe Borough Council areas.

Bassetlaw, Gedling, Mansfield and Newark and Sherwood Borough Councils

- Bassetlaw, Gedling, Mansfield and Newark and Sherwood Borough Councils propose a unitary covering Nottingham City, Broxtowe and Rushcliffe Borough Council areas, with a second unitary council to cover Bassetlaw, Gedling, Mansfield and Newark and Sherwood Borough Council areas.

- 2.2 North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire Councils are not included within LGR proposals, as both councils were only recently established in April 2021, replacing the previous county councils and district/borough councils.
- 2.3 In total, 52 different proposals for LGR were submitted nationally across 14 two-tier areas, with the total number rising to 70 when the 6 areas on the devolution priority programme that submitted bids in September 2025 are included.

MHCLG Consultation

- 2.4 MHCLG officials carried out a preliminary review of the submissions received on 28th November to ensure that they met with the statutory requirements under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Specifically, that the submission contains one option for the whole of the invitation area; that each principal authority has only made (or co-signed) one proposal; and that there is sufficient evidence provided to make a judgement against each criterion.
- 2.5 On 5th February 2026, the Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness, Alison McGovern MP, wrote to council leaders in 14 areas to inform them of the launch of the local government reorganisation consultations in their areas.

- 2.6 This letter was sent to councils in the following areas:
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough
 - Derbyshire and Derby
 - Devon, Plymouth and Torbay
 - Gloucestershire
 - Hertfordshire
 - Kent and Medway
 - Lancashire, Blackpool and Blackburn with Darwen
 - Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland
 - Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire and Northeast Lincolnshire
 - Nottinghamshire and Nottingham
 - Oxfordshire
 - Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent
 - Warwickshire
 - Worcestershire
- 2.7 Where submissions request a boundary change together with structural change, justification for this must also be provided. The Government confirmed that for these areas, it would be appropriate to consult the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.
- 2.8 While MHCLG has undertaken a preliminary assessment of all submissions, it has not made any formal assessment against the ‘invitation criteria’. This will be completed once the consultation process has concluded, so that all evidence can be considered.
- 2.9 The consultation will run until 26th March 2026. Once concluded, the Government will then formally assess the proposals against the criteria in the invitation letters and consider whether the proposals “are to be implemented, with or without modification”, with final decisions expected before the summer parliamentary recess.

MGCLG Advisory Group and Sector Advisors

- 2.10 MHCLG set up the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) advisory group to support the delivery of the government’s reorganisation programme, bringing together senior figures from across local government to provide independent, evidence-based advice to inform policy development and guide implementation.
- 2.11 MHCLG also appointed 3 experienced Sector Advisors to support the government and local councils in the planning and delivery of local government

reorganisation. The 3 advisors include Tony McArdle OBE, previous district and county chief executive, and local government commissioner.

- 2.12 All 3 sector advisors also sit on MHCLG’s local government reorganisation advisory group.

3. Devolution – The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill

- 3.1 The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill sets out how Government intends to deliver on its promised ‘devolution revolution’ over the course of this Parliament. Headlines include plans to extend devolution to all parts of England, additional powers and funding flexibility for mayors, and the replacement of two-tier local government with unitary authorities.
- 3.2 The Bill is currently in the Committee Stage in the House of Lords. It is anticipated to receive Royal Assent before the summer 2026.
- 3.3 The Bill establishes the proposed role of Strategic Authorities that will have a statutory basis, with the following levels:
- a) Foundation Strategic Authorities: these include non-mayoral Combined Authorities and Combined County Authorities automatically, and (in ‘exceptional circumstances’) any Local Authority designated as a Strategic Authority without a Mayor.
 - b) Mayoral Strategic Authorities: the Greater London Authority, all Mayoral Combined Authorities and all Mayoral Combined County Authorities will automatically begin as Mayoral Strategic Authorities.
 - c) Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities: for those Mayoral Strategic Authorities that meet specified eligibility criteria, and a status that will unlock further devolution, most notably an Integrated Settlement.
- 3.4 The Bill clarifies the principles it will use to decide upon the geography for future devolution agreements: scale (with a preference for more than 1.5m people), economic geography, alignment to public service footprints and local identity.
- 3.5 It has also introduced a ‘Ministerial directive’ to compel areas to establish strategic authorities if they are unable to agree – or to prevent small devolution ‘islands’ being left out of the process.

New Powers for Combined Authorities

- 3.6 Substantial new powers were announced in relation to spatial development and planning. All areas will be required to develop Spatial Development Strategies over a strategic geography including the apportionment of housing targets across local areas. In Mayoral Strategic Authorities, Mayors will be empowered to develop and propose the Spatial Development Strategy for their areas, working closely with Strategic Authority members.
- 3.7 Mayors will also be granted call-in powers, allowing them to override local planning decisions in some circumstances.
- 3.8 The Bill also confirms additional control over employment support and plans for new innovation funding for combined authorities with the role of mayors expanded in areas such as health, energy and net zero.
- 3.9 The Bill announced proposals for how combined authorities take key decisions including for mayors to be able to exercise their functions with simple majority support from other local leaders 'wherever possible'. This is perhaps intended to make it easier to implement spatial development, transport and investment strategies, where many existing current arrangements would require unanimous or two-thirds approval of combined authority boards.
- 3.10 It was recently announced that Mayors outside of London will be given greater influence over the Government's affordable housing programme. Mayors, working jointly with Homes England, will be able to prioritise indicative spending of £7bn and shape how affordable housing money will be spent in their regions, detailing the types of homes that get built and sites that will be prioritised for construction.
- 3.11 Established' Mayoral Strategic Authorities will be granted single-pot 'integrated settlements' that can be allocated flexibly in line with local preferences. As not all places will be ready to take on this level of responsibility, less advanced Mayoral Strategic Authorities will get separate consolidated funding pots covering local growth, place, housing, and regeneration, non-apprenticeship adult skills and transport following the next spending review.
- 3.12 To take advantage of these additional devolution powers, Mayor Clare Ward has written to the Government with an application for the East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA) to be granted 'Established Status'.

- 3.13 MHCLG wrote to Council Leaders and Chief Executives on 12th February inviting expressions of interest from authorities without an existing devolution agreement to establish Foundation Strategic Authorities (FSAs).
- 3.14 FSAs will have devolved powers over local transport and skills, as well as being responsible for delivering the area's SDS where the SDS boundary is coterminous with the FSA. Alongside the set of powers and partnerships available to FSAs as set out in the Government's published 'Devolution Framework', the Government is also currently consulting on giving FSAs the additional power to raise an Overnight Visitor Levy.
- 3.15 FSAs, as non-mayoral Combined or Combined County Authorities, are stated by Government to be a valuable means to build local capacity and partnerships, and as a stepping stone towards mayoral devolution in the future.
- 3.16 In the same letter, Government also launched a consultation on proposed new spatial development strategy (SDSs) areas to oversee sub-regional strategic infrastructure and housing plans.
- 3.17 Mayoral Strategic Authorities will have responsibility for producing SDS for their regions. Government has set out that SDS needs to be developed across 'sensible geographies', and for parts of the country without mayoral devolution, FSAs are expected to cover the same boundaries as SDSs.
- 3.18 SDS are covered in greater detail within the Item 9 of this agenda, as part of the Infrastructure and Growth report.

4. Recommendation

- 4.1 Members of East Midlands Councils are invited to consider the range of LGR proposals from councils in the East Midlands, including issues relating to the preparation for, and implementation of, agreed propositions and wider developments relating to devolution

Cllr Sean Matthews
Chair
East Midlands Councils

Summary of Local Government Reorganisation: Process and Timetable¹

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (the 2007 Act) provides the statutory framework and process for LGR.

Process

1. Stage one: Inviting unitary proposals. Invitations went to the 21 two-tier areas and their neighbouring small unitary authorities and included statutory guidance, specifying criteria for establishing new unitary authorities and matters that should be considered. Councils must have regard to the criteria and guidance, including the specified deadline for proposals.
2. Stage two: Submission of formal unitary proposals. Each council can only make one formal proposal for unitary local government, and a proposal can either be submitted individually by a council or jointly with other councils that were invited. The Secretary of State can decide to take forward proposals that are submitted by areas with or without modification. If councils within an area cannot agree on a single proposal and want to submit separate proposals, the Government's stated preference was they be supported by a shared evidence base.
3. Stage three: Statutory consultation. The government will carry out a statutory consultation including first consulting any council affected that has not submitted the proposal, as well as any other persons considered appropriate, before a proposal can be implemented. This consultation commenced on 5th February 2026.
4. Stage four: Decision to implement a proposal. Once a statutory consultation is concluded, Ministers will decide, subject to Parliamentary approval, which, if any, proposal is to be implemented, with or without modification. In taking these decisions, Ministers will judge proposals in the round against the criteria, having regard to all the representations that were received, including the consultation responses, and any other relevant information available to Ministers.
5. Stage five: Making secondary legislation – the Structural Changes Order (SCO). Once a decision is taken on which proposal to implement, the Department will prepare the necessary legislation (the SCO) for Parliamentary approval. The SCO establishes the new single tier of local government in the relevant area and makes

¹ [MHCLG Correspondence](#), published 25th July 2025.

provision to abolish the predecessor councils. It will replace any currently planned elections with new elections for the new councils with appropriate wards/divisions for these new elections, amend the terms of office of current councillors as required, and give any preparatory functions needed. This means, for example, any councillors elected in local elections in May 2026 will be elected for a normal term but, if the council is abolished during that term through the reorganisation process, their terms would be reduced.

- a) The Order: will specify arrangements for the first elections for the new unitary council/s, councillor numbers, the functions the new council has in the transition period and establish suitable governance arrangements for the transition period before new councils go live, by giving powers to the relevant executive or joint committee overseeing the transition.
 - b) Elections: Typically, the first elections to new unitary councils take place on electoral arrangements specified in the SCO, and which are built using a mixture of existing wards, divisions or, in some cases, parishes. The names of wards/divisions and the numbers of councillors to be elected are also specified in the legislation. A councillor can stand in elections for the new unitary authority at the same time as serving their term in the existing council. If elected to the new unitary council, this will be for a new term as set out in the SCO. They can simultaneously serve out the remainder of their term as a councillor for the existing local authority until such time as the existing local authority is abolished – this may be a reduced term, or in some cases their term may be extended to provide for the transition.
 - c) Transition period arrangements: The SCO will specify the governance arrangements for the new unitary councils in the transition period i.e. what sort of transition body will be in place during the transition period until predecessor councils are abolished and new unitary councils go live.
6. Stage six: Transition period. Once the SCO has been made, the existing councils carry on delivering services and fulfilling their duties until vesting day, while preparing to transfer all assets, functions and staff on vesting day when the predecessor councils are dissolved and the new unitary authority takes on the legal duties and powers for providing local government to the area. The relevant transition body will focus on getting ready for the go-live day for the new unitary authority and will be responsible for taking any decisions relating to the preparation for new unitary authority to be safe and legal on day one. MHCLG will require an Implementation Plan from the relevant transition body, which will set

out what steps and decisions the body needs to take in order for the new unitary council to be ready for vesting day.

Key implementation issues likely to be included in the Implementation Plan include council tax harmonisation and preparing for the aggregation (and potentially disaggregation) of services.

7. Stage seven: New unitary authority goes live, called vesting day. While preparatory work may start with the development of proposals and continue through the process, a minimum of around a year is allowed to enable safe and legal transfer of key services from the point the legislation is made, to when the new unitary council/s goes live. Government is aiming for new authorities to go live on 1st April 2027 (for Surrey) and 1st April 2028 (for other areas) depending on the proposals received.

Timetable

8. Note, Government has stated a number of caveats, including that the timetable is subject to a number of external factors and that they would like to move to new structures 'as soon as practicable'.
9. For areas not included within the Devolution Priority Programme (i.e., the East Midlands), final proposals were submitted at the end of November 2025, consultation commenced in February 2026, and closing on 26th March 2026.
10. Following this, decisions on which proposal to implement are likely to be announced before the summer recess. Secondary legislation would then be prepared, to be laid in the House after the summer recess. The legislation could then be made, subject to Parliamentary approval. This would allow for elections to the new unitary authorities on 6th May 2027. The new authorities would then go live on 1st April 2028.



General Meeting

27th February 2026

Chair's Report - Cllr Sean Matthews

Summary

The following report provides a summary information on recent developments relating to proposed Local Government Reorganisation, future governance arrangements and devolution.

Recommendation

Members of East Midlands Councils are invited to:

- Consider and advise on core priorities for inclusion within EMC's business plan 2026/27.
- Consider the issues paper on future governance that relate to EMC as a partnership organisation, for comment and advice, as attached as Appendix 6(a).

