

Navigating Local Government Reorganisation in Children's Services Roundtable, 16 July 2026

Local Government East recently hosted a virtual roundtable bringing together Directors of Children's Services and senior officers from councils across the East of England to discuss the implications of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) for children's services. Sponsored by IMPOWER Consulting and chaired by **Marcel Coiffait**, Chief Executive of Central Bedfordshire Council and Regional Lead Chief Executive for Children's Services, the event provided an opportunity to share experiences, reflect on lessons from previous LGR, and consider the challenges and opportunities during a period of significant change.

Learning from Previous LGR

Milorad Vasic, Director of Children's Services at Westmorland and Furness Council, reflected on the challenge of disaggregating Cumbria's county-wide children's service into two new unitary authorities while also consolidating seven district councils. While the overarching objective was straightforward, ensuring services remained safe, legal and uninterrupted from day one, was considerably more complex. Establishing governance arrangements, maintaining service continuity and creating new organisational structures required careful planning and strong leadership.

Philip Simpkins, former Chief Executive of Bedford Borough Council, Local Government East Talent Bank Associate and Local Government Association Children's Improvement Adviser, shared lessons from Bedfordshire's transition from a county council to two unitary authorities. He emphasised that successful reorganisation depends on keeping children and families at the centre of strategic decision-making. Where children's services become just one element within a larger transformation programme, there is a risk that safeguarding, education and family support priorities can become diluted.

Dominic Luscombe, Director at IMPOWER Consulting, described the sector's current challenge as a "**triple collision**" of **LGR, major national reforms and business as usual**. A clear organisational vision is critical to maintaining staff confidence and building a shared culture.

Opportunities for Children's Services

The speakers shared that LGR provides an opportunity to challenge historic ways of working, encourage innovation and redesign services around the needs of

children and families rather than organisational boundaries. It can strengthen partnerships by bringing together social care, education, SEND, public health, housing and community services in a more integrated way. The aim should be to create a more coordinated system that improves outcomes and reduces barriers for families.

Managing the Risks

However, the discussion highlighted that financial considerations can become the dominant focus of reorganisation, despite children's services being highly regulated and subject to extensive statutory responsibilities. Reorganisation cannot remove safeguarding duties, SEND obligations or inspection requirements, nor can it solve wider funding pressures. Balancing the ongoing demands of service delivery is a huge challenge.

Asset distribution present additional challenges. Children's homes, family hubs and SEND provision often reflect historic arrangements rather than future demand, requiring careful planning to ensure resources are aligned to new organisational structures.

There was also a recognition of the importance of strong corporate support functions, including HR, ICT, finance, legal, procurement and communications. Case management systems were identified as a particular challenge, requiring realistic timescales and sufficient investment.

Workforce stability emerged as a critical concern. Participants stressed the importance of visible leadership, regular communication to support staff confidence and retention throughout the transition.

Final Reflections

Successful local government reorganisation requires strong leadership, early planning and an unwavering focus on children and families. Reorganisation can create opportunities to improve services and outcomes, but risks must be carefully and mitigated, with children placed at the heart of every strategic decision.

Further information

Please contact, **Dominic Luscombe, Director, IMPOWER Consulting, email d Luscombe@impower.co.uk** for details about how IMPOWER can support your council's children's services through LGR.

Please contact **Kate.O'Driscoll@localgoveasteng.gov.uk** for further information about Local Government East series of virtual roundtables.
