

Overview and Scrutiny

2026

15th of September

Report title

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Kit Taylor
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Assistant Director	Hannah Corredor / Rob Elmes
Report Author	Job Title: Assistant Director Corporate Services and Transformation Contact email: rob.elmes@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councilor(s) consulted	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 to the governance matters, including upcoming Full Council paper, and wider operational matters.

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.
Stage four: Decision to implement a proposal	Decision received 16 th of July 2026
➤ Stage five: First Transition Period Making secondary legislation – the Structural Changes Order (SCO).	The first transition period runs from when the SCO comes into force, up to the inaugural elections to the new council. We expect the SCO to pass through parliament by the end of 2027. However, we have informally and voluntarily entered this stage. Please see 3.1 for more details.

Overview and Scrutiny

2026

15th of September

Stage six: Second transition period	The second transition period begins following the inaugural elections to the Shadow Authority, scheduled be held on 6 May 2027, with new Councillors will taking office on 10 May. It ends on Vesting Day, referred to as the reorganisation date in the SCO, 1 st April 2028.
Stage seven: New unitary authority goes live	April 2028.

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

Voluntary Joint Committees and Member's role throughout transition

- 3.1 A report is scheduled for consideration by Full Council on 23 September 2026 seeking approval to establish a North Worcestershire Voluntary Joint Committee. Equivalent reports are being considered by the other Worcestershire councils during September. The voluntary arrangements are intended to enable preparatory work to begin before the Structural Changes Order comes into force (by the end of 2026). The intention is that the voluntary committee will transition seamlessly into the statutory joint committee required by the Structural Changes Order once enacted.
- 3.2 The proposed North Worcestershire committee would comprise two members from each participating district council, together with two Worcestershire County Council representatives, reflecting the long-standing principle of equal representation across Worcestershire authorities. The Committee will operate in public and be subject to the normal requirements of local government transparency legislation, including publication of agendas, reports and minutes and public access to meetings, except where confidential or exempt matters are being considered.
- 3.3 According to national guidance from MHCLG, the Joint Committee prepares options and recommendations; it does not decide what North Worcestershire Council will look like. Joint Committees are preparatory bodies whose purpose is to develop proposals, establish implementation arrangements and prepare the ground for the future Shadow Authority. They are not responsible for taking decisions on behalf of the future authority and should not act in a way that would predetermine or constrain decisions that must properly be taken by the elected Shadow Council following the May 2027 elections.
- 3.4 The Committee's role will be to oversee and coordinate preparatory activity necessary to support the creation of the new authority. In

Overview and Scrutiny

15th of September

2026

practice, this means the Joint Committee can oversee the development of implementation plans, governance proposals, programme structures and transitional arrangements, but it cannot determine the future operating model, set budgets, make decisions on future service delivery arrangements or take policy decisions on behalf of the new council. Those matters will ultimately fall to the elected Shadow Authority and, subsequently, the new unitary council itself.

- 3.5 Whilst responsibility for developing recommendations relating to implementation will sit with the Joint Committee, decision-making powers relating to existing council services in operation in service of residents remain with the existing councils until transferred through legislation (e.g. at Vesting Day April 2028). Predecessor councils remain legally responsible for delivering business-as-usual services until vesting day and continue to exercise their statutory functions throughout both transition periods. Existing governance arrangements, including Overview and Scrutiny, therefore continue to operate throughout the transition period. Residents should continue to contact existing councillors from predecessor authority right up until Vesting Day.

	Purpose and duties
Existing councils Now until Vesting Day April 2028	Remain legally responsible throughout transition and continue delivering business-as-usual services until vesting day. • Deliver existing services • Support transition activity and release appropriate officer capacity • Prepare for the transfer of functions, staff, property, rights, liabilities and information. • Continue to exercise existing statutory and democratic responsibilities • Respond to all resident enquiries and service requests
Joint Committees Now until Elections May 2027 only	Purpose is to prepare the ground for the Shadow Authorities and provide direction to the Implementation Team. • Establish and oversee the Implementation Team • Prepare a strategic implementation plan • Develop proposals for matters the Shadow Authority will need to consider • Seek assurance that adequate transition arrangements and implementation resources are in place • Are not decision-making bodies for the future authority • Cannot fetter or predetermine decisions of the elected Shadow Authority • Cannot determine the future operating model, service delivery or policy • Cannot set the new council's budget or recruit to its senior posts

Overview and Scrutiny

2026

15th of September

Shadow Authorities Election May 2027 – Vesting Joint Committee ceases to exist	Take over as the implementation bodies: • Existing councils retain legal independence and responsibility during the shadow period. • Shadow Authority does not take over delivery of all local government services until vesting day. • Reviews and revises the implementation plan • Takes the substantive decisions needed to prepare for vesting day. • Decides the shape, governance and strategic direction of the new authority • Sets the new council's budget and makes required officer appointments
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3.6 The role of Overview and Scrutiny continues as it is now throughout both transition periods: focus remains on matters that are pertinent to Bromsgrove District Council as the existing, legacy authority, including the continued performance, resilience and effective delivery of local services until the point at which those services legally transfer to the new authority on Vesting. Overview and Scrutiny continue to provide democratic oversight of the Council's existing functions, budgets, resources, risks and local service impacts, while also maintaining visibility of transition activity where it affects Bromsgrove residents, staff or services.