1. Local Government-led Governance

- 1.1 The implications of LGR are far reaching, and as one of the most two-tier regions nationally, will have a significant impact on the East Midlands. It will also impact upon EMC as an organisation, in terms of the work we do, our partnership and resource base.
- 1.2 Once the new local government and devolution arrangements are in place, if councils have an expectation that future unitary arrangements would benefit from a partnership structure to support collective work separate from the strategic authority construct, then this is a matter for local authorities to consider and agree, including on its form, its function and associated timings.
- 1.3 In consideration of the Government's stated timetable, EMC is now working within an 18-month timeframe with related budgetary assumptions and an expectation that shadow unitary authorities are established in April 2027. Future governance arrangements that relate to EMC will therefore need broad agreement, at least in principle, by end-2026/27.
- 1.4 Members have considered these matters with a commitment to explore proposals with member councils over the course of 2026/27 once the LGR proposition becomes clearer. However, conscious of timescales, with decisions on LGR not likely until the summer 2026, Members directed that initial issues paper be brought to a future meeting.
- 1.5 The purpose of the paper is to summarise the timings, scope and implications of LGR and devolution, and related issues for future arrangements of any regional partnership body that sits within the new structure for local government in the East Midlands.
- 1.6 The summary paper is attached as Appendix 6(a) for Member comment and advice and explores the principles and broad options that may be considered when determining the future shape and resource implications of regional partnership arrangements, if any. It does not seek to propose or confirm the way forward but seeks Member advice in the determination of these matters.

2. Draft Business Plan 2026-27

- 2.1 EMC's Executive Board will consider the draft business plan for 2026/27 that details EMC's proposed activity over the next 12 months.

- 2.2 EMC must be flexible and respond to the changing priorities and challenges faced by the sector. Therefore, the activities within any business plan may change if Members require it. However, within this context, the business plan should reflect issues highlighted through initial consultation with our membership and so provide the basis for work in the coming year.

Structure

- 2.3 EMC delivers a wide range of services and programmes working closely with our member councils. These can be split into the following four main areas of activity:

a) Local Government Workforce and Councillor Development

EMC is the statutory Employers' Organisation for local government in the East Midlands, which will be of benefit to councils in moving forward with LGR proposals. We represent the interests of councils as employers, providing support on workforce issues and development including councillor development. EMC also provides the Regional Joint Council which brings together employers and trade union representatives and gives support to councils on dispute resolution.

b) Asylum and Refugee Resettlement

EMC, through its Strategic Migration Partnership, co-ordinates collaborative activity on asylum and refugee resettlement, managing the delivery of national UK Government programmes in support of local authorities in the East Midlands. These programmes currently include Asylum Dispersal, Ukrainian visa schemes, Afghan and wider UK resettlement schemes, the National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), and those arriving from Hong Kong with British National (Overseas) status.

c) Transport & Growth

EMC supports the work of Transport for the East Midlands (TfEM), which brings together the region's ten local transport authorities to provide collective leadership of strategic transport issues, including through a Rail Collaboration Agreement with Department for Transport. EMC also leads collective work to maximise the regional economic benefits of transport infrastructure investment and provides regular updates of key regional metrics on growth and public investment.

d) Strategic Leadership

EMC plays a key role in coordinating regional leadership and collaboration across local government. We nominate representatives to key national and

regional boards, and the strategic board of Midlands Connect. We also provide forums for joint working, including for Children's Services Lead Members and all 40 Chief Executives in the region.

- 2.4 EMC with its range of roles, responsibilities, and support offer for its membership, will focus its resources where it can add value, delivering a greater impact through a regional partnership approach and securing funding to deliver against membership priorities.
- 2.5 The business plan sets out our proposed work, and wider approach, for the next 12 months. A number of existing programme commitments remain, including our workforce development and organisational support, rail collaboration agreement with DfT and the delivery of asylum and resettlement programmes. But the new local government institutional framework, that includes 2 mayoral county combined authorities, will require collaboration across the sector and with national bodies to deliver shared outcomes across a number of geographies.
- 2.6 A summary of the draft priority work areas are summarised in Appendix 6(b) for initial Member consideration and comment. These will be further consulted upon with partners in advance of consideration by EMC's Executive Board.
- 2.7 We will continue to add value to the work of our member councils and will focus on effective engagement with both members and officers in the delivery of agreed programmes. It remains important that all member councils access at least one of EMC's discounted services during the coming year, and it is our objective to match last year's success in delivering over £450,000 of savings for the sector.

3. Recommendation

Members of East Midlands Councils are invited to:

- 3.1 Consider the issues paper on future governance that relate to EMC as a partnership organisation, for comment and advice, as attached as Appendix 6(a).
- 3.2 Consider and advise on core priorities for inclusion within EMC's business plan 2026/27.

Cllr Sean Matthews
Chair
East Midlands Councils

DRAFT

**Future Partnership Arrangements
Thoughts on Devolution, LGR and Revised Governance**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to summarise the timings, scope and implications of LGR and devolution, and the related issues for the future arrangements of any regional partnership body that sits within the new structure for local government in the East Midlands.
- 1.2 The following report does not seek to confirm the way forward, but to highlight many of the issues that should be considered in the determination of these matters.

2. Background

- 2.1 East Midlands Councils is a voluntary, membership-based, local government representative body. It is politically-led with responsibility for a number of programmes and services, including progressing the region's agreed investment and growth proposals, (e.g. our work on Midland Mainline electrification, the A46 and A1), supporting councils on the implementation of the NPPF and housing delivery, providing focused member and officer development programmes, transformation and HR support and our wider role as the Regional Employers' Organisation; as well as taking forward the management of important refugee and asylum resettlement programmes.
- 2.2 EMC is a small, modestly funded organisation with annual budget of £1,743,000 (2025-26). Each council in membership pays an annual subscription, districts/borough councils' subscription (at 2025/26 levels) is £6,250 while the level of subscriptions for upper tier councils is £11,550. As a proportion of total income, subscriptions 16%, Government grants 48%, contracts 18% and earned income 17%.
- 2.3 East Midlands Councils adds value to the work of councils across the region by:
- Evidencing proposals for change and improvement
 - Influencing national decisions and decision-makers
 - Collaborating across the sector and with national bodies to deliver shared outcomes
 - Delivering cost effective services and products on behalf of all our member councils.

- 2.4 These responsibilities can be split into the following four main areas of activity:

Local Government Workforce and Councillor Development

- 2.5 EMC is the statutory Employers' Organisation for local government in the East Midlands, representing the interests of councils as employers to support positive employment relations and help councils make progress on workforce priorities and councillor development. This includes the provision of the Regional Joint Council which brings together employers and trade union representatives to work jointly on workforce priorities and offer a mechanism for dispute resolution.

Asylum and Refugee Resettlement

- 2.6 EMC co-ordinates work on asylum and refugee resettlement, managing the delivery of national programmes in support of local authorities in the East Midlands including Asylum Dispersal, Ukrainian visa schemes, Afghan and wider UK resettlement schemes, the National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), and those arriving from Hong Kong with British National (Overseas) status.

Transport & Growth

- 2.7 EMC supports the work of Transport for the East Midlands (TfEM), which brings together the region's ten local transport authorities to provide collective leadership of strategic transport issues. EMC also leads collective work to maximise the regional economic benefits of transport infrastructure investment and provides regular updates of key regional metrics on growth and public investment.

Strategic Leadership

- 2.8 EMC plays a key role in coordinating regional leadership and collaboration across local government. We also provide forums for joint working, including for Children's Services Lead Members and all 40 Chief Executives in the region, and in partnership with the East Midlands Chamber, EMC provides the secretariat for the East Midlands All Party Parliamentary Group of MPs.
- 2.9 All 39 county, unitary and district councils are in membership of EMC, plus the Peak District National Park Association. Associate membership of EMC is taken up by organisations including Fire and Rescue Authorities. Devolution and local

government reorganisation have profound implications for the sector, including for representative organisations such as EMC, and the following report summarises these issues and potential options going forward.

3. Institutional Changes

Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution

3.1 The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill proposes the establishment of Strategic Authorities that will have a statutory basis, with the following levels:

- Foundation Strategic Authorities: these include non-mayoral Combined Authorities and Combined County Authorities automatically, and (in ‘exceptional circumstances’) any Local Authority designated as a Strategic Authority without a Mayor. There is potential for one or more to be established to address the ‘devolution gaps’ in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, and Northants, particularly in relation to strategic planning responsibilities.
- Mayoral Strategic Authorities: the Greater London Authority, all Mayoral Combined Authorities and all Mayoral Combined County Authorities will automatically begin as Mayoral Strategic Authorities. At least in the short-term, EMCCA and especially GLCCA will likely stay in this middle-lane.
- Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities: for those Mayoral Strategic Authorities that meet specified eligibility criteria, and a status that will unlock further devolution, most notably an Integrated Settlement.

3.2 With no areas included within the ‘devolution priority programme’, the Government proposes that LGR will be implemented for councils in the East Midlands by April 2028, and if these timescales are met, then shadow elections are likely to be held in April 2027. This implies an 18 month transition period.

3.3 While the exact configuration of post-LGR arrangements is to be confirmed, it is likely that it will result in 10/12 local authorities in the region.

Midlands Connect

3.4 Following the recent Spending Review, DfT have confirmed the Government’s intention to cease funding sub-national transport bodies from the end of 2026/7. Transitional funding for 2026/27 has been confirmed, at a substantially lower level than existing levels of DfT grant.

- 3.5 DfT has made this decision in the context of both the changing devolution landscape and the level of funding provided directly to local areas focusing on making sure locally elected leaders are empowered to lead on regional collaboration.
- 3.6 It is understood the WMCA and EMCCA are considering the basis, if any, for a successor body but this may only cover the limited geographical areas covered by those 2 combined authorities.

Local Government Association, County Councils Network and District Council Networks

- 3.7 The structural changes resulting from LGR will similarly impact upon the national representative bodies; LGA, CCN and DCN.
- 3.8 While LGA will need to consider its offer and subscription base, it is reasonable to conclude that a national representative body for the sector will endure. The future for CCN and DCN is less certain, as both organisations represent types of authority that will be replaced by single-tier arrangements.
- 3.9 It is worth considering whether a likely reduction in the number of sector bodies may therefore be an opportunity for future EMC-type arrangements, providing a sub-national partnership vehicle that aligns with the national representative body.

4. Timescales

- 4.1 The timetable for the implementation of LGR in this region is likely to be:
- 2026/27 support to the sector in the development and preparation for implementation of devolution and LGR proposals, and agreement of options for future regional arrangements.
 - 2027/28 implementation of new arrangements and business modal based around a small number of unitary authorities and with 2 or more Mayoral Combined Authorities.
- 4.2 With elections to shadow councils scheduled in May 2027, timings align with EMC's existing programme responsibilities and grant arrangements with Government departments. Assuming current funding commitments continue to be met, and membership and subscription income is largely maintained, it is reasonable to suggest that EMC is likely to continue in its current, or similar form, until end 2026-27.

- 4.3 Any new local government partnership should ideally be agreed at or around the onset of the shadow arrangements for new councils. Whatever the roles and responsibilities of the new partnership organisation, it should not be assumed that it is a ‘roll-over’ of existing arrangements. It will be for the new councils to determine their support and representative arrangements, including their scope and funding.
- 4.4 However, it will be difficult to secure firm political and organisational agreement for any new model from the shadow leaders of the new authorities who will not be elected until May 2027. Whilst options can be developed before then and political soundings taken; it will ultimately be for the leaders of the shadow councils to decide future arrangements.
- 4.5 Given the challenges for securing political agreement, Members agreed that a Chief Executive Steering Group is established to consider and agree preferred options for any new regional body, with oversight by EMC’s existing political leadership.

5. Revised Governance

- 5.1 Any revised governance structures will need to align with the new local government architecture and be unitary facing. There would appear few incentives for strategic authorities to engage with revised governance arrangements and so the focus should remain on local government.
- 5.2 It can be reasonably assumed that a number of roles and responsibilities will likely endure going forward, e.g. programmes relating to asylum and refugee resettlement, and the Regional Employers’ Organisation. In addition to these roles, local authorities will need to agree the basis for joint work they wish to collectively undertake – and in consideration of ‘form follows function’, the subsequent shape of any partnership arrangements in support.
- 5.3 As part of the review, an option with no partnership support organisation in place will be considered, where any residual programme work could be undertaken by a single council on behalf of others, underpinned by partnership agreements.
- 5.4 Alternatively, if councils have an expectation that future unitary arrangements would benefit from a partnership structure to support their collective work, then this is a matter for local authorities to consider and agree, including on its form, its function and associated timings. There are a number of options that maybe

considered, from retaining a smaller, stand-alone partnership body focused solely on the delivery of existing joint programmes, to a more expansive option that includes improvement/service delivery work, strategy development and policy role.

