

Overview and Scrutiny

14th of April

2026

Report title

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Sue Baxter
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Assistant Director	Hannah Corredor, Assistant Director Corporate Services and Transformation
Report Author	Job Title: as above. Contact email: Hannah.corredor@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk
Wards Affected	All
Ward consulted	Councillor(s) N/a
Relevant Council Priority	Local Government Reorganisation
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	
This report contains exempt information as defined in Paragraph(s) of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended	

1. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Overview and Scrutiny RESOLVE that:-

- 1) Note the updates regarding the refreshed guidance from MHCLG.
- 2) Note the new workstreams established by the LGR Preparations Board – Comms and a Data Hub.

2. **BACKGROUND**

Stage one: Inviting unitary proposals	Received November 2024
Stage two: Submission of formal unitary proposals.	Completed November 2025
➤ Stage three: Statutory consultation (MHCLG)	5 th of February to 26 th of March 2026. Consultation is now closed. We are advised by MHCLG to expect, 'meetings during May to begin discussions on the Structural Changes Order, and possible in person visits to your areas over the Spring'. We have not yet been contacted to arrange these.
Stage four: Decision to implement a proposal	Expected before summer recess, July 2026

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Stage five: Making secondary legislation – the Structural Changes Order (SCO).	Begins later in 2026 and ends with shadow elections in May 2027.
Stage six: Transition period	From decision to vesting day April 2028.
Stage seven: New unitary authority goes live	April 2028.

- 2.1 Attached in the appendix is a guidance document shared by MHCLG to help Councils understand the legislative framework that is in place to take us through to Vesting Day, once a decision is made to implement Local Government Reorganisation. It explains the respective roles and responsibilities of predecessor councils, implementation bodies (such as Joint Committees or Implementation Executives), Shadow Councils, and the Implementation Team during the period from the making of a Structural Changes Order (SCO) through to vesting day. We are advised to expect a draft by September 2026, and that it will take several months to formally pass through parliament.
- 2.2 The guidance sets out the two statutory transition periods, describes how implementation bodies are established and dissolved, and clarifies that predecessor councils retain their full legal powers and responsibilities for service delivery until vesting day. It also outlines the limited, preparatory nature of Joint Committees and Implementation Executives, emphasising that they support planning and coordination but take no decisions on behalf of the future unitary authority.
- 2.3 In addition, the guidance explains the purpose and role of the Implementation Team, made up of officers from predecessor councils, which operates throughout both transition periods to support the transfer of functions, staff, assets and information. The document is intended to provide clarity, consistency and good practice across LGR areas, while recognising that detailed arrangements will be set out locally through each area’s Structural Changes Order. We reviewed this document at our internal LGR Preparations Board and at our system-wide Chief Executives LGR Preparations Board and will base our implementation planning over the coming months on the structures described.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

- 2.4 On 26 March 2026, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) issued an update to Chief Executives confirming Tranche 2 decisions on Local Government Reorganisation proposals. Decisions were confirmed for Essex, Hampshire, Norfolk and Suffolk,

with further detail published on [GOV.UK for each area](#). The decisions confirm the Government's intention to proceed with reorganisation on the timeline described, even in the case of Sussex, with no delays to the assigned Vesting Day dates.

- 2.5 The decisions reflect a strong emphasis on smaller, locally-focused unitary councils. In most cases, the approved proposals involve district-led models of manageable scale, rather than very large single unitaries. The decisions also demonstrate a degree of flexibility in how the Government is applying earlier population thresholds when considering what constitutes a sustainable unitary authority. This provides further context that the Transforming Worcestershire proposal aligns with the range and scale of unitary models being taken forward nationally.
- 2.6 The announcement also confirmed that decisions on Surrey and Sussex have been delayed, with MHCLG indicating that further consideration is required before determinations are made. This reinforces that decisions are being taken on a case-by-case basis, reflecting local complexity and the quality of proposals submitted. The Local Councils Network (LCN, previously known as the District Councils' Network - DCN) publicly welcomed the direction of travel emerging from the Tranche 2 decisions, stating: 'Our long-held view is that the best way to ensure LGR is successful is to create smaller unitary councils that are genuinely local. We are pleased that almost all the new unitary councils will have a population lower than 500k, as we have long campaigned for.'
- 2.7 Alongside the decisions, MHCLG also confirmed further detail on the allocation of £63 million of Local Government Reorganisation transition funding. The Government has confirmed that it will provide at least £900,000 for each new unitary authority being established to support effective transition, service continuity and governance arrangements. Funding will be distributed 'fairly and as quickly as possible' through established channels.
- 2.8 For Bromsgrove District Council, this provides early confirmation that transition funding will be available once decisions are made for Worcestershire. While funding will be paid to the future unitary authority, it will support county-wide transition activity during the shadow and implementation phases, including work currently being undertaken by district councils as part of LGR preparations.

