

Electoral Matters Committee

07 November 2025

Local Government Reorganisation: Implications for Local Governance in Bromsgrove

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Karen May, Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships, Economic Development and Enabling
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Assistant Director	Claire Felton, Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services
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Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	N/A
Relevant Council Priority	All
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to RESOLVE

- 1) To note that irrespective of the options selected at recommendation 3, a Community Governance Review will be undertaken for Finstall parish**
- 2) To approve the submission of a Related Alteration for the Hagley East, Hagley West and Belbroughton and Romsley wards to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England as detailed in Appendix 1.**

Members are asked to RECOMMEND

- 3) One of the following options, as detailed in this report, to ensure robust neighbourhood governance arrangements following Local Government Reorganisation:**
 - i) OPTION 1: Subject to resolution 1 above, that officers be instructed to take no further action at this stage to provide for future local neighbourhood governance arrangements in the District; or**

- ii) **OPTION 2: Subject to resolution 1, that officers be instructed to explore in more detail the option of appointing “Charter Trustees” for the District and that a further report, including costings and a timetable for appointing Charter Trustees, be presented to Council in due course; or**
- iii) **OPTION 3: That officers be instructed to proceed with a Community Governance Review of the District. This process be initiated in accordance with the timetable set out in Appendix 3 and a further report on the outcomes of the process be presented to Council on this subject in due course.**

Members are also asked to NOTE: -

- 1) the matters set out in this report relating to Local Government Reorganisation and future neighbourhood governance arrangements for Bromsgrove District Council; and**
- 2) that should members endorse option 3 recommendation 3(iii), this would have financial implications for the Council and therefore a further report detailing the revenue implications of a Community Governance Review would need to be considered at a later date.**

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In December 2024 the Government published the English Devolution White Paper which confirmed the Government’s intention to restructure local government in England, particularly in two-tier areas, through the creation of new unitary authorities.
- 2.2 Bromsgrove District Council is currently working alongside Redditch Borough, Malvern Hills, Worcester City and Wychavon District Councils to prepare and submit a final proposal for local government reorganisation in November 2025. This submission will propose the creation of two unitary councils covering the north and south of Worcestershire.
- 2.3 Worcestershire County Council and Wyre Forest District Council are also preparing final submissions, which will propose the establishment of a single unitary authority for the whole of Worcestershire.

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- 2.4 At this stage, it is not known what the final structure for Worcestershire will be. Following statutory consultation, and subject to parliamentary approval, ministers are expected to decide which proposal will be approved and implemented and may make modifications as a result of consultation. On the current indicative timetable, a decision will be announced in early summer 2026.
- 2.5 In addition to Local Government Reorganisation, the Government's English Devolution White Paper also references neighbourhood governance arrangements in local areas.
- 2.6 Regardless of which proposal is ultimately approved, Local Government Reorganisation will result in significant structural change for the District. Given the District's existing network of parish councils and established local governance arrangements, Members are invited to consider how these might best be supported within any future unitary authority. This may include following the Government's emerging framework for neighbourhood governance, making provision for Bromsgrove's civic and ceremonial continuation, or exploring opportunities to enhance the existing parished framework. Consideration of these issues may also strengthen the Council's case in the proposals submitted to Government.
- 2.7 The Government defines a neighbourhood area as 'any area of specified description that falls within the authority's area'. Throughout this report, the terms *neighbourhood governance* and *local governance* are therefore used interchangeably.

Electoral Review and Community Governance Arrangements

- 2.8 Prior to the publication of the Government's English Devolution White Paper, Bromsgrove District Council was in the process of an Electoral Review being undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE). The Council had submitted both its Council Size submission and its Ward Pattern proposals as part of that review.
- 2.9 The Ward Pattern submission included a proposed boundary change affecting the Clent and Hagley parishes, which sought to correct the non-coterminous boundary between the District wards and the parish boundaries created by an earlier CGR. Details of this discrepancy can be found in Appendix 1.
- 2.10 In February 2025, the LGBCE confirmed that the Bromsgrove Electoral Review would be placed on pause for the foreseeable future due to the implications of the Government's proposals for Local Government Reorganisation.