6. Budgets

- 6.1 The 12-18 month transitional period until elections to shadow councils in May 2027 likely aligns with EMC's existing grant arrangements with the Home Office and DfT. Assuming current funding commitments continue to be met, and membership and subscription income is largely maintained, it is reasonable to suggest that EMC is likely to continue in its current, or similar form, until end 2026-27.
- 6.2 If a regional platform is the preferred way forward, it is not clear what level of resource support revised governance arrangements would be required. This will become clearer once the governance proposition itself is agreed.
- 6.3 However, it is certain that the subscription base for any future regional organisation will be fundamentally different. With the possible creation of 10-12 unitary councils in the region, instead of the current 39 councils (10 upper-tier and 29 districts), the current individual rates will not endure and could not be simply rolled forward to new arrangements. Subscription income would fall from £294,000 (2025/26) to approx. £120,000 – a loss of £175,000 (at 2026/27 rates), a level unlikely to be able to sustain any future organisation.
- 6.4 In all likelihood, the resource base may be similar in principle to that of EMC with a combination of membership subscriptions, grant and income generation. The key point remains, however, that new councils will be in place and prior agreement will need to be secured at or around the transition to shadow council arrangements in April 2027.

7. Potential Basis for Collaborative Work

- 7.1 Local government reorganisation does not in itself negate any voluntary partnership body that works on behalf of councils in the region. However, the institutional changes do offer the opportunity to consider what structures best support the new local government structures, as well as oblige the agreement of a new funding model.

- 7.2 Grant funded regional programmes, e.g. asylum and refugee resettlement, will continue for at least the foreseeable future and require hosting arrangements to be in place. The responsibilities of the Regional Employers' Organisation will still need to be undertaken in some form. The platforms for undertaking these roles may change, depending on preferred options for councils' collective leadership.
- 7.3 If the post-LGR arrangements do not entail a regional partnership working to 10-12 unitary councils, then EMC arrangements will cease at or around the point of transition to new council structures.
- 7.4 Conversely, if there is preference for a partnership platform to support councils to voluntarily collaborate on HR advisory support and service delivery, workforce development and support, collective leadership on children's and adult social care services, scrutiny, councillor and officer development, and joint work on growth, investment and/or planning and housing matters, then arrangements related to Options 2 or 3 should be considered.
- 7.5 There is potential for LTA transport portfolio holders to continue to meet under the Transport for East Midlands (TfEM) banner with MCA officers in attendance, to discuss issues of common concern, share information and align investment priorities. However, this would be a voluntary collaborative arrangement with no formal role in the new devolved landscape.

8. Next Steps

- 8.1 While it will be difficult to secure firm political and organisational agreement for any new model in advance of the election of shadow leaders in May 2027, options can be developed and political soundings taken.
- 8.2 EMC's Executive Board agreed that work should commence work on the development of options and proposals for any future partnership arrangements. This work will be informed by consultation with Chief Executives, and with oversight provided by existing political governance of EMC's Management Group and Executive Board.

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION - EMC Priorities for 2026/27

Proposals for devolution and local government reorganisation will be a major focus for the sector in 2026/27, leading to a period of significant institutional change from 2027 onwards. For EMC, a central priority will be to support member councils to prepare for and manage this transition. Alongside this, 2026/27 will be a year of consolidation, with national programmes continuing to be delivered and ongoing commitments to members and the Government being maintained. EMC will balance support for structural change with the need to sustain high-quality delivery across its core programmes.

Within this context of change and uncertainty, East Midlands Councils will work across the four themes of evidencing, influencing, collaborating, and delivering to provide focused, practical support to our members over the next 12 months.

Local Government and Workforce Development	
Evidencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce and maintain regional benchmarking on workforce capacity, skills, recruitment, retention, and organisational change. • Coordinate and draft regional consultation responses on workforce-related legislation, supporting councils with their own submissions. Run events and practitioner networks to share advice, learning, and good practice on workforce and councillor development. • Identify common workforce challenges and support councils to co-produce practical solutions.
Influencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead regional engagement on pay consultations, enabling councils to shape the evidence submitted to national negotiations and reflect the East Midlands’ needs. • Agree and maintain shared regional workforce and councillor development priorities and use these to guide external engagement. • Act as a conduit between councils and national bodies (e.g., LGA, National Employers) to ensure regional needs and delivery realities are understood. • Represent councils’ workforce interests in relevant national policy discussions and sector initiatives.
Collaborating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate activity through the Regional Employers’ Board and Regional Joint Council to align regional workforce priorities and positions. • Convene and support regional networks to strengthen peer support and consistent approaches across councils as authorities prepare to navigate and manage the process of implementing LGR. • Work with national partners to shape and support the development and delivery of workforce policies, services, and programmes for councils. • Broker regional partnership arrangements that help councils access support more efficiently and consistently.

Delivering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver learning and development opportunities for officers and members, including CPD and training offers. • Provide councils with practical support for LGR preparation and workforce transition, including targeted advice and access to expertise. • Maintain core workforce support services, including the HR helpline and regular workforce bulletin. • Deliver savings for councils through regional collaboration, partnerships, and discounted access to relevant systems or services.
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Asylum and Refugee Resettlement (Strategic Migration Partnership)	
Evidencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop standardised regional reporting across all local authorities to give a clear picture of asylum and refugee resettlement pressures, case types, and issues. • Strengthen and standardise data and intelligence on UASC, including costs, age assessments, demographics, placement stability, health needs and demand modelling. • Evaluate ESOL delivery, ensuring learner needs, barriers, and inconsistencies are well understood and communicated. • Evaluate the Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP) regionally to assess performance, matching success, and LA/VCSE experience.
Influencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shape national and regional policy through evidence on UASC demand, placement and service pressures, and long-term outcomes. • Use findings from the adult asylum mental health pilot to reduce costs and secure sustainable provision. • Provide timely, practical guidance for councils on evolving legislation and asylum policy changes. • Inform and influence national decisions around funding allocations for UKRS, ARP, UASC and asylum dispersal. • Contribute to discussions around devolved ESOL budgets, including Adult Skills Funds.
Collaborating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-design the Afghan Transitional Accommodation model with councils, Home Office and partners to tackle operational challenges. • Coordinate regional engagement on asylum dispersal, ensuring shared solutions and clear communication. • Strengthen the East Midlands’ bespoke UASC approach, including funding, placement sufficiency, legal advice, age assessments, and health. • Maintain and improve regional intelligence-sharing via ARCSEG and related groups. • Develop a sub-regional common Initial Assessment Framework for ESOL.

Delivering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure compliant, efficient delivery of all asylum and refugee schemes, including NTS, UKRS and ARP. • Roll out region-wide age assessment training, including new tools and facial age estimation. • Deliver coordinated regional communication on migration-related training for LA officers, carers and partner agencies. • Provide immigration legal advice to Children’s Services and Legal Teams for UASC, migrant children, care leavers, and NRPF families. • Launch and maintain the new ESOL Information & Guidance resource, Learning English in the East Midlands.
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Transport & Growth	
Evidencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalise and maintain the refreshed regional transport evidence base. • Provide regular updates to members on regional economic performance, housing delivery, and investment trends. • Analyse and disseminate business case documentation and investment proposals relevant to the East Midlands. • Provide regional input to Great British Railways during the transition period.
Influencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support coordinated representations to Ministers and senior officials on regional transport and growth priorities. • Produce targeted briefings for MPs, senior politicians, councils, and business leaders. • Submit formal representations and evidence to Great British Railways in support of regional priorities. • Align regional advocacy with Midlands Connect during the transition period. • Position the East Midlands effectively in relation to the National Integrated Transport Strategy and other emerging national frameworks.
Collaborating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use Transport for the East Midlands (TfEM) as the primary vehicle for regional collaboration on transport priorities. • Manage the final phase of the TfEM–DfT Rail Collaboration Agreement and prepare for post-GBR arrangements. • Work with EMCCA and GLCCA to align regional and local transport priorities, including Local Transport Plans. • Strengthen collaboration with the Midlands Net Zero Hub, Local Authorities, and NESO through the RESP process. • Ensure regional priorities reflect and respond to national policy themes and strategic frameworks.
Delivering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roll out and embed the refreshed regional transport evidence base across member authorities. • Provide coordinated regional input into Great British Railways' transition and planning processes. • Develop and publish refreshed regional transport and investment priorities. • Host and deliver high-quality meetings, workshops, and forums to agree priorities and share intelligence. • Support partners to use regional evidence and priorities to strengthen funding bids and investment cases.
Strategic Leadership	
Evidencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate and submit regional responses to national consultations on behalf of member authorities.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce and share robust regional intelligence on economic, social, and public service pressures, including PESA and related data returns. • Analyse the local and regional impact of national policy and funding decisions. • Provide evidence-based insight to support local and regional decision-making. • Act as a collective evidence base for member authorities in discussions with the Government and partners.
Influencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead coordinated regional engagement and joint representations to the national Government and key agencies. • Provide the secretariat function for the East Midlands APPG to strengthen the region’s parliamentary voice. • Represent the East Midlands at national and regional forums with consistent messaging and priorities • Build and maintain strategic relationships with Government departments, Combined Authorities, and national bodies. • Monitor, escalate, and highlight emerging political, financial, and policy risks affecting the East Midlands. • Advocate for fair funding, investment, and policy approaches that reflect regional need and capacity.
Collaborating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene political and senior officer leaders through boards, general meetings, and themed networks. • Strengthen collaboration with regional MPs through the East Midlands APPG • Provide a structured interface between the national Government and local authorities to support programme delivery. • Work closely with EMCCA and GLCCA to align priorities, programmes, and responsibilities. • Provide a platform for collective consideration on the preparation and implementation of LGR. • Facilitate joint approaches to shared challenges, including LGR, public service reform, and financial sustainability.
Delivering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise and deliver board meetings, leadership forums, and networking opportunities for senior leaders. • Support the agreement and implementation of regional priorities and action plans. • Provide practical support to local authorities navigating Local Government Reorganisation and structural change. • Signpost, connect, and share good practice, expertise, and learning across the region. • Facilitate joint programmes, shared resources, and collaborative approaches to deliver efficiencies and savings. • Add value to partner activity through coordination, brokerage, and collective leadership.



General Meeting

27th February 2026

Local Government Workforce, Pay & Councillor Development

Summary

This report provides an update to Members on significant issues relevant to local government as employers and includes information on opportunities for councillors' development.

Recommendations

Members of East Midlands Councils are invited to:

- Consider the issues raised within this report.
- Raise awareness of the councillor development programme amongst Member colleagues.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The East Midlands Councils (EMC) through its role as the region's Employers Organisation, has the responsibility of supporting employment relations for the sector. The Regional Employers' Board provides political leadership on employment issues and councillor development and forms the Employer's side of the Regional Joint Council, which meets with joint trade unions to support employment relations on behalf of councils in the East Midlands.
- 1.2 This report provides information for members on the significant issues affecting councils as employers and includes progress on key regional priorities such as:
- Pay and Rewards
 - Attracting, Developing and Retaining Talent
 - Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)
- 1.3 An update is also provided on key employment law developments and regional support to councils, including councillor development.

