

Electoral Matters Committee
2026

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**Findings of the Future Local Governance in Bromsgrove Working Group
& Finstall Community Governance Review Draft Recommendations**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Karen May, Leader and 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

The Electoral Matters Committee is asked to RESOLVE that:

- 1) The findings to date of the Local Governance Working Group, as set out in this report, be noted.**
- 2) The Electoral Matters Committee continue the preparatory work through the established working group - to develop detailed terms of reference, a proposed timetable and a full budget for a Community Governance Review for Council's consideration in due course.**
- 3) The draft recommendation for the Finstall Community Governance Review be that the area west of the railway line, as shown on the map at Appendix 1, be removed from Finstall Parish and become unparished.**
- 4) In respect of resolution 3, delegated authority be granted to the Electoral Services Manager, following consultation with the Chairman of the Electoral Matters Committee, to finalise the**

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consultation material and make any minor presentational or factual amendments required before publication.

The Electoral Matters Committee is asked to RECOMMEND that:

- 5) A budget, to be proposed at the Electoral Matters Committee meeting, be approved to fund specialist consultancy support and additional resources for Electoral Services to develop the detailed terms of reference, timetable and budget for the Community Governance Review. This budget should be funded from reserves and any remaining funds from member ward budgets 2026/2027.**

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At the Annual Council meeting held on 20 May 2026, Council agreed a motion calling for a cross-party working group to undertake preparatory work in relation to future local governance arrangements within Bromsgrove District.
- 2.2 At its meeting on 11 June 2026, the Electoral Matters Committee subsequently established the Future Local Governance in Bromsgrove Working Group. The group comprised members of the Electoral Matters Committee, together with any other interested members of the Council.
- 2.3 The working group's purpose was to consider how effective local representation and neighbourhood-level governance could be maintained in Bromsgrove in the context of Local Government Reorganisation. This included considering whether there was a case for undertaking a formal Community Governance Review, as well as exploring other possible forms of local governance.
- 2.4 The working group agreed an initial scope and timetable for its work and oversaw a public engagement exercise, which ran from 1 July until 9 August 2026. The engagement sought views from residents, parish councils, community organisations and other interested parties about current local governance arrangements and the priorities that should inform any future arrangements.
- 2.5 A total of 451 responses were received. The responses demonstrated that local representation and the ability for communities to influence decisions affecting their area were important considerations. They also identified differing views about the possible creation of additional parish

or town council arrangements, including concerns about cost, duplication and potential confusion between different levels of representation. A fuller summary of the engagement findings is provided at Appendix 2.

- 2.6 Alongside the engagement findings, the working group considered information about Community Governance Reviews, the possible role and functions of parish and town councils, the financial and practical implications of establishing new governance arrangements, and the potential treatment of assets and services. The group also considered alternative or complementary arrangements, including Neighbourhood Area Committees and the use of Special Expenses.
- 2.7 Further information about the public engagement exercise and the supporting material provided to respondents has been made available on the Council's website.
- 2.8 The timing of any Community Governance Review has been an important consideration throughout the working group's discussions. The work was initially undertaken on the basis that elections to a shadow unitary authority were expected to take place in May 2027, followed by the abolition of Bromsgrove District Council and the establishment of the new unitary authority in April 2028. This created significant practical and legal considerations about whether a review could be completed and any recommendations implemented before the transitional arrangements commenced.
- 2.9 On 7 September 2026, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announced that the Local Government Reorganisation process had been paused, including in Worcestershire, while it reviewed the decisions on unitary authority structures announced in July. The duration and outcome of that review are not yet known. The working assumption is that the proposed shadow authority elections may be postponed by a year.
- 2.10 If that revised timetable is confirmed, Bromsgrove District Council may continue to operate for an additional 12 months or longer. This could provide the Council with sufficient time to establish a timetable for a Community Governance Review which would allow it to oversee the review through to its conclusion, including consultation on draft recommendations, the approval of final recommendations and, where appropriate, the making of a Reorganisation of Community Governance Order. The position remains subject to confirmation by the Government, and any timetable would therefore need to remain

sufficiently flexible to respond to further announcements or changes to the Local Government Reorganisation programme.

