

What does local government reorganisation mean for you?: webinar for the VCFSE sector

09/06/26

Resource summary

- LGR and devolution affect the whole VCFSE sector with implications for funding, commissioning, partnerships, and representation.
- VCFSE organisations are operating in a highly complex and uncertain environment, with local government reorganisation (LGR), devolution, and health system changes progressing at different speeds.
- This period of change presents opportunities to influence emerging systems, build new relationships, and help shape future services.
- Relationships are key – especially with councillors, officers, and partners navigating change themselves.
- Early engagement is critical – organisations that act now will be better positioned to influence decisions.
- The sector's strengths – community insight, trust, and local knowledge – are increasingly valuable during the transition period.
- Collaboration across the VCFSE sector will strengthen influence and help develop shared messages and approaches.
- Organisations should focus on being clear, evidence-led, and community-centred in how they engage with decision-makers.
- Despite uncertainty, those that stay informed, adaptable, and proactive will be best placed to navigate change and make the most of opportunities.

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About this resource

Thank you for joining us for the webinar on local government reorganisation (LGR) and devolution. This short resource summarises the learning and insights from the discussions and provides practical guidance that any VCFSE organisation can use to prepare for and navigate change locally. There are also links to relevant resources on [NAVCA and ACRE's LGR and Devolution Hub](#).

[You can download the webinar slide deck here.](#)

If you'd like to explore some of the issues in more depth, we also recommend the accompanying case study videos featuring Angela Galvin (Third Sector Leaders Kirklees, speaking on behalf of the [West Yorkshire LIO Collective](#)) and Ben Rollett ([CVS Lincolnshire](#)), who share their experiences and learning from areas already navigating significant change.

Key webinar themes

The overwhelming message from the webinar was that VCFSE organisations are operating in an environment of unprecedented complexity and uncertainty. Many areas are navigating multiple, overlapping timetables and reforms simultaneously, with local government reorganisation (LGR), devolution, health system changes, with this restructuring all progressing at different speeds. You can see a map of areas subject to local government reorganisation on [page 10](#) of this document. Emerging arrangements vary significantly between areas, making it difficult to predict what the future landscape will look like.

Despite this uncertainty, participants also highlighted genuine opportunities. Changes to structures, leadership teams and ways of working within local authorities create openings to build new relationships, influence emerging systems and shape how services are designed. As statutory partners adapt to new geographies and responsibilities, the VCFSE sector's grassroots knowledge, trusted relationships and community intelligence become even more valuable. The current period of change also provides an opportunity for the sector itself to revisit partnership arrangements and collaborative models.

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The political environment remains an important factor. Political change can create fresh opportunities to build relationships, particularly with newly elected councillors seeking to understand and connect with their communities. However, tensions remain between local ambitions and central government priorities.

What we learnt

LGR and devolution are not simply agendas for local infrastructure organisations to monitor on behalf of the wider VCFSE sector. They matter to frontline and specialist organisations too. The changes underway have implications for funding, commissioning, partnerships, representation and local influence, making it increasingly important that organisations across the sector understand what is happening and where they may need to engage.

It is never too early to start preparing. While some areas are further ahead than others, relationships, intelligence gathering and strategic positioning all take time. Organisations that wait for complete clarity may find key decisions have already been made. Early engagement can help ensure the sector's voice is heard as new structures and priorities emerge.

It is valuable to create space for orientation and sense-making. Take time to find out what is happening in your area, talk to other VCFSE organisations and your local NAVCA or ACRE member for more support and information.

The VCFSE sector needs further support include practical tools, briefings and guidance that help organisations move from understanding change to responding effectively.

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Preparing for local government reorganisation

Practical guidance for navigating change locally

Every area is different. The structures, politics, timelines and relationships emerging through LGR and devolution will vary significantly from place to place. However, several practical themes emerged consistently throughout the webinar and wider learning from across the sector.

Start early

Don't wait for certainty before acting.

- Build your understanding of what is happening locally.
- Follow developments even if formal proposals seem some way off.
- Use this period to strengthen relationships, gather intelligence and prepare your organisation.
- Remember that influence is often built long before key decisions are made.

