Public Document Pack

Council

Mon 17 Nov
2025
7.00 pm

Oakenshaw Community Centre,
Castleditch Lane, B98 7YB

Redditch Borough Council
Working together for our communities

If you have any queries on this Agenda please contact
Jess Bayley-Hill

Town Hall, Walter Stranz Square, Redditch, B98 8AH
Tel: (01527) 64252 (Ext. 3072)
e.mail: jess.bayley-hill@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk

GUIDANCE ON FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS

Please note that this is a public meeting and will be live streamed for general access via the Council's YouTube channel.

You are able to see and hear the livestream of the meeting from the Committee Pages of the website, alongside the agenda for the meeting.

If you have any questions regarding the agenda or attached papers, please do not hesitate to contact the officer named above.

Notes:

Although this is a public meeting, there are circumstances when Council might have to move into closed session to consider exempt or confidential information. For agenda items that are exempt, the public are excluded and for any such items the live stream will be suspended and that part of the meeting will not be recorded.

Council

Monday, 17th November, 2025

7.00 pm

Oakenshaw Community Centre

Agenda

Membership:

Cllrs:	Joanna Kane (Mayor)	Sid Khan
	David Munro (Deputy Mayor)	Wanda King
	Joe Baker	Alan Mason
	Juliet Barker Smith	Sachin Mathur
	Juma Begum	Gemma Monaco
	William Boyd	Rita Rogers
	Brandon Clayton	Gary Slim
	Claire Davies	Jen Snape
	Matthew Dormer	Jane Spilsbury
	James Fardoe	Monica Stringfellow
	Andrew Fry	Craig Warhurst
	Bill Hartnett	Ian Woodall
	Sharon Harvey	Paul Wren
	Chris Holz	

1. Welcome

2. Apologies for Absence

3. Declarations of Interest

To invite Councillors to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Disclosable Interests they may have in items on the agenda, and to confirm the nature of those interests.

4. Minutes (Pages 7 - 30)

The minutes for the Council meetings held in 4th and 15th September 2025 are included in this agenda for Members' consideration.

5. Announcements

To consider Announcements under Procedure Rule 10:

a) Mayor's Announcements

b) The Leader's Announcements

c) Chief Executive's Announcements.

Council

Monday, 17th November, 2025

6. **Local Government Re-organisation: Transforming Worcestershire - Local government that works for people, powered by place and built for the future - The North and South Local Government Re-Organisation Proposal for Worcestershire** (Pages 31 - 230)

7. **Waiver of the Six Month Councillor Attendance Rule** (Pages 231 - 234)

8. **Questions on Notice** (Procedure Rule 9)

9. **Motions on Notice** (Procedure Rule 11)

10. **Executive Committee**

Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 6th November 2025 (to follow)

The minutes from the Executive Committee meeting that took place on 6th November 2025 are due to be published on Tuesday 11th November 2025 in a supplementary pack for Council.

There were recommendations arising from this meeting in respect of the Medium-Term Financial Plan Budget Update and Consultation Report 2026-27 to 2028-29 - Business Rates Pool.

10 .1 Medium-Term Financial Plan Budget Update and Consultation Report 2026-27 to 2028-29 - Business Rates Pool (Pages 235 - 238)

11. **Urgent Business - Record of Decisions (**Pages 239 - 242)

There has been one Urgent Decision taken since the last Council meeting in respect of the Appointment of an Acting Section 151 Officer.

A copy of the Urgent Decision has been included in this agenda pack.

12. **Urgent Business - general (if any)**

To consider any additional items exceptionally agreed by the Mayor as Urgent Business in accordance with the powers vested in him by virtue of Section 100(B)(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972.

(This power should be exercised only in cases where there are genuinely special circumstances which require consideration of an item which has not previously been published on the Order of Business for the meeting.)

Redditch Borough Council
Working together for our communities

Council

Thursday, 4th September, 2025

MINUTES

Present:

Councillors Joanna Kane (Mayor), David Munro (Deputy Mayor), and Councillors Joe Baker, Juliet Barker Smith, Juma Begum, William Boyd, Brandon Clayton, Claire Davies, Matthew Dormer, James Fardoe, Andrew Fry, Bill Hartnett, Sharon Harvey, Chris Holz, Sid Khan, Wanda King, Sachin Mathur, Gemma Monaco, Gary Slim, Jen Snape, Jane Spilsbury, Craig Warhurst, Ian Woodall and Paul Wren

Officers:

Claire Felton, John Leach, Guy Revans and Bob Watson

Democratic Services Officers:

Jess Bayley-Hill

28. WELCOME

The Mayor welcomed all those present to the meeting.

29. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Alan Mason, Rita Rogers and Monica Stringfellow.

30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

31. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of Council held on Monday 30th June 2025 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Mayor.

Chair

32. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION REPORT - MUTUAL VENTURES

The Leader presented the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Report which provided an overview of the outcomes of the options appraisal that had been carried out by Mutual Ventures.

The report and associated appendices considered two main options for LGR in Worcestershire:

- Option A: One unitary authority for the whole of Worcestershire.
- Option B: presented as options B1 and B2, considered the creation of two unitary authorities made up of North Worcestershire (covering Bromsgrove District, Redditch Borough and Wyre Forest District) and South Worcestershire (covering Malvern Hills District, Worcester City and Wychavon District).

Option B consisted of two variants:

- Option B1 provided for two unitary Councils to be established across Worcestershire; North Worcestershire and South Worcestershire. It involved the disaggregation and transferring of all statutory and non-statutory services, functions and the operating model from Worcestershire County Council to the new unitary Councils and the aggregation and transferring of all statutory and non-statutory services, functions and operating models from the district Councils to their respective new (north or south) unitary Councils.
- Option B2 provided two unitary Councils established across Worcestershire; North Worcestershire and South Worcestershire. It offered a shared service/hybrid model across both new unitary Councils, with specific services (i.e. adult social care, children's services, education, adult education and transport) jointly delivered and commissioned. All other services would be delivered and commissioned by each new unitary Council, including prevention and early help. The exact arrangement would be determined during the development of any future full LGR proposal.

By way of background, Members were reminded that on 5th February 2025 the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution wrote to all the Worcestershire authorities inviting the Council Leaders in the area to develop a proposal for single tier reorganisation in exercise of powers under Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The timetable imposed by the Government required interim proposals to

be submitted by 21st March 2025 and final proposals by 28th November 2025.

At an extraordinary Council meeting held on 17th March 2025, Members had agreed an interim plan that covered two main options for unitarisation: a single unitary authority for the county of Worcestershire or, alternatively, two unitary authorities covering north and south Worcestershire.

At that extraordinary Council meeting, Members had agreed the interim plan for submission and to further explore the options that had been identified. On that basis, Redditch Borough Council, along with the Councils of Bromsgrove District, Worcester City, Malvern Hills District and Wychavon District, had agreed to commission consultants to carry out an options appraisal.

The company Mutual Ventures had secured the commission. Members were informed that the aim of Mutual Ventures was "to make public services better, more sustainable and more connected to communities".

The Government had confirmed that there were six criteria that were due to be used to assess any LGR proposal. In summary, the six criteria required proposals to demonstrate:

1. The establishment of a single tier of local government.
2. That unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.
3. Prioritisation of the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.
4. How Councils in the area had sought to work together in coming to a view that met local needs and was informed by local views.
5. The support of devolution arrangements.
6. How new unitary structures enabled stronger community engagement and delivered genuine opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment.