Finstall Community Governance Review

- 2.11 A separate Community Governance Review relating to Finstall Parish commenced in February 2026 following a request from Finstall Parish Council. The review considered two potential boundary changes: removing the area west of the railway line from Finstall Parish and incorporating the currently unparished Rutherford Road area east of the railway line into the parish.
- 2.12 The initial consultation closed on 17 April 2026 and received 49 responses. At its meeting on 11 June 2026, the Electoral Matters Committee considered the consultation findings but deferred determining its draft recommendations while the Local Governance Working Group considered the results of the public engagement exercise and the wider future governance arrangements for Bromsgrove.

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

Neighbourhood governance and the case for a Community Governance Review

- 3.1 The working group considered the potential role of Neighbourhood Area Committees within future unitary authorities. These arrangements would be expected to form part of the future neighbourhood governance landscape, although their precise structure, geographical coverage, membership, responsibilities and funding have not yet been determined.
- 3.2 Neighbourhood Area Committees would be arrangements established by the future unitary authority and could provide a mechanism for involving communities in local decision-making. They would not, however, constitute parish governance and could not create a parish or town council. The establishment or alteration of parish governance arrangements can only be considered through a Community Governance Review.
- 3.3 The working group recognised that Bromsgrove District currently contains both parished and unparished areas. Existing parish councils would continue unless changed through a separate statutory process, while residents in the unparished areas would not have the same

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additional tier of elected local representation following the replacement of the District Council.

- 3.4 The engagement findings demonstrated a significant level of concern about maintaining effective local representation following Local Government Reorganisation. Across all respondents, 90.9% considered good community representation to be extremely or very important, while 67.4% expected reorganisation to have a negative effect on local representation.
- 3.5 Responses from the unparished areas also indicated support for further consideration of neighbourhood governance:
- 54.6% favoured additional elected representatives at community or neighbourhood level
 - 44.8% considered that some decisions should be made at neighbourhood or community level
 - 40.4% favoured decision-making being shared between neighbourhood arrangements and the future unitary authority
 - 64.1% considered that new or expanded local governance arrangements should be explored.
- 3.6 The responses did not demonstrate a settled preference for one particular governance model. Neighbourhood-level arrangements, such as local committees, were selected by 43.5% of respondents in the unparished areas. A further 22.3% selected a combination of parish councils and neighbourhood arrangements, while 21.2% selected a single parish or town council covering a larger area. As respondents could select more than one option, these figures should not be treated as a direct vote between alternative models.
- 3.7 Respondents also raised practical concerns that would need to be examined through any further process. These included possible confusion about responsibilities, selected by 51.1%; additional costs to residents, selected by 49.5%; overlap between different councils or committees, selected by 37.4%; and inconsistent representation between different areas, selected by 36.3%.
- 3.8 The working group recognised that Neighbourhood Area Committees may have an important role within the future unitary authority and options to establish one of these in Bromsgrove was considered. However, given the resources required to undertake a Community Governance Review, it is not proposed that the Council progresses a separate workstream on Neighbourhood Area Committees at this stage. Developments will instead be kept under review and any relevant information taken into account as the Community Governance

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Review progresses. The engagement findings, the difference between the representation available in parished and unparished areas, and the potential additional time now available provide a sufficient basis for the Council to proceed with a Community Governance Review.

- 3.9 A Community Governance Review would allow the Council to examine all parish governance options in greater detail, including the possibility of creating a town council for the currently unparished central area of Bromsgrove. Undertaking a review would not predetermine its outcome. The final recommendations of any Community Governance Review would need to be informed by the statutory criteria, detailed consultation, community identities, proposed boundaries, financial implications and the evidence received during the earlier review stages.