2. Pay and Rewards: National Pay Negotiations for Local Government

- 2.1 The pay negotiation process for 2026 has begun, with pay claims to the National Employers on behalf of Local Government Services employees (those on "Green Book" terms and conditions), Chief Officers and Chief Executives. A claim has not yet been received from unions representing Craftworkers for 2026.
- 2.2 Details and copies of the claims are available at the following link: [Pay and Rewards](#) and a summary of each claim is provided below:
- For "Green Book" employees – the claim seeks:
 - a. An increase of at least £3,000 or 10 per cent (whichever is greater) across all NJC spinal column points;
 - b. A minimum pay rate of £15 an hour for the NJC pay spine
 - c. A two-hour reduction in the working week, with no loss of pay
 - d. An increase of one day annual leave for all staff
 - e. The ability of all school support staff to take [at least] a day of paid leave during term time
 - f. The abolition of Level 1 Teaching Assistant role and instead all Level 1 role holders be moved onto Level 2In the event of a multi-year settlement being proposed, the unions would seek the following structure to a three-year agreement (in addition to items c-f above):

- Year 1: £3,000 or 10 per cent (whichever is greater) on all spinal column points, alongside the introduction of a £15 minimum hourly rate
 - Year 2: An increase of RPI + 3 per cent
 - Year 3: An increase of RPI + 2 per cent.
- For Chief Officers - an increase of at least 10% or an increase that is no less favourable to Chief Officers than the NJC claim – as a step towards pay restoration. An additional day of paid leave to align annual leave with Green Book terms. To jointly agree and circulate a national survey on the levels of stress, workload pressures, and unpaid overtime experienced by Chief Officers. The claim also refers to working jointly with unions to assess the extent of, and close, the gender, ethnicity, and disability pay gaps in Chief Officer grades.
 - For Chief Executives - a pay increase that is the same as the percentage increase (or equivalent percentage if the offer is expressed in £s) for the top point on the scale for “Green Book” employees. The claim also requests a matching increase in annual leave if the 2026 pay deal for Green Book staff involves any further increase in annual leave.
- 2.3 EMC hosted a regional pay briefing meeting on 20th January 2026, attended by over 70 officers and Members from councils in the East Midlands Region. The briefing provided an opportunity for attendees to meet with the national negotiators to help inform the Employers’ response.
- 2.4 EMC’s Director of HR & Cllr Development is an appointed adviser to the Employers’ Side of the National Joint Committee and, following the regional pay briefings the Employers’ Side is meeting on 24th February 2026 and will meet again on 24th March 2026 to consider the information, take political soundings and discuss its response to the claims.
- 2.5 In addition to pay negotiations, work is continuing at national level to jointly review the national pay spine. A new pay spine is required to address the impact of the National Living Wage and to better reflect salaries of roles at more senior levels but below chief officers. A data set has now been agreed which will be used as the basis for modelling and costing new pay spine options. The work is likely to take 2 years, based on past experience and EMC will continue to keep authorities updated on progress and support the flow of information between councils and national colleagues.

- 2.6 Last year, the Coroners Society of England and Wales (CSEW) gave notice of its withdrawal from the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) for Coroners and has opted instead to negotiate on an individual basis directly with their relevant local authority. EMC is liaising with the national lead adviser and counterparts in other regions to enable councils that will receive pay claims locally to share information and approaches. The majority of councils have offered a pay award in line with the pay award agreed within the other national bargaining groups, along with a continued encouragement to the Coroners Society to return to the national bargaining arrangements. The LGA has raised the issue with the Ministry of Justice and recently received a written response, which encourages both sides to return to the negotiating table.
- 2.7 For Craftworkers, agreement has not yet been reached on a pay award for 2025. GMB agreed to the Employers' offer of a 3.2% pay award but Unite has rejected the offer. Unite has the majority of seats on the unions' side of the Joint National Committee and therefore the award cannot be agreed. Unite has now started to ballot for industrial action. It is understood that the union is targeting a number of councils, but none of these are within the East Midlands region. EMC is provided information and advice to councils in the region to keep them informed of developments.
- 2.8 **School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB) & Adult Social Care Fair Pay Agreement and Negotiating Body**
- 2.8.1 As part of the Employment Rights Act (see section 3 below), the Government is planning to establish a separate national negotiating body for school support staff, who are currently covered by the NJC for Local Government Services (NJC) – the bargaining group for the main council workforce. Consultation took place last summer on the proposals. It is taking time to progress this due to delays with legislation, and secondary legislation is awaited. Negotiations are unlikely to start until later this year, with the earliest pay agreement expected for 2027-28.
- 2.8.2 The Act also includes provisions for a Fair Pay Agreement for Adult Social Care employees which would be delivered through a new national negotiating body (ASCNB). The Government carried out consultation on the proposals and in October, EMC hosted a meeting for councils with DHSC and the LGA to discuss the proposals, provide initial feedback to DHSC and assist councils in submitting their consultation responses.
- 2.8.3 For councils, key concerns relate to:

- a) Equal pay risks that could arise if council employees are within scope, for example if the ASCNB agreed a higher annual pay award than the NJC (or vice versa) employees could make an equal pay claim comparing themselves to colleagues covered by the other bargaining group who are in jobs rated to be of equal value within a job evaluation scheme but are now paid more.
- b) The need for funding for employers to cover the transition and implementation of fair pay agreements.
- c) The extent to which local government is able to influence the outcomes of the ASCNB, as the proposal currently indicates this would be limited to being a written consultee.
- d) The extent to which the proposal reflects the complex role of local government in terms of councils' responsibilities under the Care Act and in shaping the provider market.

2.8.4 Consultation closed on 16th January 2026, and it is understood that there was a high number of responses.

3. Employment Law Developments

- 3.1 The Employment Rights Act 2025 received Royal Assent in November 2025 and will lead to wide-ranging and significant changes to employment rights, trade unions, and collective bargaining, encompassing over 28 proposals for employment law change. The changes will come into effect over the coming years, in line with a "roadmap" issued by the Government.
- 3.2 The first changes took effect from 18th February 2026 which mainly relate to trade unions and balloting. These include changes affecting industrial action ballots and protections against being dismissed for taking part in protected industrial action.
- 3.3 Of specific relevance to councils, is the lifting of the requirement for public sector employers to publish trade union facility time information and there is no longer a restriction on public sector employers to make (check-off) deductions from wages for their employees' union subscriptions.
- 3.4 A high-profile provision of the Employment Rights Bill was the proposal for unfair dismissal protection to be a right from the first day of employment (currently this arises after 2 years' service). Through the Parliamentary process, the provision was amended, and the Act now states that qualifying service for protection for unfair dismissal will be 6 months, and this will come into effect from 1st January

2027. Councils are currently reviewing their probation policies to link with the new timescales.

3.5 In addition to the Employment Rights Act, there will also be changes to the Paternity and Adoption Leave Regulations 2002 – from 6th April 2026, which remove the restriction on taking paternity leave after shared parental leave and remove the 26-week service requirement to take paternity leave.

3.6 From the regional perspective, EMC is supporting councils by providing advice and training on employment law changes, as well as promoting or engaging in consultations relating to the proposals where appropriate. EMC held an employment law seminar in November 2025 and will be hosting a further event on 17th March 2026. The Regional Joint Council will provide a forum for implementation of proposals to be discussed.

4. Regional Employers' Board and Regional Joint Council

4.1 The Regional Employers' Board met on 9th October and 4th December 2025, ahead of meetings with joint trade unions to form the Regional Joint Council. The Regional Joint Council is formed by the Employers' Board as the Employers' Side and Joint Trade Unions as the Employees' Side. The Regional Joint Council meetings take place directly following on from Employers' Board meetings.

4.2 At the October meeting of the Employers' Board, the focus was introductory, providing an opportunity for Members to review and agree regional workforce priorities and to consider key requirements of a regional councillor development programme. The Board was asked for input to help shape EMC's regional councillor development offer over the coming year.

4.3 At the Regional Joint Council meeting in October, there was a presentation on the refreshed national recruitment campaign for local government, which EMC has been supporting and working jointly with the LGA. The meeting agreed an uplift to allowances for caretakers of 3.2%, reflecting the national pay award for Local Government Services.

4.4 At the Employers' Board meeting of 4th December 2025, Members considered developments with pay and proposals relating to the new national negotiating body for Adult Social Care. The Regional Joint Council's agenda focused on the joint unions' pay claim for 2026 which had just been submitted.

4.5 The next meetings will take place on 13th March 2026 and the Regional Joint Council meeting will be focused on LGR, hearing from officers and union representatives from North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire Councils to share their insights and experience of LGR from the perspective of both unions and employers.

5. Attracting, Developing and Retaining Talent

5.1 Over 90% of councils nationally report recruitment and retention challenges, and attracting, developing and retaining talent has been agreed as a regional priority by the Employers' Board. The Regional Joint Council agreed a priority to raise the profile of local government as an employer.

5.2 Since EMC's AGM in July 2025, EMC has been working jointly with the LGA to roll-out a refreshed national recruitment campaign for the sector, building on the success of the campaign and materials that Councils can use which were first developed in 2024-25. The campaign has been funded by Government.

5.3 EMC hosted an event in July to enable councils to feed in their views on how the materials should be revised and improved, and the new resources became available for Councils to use and adapt for their own requirements in November 2026.

5.4 A national media campaign was launched on 5 January 2026 and ended on 15th February 2026. The process will start soon to independently evaluate the campaign and councils are being asked to provide their recruitment data as part of the evaluation process to understand its impact. A national event will be held to share the results and discuss any future programme, subject to the continuation of future government funding.

6. Local Government Reform (LGR)

6.1 Given the significant workforce implications arising from LGR, EMC's is ensuring that support is being provided to councils in the region through its business and service plan for the coming year.

6.2 The county-based HR networks that EMC co-ordinates and supports are being used as forums to share information and approaches in preparation for LGR. Some of these networks have been assigned as the working group to take forward the workforce implications and workstreams for LGR in their county areas. EMC's

Director for HR & Councillor Development is also providing subject matter expert advice to the LGR group of Chief Executives in the Lincolnshire area.

- 6.3 LGR is a standing item for the Regional Employers' Board and Regional Joint Council. The Regional Joint Council will provide a useful mechanism to look at the implications from a joint perspective.
- 6.4 EMC will be hosting an online event for officers to hear from the practical experience and insights of colleagues who were involved in LGR in Northamptonshire.
- 6.5 EMC is delivering development programmes – both for councils to run in-house and as regional or shared programmes to support senior leadership teams and middle managers to support their development and include a focus on leading change and transformation. Programmes are also being offered to support managers with their career development through qualification-based programmes.

7. Regional Activity and Support

7.1 Councillor Development

- 7.1.1 EMC's councillor development programme for 2025/6 has focused on popular events that are particularly valuable for new councillors to complement in-house induction programmes, as well as training for councillors who are taking up new roles, along with policy briefings on key issues facing the sector. The programme is steered by the Regional Employers' Board, as well as suggestions from EMC's regional scrutiny and councillor development networks.
- 7.1.2 The "Hitting the Ground Running Workshop" was delivered as a follow-on to the AGM in July as part of the regional programme. Other events that have been provided include a knowledge briefing on Devolution and Planning Policy Reforms, training for Civic Heads, charring skills, and cyber and online security workshops.
- 7.1.3 On 19th March 2026, EMC will be providing an in-person briefing event in Leicester for councillors and senior officers on energy – "Have We Got the Energy?". The briefing will provide a non-technical introduction to national energy policy and regional energy strategic planning as it impacts on local government in the East Midlands. It will enable councils to contribute to regional energy strategic planning processes as required. It will also enable elected members to better

represent the concerns of local people in decisions about the future generation, storage and transmission of energy. To date, over 80 delegates have booked to attend.

7.2 **Officer Learning and Development Programmes and Resources**

7.2.1 Planning Officers and Environmental Health Officers are professions that councils find challenging in terms of recruitment and retention. Development opportunities are a significant factor in retention, and EMC offers **low-cost continuing professional development programmes** so that councils can access high quality development for their planning and environmental health teams. The programmes are designed by a steering group from each profession, which ensures that the content is relevant and topical. Each event typically attracts 100+ delegates.

7.2.2 EMC provides a **regional coaching and mentoring network** that councils can subscribe to which enables them to share a pool of qualified coaches and materials to support coaching and mentoring. The network is proving popular and has seen organisations joining each year. A number of free CPD events are offered through the network each year to support the quality assurance and ongoing development of the coaches.

7.3 **Networks**

7.3.1 EMC co-ordinates and supports a range of networks to enable councils to share information, good practice and identify opportunities to collaborate to make effective use of resources. The networks also inform EMC's service plan for councils, including officer and Member training programmes.

7.3.2 The networks are focused on key themes, including county-based HR leads, councillor development, scrutiny, performance, cyber security, EDI, learning & development and organisational development.

7.4 **Consultancy**

7.4.1 Councils can access individual support from EMC on a not-for-profit basis on a range of workforce issues and in-house training/development. The types of support that councils find particularly helpful include:

- Chief Executive appraisal facilitation

- Restructuring support
- Recruitment and selection support
- Psychometric testing
- Job evaluations and job evaluation appeals
- Investigations for disciplinary, grievance, whistleblowing and Member Code of Conduct complaints
- Mediation

7.4.2 In addition to this work, EMC is supporting the delivery of a national programme of events for the Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO). Feedback from the events has been extremely positive – both from delegates and tutors, with additional sessions being held due to the levels of demand.

8. Recommendations

Members of East Midlands Councils are invited to:

- 8.1 Consider the issues raised within this report.
- 8.2 Raise awareness of the councillor development programme amongst councillor colleagues.

Cllr Jane Yates
Chair
Regional Employers' Board



General Meeting

27th February 2026

Infrastructure & Growth

Summary

This report seeks endorsement for the work of the TfEM Board and provides an update on key regional economic indicators; the Government's planning reform agenda, the future of Midlands Connect and the establishment on Regional Strategic Energy Plans (RESPs).