3.7 In addition to establishing the Joint Committee, the September Full Council report proposes the creation of an Implementation Team comprising officers drawn from across the predecessor councils, as required by Government. The Implementation Team is headed up by the nominated SRO, the Chief Executive of County, with support of all four Chief Executives from the district authorities as deputies.

3.8 The report also seeks delegated authority for the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, Monitoring Officer and, where relevant, the Section 151 Officer, to take those operational and administrative steps necessary to support implementation activity arising from the Government's decision. This includes agreeing practical implementation arrangements, responding to requests from Government, supporting Joint Committee activity, making staff and resources available where required and approving transition documentation. The purpose of the delegation is to provide sufficient flexibility and pace to respond to a rapidly evolving programme without requiring repeated reports to Council for routine implementation matters, whilst ensuring that any substantive financial commitments or decisions remain subject to the Council's constitutional, financial and legal governance requirements.

Overview and Scrutiny

2026

15th of September

- 3.9 These delegated powers are intended to facilitate the transition process rather than determine the future shape of North Worcestershire Council. The delegation is therefore primarily about enabling efficient programme delivery, ensuring Worcestershire can meet Government timetables and statutory requirements during the transition period.

Mobilisation of First Transition Period

- 3.10 Ian Benson has commenced as Director of Local Government Reorganisation for the Worcestershire programme, reporting to all seven authorities. His immediate priority is to establish an initial Implementation Plan setting out programme governance, roles and responsibilities, operating principles, workstream organisation, key milestones and sequencing. Early mobilisation activity also includes establishing the programme team, putting proportionate budget and delegation arrangements in place and getting to know all stakeholders and the work undertaken to date.

Staff Communications and engagement: 'LGR Routes':

- 3.11 A countywide staff session for fourth-tier managers and above from the seven authorities will take place at Worcester Guildhall on 18 September 2026 (approx. 160 attendees). The session will support wider understanding of the Implementation Programme, help colleagues get to know each other, and build a shared understanding of the road ahead.
- 3.12 Alongside the countywide event, internally we are continuing our LGR Routes programme of engagement and support for staff. This is designed to provide clear information, equip managers to support colleagues and signpost staff to practical wellbeing, employment and development support. Over the coming months, this includes:
- Manager focused sessions focused on enabling managers to support staff, signpost team members effectively, provide meaningful leadership and answer key LGR questions.
 - Ongoing Chief Executive and CLT Q&As, with input from an external speaker able to share lived experience of an LGR journey.
 - In person 'roadshow' events at the main officers, including depots, with access to information and support on pensions and other HR and organisational development matters, and led by senior leadership to provide visibility.

Resident Communications

Overview and Scrutiny

2026

15th of September

- 3.13 At July's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Members asked how residents will be kept informed about Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). External communications are being coordinated through the countywide Communications Workstream, part of the Implementation Programme. As the timing and content of public communications are dependent on decisions, milestones and progress across other workstreams, it is not possible at this stage to produce a single fixed communications plan covering the whole transition period. Instead, the workstream is maintaining a set of key communication milestones and will adapt activity as programme decisions are made and further detail becomes available.
- 3.14 A member of the Communications Workstream is represented across the other programme workstreams and liaises with Chief Executives to ensure that communications are issued at the right time and reflect the latest agreed position. This helps ensure that messaging is consistent across Worcestershire and that residents, staff, partners and members are not given premature or conflicting information.
- 3.15 The Transforming Worcestershire website is a key part of this approach and is being developed as the central source of information about LGR across the county. The website will now become the primary source of public information throughout the transition period. The refreshed site is expected to include dedicated sections for North Worcestershire Council and South Worcestershire Council, a timeline of key dates and milestones, frequently asked questions, regular news and progress updates, and clear information explaining what the changes mean for residents and service users. The intention is for the website to remain the single source of verified information, helping to avoid confusion and ensuring residents know where to find reliable, up-to-date information. The refreshed website is expected to launch later in September.
- 3.16 Communications will not rely solely on digital channels. As new information becomes available, updates published on the Transforming Worcestershire website will be shared through individual council channels, including council websites, social media, press releases, printed materials such as leaflets and posters, letters where appropriate, partner networks, customer service centres and elected members. As service-specific changes are developed later in the programme, individual services will also contact their customers in the usual way. At this stage, the communications focus is on explaining the LGR process, key milestones and what residents need to know now.
- 3.17 The principal message for residents remains that council services continue as normal, residents do not need to take any action at this stage

Overview and Scrutiny

2026

15th of September

and they should continue to contact their existing council in the usual way. Elections to the new councils are expected to take place in May 2027, with the new councils taking over responsibility for services from 1 April 2028. More detailed communications about changes to individual services will be developed when future service models and delivery arrangements are sufficiently defined.