Terms of Reference

- 3.10 Before a Community Governance Review can formally commence, the Council must prepare and publish terms of reference. The publication of the terms of reference marks the formal commencement of the review and begins the timetable as set out in the terms of reference.
- 3.11 Further preparatory work is therefore required before the terms of reference are presented to Council for approval. It is proposed that the Electoral Matters Committee, through the working group, continues the work to develop the scope and detailed terms of reference for the review.
- 3.12 The terms of reference will need to address:
- the geographical area or areas included within the review
 - whether the review will be limited to the currently unparished areas or include any adjoining parished areas or related boundary matters or all other parishes within the area
 - the forms of parish governance to be considered
 - the creation of a town council for all or part of the currently unparished area as a principal option to be examined
 - possible parish and town council boundaries
 - whether any proposed parish should be divided into wards and, if so, the proposed warding arrangements
 - the indicative number and distribution of councillors, or changes to these in the cases of existing parishes
 - the proposed names and styles of any new parishes or councils
 - the evidence and statutory criteria against which the options will be assessed
 - the consultation and engagement arrangements

- the process for preparing and consulting upon draft recommendations
- the timetable for the review
- the arrangements for considering and approving the final recommendations and any resulting Reorganisation of Community Governance Order.

3.13 Identifying the creation of a town/parish council as an option within the terms of reference would not amount to a decision that one should be established. The purpose of the review would be to test that option alongside any reasonable alternatives and reach recommendations following statutory consultation and consideration of the evidence.

Review Timetable

- 3.14 Although the possible extension to the Local Government Reorganisation timetable may provide the Council with more time, the Community Governance Review will still need to be progressed within a relatively short timeframe. The terms of reference should be developed with the intention of formally commencing the review towards the end of 2026 and completing it within a 12-month period.
- 3.15 Subject to confirmation of the revised Local Government Reorganisation timetable, the review should aim to reach final recommendations and, where appropriate, enable a Reorganisation of Community Governance Order to be made by the end of 2027. This would provide the best opportunity for Bromsgrove District Council to oversee the process through to completion before any future transitional period to a unitary council begins.
- 3.16 The timetable will need to allow sufficient time for evidence gathering, consultation on the initial options, preparation and publication of draft recommendations, further consultation, consideration of representations, approval of final recommendations and preparation of any resulting Order. It will also need to remain flexible enough to respond to further Government announcements about Local Government Reorganisation.
- 3.17 A detailed budget will need to be developed alongside the terms of reference before the Community Governance Review formally commences. This will need to provide separately for the cost of conducting the review and, conditionally, the potential cost of establishing a new council.

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- 3.18 At this stage, the Electoral Matters Committee is not being asked to approve the detailed terms of reference, formally commence the Community Governance Review or determine its outcome. The Committee is being asked to endorse the working group's conclusion that a review should be undertaken and agree that preparatory work should continue to develop the terms of reference, timetable and associated budget requirements.
- 3.19 Subject to the Committee's consideration, a further report will be presented to Council in October 2026. That report will update Council on the of the working group's findings. It will also seek Council's approval for an allocation from reserves to provide the specialist or additional officer capacity required to prepare the detailed terms of reference and full budget for the review.

Finstall Community Governance Review

- 3.20 The initial consultation showed support for removing the area west of the railway line from Finstall Parish, with 68% of respondents agreeing with the proposed change. By comparison, 60% disagreed with incorporating the currently unparished Rutherford Road area into the parish. Comments about the latter proposal included concerns about community identity, the benefits of joining the parish and the additional parish precept.
- 3.21 The Local Governance Working Group has now completed its initial consideration of future local governance arrangements. It is therefore appropriate for the Electoral Matters Committee to determine draft recommendations for the Finstall review and proceed to the next consultation stage.
- 3.22 Having regard to the initial consultation responses and the matters considered by the working group, it is proposed that the draft recommendation should be to remove the area west of the railway line from Finstall Parish, in Appendix 1 and make no change to the parish boundary in respect of the Rutherford Road area.
- 3.23 This remains a draft recommendation and will be subject to further consultation. The Electoral Matters Committee will consider the responses to that consultation before determining its final recommendations.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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- 4.1 There is currently no specific budget available for preparing or undertaking a Community Governance Review. Additional capacity by the Council will be required to begin developing the detailed terms of reference, timetable, consultation approach and full budget for the review.
- 4.2 Electoral Services will have significant competing demands arising from the delivery of scheduled elections. It is therefore considered unlikely that the preparatory work for the Community Governance Review can be completed entirely within the existing capacity of the team without affecting other statutory work.
- 4.3 Officers are exploring the appointment of a specialist Community Governance Review consultant to assist with the initial preparatory work, including the development of the terms of reference. Indicative costs are currently being sought and, where available, a further update will be provided at the Electoral Matters Committee meeting.
- 4.4 If suitable consultancy support cannot be secured, additional funding would instead be required to backfill capacity within the Electoral Services team. This would release an appropriate officer to undertake the preparatory work while ensuring that the Council retains sufficient capacity to deliver its statutory electoral responsibilities.
- 4.5 Subject to the Electoral Matters Committee's consideration of this report, the report to Council in October 2026 will seek approval for an initial allocation to fund specialist consultancy support and the backfilling of Electoral Services capacity. This initial allocation would allow work on the detailed terms of reference and the financial and operational requirements of the review to begin.
- 4.6 The amount and proposed funding source for this initial allocation have not yet been determined. Any funding request presented to Council will identify whether the cost is one-off, the budget from which it is proposed to be met, and the resulting financial consequences. This will include any reduction in funding available for other Council priorities or activities, so that members can make an informed decision about the allocation.
- 4.7 The initial allocation would not represent approval of the full budget for conducting the Community Governance Review. A further detailed budget proposal would be developed alongside the terms of reference and presented to Council at a later date, for approval before the review formally commences.