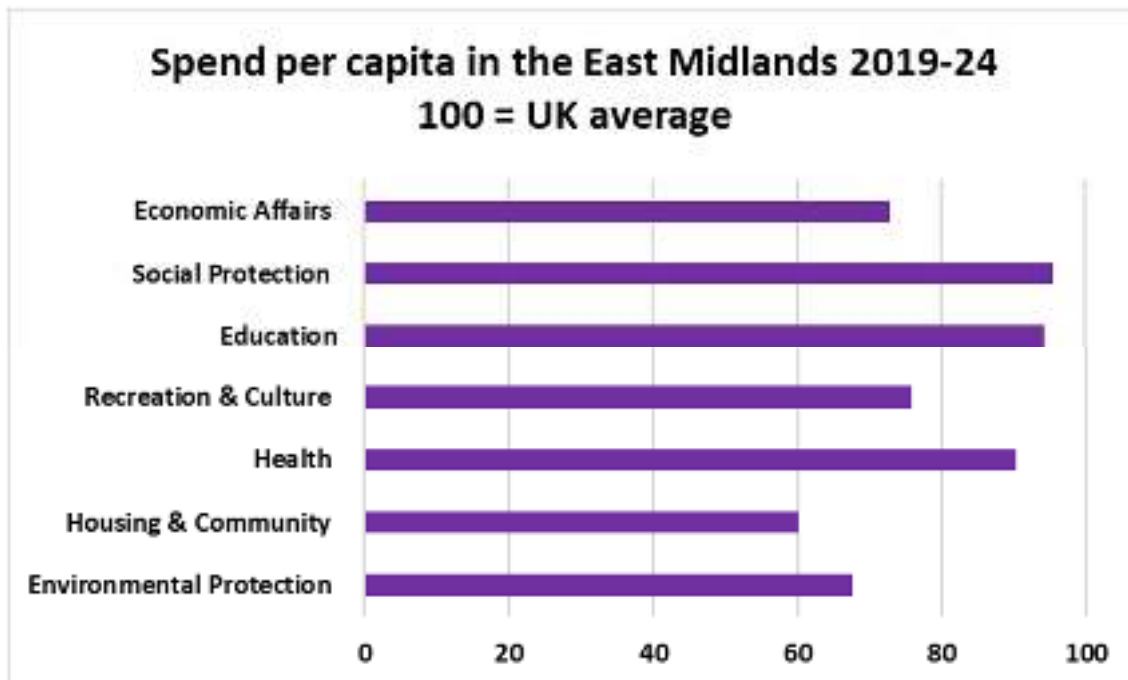
Recommendations

Members of East Midlands Councils are invited to:

- Endorse the work of the TfEM Board.
- Consider the rest of this report; and
- Direct officers accordingly.

1. Growth, Productivity & Investment in the East Midlands

- 1.1 The East Midlands is now a region of 5.1 million people and 403,000 businesses. Total regional output in 2023 (as measured by GDP) was £157bn, equivalent to 5.8% of the UK economy. The East Midlands employment rate is just below the UK average at 75.0% (UK=75.1%). Median weekly earnings are below the UK average: £721 pw compared to £767pw. 10.1% of the workforce work in manufacturing, compared with 6.9% for the UK – although this percentage has declined significantly in recent years. The region’s unemployment rate has increased recently and is now above the UK average: currently at 6.0% compared to 5.1%¹.
- 1.2 Productivity has remained below the UK average over the last 20 years in the East Midlands and has been on a declining trajectory relative to the UK - currently 84.8% of the UK average in 2023²
- 1.3 The Treasury publishes an annual Public Expenditure Statistical Analysis (PESA) every July on where public money (capital and revenue) is spent and on what, in the previous financial year. The latest analysis³ demonstrates that between 2019-20 to 2023-24, total expenditure on core public services has remained consistently below the UK and England averages.



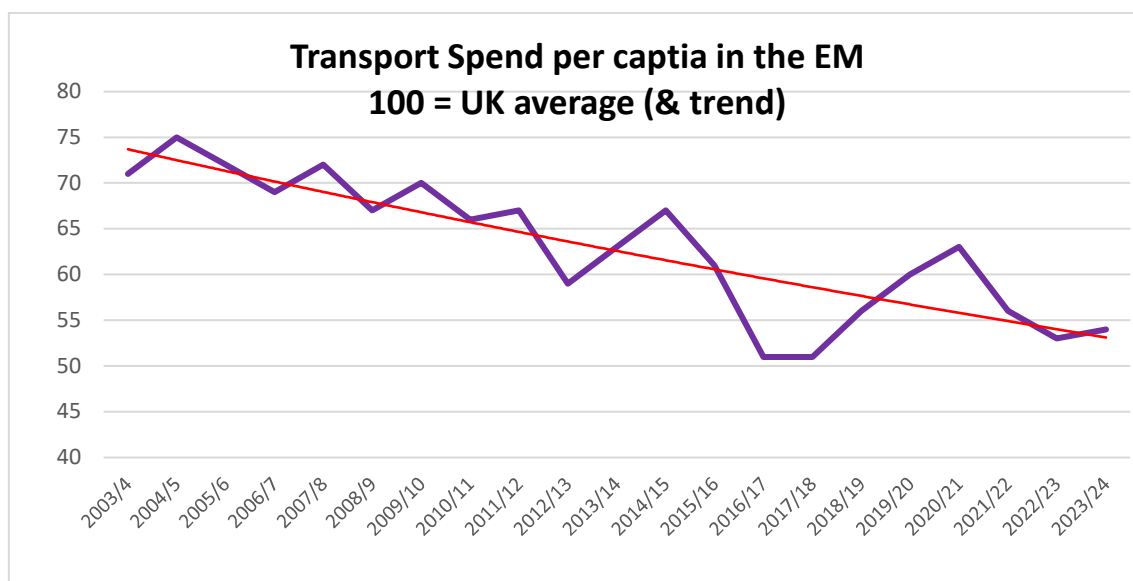
Source: [CP 1363 – Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2025](#)

¹ [Regional and National Economic Indicators - House of Commons Library](#)

² [Annual regional labour productivity - Office for National Statistics](#)

³ [CP 1363 – Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2025](#)

1.4 Transport spend per head has been very significantly below the UK average level for the last 20 years and has now declined to just 54% of the UK average for 2023/24, the lowest level of any UK region or nation. The disparity in levels of investment spend per head between the East Midlands (£368) and the West Midlands (£687) continues to widen. This is likely due to large-scale infrastructure programmes including HS2, several new local rail stations and related highways investment.



Source: [CP 1363 – Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2025](#) & previous releases

2. Transport for the East Midlands (TfEM)

2.1 Transport for the East Midlands brings together the Region’s Local Transport Authorities under the auspices of East Midlands Councils to provide collective leadership on strategic transport issues and meets on a quarterly basis. TfEM is chaired by Sir Peter Soulsby the City Mayor of Leicester. Cllr Chris McGiffen (North Northamptonshire) is the Vice Chair.

Transport Infrastructure Priorities

2.2 Since 2017 TfEM and Midlands Connect have identified, developed and promoted a programme of shared strategic transport infrastructure priorities to support growth and productivity and help to address the historic underfunding of the East Midlands - which has endured under all Governments for the last 25 years.

2.3 These priorities have flexed from time to time to reflect changing circumstances and Government policy. The current version was published in March 2024 and includes the following:

- Midland Main Line Electrification

- Nottingham-Leicester-Coventry Rail Connectivity
- Midlands-Leeds & North East Rail Connectivity
- A46 Growth Corridor & Newark
- A50/A500 Growth Corridor
- A5 Growth Corridor
- Improving Safety Reliability on the A1
- M1 Junction 24 & Surrounding Area

2.4 The Spending Review confirmed funding for the delivery of the A46 Newark Bypass, subject to the Development Consent Order (which was confirmed in October 2025) and value for money assessments. Following concerns about a delay from the most recently publicised start date of 2027 due to the number of unfinished RIS2 projects and the scale of new commitments such as the Lower Thames Crossing, the Chair of TfEM and the Chair of EMC wrote to the Secretary of State emphasising the need to expedite the scheme. The exchange of correspondence is set out in Appendix 9(a & b).

2.5 In relation to M1J24, a private sector led proposal that would allow some Freeport related development to go ahead is currently being considered through the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) regime⁴. Separately, National Highways hope to secure resources for major scheme development as part of the RIS3 settlement, and the Freeport itself is considering potential funding options. However, delivery of a strategic enhancement to M1J24 before September 2031 (when tax relief on the three Freeport sites expires) sufficient to allow the Freeport's full economic potential to be realised, appears to be challenging.

Rail Service Enhancements.

2.6 In 2020 TfEM signed a Collaboration Agreement with the Department for Transport to provide local input into the management of rail services provided by East Midlands Railway (EMR). The Agreement is joint funded and has enabled the recruitment of a TfEM Head of Rail Improvement who is accountable to the TfEM Board but sits at the interface with the DfT Rail Markets Team managing EMR's contract. In recent years the influence of this role has been extended to include services in the East Midlands run by CrossCountry and Northern.

⁴ [East Midlands Gateway Phase 2 - Project information](#)

- 2.7 The RCA has also enabled TfEM to develop independent regional evidence to support the case for DfT investment in strategic enhancements, including Midland Main Line Electrification⁵; and improved regional rail services⁶.
- 2.8 The RCA is currently funding a comprehensive refresh of regional transport and economic evidence as the basis for a revised 'Rail Strategic Statement' and a suite of supporting documents to inform the emerging Great British Railways (GBR).
- 2.9 The first public product focuses on the case for sustaining and improving rail connectivity to Lincoln and was published on 25th November 2025 entitled Keeping Pace: Enhancing Lincoln City's rail connectivity - set out in Appendix 9(c) The associated media release included quotes from the Chair of TfEM Sir Peter Soulsby, the GLCCA Mayor Dame Andrea Jenkyns and the Chair of EMC Cllr Sean Matthews is available at [Keeping Pace: Enhancing Lincoln City's Rail Connectivity](#).
- 2.10 On the 20th November 2025 the Chair of TfEM Sir Peter Soulsby attended the launch of EMR's new Auroa 810 Intercity train in Derby⁷. The new trains provide:
- 24% more seats and 19% more legroom (in a five-carriage formation)
 - Plug sockets and USB points at every seat
 - Free, class-leading Wi-Fi and improved mobile signal strength through new glass technology
 - Modern, spacious interiors with improved lighting and accessible design
 - Increased luggage space (up to 136% more capacity)
- 2.11 The first of the new fleet of 33 trains will enter service in December 2025, with full roll-out expected by the end of 2026. However, in the meantime, the ongoing cascade to an 'open access' operator of EMR's existing Meridian rolling stock is resulting in over-crowding on some services.

TfEM Board

- 2.12 The TfEM Board will next meet on the 9th March 2026 to discuss the following agenda items:
- A presentation on East-West Rail and associated economic and housing developments by England's Economic Heartland STB
 - A update on National Highways activity in the East Midlands and implications of the Government's recently published Road Safety Strategy
 - A progress update on the delivery of new and refurbished rolling stock and service enhancements by the MD of East Midlands Railway.

⁵ [TheFuturesElectric.pdf](#)

⁶ [A-Platform-for-Growth.pdf](#)

⁷ <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7397305545516339201>

- An update by TfEM’s Head of Rail Improvement on work to develop and extend a regional evidence base to support revised priorities prior to the formal establishment of Great British Railways in April 2027.

3 Midlands Connect

- 3.1 The Midlands Connect Strategic Board last met on the 27th November 2025 in Birmingham with Sir Peter Soulsby and Mayor Clare Ward in attendance representing the East Midlands. Mayor Dame Andrea Jenkyns sent apologies and submitted written comments. The Meeting was chaired on an interim basis by WMCA Mayor Richard Parker.
- 3.2 Following the recent Spending Review, DfT have decided to cease funding sub-national transport bodies from the end of 2026/7. Whilst the Midlands Connect budget for 2025/26 remains untouched, DfT has told all STBs to expect transitional funding only for 2026/27, and at a substantially lower level (c40%).
- 3.3 The meeting therefor considered a draft transition plan and 2026/7 budget for Midlands Connect as a basis for submission to the DfT by the 8th December, and proposals to explore the potential for a post March 2027 collaborative model which could be sustained in the absence of DfT grant funding. The Board will next meet on the 24th March 2026.