The approach taken in appraising each option had been to consider qualitative and quantitative information against the Government's six LGR criteria. Members were informed that the qualitative information was acquired through 32 engagement sessions, a county wide public survey and staff surveys.

The design principles had been based on the outputs from the engagement sessions for what good might look like in terms of local government in Worcestershire in the future. In addition, feedback received in the public survey, entitled "Shape Worcestershire", had

highlighted a preference for two authorities covering the north and south of the County. Similarly, this preference had been shared by staff employed by Redditch Borough and Bromsgrove District Council who had responded to an internal consultation exercise.

Within the report, a summary had been provided of each of the options in terms of their performance against the Government's six LGR criteria. This was further divided into 21 other elements as set out by the Minister in Annex A of his letter of 5th February 2025. As part of this section, consideration had been given to the probability, with scores of high, medium and low or unclear, of each option meeting the individual criteria.

In overview, Members were asked to note the following headlines:

- All options delivered a single tier of Local Government. Options A and B2 had a high probability of prioritising the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens. Option B2 also offered the dynamic of operating at size and scale for large services such as adults and children's services whilst being able to deliver place-based services at the locality level. Both options B1 and B2 offered a higher probability than Option A of being able to deliver to meet local needs as informed by local views.
- Option A could achieve significant savings but was believed to perform less well in respect of empowering local communities and meeting people's expectations/views in terms of what kind of local authority they wanted to have serving them and their local area.
- Whilst Option B1 with Option B2 offered a higher probability of providing stronger local community engagement/neighbourhood empowerment than Option A, it delivered the least efficiencies of all of the options and included the risks and costs of disaggregating adults' and children's services.
- Under Option B2, adults' and children's services were not disaggregated and place services remained focussed on localities and prevention. This option, whilst making more savings that Option B1, did not perform as well as Option A in relation to efficiencies but performed better than Option A in respect of the probability of empowering local communities and meeting people's expectations/views in terms of what kind of local authority they wanted to serve them and their local area.

After the report had been presented, Members discussed the content in detail and in doing so commented on the fact that Councils in two-tier areas across the country were subject to LGR and were all reviewing potential unitary authority arrangements that

could be implemented moving forward. Local authorities had discretion to assess what they believed would be the best unitary authority structures for their areas, subject to final proposals addressing the six criteria identified by the Government. However, ultimately the final decision in respect of this matter would be taken by the Government.

Members noted that the decisions that Councillors would take on this subject at both this stage and in November prior to a final submission to Government would be historic. It was noted that significant changes to local government such as these happened approximately every fifty years and would have profound implications for future generations.

Reference was made to the current operation of both the County Council and the District Councils in Worcestershire and questions were raised about whether Option A, involving a single unitary authority, would effectively involve the continuation of service delivery by an authority based on Worcestershire County Council. Concerns were raised about whether this would serve the interests of Redditch residents and Members commented that they believed that over the years the Borough had not always received fair treatment compared to other parts of Worcestershire. However, Members also noted that, on vesting day, both Worcestershire County Council and all of the District Councils, including Redditch Borough Council, would cease to exist. Any future unitary authority or authorities would be entirely separate from the existing local Councils.

Members discussed the feedback that had been received during the Shape Worcestershire public consultation exercise. In reflecting on this feedback, Members noted that a majority of residents in both the county and in the Borough of Redditch had favoured Option B: two unitary authorities, one for the north of the county and one for the south. Questions were raised about whether there had been sufficient clarity regarding the implications of each option to enable the public to provide informed responses and reference was made to the varying feedback that different Councillors had received from the public when discussing these options with local residents. However, Members also commented that the feedback received from the public in completed surveys needed to be taken on board when determining which option of LGR to take forward in Worcestershire.

During consideration of this item, reference was made to the financial savings arising from each of the options detailed in the report. Concerns were raised that Option B1 would result in limited financial savings. The financial savings arising from Option B2 were greater, but it was noted that these were not as significant as

the financial savings associated with Option A. On the one hand, some Members suggested that under these circumstances, Option A might be the only viable option to ensure financial sustainability and therefore the continuation of key local services moving forward. On the other hand, Members suggested that decisions could not just be taken on the basis of financial considerations and Members needed to also take on board the views of the public and the extent to which each option supported community engagement and empowerment. Furthermore, Members commented that all of the options would result in financial savings eventually, albeit over a longer period of time for Options B1 and B2 compared to Option A.

In considering the financial implications highlighted in the report for each option, concerns were raised about the extent to which the report had taken into account Worcestershire County Council's financial challenges. Members also commented that it was anticipated that Redditch would benefit from the Fairer Funding review of local government, due to the relatively high levels of deprivation in the Borough and questions were raised about whether this had been considered in relation to any of the options. In addition, Members commented that financial savings should only form one consideration when reviewing the Options available and it was noted that the Government had been clear that no criteria should be regarded as taking precedence.

The financial challenges facing local government in general were highlighted as part of the debate. Members commented that there had been underfunding of local government for decades under successive Governments which had impacted on the performance of local authorities. The point was made that, regardless of the final model of LGR approved by the Government for Worcestershire, local government would need to be provided with appropriate funding moving forward in order for the new unitary authorities introduced across the country to be financially sustainable.

The differences between Options B1 and B2 were discussed. Concerns were raised that Option B1 would result in the disaggregation of social services, which were used by a lot of residents living in the Borough. By contrast, the shared service arrangements under Option B2 would not result in the same challenges. Under these circumstances, many Members commented that they would prefer Option B2 to Option B1, although it was recognised that this choice was not available for consideration at the meeting.

The arrangements that would be in place should Option B2 be endorsed by the Council were subsequently considered. Members noted that a number of key services had been identified as ideal for sharing services under this model, including adult's and children's

social services as well as transport. The suggestion was made that many efficiencies could still be achieved under this model whilst the two unitary Councils would have a local focus on communities. The point was raised that many partner organisations, including in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), had already developed separate working arrangements for the north and south of the county. Members commented that two unitary authorities reflecting the same areas of separation would have natural alignments with these arrangements.

Consideration was given to the potential focus of a north Worcestershire unitary authority and concerns were raised that in the long-term this type of Council could be at risk of being subsumed into a Birmingham local authority or into the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). However, Members also noted that there were no plans to change the boundaries of Birmingham City Council nor was inclusion in the WMCA an option that could be explored.

Reference was made to the implications of each of the options in relation to devolution, which would also need to be implemented over forthcoming years. Concerns were raised that a north Worcestershire unitary authority might have limited influence with regard to final arrangements for a strategic authority in the region. The suggestion was made that Redditch might have more influence over arrangements for a new strategic authority and how an elected Mayor operated in the region if the Borough was represented by a single unitary authority. However, Members also commented that a north Worcestershire unitary authority could focus on the specific issues that tended to impact on the more urban north of the county, which differed from the south of the county that tended to be more rural.

A number of Councillors expressed their regrets that, as a result of LGR, Redditch Borough Council would cease to exist. Questions were raised about the impact that this might have on local democracy regardless of the model of unitary authority that was introduced moving forward. However, Members also commented that LGR provided an opportunity to modernise and improve local government and the suggestion was made that this could have a positive impact in the Borough.

The timescales available to complete the LGR process were debated. Members noted that the Government had announced LGR in the Government's English Devolution White Paper that had been published in December 2024. Since then, a lot of work had been undertaken by local Councils to review the options available in Worcestershire for reorganisation. Concerns were raised that the timescales available were quite tight and Members commented that

there was a risk that this could result in rushed decisions being taken.