Invest in relationships

Relationships remain one of the most important assets any organisation has during periods of change.

- Nurture existing relationships with councillors, officers, commissioners and partners.
- Look for points of continuity as structures and personnel change.
- Build connections at multiple levels – political, strategic and operational.
- Take opportunities to engage newly elected councillors and leaders as they establish themselves in their roles.
- Don't assume there is a single "council" view; different departments, teams and individuals may have different perspectives and priorities.

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Lead with empathy

Many statutory colleagues are navigating significant uncertainty themselves.

- Avoid an "us and them" mindset.
- Take time to understand the pressures facing local authorities and other public bodies.
- Listen as well as advocate.
- Focus on shared challenges and shared outcomes.
- Position your organisation as a trusted partner and problem-solver.

Periods of change can be stressful for everyone involved. Constructive relationships built during difficult times often endure long after the transition itself.

Be clear about what you need

Decision-makers are likely to be managing competing demands and large volumes of information.

- Be clear about your purpose and contribution.
- Understand your priorities and where flexibility exists.
- Articulate what would help your organisation sustain and grow its impact.
- Explain barriers clearly and offer practical solutions where possible.
- Develop concise messages that can be understood by people who may be new to your organisation, sector or area.

Use evidence strategically

Evidence is more important than ever during periods of uncertainty.

- Gather data on your reach, outcomes and impact.
- Combine numbers with case studies and lived experience.
- Demonstrate your social and economic contribution.
- Show how your work supports wider public service goals.
- Capture emerging needs and trends within communities.

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Importantly, evidence should not only demonstrate the value of your organisation. It should help decision-makers understand the likely consequences for communities if services, relationships or local capacity are lost.

Bring community intelligence to the table

One of the VCSE sector's greatest strengths is its connection to communities.

- Share what you are hearing from residents and service users.
- Highlight emerging issues and unmet needs.
- Help partners understand how change is being experienced on the ground.
- Bring voices into decision-making processes that might otherwise be absent.

As statutory organisations adjust to new structures and geographies, this local intelligence becomes even more valuable.

Work together

Periods of uncertainty often reward collaboration.

- Strengthen relationships across the VCFSE sector.
- Share intelligence and learning.
- Look for opportunities to develop common messages and shared evidence.
- Consider whether existing partnership structures remain fit for purpose.
- Present a coherent voice where collective influence is likely to be more effective than individual advocacy.

The churn created by LGR and devolution may also offer an opportunity for the sector to revisit its own structures, partnerships and ways of working.

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Keep communities at the centre

When resources are stretched and change is constant, it can be tempting to focus solely on organisational survival.

- Frame conversations around communities and beneficiaries.
- Explain the impact of decisions on people and places.
- Focus on outcomes rather than organisational interests alone.
- Keep sight of your core purpose and mission.

The strongest case for the sector is often the difference it makes in people's lives.

See opportunity as well as risk

Change inevitably creates uncertainty, but it also creates opportunities.

- New structures create opportunities for new conversations.
- New leaders create opportunities for new relationships.
- New priorities create opportunities to demonstrate value.
- New systems create opportunities to rethink how sectors work together.

The organisations best placed to navigate this period are likely to be those that remain informed, evidence-led, collaborative and focused on the communities they serve.

Further resources and support

The webinar highlighted both the scale of change underway and the importance of preparing early. The [NAVCA and ACRE Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution Hub](#) contains a growing library of practical resources to help VCFSE organisations navigate these changes.

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We particularly recommend:

Getting started

What is local government reorganisation and why is it important? – A practical introduction to the LGR process, key stages and implications for the VCFSE sector.

What is devolution and how does it affect me? – An accessible guide to the emerging devolution landscape and why it matters for local organisations.

Understanding the political and system context

Navigating changes in local councils post-May 2026 elections – Practical guidance on working with new political administrations, newly elected councillors and an increasingly fragmented political landscape.