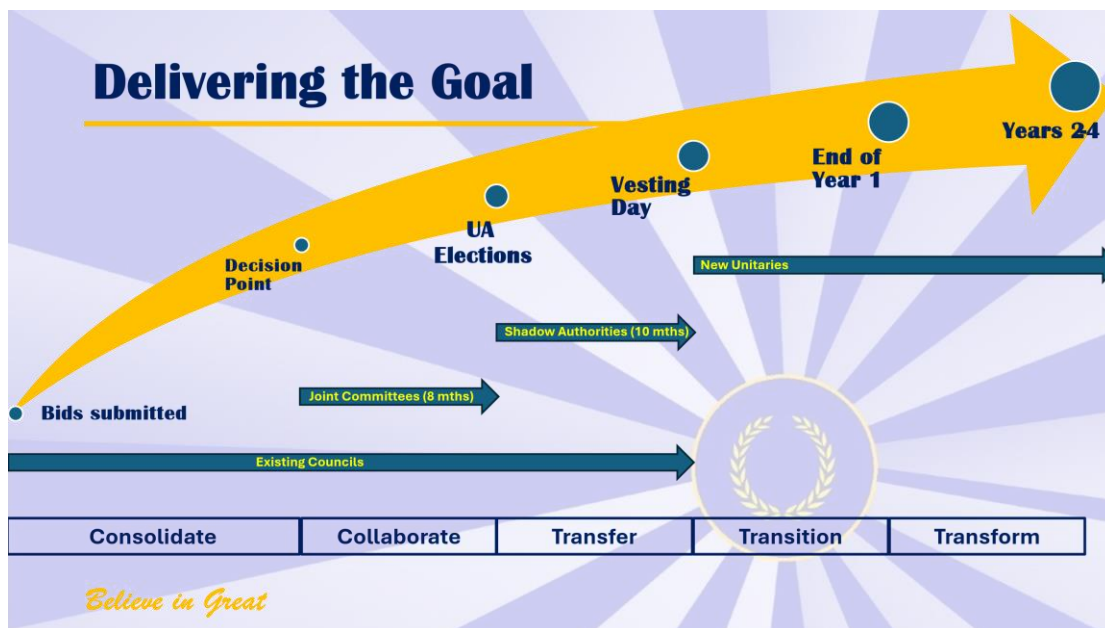
3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

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- 3.1 On 26 March 2026, a meeting of Chief Executives, Section 151 Officers, Monitoring Officers and senior officers from the Worcestershire councils was held in Pershore to review progress on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) preparations and to agree next steps for the programme. The meeting formed part of the ongoing county-wide arrangements to ensure effective coordination and readiness ahead of Government decisions. The agenda was 1) enhanced governance arrangements guidance from MHCLG Senior Sector Advisor (see appendix 1), 2) learning from Cumbria who have recently completed LGR and 3) adding two new workstreams.
- 3.2 A advice from MHCLG emphasised the importance of strong programme management, early focus on enabling services (HR, IT, Legal, Finance), a focus on *'safe and legal' transfer and transition, not transformation*, effective communication with staff, and the early establishment of robust arrangements for managing and assuring data.



- 3.3 The role of Scrutiny Committees was discussed, as well as advice given around the use of Internal Audit. Guidance from both MHCLG and Cumbria was to enable Scrutiny to hold officers to account on the processes in place to safely implement LGR, particularly 'Safe and Legal' by 1st of April 2028. We also learned that on the appointment of the Shadow Authority in May 2027, a Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee is likely to also be put in place for the new authority. The group discussed how we can ensure each O&S Committee across the County is provided with shared information and opportunity. In addition, Internal Audit have begun to consider what audits they will recommend

over the next two years to provide members with additional insight and assurance. MHCLG will also impose a formal assurance process with regular meetings.

3.4 **Communications:** The meeting agreed the creation of a separate Communications workstream within the LGR programme. This reflects recognition that communications activity is cross-cutting and underpins the success of all other workstreams. Communication was identified as requiring dedicated focus due to:

- The important of ensuring consistent and coordinated messaging across all councils;
- close interdependencies with HR, IT and service planning, particularly in relation to workforce engagement and change management;
- the importance of maintaining staff confidence, morale and wellbeing throughout the transition period;
- and the reputational risks associated with uncertainty, misinformation or inconsistent communication during LGR.

Establishing this as a standalone workstream is intended to reduce risk and ensure communications activity is proactive rather than reactive.

3.5 **Data Hub Workstream:** A Data Hub is a shared, secure way of bringing together key information from all councils in one place so that there is a single, trusted version of the data to support planning, decision-making and transition activity. This includes information on areas such as workforce, finances, contracts, assets, services and performance. It ensures efficiency and prioritisation, with a basic principle of COUNT: 'Collect Once Use Numerous Times'. Establishing a dedicated Data Hub workstream provides clear accountability, allows early baselining of services and resources, and reduces the risk of inconsistent or poor-quality data being used at later stages of the programme. This approach reflects best practice from recent LGR programmes and supports effective governance and compliance with data protection requirements.

3.6 Experience from Cumbria highlighted that the Data Hub is not primarily a technical ICT system, but a strategic function focused on:

- data quality, assurance and version control;
- common standards for data collection and analysis;
- data sharing agreements and information governance;
- providing programme-wide intelligence to support options appraisal and service design; and
- enabling informed, evidence-based decisions by leaders and members.