4 Planning Reform

- 4.1 The 2025 Autumn Budget made available £48m over the next three years to boost capacity and capability in the planning system. This includes additional investment to recruit an extra 350 planners in England by expanding the Pathways to Planning graduate scheme⁸, and creating a new Planning Careers Hub to retain and retrain mid-career professionals. However, there is no sign of the Government removing the age 16-21 age restriction on Level 7 Apprenticeships, which have proven to be effective means of training local authority planners in recent years.
- 4.2 The Government’s revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published for consultation on the 16th December 2025⁹. The draft incorporates a major presentational change in that the text is ordered into a series of numbered policies similar to a development plan - although without the same statutory status. Taken together the draft NPPF appears to take a more permissive

⁸ [Pathways to Planning | Local Government Association](#)

⁹ [National Planning Policy Framework: draft text for consultation](#)

approach to new development than the extant version. In particular, the revised ‘presumption in favour of sustainable development’ (set out in policies S3, S4 and S5) appears to apply in all circumstances - not just when a local plan is absent or out of date. The closing date for comments on the draft NPPF is the 10th of March 2026.

4.3 The Planning & Infrastructure Bill received Royal Assent on the 18th December 2025. Amongst key proposals is the re-introduction of statutory strategic planning in the form of ‘Spatial Development Strategies (SDS). SDSs will be produced by Mayoral Combined Authorities where they exist, and ‘Strategic Planning Boards’ made up of constituent local authorities and designated by Government where they do not¹⁰.

4.4 The Government intends to commence the legislation to establish SDSs in the summer of 2026. In preparation, Ministers published draft proposals for SDS geography for consultation on the 12th February 2026, (closing date 26th March 2026)¹¹. In the East Midlands SDSs are proposed for:

- EMCCA area (Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham & Nottinghamshire)
- GLCCA area (Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire & North East Lincolnshire)
- Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland area

4.5 North and West Northamptonshire are in a group of 10 authorities where currently no SDS geography is proposed, and the Government is seeking proposals through the consultation process.

4.6 Such is the pace of planning reform that the Government is still implementing key aspects of the Levelling Up & Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023. Following the Budget the Government published proposals to implement a 30-month local plan review process¹², with formal regulations to follow. These regulations will apply to those Local Planning Authorities which fail to meet the December 2026 deadline for progressing local plans under the current system.

5 Regional Energy Strategic Planning (RESP)

5.1 The Government has established a new independent public corporation the National Energy Systems Operator (NESO) to ensure the nation has access to ‘reliable, clean and affordable energy’. NESO is also charged with developing Regional Energy Strategic Plans (RESPs).

¹⁰ [Factsheet: Strategic planning - GOV.UK](#)

¹¹ [Areas for producing spatial development strategies - GOV.UK](#)

¹² [Plan-making regulations explainer - GOV.UK](#)

- 5.2 The RESP role has been set up to develop regional plans that span across electricity, gas, and hydrogen networks as part of one integrated energy system. They will provide the strategic basis against which electricity distribution network operators will make their investment plans. The RESPs will also form part of NESO’s wider strategic energy planning activities, ensuring a joined-up approach between national, regional and local levels.
- 5.3 The East Midlands is split between two RESP regions. Northamptonshire sits within a ‘Central England’ RESP Region, the rest of the East Midlands along with North and North East Lincolnshire fall within an ‘East Midlands’ RESP Region.
- 5.4 To provide a basis for preparation of business plans for the next energy price control period between 2028 to 2033, NESO published a series of ‘transition’ RESPs or t-RESPs in January 2026¹³ Work will start later this year to produce the first round of full RESPs, which are likely to be published in 2027/8. EMC made high level representations to both the t-RESP and RESP methodology consultations to complement submissions made by individual councils.
- 5.5 To help councils engage with this new and important process, EMC has brought together a range of expert speakers at a seminar for councillors and senior officers to be held on the 19th of March 2026 in Leicester: [Have we got the Energy? Understanding the decisions that will shape our energy future](#). The seminar is free to EMC member councils to attend.

6 Recommendations

Members of East Midlands Councils are invited to:

- 6.1 Endorse the work of the TfEM Board.
- 6.2 Consider the rest of this report; and
- 6.3 Direct officers accordingly.

Andrew Pritchard
Director of Policy & Infrastructure
East Midlands Councils

¹³ [transitional Regional Energy Strategic Plan \(tRESP\) | National Energy System Operator](#)



Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

9th October 2025

Sent by email

Dear Secretary of State

DELIVERY OF THE A46 NEWARK BYPASS

We are delighted that the Spending Review confirmed funding for the A46 Newark Bypass and that the necessary Development Consent Order has now been issued.

As you will be aware, the scheme is vital not just to the town of Newark-on-Trent, it forms a key part of a wider 'trade corridor' linking the Humber Ports and East Midlands Freeports with key cities across the Midlands, and with the A1.

Consequently, the A46 Newark Bypass has been TfEM's top strategic road investment priority for the last decade.

With all the key elements now in place, we are keen to secure prompt delivery by National Highways of this long overdue scheme.

The last published estimated start date was 2027 with completion within the RIS3 period. It is vital that this timetable is not allowed to slip. Any delay will lead to further cost increases and traffic congestion and undermine delivery of planned large-scale housing and employment development across the East Midlands.

The indefinite 'pausing' of Midland Main Line Electrification was a bitter blow for the region and the latest Treasury figures published this July confirmed that the East Midlands remains rooted to the bottom of the league table for transport investment - just 54% of the UK average per head.

Turning this situation around after years of neglect by successive Governments will take time. As we hope that you will agree, kickstarting delivery of the A46 Newark Bypass represents an essential first step.

Yours sincerely



Sir Peter Soulsby
Chair of Transport for the East Midlands



Cllr Sean Matthews
Chair of East Midlands Councils

Copied to: James Naish MP (Rushcliffe), Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for the East Midlands



Department
for Transport

From the Parliamentary
Under Secretary of State
Simon Lightwood MP

Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Tel: 0300 330 3000
E-Mail: simon.lightwood@dft.gov.uk

Web site: www.gov.uk/dft

Our Ref: MC/00050709

Sir Peter Soulsby
Chair of Transport for the East Midlands

Councillor Sean Matthews
Chair of East Midlands Councils

14 November 2025

Dear Sir Peter and Councillor Matthews,

Thank you for your letter of 9 October to the Secretary of State regarding the A46 Newark Bypass scheme. I am responding as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

I appreciate and acknowledge your comments on the importance of the A46 Newark Bypass, not only for Newark-on-Trent, but also as a vital part of the wider 'trade corridor' linking the Humber and East Midlands Freeports with key cities across the Midlands.

Following the Spending Review, the Secretary of State announced on 8 July 2025 that the government has set aside funding for the A46 Newark Bypass scheme. As you note, the necessary Development Consent Order has now been granted.

We continue to work with National Highways to identify the most efficient cost and delivery timelines, more information on delivery will be available as part of next year's RIS3 publications.

Looking ahead, I can assure you the Government remains committed to maintaining and renewing the road network to ensure that it works for all residents and businesses who use it.

Thank you again for taking the time to write to the Secretary of State about the A46 Newark Bypass scheme.

Yours sincerely,

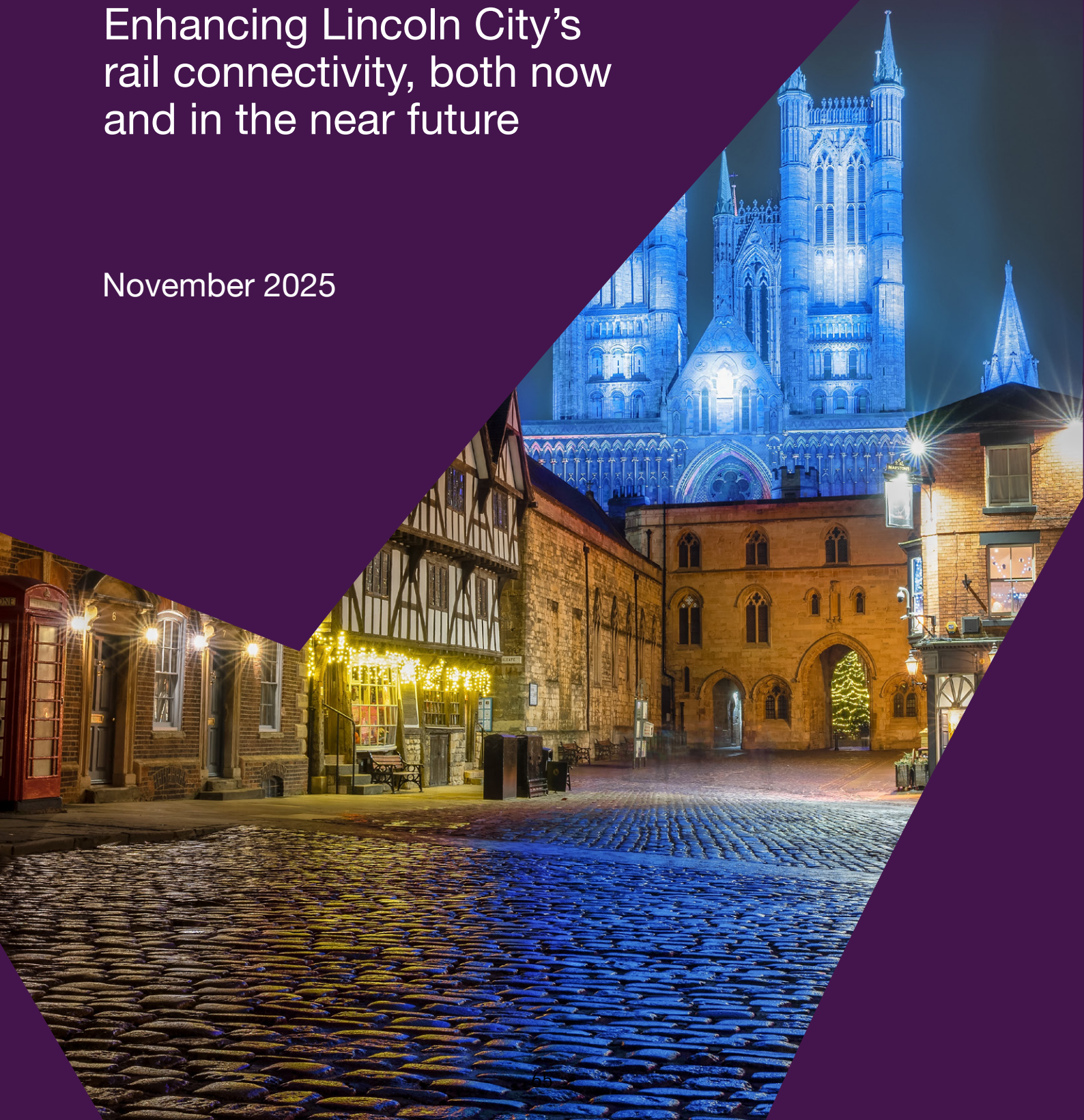
⁶⁴
SIMON LIGHTWOOD MP
MINISTER FOR ROADS AND BUSES



KEEPING PACE:

Enhancing Lincoln City's
rail connectivity, both now
and in the near future

November 2025



FOREWORD: Keeping Pace with Growth

Lincoln is an ambitious city with a young and rapidly growing population. Lincoln's diverse economy spans agrifood, tourism, logistics and manufacturing, and its cultural and historic offer attracts millions of visitors each year. New homes and jobs are being created at pace, and the city is already home to two universities with a combined student population of over 20,000¹.

But while Lincoln has moved forward, its rail services have not kept pace. Councils and local partners have long campaigned for better connections, recognising both the importance of frequent services to Nottingham and direct links to London.

That persistence is starting to pay off. From December 2025, services between Lincoln and Nottingham will double from hourly to half-hourly, a long-awaited breakthrough that will strengthen the city's role within the wider East Midlands economy. Together with the two hourly daily direct London services, this timetable should now be seen as the baseline level of connectivity that Lincoln requires.

As Lincoln grows, further investment in infrastructure and trains will be essential. Regional links made more convenient and resilient for passengers, faster journey times, and the removal of capacity constraints are all needed to match the scale of Lincoln's growth and ambition.

Transport for the East Midlands (TfEM) and the Greater Lincolnshire Combined County Authority (GLCCA) have a shared vision that sees a better-connected Lincoln City as a priority for the East Midlands transport network and the East Midlands economy.

**Mayor
Sir Peter Soulsby:
Chair Transport for
the East Midlands**



**Dame Andrea Jenkyns:
Mayor of Greater
Lincolnshire
Combined County
Authority**



**Cllr Sean Matthews:
Chair of GLCCA
Transport Board,
Chair East Midlands
Councils and Leader
Lincolnshire County
Council**



Lincoln City: In Profile



100,000+
population and one of
the fastest-growing
cities in the East
Midlands



12,000
new jobs by 2036



3 million
visitors a year



31,000
new homes expected
by 2045



£264
million
of economic activity



**A young,
ambitious city whose
future success depends
on reliable, frequent,
and fast rail services**

As Lincolnshire's only city - and its principal economic and administrative centre - Lincoln plays a critical role in driving the county's future. Regional partners see stronger transport links with Lincoln as essential to unlocking both the city and the county's full potential.