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- 2.11 Before the commencement of that review, in February 2024, the Electoral Matters Committee (EMC) had resolved to conduct a CGR for the parish of Finstall to propose an amendment to its boundaries in relation to Field View House and the Rutherford Road area. However, this work was subsequently paused when the Electoral Review began, to avoid potential overlap and ensure consistency between the two processes.
- 2.12 When the LGBCE advised the Council of the decision to pause the Electoral Review, they also confirmed that they were content for the Council to proceed with any necessary CGRs in the meantime, should it wish to do so.
- 2.13 Given that the LGBCE has confirmed the Council may now proceed with CGRs, Members should note that they will need to reinstate the previously agreed review of Finstall Parish alongside any decisions arising from this report. It would also be advisable to submit a Related Alteration to the LGBCE to align the Hagley and Clent parish boundaries with the district ward boundaries between Hagley East, Hagley West and Belbroughton and Romsley, ensuring they are fully coterminous.
- 2.14 Should Members decide to proceed with a wider CGR, both the previously agreed review of Finstall Parish and the alignment of the Hagley and Clent parish and district ward boundaries could be incorporated into that process. However, should Members wish to pursue an alternative approach to local governance, these matters would need to be brought back to the Committee as separate items for further consideration.

Current Local Governance and Unparished Areas

- 2.15 Bromsgrove District is predominantly parished, with many of its communities represented through established parish councils of varying size and capacity which provides a strong foundation for local governance.
- 2.16 However, there are areas of the District which are currently unparished. These are within and surrounding the Bromsgrove town centre, as well as the Rubery North and Rubery South wards. Maps showing the extent of the unparished areas are provided in Appendix 2.
- 2.17 As at the publication of the current Register of Electors, 44,514 electors reside within the parished areas of the District, represented by 19 parish councils of varying size and population. The remaining 31,252

electors live within the unparished areas of the District. Of these, approximately 4,940 electors are located within the unparished Rubery North and Rubery South wards, while the remaining 26,312 electors reside within the unparished area surrounding Bromsgrove town as depicted in Appendix 2.

- 2.18 This report seeks to explore a range of potential options for future local governance within the District, in the context of Local Government Reorganisation and the local factors outlined above. These include the introduction of Neighbourhood Area Committees under the forthcoming legislative framework, the appointment of Charter Trustees to maintain Bromsgrove's civic identity, and the option of undertaking a CGR to assess whether adjustments to existing parish arrangements are required, as well as to consider the creation of additional parish or town councils where appropriate.

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

Neighbourhood Area Committees (Corresponds with Option 1)

- 3.1 It should be noted that one of the elements that the Government is considering in the establishment of new unitary authorities is how to provide for community level representation. The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, currently before Parliament, introduces a new duty on local authorities to put in place "appropriate arrangements" for effective neighbourhood governance.
- 3.2 The detail of how neighbourhood governance will operate is not prescribed in the Bill itself but is expected to be set through secondary legislation. In a Ministerial Statement issued by the then Minister for State for Local Government and English Devolution (Jim McMahon MP) on 3rd June 2025 the Government set out a broad approach as follows: -

"Local Government Reorganisation should facilitate better and sustained community engagement, and I welcome the steps areas are taking to consider how to maintain strong community voice. A simplified and standardised system of local area-working and governance is needed, and Neighbourhood Area Committees, led by frontline ward councillors, are the best route to achieve this. Neighbourhood Area Committees support local authorities to deliver their commitments to community partnership-working at a neighbourhood level. There are also opportunities to bring in other service providers into broader membership of Neighbourhood Area Committees, for instance town or parish councillors where they exist, and co-opted members from other local community organisations. This allows for the benefit of

structural efficiencies from Local Governance Reorganisation while deepening localism and engagement across every community.”

- 3.3 The Government’s vision therefore is for Neighbourhood Area Committees or forums, to be established by the new unitary authority, with the purpose of strengthening local representation and community engagement. It should be noted that any decisions relating to establishing Neighbourhood Area Committees would be made by the future unitary authority rather than by Bromsgrove District Council.
- 3.4 The definition and interpretation of “appropriate arrangements”, and how this relates to Neighbourhood Area Committees is currently unclear. However, it is expected that Neighbourhood Area Committees could provide a structured forum for Councillors to engage with local communities and consider local priorities. Depending on the scope of delegation from the unitary council, their role could include:
- Providing a forum for discussion of issues affecting the local area.
 - Making recommendations to the unitary authority on matters of local concern.
 - Exercising delegated decision-making powers where these are granted.
 - Managing small budgets to support local services or community projects.
 - Strengthening the link between communities and the unitary authority to ensure that local voices are heard.
- 3.5 These Committees would not be statutory councils in their own right and would not have the ability to raise a precept. Their effectiveness would depend on the powers, responsibilities and resources delegated to them by the unitary authority.
- 3.6 Neighbourhood Area Committees may operate across all or parts of the Bromsgrove area, encompassing both parished and unparished communities. In areas with existing parish councils, those councils would be well placed to contribute to the work of the Neighbourhood Area Committees, helping to identify local priorities and strengthen coordination with the new unitary authority.
- 3.7 In summary, Neighbourhood Area Committees are expected to provide the main mechanism for community-level governance within the new unitary structure. However, their powers would depend on delegation from the unitary authority, as well as the contents of any secondary legislation provided by Government. The arrangements described in this section of the report are those which would come into place