The physical base for a future unitary authority or unitary authorities was also discussed. Members commented that, on the date of the meeting, there remained uncertainty about which offices would continue to be used and where Council and Committee meetings would take place. Concerns were raised that, should a meeting venue be used that was located some distance from Redditch, this might disenfranchise Redditch residents, particularly those residents without access to their vehicles, due to challenges highlighted by Members with transport infrastructure in the county.

The population that would be served by two unitary authorities as opposed to a single Council was considered at the meeting. Members noted that whilst the Government had initially highlighted that Unitary Authorities would be expected to serve a population of at least 500,000, the Minister of State for Local Government had subsequently clarified that there was flexibility. Members noted that a number of existing unitary authorities already served populations that were far lower than 500,000. However, questions were raised as to whether efficiencies could be achieved if two unitary authorities in Worcestershire delivered services to much lower populations.

The future of the assets owned by Redditch Borough Council was also discussed by Members. It was noted that Redditch Borough Council was the only local authority in Worcestershire to retain a Council housing stock and concerns were raised about the potential for these houses, as well as other assets, such as the leisure venues managed by Rubicon Leisure Limited on behalf of the Council, to be sold by a future unitary authority. Members expressed the view that these assets needed to be protected for the benefit of future generations and the suggestion was made that the introduction of Parish and Town Councils in the Borough prior to delivery of LGR could assist with this process.

Consideration was given to the number of Councillors that would serve on the new unitary Council(s). In a single unitary authority for Worcestershire, Members commented that each Councillor would be expected to represent circa 6,000 residents whereas, if north and south Worcestershire Councils were introduced, each Member would represent approximately 4,000 residents. Concerns were highlighted that the former scenario could be difficult to manage, particularly for Members with work and other personal commitments. Questions were also raised about the extent to which Councillors representing 6,000 residents in a single unitary authority could be said to be accessible to the public and accountable to the people or able to engage with and empower

their local communities effectively. The suggestion was made that under Option B, this would be more achievable, and it was noted that Councillors representing 4,000 residents would be closer to the average number of residents represented by Councillors at existing unitary authorities in the country.

For all of the Options, Members commented that the role of a Councillor would be like that of a full-time job. The suggestion was made that Members would need to receive appropriate remuneration in order for the role to be viable. Concerns were raised that without suitable remuneration, candidates from deprived backgrounds might be deterred from standing in local elections and this would impact on the diversity of local Members moving forward.

Consideration was given to the implications of each of the models in relation to localism. Concerns were raised that a single unitary authority would be more distant from local communities and that this model could undermine local identities. By contrast, Members commented that two unitary authorities, for the north and south of the county, would be in a stronger position to continue to maintain local identities.

Members made reference to the opportunities that could arise from LGR and in doing so referred to lessons learned from existing unitary authorities located in the West Midlands. Particular reference was made to Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, both of which had secured considerable financial investment, including in respect of local regeneration projects. In both cases, it was noted that these unitary authorities served residents living in defined geographical areas with strong local identities.

The different financial situations of the seven authorities in Worcestershire was also considered during the debate. Members noted that currently, Redditch Borough Council had strong financial reserves. By contrast, some of the other local authorities, particularly Worcestershire County Council, were struggling financially and had accumulated debts. Members commented that as a result of the LGR process, consideration would need to be given to how these debts would be addressed, and it was noted that under Option B, a process for calculating how to share these debts between the two new unitary authorities would need to be identified and agreed.

The provision of SEND services to children and young people living in the county was considered. Concerns were raised that the needs of children living in urban areas, like Redditch Borough, differed from the needs of children living in rural areas in the south of the

county. The suggestion was made that current arrangements for service delivery needed to change in order to meet local needs.

Members noted that five of the six district Councils in Worcestershire (with the exception of Wyre Forest District Council, which had agreed a direction of travel when debating a Motion at Council in February 2025) had been due to debate the Options Appraisal issued by Mutual Ventures at Council meetings held during the first week of September. The other four District Councils had already met to consider the report and it was noted that they had all endorsed Option B.

In concluding their discussions, Members thanked Officers for their hard work preparing the report for Members' consideration. Mutual Ventures was also thanked for their help, including with regard to preparing the Options Appraisal for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that

1) the matters set out in the report and the findings of the Options Appraisal carried out by Mutual Ventures; and appendices associated with the Mutual Ventures report listed within their report as Appendix A - Financial modelling and assumptions, Appendix B – Shape Worcestershire: outputs from public engagement, staff surveys and focus groups and Appendix C – Place profiles be noted;

2) the following model of Local Government re-organisation be selected as the Council's preferred option to be progressed to be developed into the final proposals for submission to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government by the deadline of 28th November 2025:

OPTION B: Two Unitary Authorities made up of North Worcestershire (covering Bromsgrove District, Redditch Borough and Wyre Forest District) and South Worcestershire (covering Malvern Hills District, Worcester City and Wychavon District) providing the former district/borough and county council local government services for each area;

3) having selected Option B, that Members instruct officers: -

a) to undertake further analysis and development of the option selected under Recommendation 2 above;

b) to bring back to Members at a Council meeting in November a set of final proposals for their consideration representing the Council's draft submission on Local Government Re-organisation; and

c) in recognition of the requirement to collaborate with other authorities when putting forward plans for Local Government Reorganisation, to work with the Leader of this Council and Leader or Leaders of any other authorities which have chosen the same option to develop joint final proposals for consideration at the meeting referred to in recommendation 3(b);

4) to delegate authority to the Chief Executive following consultation with the Leader to work with other Councils and consultants as necessary; and

5) to agree a supplementary budget estimate of up to £100,000 to allow further work on the Council's proposal for Local Government Reorganisation. This would be in two tranches of firstly £50,000 with a second tranche of £50,000 to be drawn only if required, under authority delegated to the Chief Executive following consultation with the Leader of the Council.

(During consideration of this item, there was an adjournment from 20:56 to 21:10).

33. URGENT BUSINESS - GENERAL (IF ANY)

There was no urgent business for consideration on this occasion.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.39 pm

This page is intentionally left blank

Redditch Borough Council
Working together for our communities

Council

Monday, 15th September, 2025

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Joanna Kane (Mayor), and Councillors Juliet Barker Smith, Juma Begum, William Boyd, Claire Davies, Matthew Dormer, James Fardoe, Andrew Fry, Bill Hartnett, Sharon Harvey, Chris Holz, Sid Khan, Wanda King, Gemma Monaco, Rita Rogers, Jen Snape, Monica Stringfellow, Craig Warhurst, Ian Woodall and Paul Wren

Officers:

Nicola Cummings, Debra Goodall, John Leach, Simon Parry and Judith Willis

Principal Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

34. WELCOME

The Mayor welcomed all present to the meeting.

35. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Joe Baker, Brandon Clayton, Sachin Mathur, Alan Mason, David Munro, Gary Slim and Jane Spilsbury.

36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

37. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following announcements were made at the Council meeting:

a) <u>The Mayor's Announcements</u>

The Mayor advised that a list of the civic engagements that she and the Deputy Mayor had attended in July and August 2025 had been tabled for Members' consideration (Appendix 1).

Chair

The Mayor thanked the Deputy Mayor for attending two civic engagements on her behalf during this period. Members were also thanked for attending a recent event that had been held at the Boathouse.

b) The Leader's Announcements

The Leader read out the following announcement to Members:

"The Council recognises the grief and suffering of those bereaved or seriously injured through road crashes. We welcome the opportunity to work with RoadPeace to recognise the World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims. We applaud the work of this charity in providing information and support services to people bereaved or seriously injured in road crashes, alongside their work to reduce road danger.

