

Guidance for Libraries and Archives on Local Government Reorganisation

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Introduction

LGR guide for public libraries and archives

- Most discussion about local government reorganisation (LGR) since the publication of the [Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution's letter](#) to local areas in December 2024 has been about top-level decisions and the challenge of building local consensus.
- This is a practical guide for those with professional responsibility for local public library and archive services. Although this guidance covers a range of possible scenarios, it is unable to include every possible permutation.
- The macro decisions of LGR – the number of authorities, boundaries, population – are political. In practice, those running library and archive services, are unlikely to become directly involved in these.
- Important preparatory discussions are taking place about how individual services will be configured within the macro picture and Heads of Services must play a central role in that.
- Some areas may also have to take into account recast timelines for devolution and LGR, such as the four regional mayoral elections postponed until 2028 or those areas pursuing legal challenges against the Government's LGR plans.

Anticipate and prepare

- This guide sets out the different models of LGR we can anticipate. It suggests opportunities and challenges of different options drawing on experience from places that have been through LGR before. This guide also includes a SWOT template and a readiness checklist to support preparedness.
- It provides information to enable local library and archive leaders to prepare for LGR and understand the key requirements of the process¹:
 - Be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity, and withstand financial shocks.
 - Prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens. ²
 - Meet local needs and is informed by local views³ – *for example detailed arrangements may need to fit with general commitments about how the new authority will fit with design principles created in response to local consultation.*
 - Libraries and archives must continue to serve their statutory functions⁴.
- This document does not indicate preferred models – each locality is different – but it provides information and checklists to help library and archive teams contribute positively to LGR discussions about future operational arrangements.

Vesting day is only the start

- LGR is a medium-term programme of change. The short-term milestones are **elections of Councillors for shadow authorities** (for areas without a continuing authority) and one year later, “**vesting day**” when formal responsibility transfers to the new authority. This is only the start and the detail continues to be implemented long after that date.
- Heads of Services won’t have access to the new political decision-makers until they have been elected to shadow authorities, but they need to play an active role in preparatory work – if Heads of Service do not shape preparatory thinking about libraries and archives in LGR, then others will.
- The main priority is for new authorities to be “safe and legal” on vesting day, ensuring statutory service requirements are met (see appendix), and continuity for residents. This means **essential** tasks are the priorities for day 1, and **transformational** change happens later.
- For example:
 - Ensuring staff and residents can still access libraries and systems is a task for vesting day.
 - Implementation of new service structures, new systems, or new ways of working are transformation tasks that may wait for many months after vesting day.

Checklist

Adopting a state of readiness: checklist

- All local authorities set up special teams to manage LGR in the run-up to elections to the shadow authority and until vesting day, usually 12 months after the shadow authority is created.
- This period is all about getting your service into a state of readiness for change – getting actively involved in preparations, reviewing core management information about staffing, buildings, IT systems, financials, service data, and getting systems in order.
- Expert teams across councils are busy with numerous aspects of LGR and may be focused on other services. When library and archive services engage with LGR programme teams, they need detailed information about their service – including statutory duties, and issues that need to be addressed through the LGR process. Services also need to be clear about their own priorities and be prepared to make a well-evidenced case about why their needs should be treated as an authority-wide priority. If information or systems needs to be updated, improved, or reviewed, this is the time to do that.
- It is also the time to build understanding of how libraries and archives contribute to local outcomes.
- Are you ready to provide the following information?



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Adopting a state of readiness: checklist

Staffing

Most staffing information will be available through your central HR system, but can you provide detailed contextual information like organisational charts, narratives about team roles, staff locations and numbers of volunteers?

Buildings

Do you have ready-to-go descriptions of estates needs, building specifications, recent investment or investment needs, building contracts, or DDA issues?
Might you be asked about a new or additional Place of Deposit (PoD) – is a rapid SWOT needed so that you can respond?

Adopting a state of readiness: checklist

Contracts

Can you provide a comprehensive list of your systems, suppliers, contract terms and renewal or expiry dates? What contracts are in place for your mobile library services? Do you understand all contracts that need novating? Are you able to identify all the complexities that may causes issues? E.g. if you are part of a consortium contract or a contract is approaching renewal.