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- 4.8 The full Community Governance Review budget will need to take account of:
- project staffing and any continuing need for additional capacity or backfilling
 - specialist Community Governance Review consultancy support
 - consultation design, printing, delivery, postage and publicity
 - accessible consultation materials and targeted engagement
 - data analysis, electorate forecasting, mapping and GIS work
 - legal, electoral, financial and communications support
 - preparation and publication of reports, recommendations and any resulting Reorganisation of Community Governance Order
 - external legal or specialist advice arising from Local Government Reorganisation (if required)
 - an appropriate contingency for changes to the options, consultation requirements or timetable.
- 4.9 Separate financial provision will also need to be considered for the potential establishment of a new town council and any other additional parishes. These costs would arise only if the Community Governance Review ultimately recommended the creation of a council(s) and a Reorganisation of Community Governance Order was made.
- 4.10 Potential establishment costs could include specialist implementation support, the appointment of an interim clerk, recruitment and initial staffing, governance and financial systems, accommodation and IT, the first election, councillor induction, civic arrangements, and work associated with any transfer of assets, services, contracts or liabilities.
- 4.11 It is anticipated that the further report containing the proposed terms of reference will therefore need to set out two separate provisions:
- the full budget required to conduct and complete the Community Governance Review
 - conditional provision for the potential establishment of a new town council and any additional parishes.
- 4.12 The amount required for each provision will be developed as the scope of the review and the potential implementation requirements are refined. Any provision for establishing a town council would remain conditional and would only be used if that outcome were subsequently approved through the Community Governance Review process.

Fininstall Community Governance Review

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- 4.13 There will be further costs associated with consultation on the draft recommendation. These are expected to be met from within existing Electoral Services budgets.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Community Governance Reviews are undertaken under Part 4, Chapter 3 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The Council must also have regard to the statutory guidance issued by the Secretary of State and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.
- 5.2 The recommendations contained in this report would not formally commence a Community Governance Review. The review would commence when the Council publishes its terms of reference. The preparatory work proposed, including appointing a consultant or providing additional officer capacity, developing the terms of reference and preparing a detailed budget, can therefore take place before the statutory review begins.
- 5.3 The review will formally begin when the Council publishes its terms of reference. The Council will then be required to complete the review in accordance with the timetable set out in those terms of reference. That timetable should provide for the publication of the Council's final recommendations within 12 months of the date on which the review begins.
- 5.4 Once the terms of reference have been published and the review has formally commenced, the Council will be under a statutory duty to undertake and conclude the review. The legislation does not provide a general mechanism for the Council simply to pause or abandon a review once it has begun. It is therefore important that the scope, timetable, resources and decision-making arrangements are sufficiently developed before the terms of reference are published.
- 5.5 The Council may modify the terms of reference during the review, but any modifications must also be published. Any changes would need to be compatible with the statutory requirements and consultation duties. Substantial changes may also require further consultation to ensure that the process remains fair and that interested parties have a meaningful opportunity to respond.