This World Day of Remembrance takes place on the third Sunday in November, and this year will fall on 16th November. Rubicon Leisure will work with RoadPeace to place an artificial tree in the grounds of The Boat House prior to the event, where people can write a message on a dove card, either to remember a loved one or show their support for the charity. This will stay in place for 14 days. There will be an act of remembrance at the Boathouse on Friday 14th November. Additionally, The Palace Theatre and the Bandstand and fountain on Church Green will be lit up in purple on the third Saturday of November. This will provide an opportunity to remember road traffic victims, support their families and to promote road safety.

RoadPeace will be sending an invitation to all Councillors for the event on 14th November, and I encourage you to attend.

All Councillors are also welcome to attend their Service of Remembrance which is held in Birmingham on 16th November."

c) The Chief Executive's Announcements

The Chief Executive confirmed that he had no announcements to make on this occasion.

38. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 9)

The following Question on Notice was submitted by Councillor Chris Holz in advance of the meeting for the consideration of the Leader:

"Recognising that some cash strapped Councils are selling off allotments, does the Leader agree with me that allotments are valuable community assets?"

The Leader responded by commenting that she was grateful that Redditch was not a cash strapped Council. In addition, the Leader agreed that allotments were valuable community assets and important green spaces. Members were advised that the Council had no plans to sell allotments. Instead, the authority was working through the recommendations of the Leisure Strategy to give communities a stronger role in how allotments were managed in the future. The Council's approach recognised allotments as cherished green spaces that supported residents' wellbeing, promoted active lifestyles, and strengthened community connection.

Councillor Holz subsequently asked the following supplementary question:

"Thank you for your answer. With a Unitary Authority around the corner and associated uncertainty, will you confirm that all allotments, including non-statutory allotments, will be safe and will you go further to make them all statutory?"

The Leader responded by explaining that the Council did not want to lose any allotments. In terms of the potential to make all the allotments statutory, the Leader explained that she would ask Officers to provide a written update to Councillor Holz after the meeting.

39. MOTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 11)

There were no Motions on Notice for consideration on this occasion.

40. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Digital Manufacturing and Innovation Centre (DMIC) - Appointment of Contractor for Stage 4 Designs

The Leader advised that the appointment of a contractor to work on stage 4 designs for the Digital Manufacturing and Innovation Centre (DMIC) needed to be funded. The work would be financed using the Town's Deal funding, as agreed by the Town's Deal Board, and would not therefore require further funding from the Council. However, the Council was the body, under governance arrangements for Town's Deal funding, that needed to make this decision.

During consideration of this item, Members noted that display boards had recently been put in place at the site. The information

provided would help to inform the public about the works that would be taking place.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Sharon Harvey and seconded by Councillor Bill Hartnett.

Housing Growth Programme

Members were advised that the Executive Committee had agreed four recommendations on the subject of the Housing Growth Programme at a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 8th July 2025. One of these proposals, listed in the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on 8th July 2025 at Minute Item No. 18 as recommendation 4, had subsequently been approved through the urgent decision process. This decision had had to be taken urgently in order to enable the Council to have authority to access the necessary budget to purchase properties that had become available but which had needed to be sold by a developer prior to the date of the Council meeting. The other three recommendations, listed as recommendations 5 to 7, were therefore the focus of the debate at the Council meeting.

The positive impact that the purchase of new properties under the Housing Growth Scheme could have was discussed by Members. It was noted that by the date of the Executive Committee meeting held in July 2025, there had been over 2,000 households on the housing waiting list in the Borough. The properties added to the Council's housing portfolio through the Housing Growth Programme would help to increase the number of social housing and affordable units that could be offered to local residents.

Reference was made to the proposed amendments to the Rent Setting Policy and concerns were raised that affordable housing units, whereby the rent was set at 80 per cent of market value, could be difficult for some residents to afford. However, clarification was provided that wherever possible, the Council would aim to rent properties acquired under the Housing Growth Scheme at social housing levels. Higher rent levels would only apply in cases where this was considered to not be viable.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Bill Hartnett and seconded by Councillor Jen Snape.

Treasury Management Outturn Report 2024/25

The content of the Treasury Management Outturn Report 2024/25 was considered by Council. Members were informed that the Council was in a reasonably strong position financially, although the authority was subject to the same macro-economic pressures that

were impacting on all Councils. The Council had robust prudential indicators in place and had started the 2025/26 financial year with a budget surplus.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Ian Woodall and seconded by Councillor Rita Rogers.

Voluntary Sector Grants Scheme 2026/27 to 2029/30

A report detailing the proposed Voluntary Sector Grants Scheme for 2026/27 to 2029/30 was considered by Council. As part of the scheme, there would be £175,000 funding available to support Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations each year, including £75,000 funding for a Financial Advice service.

Reference was made to the detailed scrutiny of the report that had occurred at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 1st September 2025. During this meeting, concerns had been raised about the extent to which VCS organisations that did not have access to a professional bid writer would receive support with advice on completing applications. It was noted that Officers would need to address this as part of the scheme moving forward.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Juma Begum and seconded by Councillor Monica Stringfellow.

Adoption of Fixed Penalty Charge for Breaches of Community Protection Notices

Members considered a report proposing the introduction of a Fixed Penalty Charge (FPN) for breaches of Community Protection Notices (CPNs).

In presenting this report, the Leader highlighted the following information that officers had provided in respect of the use of FPNs for enforcement purposes. This had been provided following scrutiny of the report at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 1st September 2025 when additional clarification about enforcement arrangements and how it worked without access to FPNs had been requested.

“We serve FPNs for littering and fly tipping already, with charges set in the normal fees and charges setting process. We have served five this financial year; three for fly tipping and two for littering, all of which have been paid. As of today, we have 67 open investigations for Redditch. Where evidence has been identified for a potential offender we are moving toward either FPN or a prosecution.

Alongside the above, we also undertake investigations into untidy land and anti-social behaviour concerning waste related matters, such as persistent dog fouling, littering and side waste. For such issues, where detriment to the local amenity and persistence can be established, the serving of a Community Protection Warning (CPW) may be an appropriate step. For dog fouling, for example, we cannot serve an FPN. If that is not heeded, then a CPN can be served. Failure to comply is a criminal offence. We have not served any CPWs or CPNs in Redditch to date as we have so far managed to bring about compliance with warning letters ahead of any CPN.

However, we are acutely aware of our experience in Bromsgrove and that of colleagues around the county where CPWs and subsequently CPNs have been required. We also have experiences of cases where a CPN has technically been breached but it is a minor breach and it would be better dealt with by serving an FPN rather than by prosecution. Since that time, the Council's Community Safety Manager has advised that it is generally recognised that there is 80 – 90 per cent compliance when a CPW is served and that rises to 95 per cent for CPNs which leaves a small per cent of cases where prosecution or an FPN might be used. Most of these will require prosecution because of the scale and severity. However, where there is partial compliance or mitigating circumstances, liability for breaches to date can be discharged by payment of an FPN where that is appropriate."

In this context, Members were asked to note that FPNs provided an additional tool that could be used by Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) for enforcement purposes but this was not the only tool available and would not need to be used on every occasion.

During consideration of this item, questions were raised about the extent to which WRS had access to sufficient resources for enforcement activities and whether action could be taken to strengthen the powers available to the Officers undertaking enforcement action. Members were advised that staffing was a separate matter to the enforcement tools available. Council was reminded that WRS had only taken over responsibility for undertaking enforcement action relatively recently but already progress was being made.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Sharon Harvey and seconded by Councillor Monica Stringfellow.