- 3.7 It was agreed that this work is qualitatively different from the ICT workstream, which is already managing significant and time-critical activity such as infrastructure, cyber security, applications and systems alignment. Combining the two would risk overloading ICT capacity and delaying progress in both areas. A Data Hub workstream was approved for development and further updates will be brought in due course.
- 3.8 Other key lessons were taken away from the presentations, with a clear message to prioritise workplans, cull non-critical activity, focus on safe transition and prepare for extremely in depth, analytical work, particularly in the case of disaggregation. In the Cumbria example, service areas were disaggregated after Vesting Day due implementation complexities and capacity constraints – which agreements had to be come to early on in implementation planning. Elsewhere, a common decision is to split the ‘back-office’ and ‘front-office’ ICT requirements, with the focus on the resident front-facing elements such as the website, email and customer contact systems, with back-office left to post-Vesting. One example from Cumbria included the disaggregation of the winter maintenance budget, which required mapping of the entire length of every road in the county and its height above sea level, to agree the split of the gritting budget between the two new authorities. This illustrates the level of technical detail required, rather than indicating any specific implications for Worcestershire.
- 3.9 Finally, at the last O&S Committee, members agreed to stand-up a task group for their LGR activities. It has been agreed that the Terms of Reference for this group will be developed by the Chair and Portfolio Holder, for agreement with the group, with a meeting scheduled on the 13th of April to begin drafting of this ToR.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Financial implications will continue to arise as LGR progresses; however, these implications may relate to Bromsgrove District or the future Unitary, dependent on the time of arising. Please note the update from the Government regarding the finding for newly established unitaries.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Legal implications will continue to arise as LGR progresses. This committee will be updated as and when necessary.

6. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS

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Local Government Reorganisation

6.1 This is the subject of this report.

Relevant Council Priority

6.2 N/a

Climate Change Implications

6.3 N/a

Equalities and Diversity Implications

6.4 Significant equalities implications will arise from the redesign and redistribution of services across the County. Reports will be brought here once planning progresses to a stage where these can be considered.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1 LGR is listed as a Corporate Risk in the Corporate Risk Register, owned by the Chief Executive Officer and lead by the Assistant Director of Corporate Services and Transformation. A copy of the LGR risk as reported on the Corporate Risk Register is included in the appendix below.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

- PDF: 'Implementation bodies and predecessor councils during local government reorganisation'
- Extract from Corporate Risk register below:

Reference	Risk Title	Risk Owner	Risk Lead	Status	Inherent	Residual
COR14	Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) prevents the Council from delivering business as usual and work	John Leach	Hannah Corredor	Open	Red	Amber

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Reference	Risk Title	Risk Owner	Risk Lead	Status	Inherent	Residual
	associated with LGR is also ineffective					

Mitigating Action

1. An LGR Preparations Board has been established internally, attended alternate meetings by portfolio lead members.
2. The LGR Board has supported regular updates to Members and staff during the development of the proposal stage. This work is to continue.
3. An Assistant Director for Corporate Services and Transformation has been appointed with responsibilities relating to LGR transition. The postholder commenced work on 24th November 2025.
4. Through the LGR Board and cross system LGR Preparations Board of Chief Executives, working with the other Councils, deliver against and an action plan that covers the framework of agreed activity in the “Transforming Worcestershire” proposal that was submitted to Government on 27th November (pages 164 – 173).
5. A Programme Management Office (PMO) across all seven councils has been agreed by Chief Executives, Monitoring Officers and Section 151 Officers. This will report to the Leaders Board.
 - The Programme Management Board has developed the following workstreams that are undertaking a “housekeeping exercise” to ensure all data is up to date in readiness for the outcome of the proposal assessment stage by Government (due before summer recess 2026): Finance, HR, ICT, Legal, Services, Data Hub, Communications.
6. The work of the PMO and the above workstreams are also aligning actions to LGA/MHCLG guidance issued to support the LGR prepare stage (November 2025 – June 2026).
7. Assistant Directors to ensure that Service Business Plans cover key priority areas for work activity (for example delivery of matters such as the Local Plan) classed also as business as usual whilst undertaking any LGR related work. The preparations are to include consideration in particular relating to HR (e.g. capacity, resilience and recruitment) and finance matters including bids for capacity. Each service business plan has to have an LGR specific section that links in to ensure BAU activities are safeguarded as much a possible and relates to each services risk register.
8. Assistant Directors provide quarterly assurance returns to SLT regarding delivery against the priorities for the service, finance, risk, capacity etc.
9. All decision reports through the councils governance arrangements include a section on the impact of LGR regarding any proposals so that decision makers are sighted on the implications of their decision.
10. Updates on LGR are provided to the LGR Portfolio Holder, Cabinet/Executive, Council and Scrutiny as appropriate.

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9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Baxter	01/04
Lead Director / Assistant Director	Hannah Corredor	13/03
Financial Services	Julie Lorraine	01/04
Legal Services	Claire Felton	01/04
Policy Team (if equalities implications apply)	Hannah Corredor	01/04
Climate Change Team (if climate change implications apply)	N/a	