

**Local Government Re-organisation – Interim Plan Proposals for Worcestershire – Bromsgrove - Addendum**

**1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Additional recommendation 1.4**

**Council RESOLVE:**

- 1.4 That the Interim Plan (as attached at Appendix 5) which identifies two options for a unitary structure in Worcestershire, be adopted as the Council's interim plan response. This is to be sent to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government setting out the Council's position on local government re-organisation devolution.**

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 This is an addendum to the original report on Local Government Re-organisation which was published by the Council on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2025 for consideration at the extraordinary meeting of Council on 12<sup>th</sup> March.
- 2.2 The addendum provides an update on discussions between the Leaders of the Councils in Worcestershire that have been taking place through the Worcestershire Leaders Board. Further, the addendum refers to Appendix 5 to the report, the joint Interim Plan for Worcestershire, which Members are being asked to approve as set out in additional recommendation 1.4.

**3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES**

- 3.1 As set out at paragraphs 2.9 and 3.22 of the covering report published on 4<sup>th</sup> March, officers were waiting for the outcome of a further meeting of the Worcestershire Leaders Board which was due to take place on 6<sup>th</sup> March. The purpose of the meeting was to continue discussions on the submission of a joint interim plan covering the whole of Worcestershire. As noted in the covering report, the government expectation is that one interim plan should be submitted jointly for each County area.
- 3.2 Officers can report that the outcome of the meeting was that all seven Councils have indicated their intention to move forward with the joint interim plan. This will be subject to approval of that course of action by Members either through individual Council meetings or other processes

as appropriate for the Councils concerned. As Members are aware the deadline for submission of the interim plan to the Ministry of Communities, Housing and Local Government (MCHLG) is 21<sup>st</sup> March 2025. It should be noted that whilst the outcome of discussions through the Leaders Board has led to support for the submission of the joint Interim Plan at Appendix 5, individual councils may still choose to send additional comments relating to their own council to the MCHLG before the 21<sup>st</sup> March deadline

- 3.3 The joint Interim Plan sets out two alternative models of either a county wide unitary or two unitaries based in the North and the South, and expresses the 7 Worcestershire councils' commitment to working collaboratively to further examine the two options.

Proposals in the Worcestershire Interim Plan

- 3.4 Members are referred to the full details set out in the Interim Plan at Appendix 5. To highlight some key aspects Members are referred to the following points:-
- 3.5 With regard to timing, it is proposed in the Interim Plan that a unitary structure (or structures) be introduced across Worcestershire with effect from 01 April 2028 following elections to a shadow authority in 2027.
- 3.6 As already reported to Members the only two re-organisation models under consideration are:-
- Option A: A unitary council for the whole county with an estimated population of 614,000; or
- Option B: Two unitary councils, one made up of Malvern Hills, Worcester City and Wychavon (population 323,000) and the other made up of Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre Forest (population 291,000).
- 3.7 The county division boundaries have only recently been reviewed by the Boundary Commission. The Interim Plan suggests that the existing boundaries could continue to be used for a unitary structure by doubling the number of councillors per division. As none of the divisions crosses any District boundary this approach would be workable for either a single unitary council or two unitary councils and would result in the following size councils: -

Option A – single unitary – 114 councillors.

Option B - 60 members in the Southern unitary council and 54 members in the Northern unitary council.

- 3.8 The Interim Plan identifies a clash in May 2027 between proposed elections for the new unitary structure and the district council elections which are due to take place. It is therefore being recommended to government that the 2027 district council elections should be cancelled and the term of office of those councillors that was due to end in May 2027 be extended to May 2028.
- 3.9 With regard to progressing devolution, the interim plan includes a pledge that "Worcestershire's councils commit themselves to working with neighbouring and nearby county and district councils and unitary authorities to provide clarity about the footprint [of a mayoral combined authority] and timetable as part of the final proposals". It further states that "Discussions with councils in neighbouring areas will be taken forward by all seven councils in order to identify a position that is supported not only in Worcestershire but also in other areas that would participate in a devolution structure".

#### Supporting evidence

- 3.10 Worcestershire County Council has commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers ("PwC") to advise them on the likely costs and savings associated with the two models being considered. An initial assessment has been produced but further work needs to be done to fully understand the assumptions that were used for the modelling. At this stage the Section 151 officer is waiting for further information in relation to the PwC model to be shared by the County Council and until more data is forthcoming it will not be possible to validate to the assumptions in the PwC model.
- 3.11 Whilst it is to be welcomed that the 7 Worcestershire Councils are pledging to work collaboratively, as identified at paragraphs 3.29 to 3.31 of the covering report, it remains the case that additional expertise may be needed to carry out more detailed work on option appraisal.

#### **4. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS**

##### Appendices

Appendix 5 - Interim Plan for local government reorganisation in Worcestershire