Council

Monday, 15th September, 2025

Regulator of Social Housing – Inspection Report and Housing Improvement Plan

Council was advised that the report detailed the outcomes of an inspection of the Council's Housing Services that had been carried out in 2025 by the Regulator of Social Housing. The inspection was required because the Council was a social housing provider with a housing stock in excess of 1,000 properties. At the end of the inspection, a report had been issued by the Regulator of Social Housing and the Council had been awarded a C3 grade. Whilst Members expressed disappointment that the Council had received a C3 rating, it was noted that over 50 per cent of local authority social housing providers had received the same rating.

In discussing the outcomes of the inspection, Members highlighted that a key challenge that had been identified in respect of the Council's services had related to data and record keeping. This issue had arisen due to problems with the recording of cases, including when tasks had been completed. Officers were working hard to address this issue and Members praised staff in the Housing Department for their dedication to tenants.

Additional action in respect of governance arrangements for the Housing Department were also highlighted. Members were informed that new housing Boards were in the process of being stablished and senior officers would be involved in the work of these Boards. In addition, there would be opportunities for tenants to contribute through representation and further arrangements that could be introduced to enable greater tenant participation were being explored.

During consideration of this item, Members noted that the report had been pre-scrutinised at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 1st September 2025. All Members had been invited to attend this meeting of the Committee, as it had been recognised that the subject would be of interest to all Councillors. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee was praised for the robust nature of the debate in respect of this item and Members of the Committee were thanked for their hard work.

Consideration was given to one of the points that had been raised at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, where Members had requested assurances that progress would not slip back following the initial response to the inspection findings. It was highlighted that the Council was performing well on important areas such as gas a fire safety inspections of properties. However, concerns were raised that there had been more limited progress with stock condition surveys in recent years. Members were informed that in many areas, good performance had been reported

and improvements continued to be made. However, the Council was not complacent and it was recognised that further action would be needed over the long-term.

In concluding their discussions in respect of this report, Members highlighted that the proposals detailed in the report were integral to the success of the Council's tenant engagement plans. Action would be taken to involve tenants more constructively in the future, as it was recognised that it was important to ensure that tenants were aware of what was happening and could get involved.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Bill Hartnett and seconded by Councillor Ian Woodall.

Quarter 1 2025/26 Finance and Performance Monitoring Report

The Finance and Performance Monitoring Report for the first quarter of 2025/26 was considered by Members.

Council was advised that a slight overspend for the 2025/26 financial year on departmental budgets was anticipated, although the position could change by the end of the financial year. A more rigorous financial management process compared to previous years was being introduced at the Council together with more transparent financial monitoring arrangements. The reports would be open to scrutiny, at meetings of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Ian Woodall and seconded by Councillor Sharon Harvey.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the Executive Committee meetings held on 8th July and 2nd September 2025 be approved and all recommendations adopted.

41. APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

Members were advised that a vacancy had arisen on the Tardebigge Relief in Need and Sickness Charity since the previous meeting of Council, following Councillor Sachin Mathur's resignation from the body.

A nomination was received to appoint Councillor Juma Begum to the Tardebigge Relief in Need and Sickness Charity. The nomination was proposed by Councillor Sharon Harvey and seconded by Councillor Juliet Barker Smith.

RESOLVED that

Councillor Juma Begum be appointed to serve on the Tardebigge Relief in Need and Sickness Charity until May 2028.

42. URGENT BUSINESS - RECORD OF DECISIONS

The Mayor advised that, as detailed during Minute Item No. 40, there had been one urgent decision since the previous Council meeting on the subject of the Housing Growth Programme.

43. URGENT BUSINESS - GENERAL (IF ANY)

There was no urgent business for discussion on this occasion.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 7.56 pm

This page is intentionally left blank

Appendix 1 Council – 15th September 2025

The Mayor's Announcements

Mayoral Engagements during July 2025

Date	Event	Venue
Saturday 5th	Redditch One World Link's celebration of 40 years of twinning with Mtwara, Tanzania	The Boat House, Arrow Valley Country Park
Sunday 6th	The Mercian Regiment's Annual Pilgrimage to the Memorial	Armed Forces Memorial, Crich, Derbyshire
Friday 11th	Srebenica memorial event held by the Mayor of Worcester	Guild Hall, Worcester
Friday 11th	Christians Against Poverty briefing about tackling debt and poverty in our community	CAP, AOK, The Foodbank and The Project, Church Green East
Friday 11th	Astwood Bank Sundowner evening	S.E. Davies, Astwood Bank
Saturday 12th	Astwood Bank Carnival	S.E. Davies, Astwood Bank
Sunday 13th	Presented prizes at 1st Redditch Scout Group's family afternoon	1st Redditch Scout Group, Hadlow Close
Monday 14th	Photo opportunity to promote the Garden of Remembrance service on the 26th	Garden of Remembrance, Plymouth Road
Wednesday 16th	Feast day of Our Lady of Mount Carmel	Our Lady of Mount Carmel RC Church
Friday 18th	Summer fete at Woodrow First School	Woodrow First School
Friday 18th	'Miracle of the Bees' multisensory experience	Kingfisher Centre
Friday 18th	Mayor of Alcester's charity quiz	Eric Payne Community Centre, Alcester
Saturday 19th	Kerala Cultural Association (KCA) Redditch barbecue	Our Lady of Mount Carmel RC Church
Monday 21st	Bleed kit training with Peter Martin of Drop the Knife	Woodrow Community Centre
Monday 21st	Funeral of former Mayor, Roy Vickers	Abbey Crematorium
Thursday 24th	Mayor of Wyre Forest's afternoon tea	Wharton Park Golf and Country Club, Bewdley
Saturday 26th	Commemorative service to mark the 100th anniversary of the Garden of Remembrance	Garden of Remembrance, Plymouth Road
Saturday 26th	Armed Forces Veterans' summer ball	Abbey Hotel

Mayoral Engagements during August 2025

Date	Event	Venue
Thursday 7th	Chaplaincy stall visit	The Alexandra Hospital
Saturday 9th	Launch of 'The Last School Bell' by author Tony Aston	Trinity High School
Saturday 9th	Kerala Cultural Association (KCA) health and wellness event	Windmill Community Centre
Saturday 16th	Community school uniform bank	Kingfisher Centre
Saturday 16th	Commemoration of 80th anniversary of VJ Day	St Stephen's War Memorial
Saturday 16th	Afternoon tea party held by Redditch Royal British Legion	Our Lady of Mount Carmel RC Church parish hall
Tuesday 19th	Funeral of parish priest Father Tony Rohan	Our Lady of Mount Carmel RC Church
Tuesday 19th	U3a open afternoon – attended by the Deputy Mayor	The Bridge Community Hall
Sunday 24th	Church Hill Big Local summer fayre – attended by the Deputy Mayor	Willow Trees Community Centre
Saturday 30th	Opened garden renovated by the Redditch 41 Club	The Alexandra Hospital
Saturday 30th	Family fundraising day	The Redi Centre

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Council

17 November 2025

Local Government Re-organisation: Transforming Worcestershire

Local government that works for people, powered by place and built for the future - The North and South Local Government Re-Organisation Proposal for Worcestershire

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Sharon Harvey, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Environmental Services
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Senior Officers	John Leach, Chief Executive. Claire Felton, Assistant Director for Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services
Report Authors John Leach Claire Felton	 Job Title: Chief Executive Contact email: john.leach@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Job Title: Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services Contact email: c.felton@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	N/A
Relevant Council Priority	All council priorities
Key / Non – Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to

1.1 NOTE the matters set out in the Local Government Reorganisation Transforming Worcestershire proposal: Local government that works for people, powered by place and built for the future - The north and south Local Government Re-Organisation Proposal for Worcestershire attached at Appendix 1; and

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Council **17 November 2025**

RESOLVE

1.2 To adopt the Local Government Reorganisation Transforming Worcestershire proposal: Local government that works for people, powered by place and built for the future - the north and south Local Government Re-Organisation Proposal for Worcestershire, as the Council's final submission to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government ("MHCLG") on the issue of Local Government Re-organisation.