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following Local Government Re-organisation if Members chose to take no further action in accordance with Recommendation 3(i).

Charter Trustees (Option 2)

- 3.8 Members may wish to consider whether additional local governance arrangements are needed to ensure continuity of civic identity and/or representation in the unparished areas of the District following Vestment Day for the new unitary authority. In addition to Neighbourhood Area Committees, the option of appointing Charter Trustees could also be considered. While Neighbourhood Area Committees are intended to provide a mechanism for localised governance within the unitary structure, Charter Trustees could operate in parallel to ensure that the civic and ceremonial traditions of the District are maintained where no parish or town council currently exists.
- 3.9 Charter Trustees can be put in place when a Borough or District with historic civic functions is abolished and there is no parish or town council to take them on. They are provided for in legislation and allow those civic traditions to continue through a group of councillors drawn from the area concerned.
- 3.10 The role of Charter Trustees is to safeguard civic and ceremonial traditions, such as the mayoralty, regalia, and historic property. These responsibilities are ceremonial in nature and do not extend to wider service delivery or community governance. It should also be noted that Charter Trustees are unable to own land or buildings.
- 3.11 Membership would usually consist of councillors of the principal authority representing wards, or divisions that make up the unparished area of the former District. The Trustees must elect a Mayor and Deputy Mayor annually and have the ability to indirectly raise a modest precept to cover civic expenses.
- 3.12 To explore this option further, consideration would need to be given to which civic and ceremonial functions, property and regalia should be transferred to the Charter Trustees upon the dissolution of the District Council.
- 3.13 Taken together, Government plans for Neighbourhood Area Committees alongside Charter Trustees may provide sufficient arrangements for local governance in the District, particularly in preserving both area-level governance and civic identity. This approach follows wider Government sentiment for reorganisation and would be consistent with the Council's wider position in supporting proposals for two unitary authorities in Worcestershire, which seek to balance effective strategic governance with meaningful local accountability.

- 3.14 Bromsgrove District Council currently appoints a Chairman of the Council on an annual basis, who serves as the District's civic head of the authority. Under the new Unitary Council arrangements, a Chairman will be appointed to perform civic and ceremonial duties across the full geographic area of the new authority, representing all communities within its boundaries. This role will not specifically represent the former Bromsgrove area.
- 3.15 The appointment of Charter Trustees for Bromsgrove would therefore provide a mechanism to preserve historic civic identity. The Charter Trustees, drawn from the elected members representing wards within the former unparished Bromsgrove area, would have the ability to appoint a Mayor of Bromsgrove who could act on behalf of the area at local, regional, and ceremonial functions, thereby maintaining continuity of civic tradition and identity following reorganisation.
- 3.16 Further work would have to be carried out by officers to bring a full report to Council on the details of appointing Charter Trustees, including the process to be followed and seeking authorisation to set up a budget to cover the anticipated costs. Members are referred to Recommendation 3(ii) which details the actions required should this option be selected.

Parish / Town Councils (Option 3)

- 3.17 If Members wish to consider arrangements that extend the current provision for local governance in a broader way, the alternative would be to consider commencing a CGR to explore the creation of parish councils in areas of the District which are currently unparished. Legally, there is no difference between a parish council and a town council. Both are corporate bodies created under the Local Government Act 1972 with the same statutory powers and duties. The distinction is simply that a parish council may, by resolution, choose to call itself a town council and adopt the style of town Mayor.
- 3.18 Parish councils have a range of powers to provide and maintain local facilities and services. These can include allotments, parks and open spaces, cemeteries, bus shelters, community centres and events. They have the power to raise their own funding through a precept as part of council tax and must operate within the same financial and audit framework as other local authorities.
- 3.19 While parish councils can own property and employ staff, they must remain financially sustainable. Any transfer of assets or responsibilities from a principal authority must therefore be supported by an

appropriate level of resources to ensure the new council can meet its obligations.