Learning from previous local government reorganisation – Lessons and reflections from areas that have already experienced LGR.

Building influence and local voice

Neighbourhood working: introduction for VCFSE organisations – Explores how neighbourhood working can strengthen local influence and community engagement.

Neighbourhood governance: current experience – Examines different neighbourhood governance models and how communities and VCFSE organisations can participate effectively.

VCFSE Sector Devolution Manifesto (Cheshire and Warrington Infrastructure Partnership) – A practical example of how the sector can come together to shape and influence devolution agendas.

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Managing change and risk

Risk barometer – A practical tool to help organisations monitor risks arising from LGR, devolution, health system change and wider partnership developments.

Enabling conversations: joint working – Guidance on collaboration, partnership and merger conversations in the context of changing local government structures.

Navigating a section 114 notice – Although focused on local authority financial difficulty, this guidance contains valuable advice on relationship building, evidence, partnership working and navigating uncertainty.

You can access the full library of resources, briefings, tools and updates via the NAVCA and ACRE Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution Hub: <https://www.navca.org.uk/devolution-lgr>

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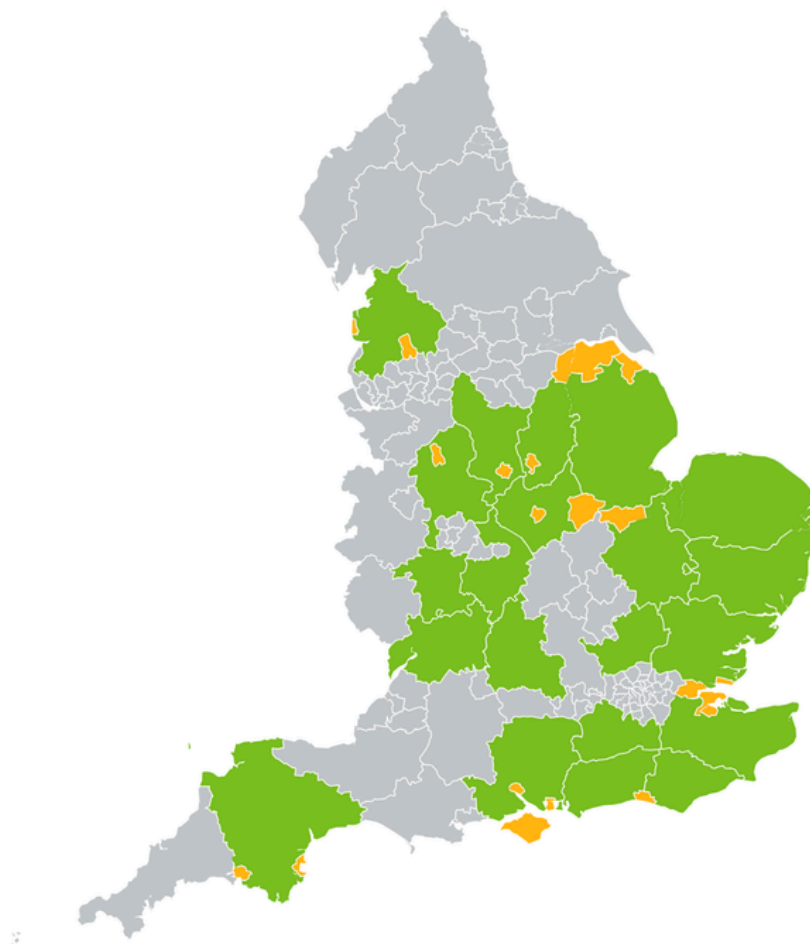
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Areas that are currently going through local government reorganisation. The green areas are county councils and the yellow areas are neighbouring unitary authorities that have been brought into the reorganisation. This map is courtesy of the Institute for Government.

Areas invited to submit local government reorganisation proposals, February 2025

IfG

■ Invited two-tier area ■ Invited unitary authority ■ Not invited



Source: MHCLG, correspondence: 'Local government reorganisation: invitation to local authorities in two-tier areas', 6 February 2025 • Map data: © Crown copyright and database right 2020

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