1.3 That authority be delegated to the Chief Executive and the Assistant Director of Legal Democratic and Procurement Services to make any final amendments to Appendix 1 following consultation with the Leader and thereafter to submit the document to the MHCLG by the deadline of Friday 28th November 2025.

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Council **17 November 2025**

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 This is the third report to be brought to Members on the issue of Local Government Re-organisation ("LGR") in Worcestershire. The previous reports were as follows: -

Date of report	Details and Decision
17 March 2025 Local Government Re-organisation - Interim Plan Proposals for Worcestershire – Bromsgrove	To inform Members of plans for LGR issued by MHCLG and seek approval of draft interim plan for Worcestershire. The draft interim plan had been formulated following joint discussions of the Leaders of the authorities in Worcestershire. Proposal was for two options to be pursued • **Option A**: One Unitary Authority for the whole of Worcestershire made up of the six district councils and Worcestershire County Council. • **Option B**: Two Unitary Authorities made up of North Worcestershire (covering the footprint of Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre Forest) and South Worcestershire (covering the footprint of Malvern Hills, Worcester City and Wychavon) together with associated County Council functions for each area Final decision taken by Members was to support the submission of the draft interim plan for Worcestershire to further explore the two options of either a single county wide unitary (Option A) or two separate North and South unitaries (Option B).
04 September 2025 Local Government Re-organisation – Outcome of Options Appraisal Work	To update Members on events since 12th March 2025 and the outcomes of the Options Appraisal undertaken by Mutual Ventures on behalf of Bromsgrove District Council and the other District Councils in Worcestershire (excluding Wyre Forest District Council).

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Council **17 November 2025**

	Members were asked to consider the contents of the Options Appraisal and decide which of the options (Option A or Option B (named as B1 and B2)) should be further developed to final proposal stage. **Option A**: One Unitary Authority for the whole of Worcestershire made up of the six district councils and Worcestershire County Council **Option B1**: Two new unitary councils to be established across Worcestershire; North Worcestershire and South Worcestershire with an operating model based on: - • the disaggregation and transferring of all statutory and non-statutory services, functions and operating model from Worcestershire County Council to the new unitary councils; and • the aggregation and transferring of all statutory and non-statutory services, functions and operating models from district councils to their respective new (north or south) unitary council. **Option B2**: Two new unitary councils established across Worcestershire; North Worcestershire and South Worcestershire, based on: - • a shared service/hybrid model across both new unitary councils, with specific services (i.e. adult social care, children's services, education, adult education and transport) jointly delivered and commissioned. • All other services would be delivered and commissioned by each new unitary council, including prevention and early help. Members resolved to support Option B (made up of B1 and B2) and officers were instructed to carry out further analysis and development to shape draft final proposals for consideration of Members at an Extraordinary meeting of Council in November 2025.

2.2 Following the Full Council meeting on 04 September 2025, steps were taken to appoint a suitable organisation to undertake the further development of Option B (comprising of B1 and B2 as set out in Section 2.1 above). In progressing this there was a continued collaboration with

the other District Councils who had also selected Option B, namely Bromsgrove District Council, Malvern Hills District Council, Worcester City Council and Wychavon District Council. Accordingly, KPMG were jointly appointed by the five District Councils ("the commissioning Councils") to work up the final submissions into a proposal document. In approaching this matter KPMG also worked with the previous suppliers of the Options Appraisal (Mutual Ventures) that was previously considered by Council.

2.3 A Proposal Built Through Collaboration

2.3.1 This work has included a systematic approach to formulating a proposal that was developed through collaborative discussion and joint analysis. The high level of collaboration that has taken place across five councils reflects the significant ability of these Worcestershire local authorities to work together constructively and in the interests of delivering the right model for local government in the County. It demonstrates a shared commitment to shaping a future local government model that delivers better outcomes for the people, places and economy of Worcestershire. In progressing this work KPMG working with Mutual Ventures and the five commissioning councils have worked up a proposal that covers Options B1 and B2 (as directed by Council under the chosen option, Option B) to take into account the government criteria for assessing plans for re-organisation.

2.3.2 **Central to the development of this proposal are the views of those who will potentially receive the services of the proposed new councils (i.e. the residents), and those democratically elected to represent them in the five Commissioning Councils, alongside feedback from other key stakeholders.**

2.4 Members will recall that at the start of the current process guidance was issued by the Minister for State for Local Government as to the six criteria against which final plans would be assessed. For ease of reference these are re-produced below: -

1. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.
2. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.
3. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.
4. Proposals should show how Councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.

5. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.
6. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.

2.5 The final proposal is attached for Members consideration at Appendix 1 of this report titled, “Transforming Worcestershire”, “Local government that works for people, powered by place and built for the future” (referred to in this report as “the proposal”). This proposal has been developed on behalf of Redditch Borough, Bromsgrove District, Malvern Hills District, Worcester City and Wychavon District Councils. Wyre Forest District Council and Worcestershire County Council are considering a different proposal based on a single county unitary footprint. The decision from this report that is sought is for Members to consider and approve the contents of Appendix 1 and for this to be adopted as the Council’s final submission to MHCLG for local government reorganisation in Worcestershire. As referenced at paragraph 1.3, the final deadline to submit is Friday 28th November 2025.

3.0 OPERATIONAL ISSUES

3.1 In approaching the next stage of the development of the proposal towards final completion, the starting point was to carry out an in-depth analysis of the outcome of the Options Appraisal exercise. At the time of the last report to Members Option B was to be further explored looking at the scope for the best proposal possible utilising the following: -

Option B1

Two new unitary councils for North Worcestershire and South Worcestershire with an operating model based on: -

- the disaggregation and transferring of all statutory and non-statutory services, functions and operating model from Worcestershire County Council to the new unitary councils; and
- the aggregation and transferring of all statutory and non-statutory services, functions and operating models from district councils to their respective new (north or south) unitary council.

Option B2

Two new unitary councils for North Worcestershire and South Worcestershire based on: -

- a shared service/hybrid model across both new unitary councils, with specific services (i.e. adult social care, children's services, education, adult education and transport) jointly delivered and commissioned.
- All other services would be delivered and commissioned by each new unitary council, including prevention and early help.