Financials

Is your running cost data up to date, can it be broken into categories? Can you share income figures besides general funding, income projections, or information about grants? Have you modelled where savings can be made, or the potential for joint-working with neighbouring authorities?

Adopting a state of readiness: checklist

Service data

Is your data up to date on the proportion of the population who use your services, numbers of visits, event attendance, your reach (priority groups or geographies)? Do you have impact data - people helped into work, supported when in need, or geographic areas served as a Place of Deposit?

IT

Contracts – who supplies key systems and when do they renew or expire? Have you considered the impacts of IT system changes, including system and data migration across new boundaries and any associated cybersecurity risks?

Adopting a state of readiness: checklist

Service demand

For archives in particular the ending of predecessor councils is likely to lead to a spike in records needing to be processed. Can you present realistic estimates of what this might be, to inform resource planning? Can you review existing contingency arrangements to account for potential service disruption?

Accreditation / peer review

Do you have recent findings from accreditation and peer reviews as evidence of service impact and contribution to corporate objectives? Do you have background data from those processes which could inform future delivery models.

Adopting a state of readiness: checklist

Partnerships

Does your service have culture, leisure or heritage partnerships that could be strengthened and developed under LGR – e.g. by formalising or extending these? Or for health, wellbeing, skills partnerships.

Are there partnerships in neighbouring areas or covering larger geographies you need to liaise with such as strategic authorities?

Services served by an outsourced Trust

Processes and lines of accountability will be different for library or archive services operated by a Trust or outsourced provider, but the service will still need to adopt a state of readiness both on the delivery side, and within the council as the statutory authority.

Macro models of LGR and possible structures

Possible macro models of LGR

Heads of library and archive services have *little influence* over these

County break-up

Merged unitaries

City expansion

Metro region

New geography
(for example, a home
counties district becomes a
London Borough)

Shifted boundaries can occur in any of these scenarios

Possible libraries and archives structures

Heads of Services *can* help shape these. Library and archive services may choose different structures from each other

One service becomes two or more

Division of functions e.g. stock and back office are single service, but frontline is multiple services

County splits but library and archives service remain a single service

Two or more services become one

One service acquires part of another

One service runs a non-neighbouring area

One service becomes two or more

e.g. the Berkshire unitaries as part of LGR in 1998 created six separate library services (and also created a new single archive service The Royal Berkshire Archives).

Opportunities

- Localised focus.
- Potential for quicker decision making.

Challenges

- Very small services.
- Duplication of functions.
 - Multiple and less senior heads of service.

Financial considerations

- There may be duplication of services and roles.
- Increased complexities running smaller services.
- Exiting existing contracts.

Division of functions

e.g. Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness share the single stock and back office of former Cumbria, but frontline services have been split into two

Opportunities

- One agreement covering everything for libraries and one covering everything for archives.
- Cost efficiency with less duplication of functions.

Challenges

- Divergence of vision for the services.
- Budget negotiations – are budgets split based on population or the number of frontline services?
- Staffing split.

Financial considerations

- Costs depend on how deeply a service is split and which functions are shared.
- There may be duplication of services and roles.
- Exiting existing contracts.

County splits but single library and archive service remains

e.g. single service for Cheshire Archives, also, Royal Berkshire Archives

Opportunities

- Shared service governance means that small services have exposure to senior officers and members more regularly.
- Continuity of service.
- A larger strategic voice.

Challenges

- Dependency on provider.
- Complex governance.
- Maintaining local identity.
- Risk of political divergence.

Financial considerations

- Multiple business cases needed for capital projects.
- Complex governance, serving multiple decision-making structures.

Two or more services become one

e.g. Creation of Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole “BCP” from two unitaries plus a lower-tier borough previously part of Dorset

Opportunities

- Simplifies negotiations with decision-makers.
- Greater strategic capacity.

Challenges

- Navigating boundary changes and local identity.
- Risk of political divergence.

Financial considerations

- Multiple business cases needed for capital projects.
- Complex governance, serving multiple decision-making structures.

One service acquires part of another

e.g. Creation of Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole “BCP” from two unitaries plus a lower-tier borough previously part of Dorset

Opportunities

- Can reduce duplication of functions.