- 3.20 It should be noted that there is no requirement for any area to be parished. In many urban areas, local governance is provided entirely by the principal authority without parish councils. Where parish or town councils are created, they take on responsibility for certain local matters and operate as an additional tier of governance within the area.
- 3.21 As referred to in the background section of this report, the statutory process by which new parish/town councils can be created is via a CGR.

Community Governance Reviews (Option 3)

- 3.22 A CGR is the statutory process by which a principal council can review and, if appropriate, establish or amend parish governance arrangements. The process is governed by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and associated guidance.
- 3.23 A CGR can consider a range of options, including:
- The creation of new parishes and parish or town councils
 - The alteration or abolition of existing parishes
 - Changes to the name of a parish
 - Alterations to parish boundaries
 - Changes to the electoral arrangements of a parish, including the number of councillors and the warding of the parish.
- 3.24 Should Members wish to proceed with a CGR, it would be appropriate for the review to encompass the whole of Bromsgrove District within its Terms of Reference. This approach would ensure that the previously agreed review of Finstall Parish and the Hagley and Clent boundary alignment are considered within the same process, alongside any representations from other parishes or communities. A district-wide review would also allow for full consultation with all existing parish councils and neighbouring communities, while making clear that changes would only be implemented where they are considered both appropriate and necessary.
- 3.25 In practice, the process would begin with the Council agreeing Terms of Reference setting out the scope, timetable and consultation methods for the review, as well as setting aside appropriate funds. It is considered best practice for a CGR to be completed within 12 months of commencement. An indicative timetable aligning with the next scheduled ordinary parish elections in May 2027 has been provided in Appendix 3. The timetable ensures adequate timing for robust consultation on draft recommendations.

- 3.26 The outcome is not predetermined: a review may recommend the creation of new parish/town councils but may also conclude that no changes are required.
- 3.27 Undertaking a CGR would have financial implications. Costs are likely to arise from consultation, engagement and publication requirements, as well as officer time. A CGR of this scale would also require the purchase of mapping software which the Council has previously used for boundary reviews. It should also be recognised that the process would require a significant allocation of officer resources, which may have an impact on wider Local Government Reorganisation workflows.
- 3.28 In addition, the statutory requirement for robust recommendations, supported by consultation and evidence, means that work on a CGR would need to commence immediately if Bromsgrove District Council wished to see the process through to its completion within the available timeframe.
- 3.29 Should it be decided that Bromsgrove District Council does not wish to commence a CGR at this stage, this would not prevent the Council from resolving to commence a CGR at a later date, or any future unitary authority from carrying out a review in due course, including consideration of parishing currently unparished areas. The CGR for Finstall parish has previously been agreed and paused, and would therefore still need to go ahead.
- 3.30 There is also the potential that a petition could be received calling for Bromsgrove District Council, or a future unitary authority, to undertake a CGR in Bromsgrove. Should this occur, and should the petition be in receipt of signatures from at least 7.5 per cent of local electors (where there are more than 2,500 electors), then the relevant Council would then need to undertake that CGR.

Conclusion

- 3.31 In considering the options, Members should note that some form of neighbourhood governance will be a requirement under forthcoming legislation, most likely taking the form of Neighbourhood Area Committees. This approach, alongside Charter Trustees, would align closely with the Government's plans for neighbourhood governance while also supporting the Council's wider submission for two unitary authorities in Worcestershire. In addition, this would also place less demand on resources when taking into consideration the wider requirements of planning for local government reorganisation. Alternatively, commencing a district wide CGR provides an option for the consideration of creating parish or town councils in unparished

areas. When assessing this option, the timing, scope and resources of such a process will also need to be considered.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The full financial implications of the options outlined in this report cannot be fully determined at this stage. More detailed work would be required once the preferred approach is agreed, particularly in relation to consultation requirements and the scope of any new governance arrangements.
- 4.2 It is, however, possible to identify some relative differences in costs between the options:

Option 1 - Neighbourhood Committees

These are expected to be established by the new unitary authority as part of its statutory duties under forthcoming legislation. Costs would therefore be met corporately within the new authority's governance structure.