3.2 The work to develop a preferred two-unitary model termed the "north and south model" is detailed in Appendix 1. The resulting proposal aligns to Option B as directed by Council and can be described as combining elements of both Options B1 and B2. In summary the model being put to Members in the proposal is based on: -

- Two new unitary authorities made up of North Worcestershire (covering the footprint of Bromsgrove District, Redditch Borough and Wyre Forest District) and South Worcestershire (covering the footprint of Malvern Hills District, Worcester City and Wychavon District)
- Continued delivery of certain countywide functions on a county wide basis as at present, including waste disposal and strategic highway functions (such as major roads, network planning and investment), Public Health and certain elements of Children's and Adults Services including Safeguarding.
- The creation of separate departments for Children's Services and Adult Services, one in the north and one in the south each with their own statutory director roles.
- Delivery of remaining services at local level in the north and south. This group of services will include the following specific areas: -

  - Waste Collection
  - Homelessness Services
  - Public Safety/Community Safety (including the continuation of the existing north/south Community Safety Partnership boards)
  - Emergency planning and civil resilience (with a high level of collaboration between north and south).
  - Corporate/ back-office services

It is anticipated that current existing shared services in both the north and south and those that are shared between the two areas will transition into the new unitary arrangements.

Guiding principles

3.3. **Driven by the vision to transform services, ten guiding principles to determine the approach to services in the north and south unitary model have been developed: -**

1. **It's about people:** Transform, design, plan and deliver all our services with and for all Worcestershire residents including young people and vulnerable adults.
2. **Governance and oversight:** Maintain and strengthen shared governance and oversight arrangements where risks span multiple service areas or geographies.
3. **Stability and continuity:** Maintain stability and continuity of service for individuals already receiving support, supporting workforce stability and leveraging existing networks and delivery arrangements.
4. **Prevention first:** Prioritise prevention-based service delivery at the most appropriate geographic level to address needs early and reduce escalation to more intensive or costly interventions. Ensure local access points to services for visibility and accessibility for the whole population.
5. **Specialist services:** Commission and deliver specialist, low-volume, or complex services on a shared basis across localities to ensure access to expertise, efficiency, and equitable access.
6. **Localised commissioning and procurement:** Commissioning and procurement should be tailored to the specific needs, priorities, and characteristics of each locality, with flexibility to operate at different scales and respond to emergencies rapidly.
7. **Reducing bureaucracy:** Establish integrated back-office support functions to enable efficient, secure, and consistent processes across all service areas, and remove unnecessary administrative barriers so services are agile, efficient and responsive to local needs.
8. **Data sharing and intelligence:** Enable consistent data sharing protocols and joint intelligence to support planning, delivery, and evaluation across units.
9. **Co-production:** Listening to and working with residents and voluntary sector, community, and health partners to strengthen prevention and provide services that work for people.
10. **Valuing family and community connections:** Services designed around the lived experiences of individuals, recognising family relationships and local connections and assets.

Overview of the Approach

3.4 The Transforming Worcestershire proposal (north and south model) has been developed through quantitative and qualitative research comprising of data analysis and 32 engagement sessions with Members and key stakeholders as well as a resident survey that took place from 1st – 29th June 2025. As previously discussed, this work led to the five commissioning councils at each of their Full Councils considering an options appraisal (developed by Mutual Ventures) in September 2025 where they concluded a Local Government Reorganisation proposal based on a north and south unitary model (two unitary approach) should be pursued for Worcestershire as opposed to a single County unitary. Following this date the councils' procured the services of KPMG and working with them and Mutual Ventures, work has taken place to deliver a draft proposal document for consideration at the five councils' Full Council meetings in November.

Collaboration and Co-Design

3.5 During the period September-November there has been a co-ordinated effort utilising the staff resource across the councils, alongside the support of consultants to develop the proposal. In addition to this there have been councillor briefing and input sessions for all Members across the five commissioning councils including the opportunity for all Members (cross party) to help shape the final document as the democratically elected representatives of their communities. This is to further recognise the mandate of local councillors to represent their residents' views who receive council services. Notwithstanding this the perspectives of stakeholder organisations who also come into contact with communities and of course the residents themselves have been engaged, with their views helping shape this proposal provided at Appendix 1.

Composition of the Proposal

3.6 This proposal consists of six sections that cover Executive Summary, Purpose and Worcestershire Context, Vision, How the proposal meets MHCLG six assessment criteria, Implementation Plan and Appendices (covering the approach, the options appraisal, the finance case for change and assumptions, key data sets, high quality and sustainable public services, feedback from other organisations, engagement method and participant profile, implementation planning continued).

Summary of the Proposal Document

3.7 The Vision

3.7.1 The vision for the north and south model for unitarisation of local government in Worcestershire is: -

3.7.2 "We're shaping a thriving Worcestershire, North and South, where every community flourishes and public satisfaction drives everything we do. Through bold local leadership and the power of devolution, we'll unlock opportunity, remove barriers, and deliver services that truly reflect the needs of our people and places. By creating two dynamic councils rooted in local identity, we'll build vibrant, sustainable communities where residents and partners can grow, connect, and succeed. This is our commitment: a local and responsive Worcestershire, driven by what works best for each unique area."

3.7.3 Through our work we know: -

- **Adult social care demand is forecast to grow by 57%** among over-65s by 2038, placing unsustainable pressure on services and budgets.

- **43.7% of respondents** believe the current system **does not support strong community engagement** and **prefer a two-unitary model to improve local connection.**

- Residents report **delays and confusion in resolving local issues** due to the current two-tier system and remote service structures.

- The **proportion of residents aged 65+ is expected to rise** from 24.2% in 2025 to 27.6% by 2035, increasing demand for care and safe housing.

- **Worcestershire has the highest rate of looked-after children** among county councils, 87 per 10,000 compared to a 60 average (with 1,044 children in care).

- **Qualification levels vary significantly across the county**, 25.9% Level 4 attainment in Redditch vs. 38.8% in Malvern Hills, limiting access to skilled jobs and training.

- South Worcestershire has **only 1.71 years of housing land supply**; Redditch faces **housing deprivation and homelessness** and is developing its council housing stock.

- GVA per hour ranges from £25.20 in Wyre Forest to £42.30 in Bromsgrove, reflecting **unequal economic performance and distinct sector strengths across districts.**

3.7.4 The proposed north and south model offers a clear way forward. It enables locally accountable leadership, embeds prevention at neighbourhood level, and tailors services to the distinct needs of communities across Worcestershire. This proposal carries a serious and meaningful pledge to deliver change through transformation.

The Pledge to Transform Local Government in Worcestershire

3.7.5 In responding to each of the challenges described in section 3.7.3 a pledge has been developed to deliver the following local outcomes. They represent how things will be different for the people of Worcestershire in a north and south model: -

1. **Public services shift from crisis to prevention**
2. **Communities feel more connected and empowered**
3. **Local services respond faster to everyday issues**
4. **Vulnerable adults live healthier, happier, and safer lives**
5. **Children and families are supported to stay together**
6. **Young people have better access to skills and jobs**
7. **Better housing supports healthier lives**
8. **People and businesses benefit from stronger local economies**

Meeting the Government's Six Criteria for Local Government Reorganisation

3.7.6 Pages 9 -13 of the report at Appendix 1 sets out "the case for change" providing key evidence across ten parameters why a north and south model is right for Worcestershire. The strengths here are: -

1. Reflect the clear preference of key stakeholders in Worcestershire.
2. Drive long-term financial sustainability through a focus on outcomes.
3. Keep decision making local and close to communities.
4. Unlock a relational approach to working with local partners.

5. Reflect the unique geographies and local identities of North and South Worcestershire.
6. Enable tailored economic and place strategies to unlock growth.
7. Unlock devolution through balance and flexibility.
8. Maximise the opportunity to transform service delivery models.
9. Reflect balanced needs and enable targeted local delivery.
10. Support a fairer and more proportionate approach to council tax harmonisation.