Lincoln's population increased by 11%² between 2011 and 2021 to more than 100,000 people, making it among the top five fastest-growing local authorities in the East Midlands. It has a young demographic, with 13% of residents classed as young adults, including over 20,000 students³ studying at the University of Lincoln and Lincoln Bishop University.

The city's economy is diverse, with strengths in agrifood, tourism, logistics, and manufacturing, and employment opportunities are on the rise; a projected 12,000 new jobs⁴ are planned by 2036, with a Government expectation of 31,000 new homes in the Lincoln housing area by 2045. These are particularly focused around Charterholme, an intensive growth corridor to the west of the city centre, close to the Castle Line, which links Lincoln with Newark and Nottingham.

Despite these positive trends, Lincoln faces challenges related to transport and productivity. More than a quarter (28.38%⁵) of its households do not have access to a car or van, creating clear transport disadvantages. Those who do, remain heavily reliant on car travel due to limited rail connectivity, contributing to high emissions and limiting progress on decarbonisation.

Rail has not kept pace with the city's growth, leaving tourism and business at a disadvantage. As a historic cathedral city with a strong independent retail scene,

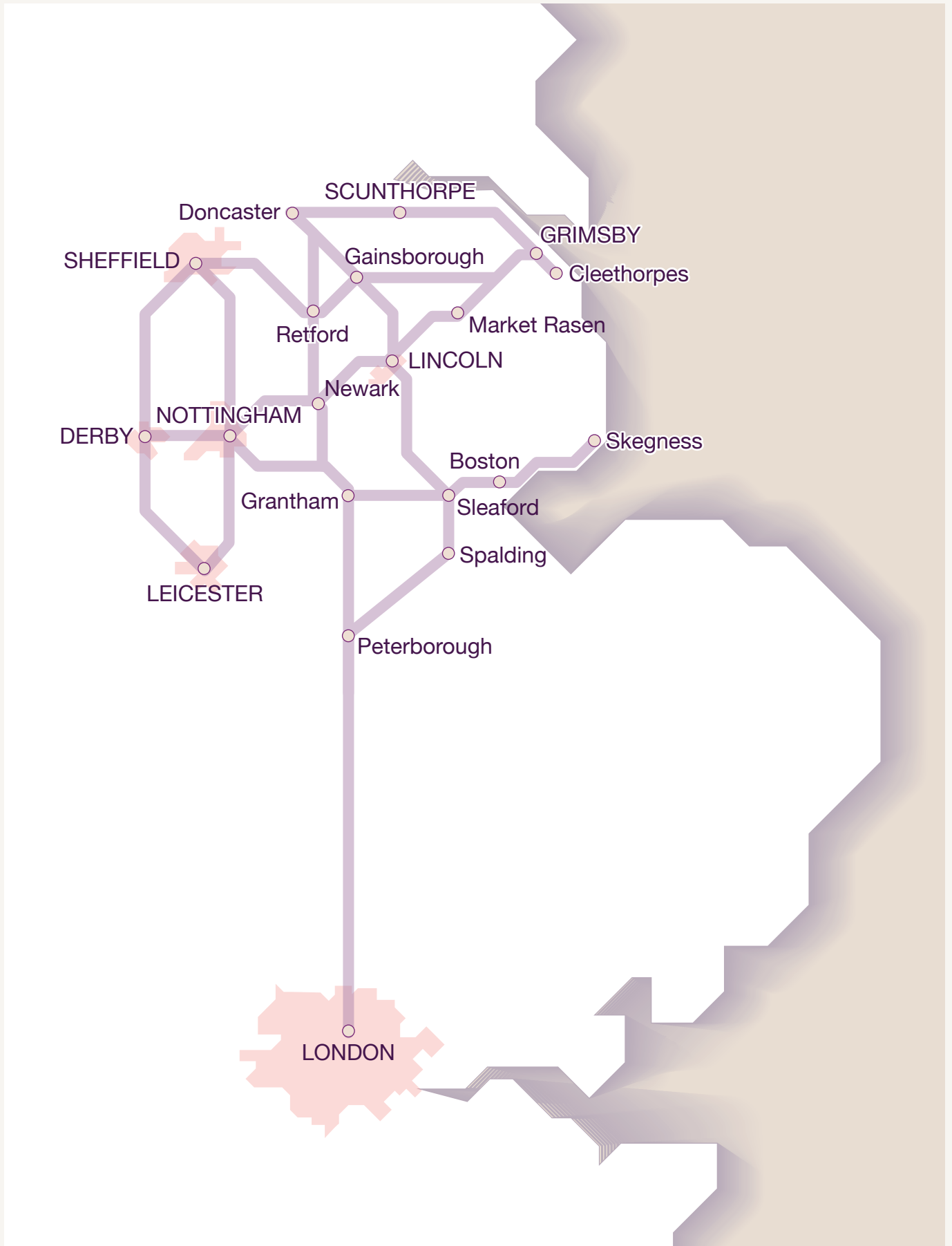
Lincoln attracts over 3 million visitors annually, generating £264 million for the local economy⁶. Yet it competes with better-connected cathedral cities such as Durham and York who, in the case of York, enjoy around 40 trains per day to London and a fastest journey time of under two hours.

Furthermore, the city's relative isolation has resulted in lower-than-average productivity and economic growth, as measured by GDP and GVA⁷, even as new initiatives like the Lincoln Science and Innovation Park point to its potential. Some important labour market opportunities also remain limited: Lincolnshire sits among the lowest third of local authorities for opportunities for 16-29-year-olds, and the bottom quarter in terms of promising prospects for 25-44-year-olds⁸.

With the right transport investment, Lincoln has the opportunity to change this trajectory and strengthen its role as a dynamic regional hub.



[By Isaac Newton Building, University of Lincoln by Oliver Mills, CC BY-SA 2.0](#)



A Steep Hill: Lincoln's Rail Ambitions

A Regional Priority

Right now, train services from Lincoln to most major destinations are simply not good enough - they're too infrequent, too slow, and too often overcrowded, making driving the default choice for many.

This has direct consequences for the A46 corridor towards Nottingham and Leicester, with around 19,000 car and van trips daily creating unreliable journey times, and the corridor predicted to be approaching capacity at key junctions by 2035⁹. Commuters and leisure travellers are forced to compete with freight and agricultural traffic, compounding delays and unreliability. Improving the Lincoln-Nottingham rail corridor is a priority identified for both TfEM and Midlands Connect¹⁰.

Investing in better rail doesn't just mean faster and more reliable trains - it means connecting more people to jobs, education, and leisure across the region - making Lincoln a vibrant, accessible place to live and work within the wider region.

Upgrading Lincoln's rail links directly supports the goals of the Lincolnshire Local Transport Plan¹¹:



Supporting economic growth

Future ready, green transport

Promoting thriving environments

Promoting high aspirations

Supporting safety, security and a health lifestyle

Improve quality of life

Slow Progress

Yet, with some market shares stuck below 10%¹², meaningful progress has been slow. The East Midlands as a whole has seen less government investment in rail than most other regions for nearly two decades¹³, and this reality is reflected in the rail service quality at Lincoln - slow journey times and a poor frequency of direct services. Trying to secure real improvements to rail for the city and wider region has often felt like a struggle against long-standing underinvestment.

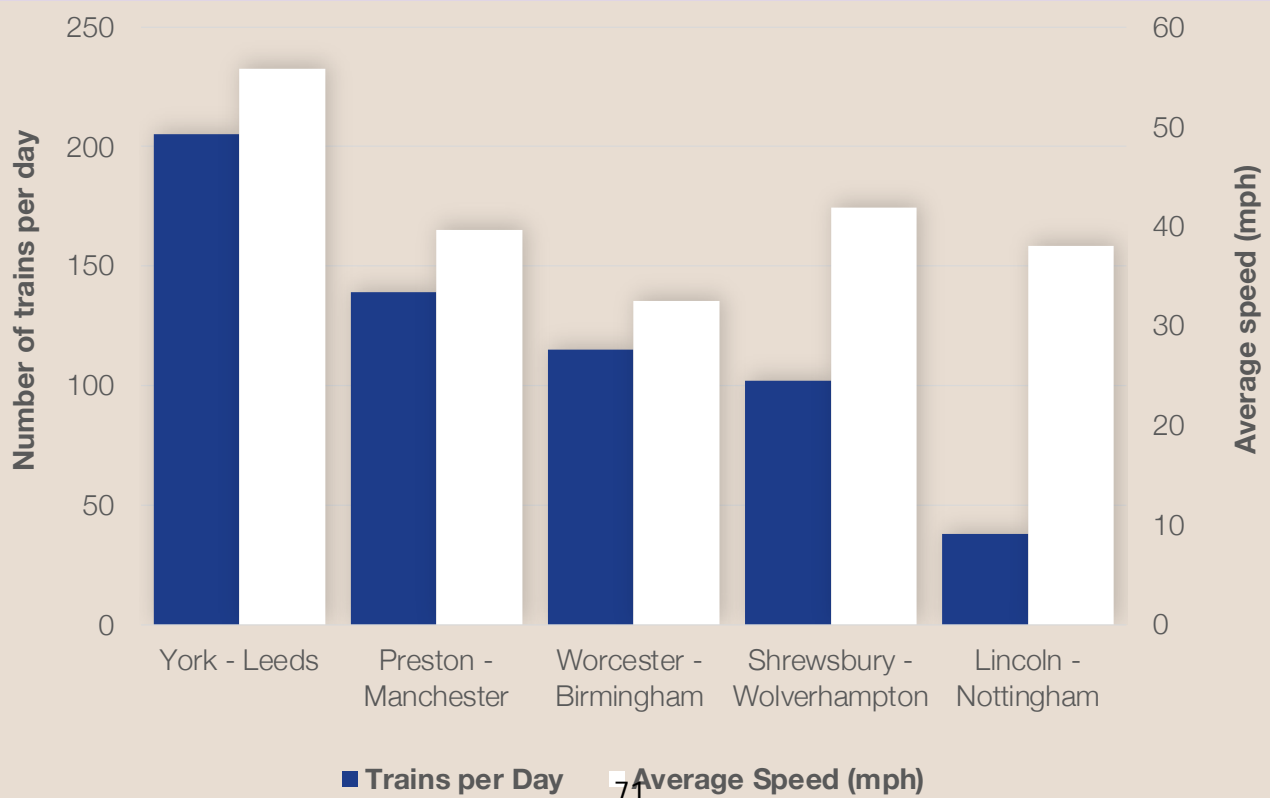
Setbacks

Lincoln's rail service has at times lost ground, losing direct trains to key economic centres in the Midlands like Birmingham, and also its faster regional services to places such as Sheffield. Many promised regional link improvements for Lincoln from previous rail franchises, like those in the East

Midlands operators' 2019 agreement, have never materialised. In the years following the pandemic a number of Lincoln's rail services were also chosen to be paused for extended periods before being only partially reinstated¹⁴. Even this year, a scarce and economically significant direct London Sunday service is being cut from December 2025. These setbacks indicate that the true potential of Lincoln's growing market continues to be underestimated and underserved by the rail industry - a missed opportunity both for the industry and for the city's economy.

An example of how Lincoln is underserved is demonstrated in the graph¹⁵ below, illustrating that Lincoln-Nottingham services, as an example, have lagged behind other regional city pairings for both service levels and average speeds.

Figure 1 Number of trains per day and average speed (mph) between comparable inter-city locations





Jayne Wingad: Lincolnshire County Council

Building From a Low Base

Despite these challenges and low modal share, Lincoln has shown resilience. While rail passenger numbers across the UK between 2019/20 and 2023/24 dropped by 6%, demand at Lincoln actually grew, climbing 4.7% from 1.96 million to 2.05 million¹⁶.

Councils and local partners, such as the Nottingham to Lincoln Stakeholder Board, did secure some important service improvements between 2015-2018 that stepped up the timetable between Nottingham and Lincoln and at weekends, which led to a sustained increase in use.

The Castle Line is now seeing strong growth again, with over 1.1 million customer journeys in 2024, a rise of 21% compared with 2023. By 2030, passenger growth at Lincoln station is forecast to have increased by 11% compared to 2019¹⁷. This underlines the strength of local demand and signals to latent demand to be unlocked. Lincoln is well-positioned to capture further growth in leisure travel and tourism by rail¹⁸, but this potential can only be realised if the current gaps in connectivity are addressed and services are brought up to modern standards.