Challenges

- Maintaining/navigating relationships between councils.
- Risk of political divergence.

Financial considerations

- Allows for economies of scale.

One service runs a non-neighbouring area

E.g. Essex running Slough from 2011-2016

Opportunities

- Income for the provider.

Challenges

- Accountability and governance are shifted away from the service.
- Maintaining/navigating relationships between councils.
- Risk of political divergence.

Financial considerations

- Allows for economies of scale.
- Complex governance, serving multiple decision-making structures.

Considerations

- How clear is the macro picture of LGR in our area?
- Do we know what newly elected shadow authority Members might want?
- What might be the consequences of running a larger or smaller service?
- How ready are we as a service to take different possible routes?
- Are there funding agreements that will be affected by change? e.g. NPO funds that can only be used for the original area.
- Are there any other major constraints? E.g. archive repository capacity, PFI deals?

In-house/contracted-out options won't change – they could still be any of these

In-house/Council-run

Spin-out trust or mutual

Contracted out to independent provider

Although one rarely used option might become more relevant...

Statutory Joint Library Board
Statutory Joint Archive Board

Other options – aggregation and disaggregation of services

Opportunities

- May lead to long term savings and efficiencies
- Potential for better data insight across wider services
- Larger, more resilient services

Challenges

- May require renegotiation or redrawing of contracts
- Risk of short-term disruption to service provision
- Disaggregation likely to result in loss of economies of scale
- Final arrangement will likely not be in place until long after vesting day

Statutory Joint Library Boards

The 1964 Act makes specific provision for local authorities to set up Joint Library Boards. However, there are no known examples of a Joint Library Board being created under the Act (n.b. exact process awaiting DCMS confirmation).

- If two or more library authorities agree, the Secretary of State can create a joint board by issuing an official order.
- A joint board takes over public library responsibilities of those authorities and acts as a single library authority.
- The official order can set rules for:
 - How the board is legally incorporated.
 - How it will run (including meeting rules and quorum).
 - How its costs will be paid.

Statutory Joint Library Boards continued

When the joint board starts:

- All library staff from the original authorities automatically become employees of the joint board.
- All library assets and debts of those authorities transfer to the joint board (unless the order says otherwise).

The Secretary of State must make an order to dissolve a Joint Board.

- When dissolved:
 - The original authorities regain their status as library authorities.
 - Staff return to their original authority (or another agreed one).
 - Assets and liabilities are divided among the authorities as stated in the dissolution order.

Statutory Joint Archive Boards

Provision is made for local authorities to set up joint archive boards under local government legislation in the UK.

- Joint archive boards in the UK are typically established under provisions of the Local Government Act 1972, particularly Section 101 and Section 102, which allow local authorities to delegate functions and form joint committees.
- There are many examples of joint archive boards including the Joint Archive Service for Dorset which served Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole Council and Dorset Council.
- Some joint archive boards are between a local authority and a university.

Statutory Joint Archive Boards continued

Relevant Legislation:

- [Local Government Act 1972](#)
 - [Section 101](#): Allows a local authority to delegate its functions to another authority or to a joint committee.
 - [Section 102](#): Provides for the establishment of joint committees by two or more local authorities to discharge functions jointly.
 - These sections are the legal foundation for creating joint arrangements like archive boards, enabling councils to collaborate on managing archives and records.
- [Public Records Act 1958](#)
 - This act governs the management and preservation of public records. However they are structured, local authority archive services must comply with its provisions in respect of public records.
- [Freedom of Information Act 2000](#) and [Data Protection Act 2018](#)
 - These acts influence how archives are accessed and managed, especially regarding public access and personal data.

Use this SWOT to help you be more prepared

Implications for our service	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	How to prepare?
One service becomes two or more					
Division of functions e.g. back office as one service, but frontline as two					
County splits but single library and archive service remains					
Two or more services become one					
One service acquires part of another					
One service runs a non-neighbouring area					

What next?