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- 5.6 Once commenced, the Council must complete the review. However, it may conclude that no changes should be made if this is supported by the consultation responses and other evidence.
- 5.7 The Council must consult local electors and other interested parties, take account of the representations received and have regard to the statutory criteria. Any final recommendations must reflect community identities and interests and provide effective and convenient community governance.
- 5.8 Where the final recommendations involve changes to parish governance, these would ordinarily be implemented through a Reorganisation of Community Governance Order. The Order may address matters including boundaries, warding, councillor numbers, electoral arrangements, the first election, the first anticipated precept and transitional arrangements.
- 5.9 Any proposed timetable will intend to enable Bromsgrove District Council to complete the review and make any resulting Order before a future Local Government Reorganisation transitional period begins. Further legal advice may be required if the reorganisation timetable or responsibilities of the existing and successor authorities change.

Finstall Community Governance Review

- 5.10 The Finstall Community Governance Review has already commenced and therefore must be completed. As the decision on the draft recommendations was deferred in June 2026, the published timetable will need to be revised and any modification published.
- 5.11 The Council must consult on the draft recommendation and consider the representations received before determining and publishing its final recommendation. The outcome of the Finstall review cannot be predetermined by the draft recommendation agreed at this meeting.

6. OTHER – IMPLICATIONS

Local Government Reorganisation

- 6.1 The proposal to undertake a Community Governance Review is directly linked to Local Government Reorganisation and the need to consider how local representation can be maintained within a future unitary authority.

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- 6.2 The pause to the reorganisation timetable may provide Bromsgrove District Council with sufficient time to undertake and complete the review, and make any resulting Reorganisation of Community Governance Order, before a future transitional period begins. However, the revised timetable has not yet been confirmed.
- 6.3 The review timetable will therefore need to remain flexible and take account of further Government announcements. If transitional arrangements begin before the review or its implementation is complete, further legal advice may be required about the responsibilities of Bromsgrove District Council, any shadow authority and the successor unitary authority.
- 6.4 Any Community Governance Review will also need to take account of emerging proposals for Neighbourhood Area Committees or other neighbourhood governance arrangements within the future unitary authority. A town council and a Neighbourhood Area Committee would have different roles and could operate alongside one another.

Relevant Council Priority

- 6.5 Work on local governance arrangements supports all the Council's current priorities.

Climate Change Implications

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

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.7 There are no direct equalities and diversity implications arising from this report. Any future Community Governance Review will need to provide residents and interested parties with a fair and accessible opportunity to participate.
- 6.8 The equalities implications of the proposed terms of reference, consultation arrangements and any final recommendations will be considered as the review develops. An Equality Impact Assessment will be prepared where appropriate.

Community Impact Implications

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- 6.9 There are no specific implications for community safety, health and wellbeing.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 The principal risks are that the Local Government Reorganisation timetable changes, insufficient capacity or funding is available to complete the review, or the process is perceived to have predetermined the creation of a town council.
- 7.2 These risks will be managed by completing detailed preparatory work before the review formally commences, securing appropriate specialist or additional officer capacity, maintaining a flexible timetable and ensuring that consultation considers reasonable governance options without predetermining the outcome.
- 7.3 There is also a risk that existing parish councils may wish to review their current arrangements. It is considered good practice for a principal council to review community governance arrangements by conducting a review every 10-15 years and Bromsgrove has not conducted a widescale review in the past 15 years.
- 7.4 This risk could be managed by extending the terms of reference to include the whole of Bromsgrove district, giving parishes the opportunity to review their existing arrangements. This will be considered further as work progresses on the Community Governance Review.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Map indicating proposed new boundary of Finstall Parish

Appendix 2 - Overview of responses to Local Governance Engagement Exercise

Background Papers

Local Governance Review Consultation Exercise documentation on the Council's website - [Future Local Governance in Bromsgrove webpage](#)

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9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Karen May, Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships, Economic Development and Enabling	
Assistant Director	Claire Felton, Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services	14/09/26
Financial Services	James Walton, Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer	
Legal Services	Nicola Cummings, Principal Solicitor - Governance	14/09/26