- 3.18 Recognising the important role elected members play in responding to constituent enquiries, Member frequently asked questions and briefing materials will continue to be developed and shared through the fortnightly Members' Bulletin. These resources will support members to access accurate and up-to-date information, reinforce consistent messaging across Worcestershire, highlight key milestones as the programme progresses and signpost residents to the Transforming Worcestershire website as the best place to find the latest verified information.

Future Local Governance Arrangements

- 3.19 The Local Governance Working Group met on 20 August 2026 to consider the findings of the public engagement exercise, neighbourhood area committees and alternative neighbourhood governance, special expenses, and Community Governance Reviews during Local Government Reorganisation.
- 3.20 The engagement findings showed that respondents placed considerable importance on maintaining local representation within the future unitary authority. However, the responses did not indicate a clear preference for any neighbourhood governance model.
- 3.21 Members agreed that further information was required before determining what recommendations should be made. This included clearer information on the differences between parish councils and neighbourhood area committees, the powers and responsibilities of parish councils, the experience of other principal councils undergoing Local Government Reorganisation, and the potential costs associated with undertaking a Community Governance Review.
- 3.22 A further meeting of the Working Group has therefore been arranged for 9 September 2026. Officers are seeking contributions from representatives involved in neighbourhood governance arrangements elsewhere and from the Worcestershire Association of Local Councils to inform the Working Group's further consideration. The Electoral Matters Committee meeting has been rescheduled for 24 September 2026 to allow this further work to take place. The Committee is expected to

Overview and Scrutiny

2026

15th of September

consider the Working Group's findings ahead of a report to Council in October.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The financial implications of LGR will be assessed as part of the ongoing programme. Current work is focussed on establishing baseline financial information across all authorities to support the development of a robust financial model for the new authority or authorities. This includes:
- Asset valuation and capital receipts
 - Contract data
 - Budgeted revenue expenditure, income, borrowing and investment
 - Council Tax data and forecasts
- 4.2 Final proposals for the two proposed models in Worcestershire include transition costs arising from such areas as programme management, IT integration, workforce change and harmonisation of policies and systems. These costs will be refined following the stage four decision expected in July, as design work progresses.
- 4.3 Opportunities for medium term savings are expected through service consolidation, reduced duplication and streamlined governance but will be dependent upon the final decision and implementation plan. Financial risk will include demand driven service delivery and Exceptional Financial Support legacy implications, again dependent upon the final unitary model and the approach to aggregation / disaggregation necessitated.
- 4.4 No decisions have yet been taken on Council Tax harmonisation, future fees and charges structures or the treatment of reserves. Further modelling and member consideration will be necessary, and all financial planning will be subject to statutory requirements and agreement.
- 4.5 It will be necessary to deliver a balanced budget for vesting day. All material financial decisions taken by existing councils during the transition period will be subject to assurance processes to ensure undue liabilities are not created for the new authority or authorities.
- 4.6 A new **Worcestershire LGR Implementation Reserve MoU** has been approved that sets up the financial and governance arrangements for funding the countywide implementation of Local Government Reorganisation. It agrees a shared implementation reserve of £20m,

Overview and Scrutiny

2026

15th of September

funded jointly by Worcestershire County Council, the six district councils and implementation grant, with contributions held and administered by Worcestershire County Council on behalf of the programme. The contribution of BDC is £1.5m over this financial year and next, with £1m already earmarked and the remainder to be identified through the current budget setting and reserves review process. The shared LGR Implementation programme reserve will be used to fund programme capacity, specialist support, communications, consultation, ICT, rebranding and all other activities contributing to the creation of the new unitary authorities. Business-as-usual service costs and wider transformation investment belonging to the individual legacy authorities are outside its scope. Spend will be managed through the Implementation Team, reporting to the LGR Implementation Board, and monitored by Section 151 Officers. Spend against this reserve will be made visible to Overview and Scrutiny Committees at regular intervals.

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

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

Overview and Scrutiny

2026

15th of September

- 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**

9. **REPORT SIGN OFF**

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Taylor	04/09
Lead Director / Assistant Director	Hannah Corredor	04/09
Financial Services	James Walton	04/09
Legal Services	Claire Felton	04/09
Policy Team (if equalities implications apply)	Hannah Corredor	04/09
Climate Change Team (if climate change implications apply)	N/a	