Option 2 - Charter Trustees

The costs associated with Charter Trustees would be minimal, limited to the administration of civic and ceremonial functions and covered by a modest precept raised by the principal council. Any work undertaken to appoint Charter Trustees and assign assets would be looked at as part of the wider workflows for Local Government Reorganisation.

Option 3 - Community Governance Review

The CGR process would be significantly more resource-intensive. Costs would depend on the level of public consultation undertaken, but could include publication and engagement expenses, as well as officer time and potentially the involvement of external organisations such as the County Association of Local Councils (CALC). It would also require the use of a mapping application to determine boundaries and electorate. Should new parish or town councils be established as a result, they would be required to raise their own funds through a precept on the areas concerned, and a substantial amount of work would be needed to assess the financial viability of any potential services and assets given to any newly created parish councils.

- 4.3 Members should therefore note that the most immediate and material costs would arise from undertaking a CGR, while the costs associated with Charter Trustees are expected to be minimal in comparison.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The existing legislation which enables Local Government Reorganisations to be implemented is the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. As referenced in this report, new proposed legislation, namely the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill 2025 ("the Bill") was published in July 2025 and is currently being considered by Parliament. It is not known what the timetable will be for the new Bill to become law.
- 5.2 The Bill sets out various additional matters which will enable the current Local Government Reorganisation to be implemented. The Bill also covers other aspects such as the creation of Strategic Authorities. Section 58 of the Bill has the sub-heading "Local authorities: effective neighbourhood governance" and subsection (1) states: -
- "Local authorities in England must make appropriate arrangements to secure the effective governance of any area of a specified description that falls within the authority's area (a "neighbourhood area")."**
- 5.3 The right for a District or Borough to establish Charter Trustees upon its dissolution was set out in the Local Government Act 1972. Other relevant provisions are included in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the Charter Trustee Regulations 2009.
- 5.4 As noted above there is a set process in place for CGRs which is governed by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and associated legislation.

6. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS

Local Government Reorganisation

- 6.1 The options set out in this report all arise directly from the context of Local Government Reorganisation. Neighbourhood Area Committees are expected to form part of the statutory governance arrangements under forthcoming legislation, while the appointment of Charter Trustees and/or the creation of parish or town councils would provide additional mechanisms to maintain local identity and representation.
- 6.2 The implications of each option for LGR, including their alignment with Government expectations and the Council's wider submission for two unitary authorities, are considered in Section 2 of this report. Options in that strategic context should be considered when determining further work.

Relevant Council Priority

- 6.3 Work on local neighbourhood governance arrangements supports all of the Council's current priorities.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.4 There are no direct climate change implications arising from this report.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.5 There are no equalities implications directly arising from this report. Any consultation undertaken as part of a CGR would need to be inclusive and accessible to all communities.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 The principal risk relates to the allocation of resources to governance arrangements during a period of wider Local Government Reorganisation. CGRs in particular would require significant officer time and financial resources.
- 7.2 A further risk is that the Council's approach to neighbourhood governance could conflict with, or be perceived as inconsistent with, the proposals the authority submits to Government on unitary reorganisation. Care will therefore be needed to ensure that any decisions taken locally are aligned with the wider submission.
- 7.3 Financial risks arise from the relative costs of the options. A CGR would be considerably more expensive than appointing Charter Trustees, depending on the scope of consultation and potential involvement of external consultants. It should also be recognised that the outcome of a CGR is not predetermined. The review may ultimately recommend no change, which could raise questions about the value of the resources invested.
- 7.4 Finally, there are risks linked to public engagement. A CGR requires extensive consultation, which may create expectations within communities that new governance arrangements will follow. Managing those expectations will be an important part of the process.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Discrepancy Between Parish and Ward Boundary

Appendix 2 – Unparished Areas in Bromsgrove

Appendix 3 – Community Governance Reviews

Background Papers

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill:

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/4002>

Communities and Local Government and The Local Government Boundary Commission for England: Guidance for principal councils on undertaking community governance reviews, March 2010.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-governance-reviews-guidance>

[Ministerial Statement made by Jim McMahon](#)

[Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution dated 03 June 2025](#)

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2025-06-03/hcws676>

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9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder	Cllr Karen May, Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships, Economic Development and Enabling	28/10/2025
Financial Services	Debra Goodall	28/10/2025
Legal Services	Nicola Cummings	24/10/2025