- Remember - the short-term LGR milestones are the **election of Councillors for the shadow authority (for areas without a continuing authority)** and “**vesting day**” a year later, when formal responsibility transfers. But transformational change will come later.
- You won’t have access to the new political decision-makers until they have been elected to the shadow authority – but you need to be ready to respond quickly.
- What you can now do:
 - Use the SWOT analysis in this guide to understand the different routes you need to prepare for.
 - Use the checklist to identify where you need to update information or systems.
 - Talk to Archive Sector Leadership at TNA and use their resources such as [the Government’s vision for archives in England](#) ([contact the team](#)).
 - Talk to the DCMS libraries team and use their resources ([contact the team](#)).

Case studies

- **Surrey libraries** – [vesting day is only the start and LGR is a longer-term process](#)
 - **Northamptonshire libraries** – [preserving a single service after a split](#)
 - **Berkshire archives** – [working together to preserve shared heritage](#)
 - **Cumbria libraries and archives** – [managing strategic divergence between new authorities](#)
 - **Staffordshire archives** – [a joint service where smaller services would be less viable](#)
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- All available at the foot of the guidance, in the appendix.

Appendix – Safe and Legal guidance, further links

Safe and Legal: sources of guidance

Libraries as a statutory service

Libraries

- [Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964](#)
 - Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide ‘comprehensive and efficient’ library services.
 - The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has a legal duty for the stewardship and improvement of public libraries in England.
- [Equality Act 2010: guidance - GOV.UK](#)
 - The Secretary of State’s duty to issue statutory guidance must be exercised in compliance with his or her duty under section 149 of the Equality Act – to have due regard of the need to eliminate discrimination and to advance equality of opportunity among protected groups. This means, for example, ensuring that changes to library services do not disadvantage people who may not be able to travel large distances.
- [Public sector equality duty - GOV.UK](#)
- [Best value statutory guidance - GOV.UK](#)

Safe and Legal: sources of guidance

Statutory basis of local authority archives - Archives sector

Archives

An efficiently run archive service will support an authority's compliance by ensuring appropriate access to records. Without such a service, each request for information (including family and local history enquiries) would have to be serviced separately by the council, at greater cost*. An efficient and effective archive service also provides value to researchers and staff in Local Authorities when they have need to access historical records for work purposes.

Legal duties that apply to archives:

- [Freedom of Information Act 2000](#)
 - [Code of Practice on the management of records issued under section 46 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000](#)
- [Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\)](#)

Safe and Legal: sources of guidance

Legal duties that apply to archives continued

- [The Environmental Information Regulations 2004](#)
- [Public Records Act, overseen by The National Archives](#)
- [Archive Service Accreditation - Archives sector](#) enables The National Archives to fulfil statutory functions relating to [Places of Deposit](#)

Local Government Acts:

- The [Local Government Acts](#) give local authorities the responsibility to maintain their records and make them publicly accessible as well as the right to acquire others' records and archives. This legislation also relates to local studies libraries when they contain original and archive materials.

Safe and Legal: sources of guidance

Local Government Acts continued

- [Local Government Act, 1962](#)
 - This governs records for which the council has chosen to take responsibility – including those acquired by purchase, gift or on loan.
- [Local Government Act, 1972](#)
 - This governs the council's own records, generated in the course of its business, and those it has acquired by gift, donation or purchase.
- [The Local Government \(Access to Information\) Act, 1985](#)
 - This governs the requirement that minutes, agendas, reports and background papers of meetings of principal councils that are open to the public be available for public inspection.

Safe and Legal: sources of guidance

Archives and libraries

- [Human Rights Act 1998](#)
 - The Secretary of State's duty to issue statutory guidance is reinforced by the obligation to act compatibly with Convention rights under the Human Rights Act.
 - The lack of guidance means there is not sufficient legal certainty about how reductions in library services are compatible with Local Authorities' duty to provide 'comprehensive and efficient' services to support the rights of library users under the Human Rights Act including respect for their private lives, to receive information and to non-discrimination.
- [Localism Act 2011](#)
- [The Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2015](#)

Footnote links

- ¹Summarised from [invitation letters to two tier local authorities in two-tier areas to submit LGR proposals](#) (February 2025)
- ^{2&3}Relate to [The Libraries Development Framework | Arts Council England](#)
- ⁴[Libraries as a statutory service](#), [Statutory basis of local authority archives - Archives sector](#)