Closing the Gap

Breakthrough

The East Coast Main Line crossing at Newark-On-Trent has been a long-standing constraint to the East Midlands regional network to Lincoln. Now, planned changes to the East Coast Main Line this year have created a window of opportunity for local operators to be able to in-tandem rethink the Lincoln-Nottingham corridor. From December 2025, the hourly service will double to half-hourly, Monday to Saturday. With Nottingham being the largest economic hub of the East Midlands, and Lincoln ranking as the region's fifth largest city, these stronger rail links can promise to contribute to connectivity and economic opportunity at a regional scale.

Improvements on Track

This uplift of the service will add 12 additional daily services in each direction between Nottingham and Lincoln and more than 2,000 extra weekday seats. It will make turn-up-and-go travel more attractive, reduce waiting times, and ease overcrowding. More frequent calls at route stations and new direct links, including to Derby, will also make many longer onward trips via one change more readily accessible. Analysis for TfEM conservatively estimates £8.4 million in economic benefit directly for users and 1 million additional passengers over 15 years for journeys from Lincoln, with other parties indicating the opportunity is even higher still.¹⁹

Coupled with the investment for the A46 announced in the 2025 Spending Review, this provides the basis for a transport

future that will finally bring this key regional corridor up to speed.

Capital Gains

The transformation of Lincoln's London services shows what targeted investment can achieve. Until recently, Lincoln was one of the only English cities with a population over 100,000 without regular direct trains to the capital. Introducing six daily direct services led to a 51% surge in travellers to London, compared to just a 4% rise at many other East Coast Main Line destinations in the same period. London is now Lincoln's foremost, and fastest growing, rail destination²⁰.

For Lincoln, direct London links are more than convenient; they're essential for growth and opportunity. Sustaining and developing Lincoln-London connectivity is vital as new East Coast Main Line demands emerge. Recent evidence for TfEM shows that for Lincoln, further improving connectivity to London remains its top opportunity for rail to further contribute to Lincoln's economic prosperity²¹.



Keeping Pace

For Lincoln's rail services to keep up with the city's momentum, the recent promises for better rail services mustn't be just initially delivered; they need to become lasting improvements. Local partners may still need to play an active role in the coming years to ensure that the changes are made to stick.



TfEM's ambition is to see Lincoln City's rail services improved further still, such as faster journey times and improved frequencies.

It is clear that these can only be achieved by building on the foundation of the service levels in place from December 2025.

Fragile

The planned doubling of services between Lincoln and Nottingham is welcome, but these valuable service commitments could yet be threatened. The uplift coincides with a complex and long-awaited restructure of the timetable on the East Coast Main Line. The concern is that previous major timetable changes have led to subsequent disruption and triggered immediate operational trade-offs, ultimately to scale-back committed plans. If tough decisions have to be made on how the network is performing overall, it could be all too easy for Lincoln's improvements to be vulnerable to cutbacks, such as the decision to cut the direct London Sunday service from December 2025.

There are wider risks too. The cancellation of HS2 to the Midlands and the north could threaten existing services over the longer term, including Lincoln's direct trains to London. This is because the rail industry still has the ambition to improve its long-distance rail services between London and the North; but is now forced to plan these using largely existing congested rail infrastructure. Ambitions to improve long-distance services from London to alternative destinations further north using the East Coast Main Line, could see Lincoln's direct London service made vulnerable to being eroded by a reallocation of the East Coast Main Line's constrained capacity.

Unlike other ECML cities like Bradford, Harrogate, or Middlesbrough, alternative routes to London from Lincoln are unattractive - adding extra time, cost, and complexity. Cutting Lincoln's direct link would be a disproportionate blow to its connectivity, as demonstrated by the alternatives currently available to passengers in Table 1.

Table 1 Existing journey options to Lincoln from London (December 2024 timetable)

Route	Frequency	Time (average)	Distance
Direct service on the ECML to Lincoln via Newark Northgate	Six trains per day	1hr 48 mins	137 miles
Interchange at Newark Northgate	Four pre-1200 and one late evening service	2 hr 03 mins	137 miles
ECML to Newark Northgate, then walk to Newark Castle¹ for service to Lincoln	Hourly	3hr 0mins	138 miles
Interchange at Peterborough for service to Lincoln via GNGE	Hourly	2 hr 15 mins ²	131 miles
MML London St Pancras service to Nottingham, interchange onto train to Lincoln	Two direct southbound AM services followed by hourly Nottingham-Lincoln ³	2 hr 42 mins	160 miles

- 1 Interchange walking allowance of 23 minutes.
- 2 Journey opportunities not available in every hour.
- 3 Planned to rise to two trains per hour from December 2025.

Crossed lines

Lincoln needs industry drive towards a bold, long-term solution; one that tackles the real barriers holding rail services back. Chief among these is the Newark Flat Crossing - where the East Coast Main Line crosses the Castle Line at ground level. This outdated piece of infrastructure continues to limit trains on both lines, stifling Lincoln’s existing low-frequency links (e.g to Newark Northgate to access the ECML in the hours that the direct London service does not operate), and constraining the potential of future direct services. Relieving the crossing would have resilience benefits that would ripple across the whole ECML to places far afield that are nationally significant. Investing in ‘grade separation’ (aligning a junction of two or more lines at different heights) at this junction would transform what is possible on the network and enable trains to operate across both lines unimpeded.



J.Hannan-Briggs

Full speed ahead

The trains that will operate between Lincoln and Nottingham will be refurbished over the next couple of years. These trains are capable of sustaining up to 100mph speeds where the infrastructure allows; yet stretches of the track are restricted to just 50mph. Boosting the line speeds in these sections between Lincoln and Nottingham is a further long-overdue improvement.

In part, the outdated Signalling has held progress back. Network Rail has already mapped out a plan to increase the speed provision of the Signalling system to 75mph; but delivery has been delayed. The commitment remains to deliver this awaited Signalling renewal this decade within Network Rails current Control Period.

With an additional £18 million investment (a modest sum in rail terms), Midlands Connect has shown some journey times could be cut by up to five minutes, with a benefit-cost ratio up to 2.0²², reflecting a 'high' value for money. This is an affordable, deliverable

scheme that could bring immediate benefits if Network Rail is given the tools to finish the job.

Line speed improvements would offer both the passenger service and existing freight services improved resilience. The measurable benefits that arise from the investment could also now be forecast to increase. This is because both more trains and passengers are to be positively impacted than when the speed benefits were modelled under previous lower-frequency assumptions.

Another key Lincoln inter-urban service that is prime for speed or journey time improvements is the Lincoln - Sheffield link, which averages just 35mph. Some welcome progress was achieved in 2018 through the delivery of an express service, but this was removed during the pandemic with no sign of return. Restoring and improving this connection should be a clear priority.

Class 170 in EMR livery



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Unattractive

“Stakeholders do not seek metropolitan frequencies, just hourly trains that inter-connect.”

(Modern Railways, 2016, with reference to Lincoln's rail network during the East Midlands Franchise Tender process)

“The new Greater Lincolnshire Combined County Authority is committed to working with the rail industry to improve rail services across the area. For Lincoln, rail services need to be more frequent and attractive to tourists, visitors and businesses alike. Despite promises made nearly ten years ago during the last rail franchise planning - such as better Sunday services - Lincoln's regional rail connections still fall short of providing hourly service every day and lack proper integration across the network.”

Dame Andrea Jenkyns DBE, Mayor of Greater Lincolnshire

Despite progress on some corridors, many regional services through Lincoln will remain patchy. The current regional timetable is sparse through Lincoln to places such as Peterborough, Sleaford, Doncaster or Grimsby, and is not yet in any industry plan to be enhanced to hourly all day - every day. Until it is, it's tough for people to see rail as a real alternative to driving.

Reliability on these lines, although exhibiting amongst some of the stronger metrics for local routes, is also a challenge when set against what customers should expect from their transport fare. Punctuality on lines in the East Midlands is weaker than the experiences enjoyed on rail in most other English regions, compounding the challenge to passengers posed by the infrequent

service timetables, and undermining confidence in rail to its prospective passengers.

Some frequency improvements for these regional links were committed to as part of the last East Midlands franchise in 2019, such as to Sunday services, but these plans have not progressed. Other than the welcomed Nottingham improvements, there is no delivery plan for bringing Lincoln's wider regional rail links up to even these modest service level aspirations, which are seen as a minimum for rail to be more consistently viewed as an attractive choice.

A New Agenda

But there's hope for change. In the next few years, new organisations such as the Greater Lincolnshire Combined County Authority (GLCCA), and Great British Railways (GBR), and new collaborative frameworks for joined-up thinking on the railways, will all potentially bring a fresh approach.

In the coming years, Lincoln's case should consistently be heard at the highest level. The local plan for rail should be more tangible and integrated with interfacing national programmes, meaning integrated plans for the future, targeting: longer trains, traction decarbonisation and improved accessibility - such as renewal of the current Lincoln station platform footbridge, which is overdue for modernisation.

Also, new enthusiasm in planning 'beyond the horizon', such as enhancing the direct London service (including extending these trains to Cleethorpes), restoring Lincoln's direct links with Birmingham, and even creating new connections to York and Cambridge could all be properly reviewed by GBR hand-in-hand with the Local Authorities.

A Shared Vision for Lincoln and the East Midlands

Transport for the East Midlands and the Greater Lincolnshire Combined County Authority have a shared vision that sees better connecting Lincoln City as a priority for the East Midlands transport network and the East Midlands economy.

Lincoln has changed and now stands as a dynamic and even more regionally important city, and it should be well-connected for economic links - not just with Nottingham and London, but with more surrounding regional hubs. After years of watching other cities move ahead, Lincoln's time has come to be prioritised for rail improvement.

The upgrades coming in December 2025 are a welcome example of what's possible when 'can-do' thinking by industry drives real change, also reflecting the tireless advocacy of Councils and local partners. But this must be just the beginning. These gains cannot be allowed to slip away - they need to be protected and serve as the foundation for future improvements.

Strong local organisations will be around the table with newly integrated industry decision makers as they make early strides to ensure this year is just the first chapter. Authorities



will use new devolved arrangements to lead on advocating for rail improvements to Lincoln, whilst still leveraging strong collaboration across the whole East Midlands region.

We're making sure Lincoln's case is amplified. To **keep pace** with Lincoln's growth, it now needs further investment in infrastructure and rolling stock: faster lines, longer trains, and more frequent services, to make the railway a true match for the city it serves.



Endnotes

- 1 [Lincoln City Profile – City of Lincoln Council](#)
- 2 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000138/>
- 3 <https://www.lincoln.gov.uk/council/lincoln-city-profile>
- 4 Lincoln Transport Strategy 2020-2036
- 5 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/maps/choropleth/housing/number-of-cars-or-vans/number-of-cars-3a/no-cars-or-vans-in-household>
- 6 <https://www.lincoln.gov.uk/downloads/file/1984/vision-2030>
- 7 Office for National Statistics, 2021 (GDP) and 2017 (GVA)
- 8 Social Mobility Index, 2023, <https://social-mobility.data.gov.uk/>
- 9 Midlands Connect, A46 Corridor Study, 2020
- 10 <https://www.emcouncils.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/TfEM-Shared-Vision-2024.pdf>
- 11 <https://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/7200/local-transport-plan-5>
- 12 Midlands Connect, 2025, 'The Castle Line: Connecting Commuters between Nottingham, Newark and Lincoln'
- 13 <https://www.emcouncils.gov.uk/official-statistics-show-10-8-billion-funding-deficit-in-east-midlands/>
- 14 Examples across: Lincoln<>Newark North Gate reductions, Sheffield<>Gainsborough Central - withdrawn, Sheffield<>Cleethorpes via Brigg route: Now only Saturday, SHF<>LCN reductions
- 15 Data extracted from the September 2025 Wednesday service pattern using National Rail Enquiries and Realtime Trains (including impact of current Transpennine Route Upgrade works). Services to/from Worcester include Worcestershire Parkway.
- 16 ORR station usage data, 2019/20 and 2023/24 (<https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/statistics/usage/estimates-of-station-usage>)
- 17 https://www.emcouncils.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/EM_Rail_and_Growth_Study.pdf
- 18 TEMPro estimates the growth in leisure-related rail trips in Lincoln to be up to 5% over the next 10 years.
- 19 East Midlands Railway estimate the economic benefit of the improvements to be £2.4 million per annum.
- 20 Source: ORR Origin-Destination Matrix 2018/19 and 2023/24
- 21 SYSTRA city connectivity modelling with Miranda 2025 for TfEM
- 22 Midlands Connect, 2023, Nottingham-Lincoln Strategic Outline Business Case