3.7.7 Overall the north and south model is seen as maximising the opportunity to transform service delivery models, particularly for Adults and Children's Services, by prioritising outcome-focused, neighbourhood-based preventative services. This shift from reactive to preventative approaches is believed to drive long-term financial sustainability and offers greater financial flexibility in managing local requirements. This preference for a two unitary model was also clearly expressed through extensive public engagement and by five of the seven councils within Worcestershire.

Criteria 1: Establishing a Single Tier of Local Government

3.7.8 Page 24 – 40 provides the evidence why a north and south unitary proposal meets criteria 1. It is confirmed that north and south Worcestershire have clearly defined economic profiles, with different sector strengths, workforce characteristics and investment priorities. This model reflects these differences, enabling targeted growth strategies, tailored skills planning and locally relevant service delivery. Each council would operate from a stable and proportionate tax base, supporting financial sustainability. The model also strengthens democratic accountability and aligns with existing sub-regional planning structures, providing a coherent platform for future devolution.

3.7.9 The north and south model reflects the distinct urban and rural geographies of North and South Worcestershire, enabling tailored service delivery, transport planning and housing strategies. It avoids the operational complexity and spatial incoherence of a single unitary, supporting more responsive, place-based governance across manageable footprints.

3.7.10 The north and south model provides a resilient and flexible governance structure, capable of adapting to future strategic and local challenges. It embeds neighbourhood leadership, strengthens democratic representation, and enables tailored service delivery. Public engagement shows strong support for this approach, particularly in rural areas. It avoids the risks of centralisation and

creation of a democratic deficit and maintains trusted and effective local partnerships.

Criteria 2: Efficiency, capacity and Withstanding Financial Shocks

3.7.11 Pages 41-55 provides the evidence why a north/south proposal meets criteria 2. The north and south model creates two balanced councils with populations exceeding 300,000 by 2032, ensuring both scale and sustainability. It reflects distinct demographic needs such as higher proportions of children in the north and older adults in the south while enabling tailored local services and shared strategic functions.

3.7.12 The financial model shows that the north and south model offers the level of savings required by consolidating and reducing duplication, streamlining service delivery and unlocking economies of scale in staffing, procurement and infrastructure, delivering an estimated £9.03m in recurring revenue savings.

3.7.13 The north and south model embraces the once-in-a-generation opportunity to design new organisations that are modern, efficient and fit for the future. This model manages transition costs through leveraging existing budgets and capital receipts to fund invest-to-save activities, while enabling long term transformation through digital innovation, integrated service reform and scalable governance that supports sustainable public service delivery.

3.7.14 There is growing concern about the precarious financial position across Worcestershire, driven largely by the scale and fragility of Worcestershire County Council's budget and need for Exceptional Financial Support (EFS). The county's budget is dominated by high-cost services and without a change in delivery model, these pressures will continue to grow. The north and south model is built to focus on prevention. It is well known that for every £1 spent on prevention £3.17 is saved on adult social care. Earlier action and support: The case for prevention in adult social care and beyond | Local Government Association.

Criteria 3: High Quality and Sustainable Public Services

3.7.15 Pages 56-76 of Appendix 1 provides the evidence of why a north/south model meets criteria 3. The north and south model will transform public services by shifting from crisis response to prevention, embedding delivery in places and neighbourhoods. Services will be managed at the right scale, with shared arrangements

where appropriate and strong local leadership for high-risk services. This approach builds on existing collaboration, strengthens accountability, and enables tailored, resilient services that reflect the distinct needs of North and South Worcestershire.

3.7.16 The proposed north and south model for Worcestershire aims to also transform public services by enhancing local responsiveness, promoting prevention, and integrating with local partners, while ensuring robust governance and accountability for critical services like children's, adult, and public health.

3.7.17 Through this proposal adult services are managed separately by North and South Worcestershire, each under the leadership of their own Director of Adult Services. The two councils would be established with a strong ethos and culture of collaboration, with shared services where it benefits vulnerable adults. This would include a single Worcestershire Safeguarding Adults Board.

3.7.18 Children's services are proposed to be managed separately by the North and South Worcestershire new local authorities, each under the leadership of their own Director of Children's Services. The two councils would be established with a strong ethos and culture of collaboration, with shared services where it benefits service users and their families. This would include a single Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership Board.

Criteria 4: Working Together to Understand and Meet Local Needs

3.7.19 Pages 77–88 provides the evidence how a north and south model for local government in Worcestershire meets criteria 4. Here it can be seen that there has been extensive and meaningful engagement to genuinely shape and define the future model for local government in Worcestershire, ensuring the north and south model meets the expectations of those providing their support. The north and south model has clear majority support from residents who believe two unitaries will better improve services (45%), support local identity (46%) and strengthen community engagement (44%). It also has a 70% support rate from local Parish and Town councils. The north and south model is the only proposal across the whole of Worcestershire which is built on the needs of our residents and partners.

3.7.20 The North and South of Worcestershire have distinct cultural profiles, with the north more urban and industrial, and the south more rural and heritage focused. Public engagement shows strong support for a

north and south model to preserve local identity and ensure decisions are made by leaders with local knowledge.

Criteria 5: Supporting Devolution Arrangements

3.7.21 As previously reported to Members, the establishment of unitary authorities in two tier areas is the first step towards the government's intention of achieving greater devolution across England. The second phase would be for unitary authorities in adjacent geographic areas to come together to form regional combined authorities. Under the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill ("the Bill"), the new style combined authorities would be known as "Strategic Authorities".

3.7.22 Strategic Authorities will have defined areas of competence. These areas are: -

- Transport and local infrastructure.
- Skills and employment support.
- Housing and strategic planning.
- Economic development and regeneration.
- Environment and climate change.
- Health, wellbeing and public service reform.
- Public safety.

3.7.23 Pages 89 - 95 provides the evidence relating to criteria 5 in relation to the north and south model for supporting arrangements for devolution in Worcestershire. Here it can be seen that the commissioning Worcestershire councils are aligned in their ambition for early devolution and are actively exploring strategic options for a Mayoral Strategic Authority that builds on the strengths of a north and south model, reflects local structures, and delivers economic and public service benefits for residents and partners as quickly as possible.

3.7.24 The commissioning Worcestershire councils have identified three primary options for a future Mayoral Strategic Authority, each offering strategic potential for growth, public service reform and alignment with Government criteria, while recognising the need for further agreement with neighbouring areas.

3.7.25 During this process the following options have also been considered and the proposal notes that the five commissioning councils would be open to discussing these options further with government if they were minded to consider them: -

- West Midlands Combined Authority
- Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire (inc. Stoke)
- West Mercia and Warwickshire
- West Mercia

Criteria 6: Stronger Community Engagement and Neighbourhood Empowerment

3.7.26 Pages 96-105 provides the evidence as to how a north and south unitary proposal meets criteria 6. Worcestershire's proposal for a north and south model with two unitary councils embeds community power through Neighbourhood Area Committees and Integrated Neighbourhood Teams. This structure enables resident-led decision-making, tailored local services and preventative delivery. Survey evidence shows strong public and parish support for two unitaries over a single authority. This model ensures strategic coherence while maintaining local accountability and responsiveness.

3.7.27 District councils across Worcestershire have demonstrated the ability to deliver responsive, preventative and locally tailored services through deep community knowledge and strong partnerships. These examples show how local government can adapt to varied needs, foster resident voice and drive better outcomes. A north and south model preserves this agility and proximity to residents and communities.

The Implementation Plan

3.7.28 Section 5 of the proposal provided in Appendix 1 of this report sets out the approach to implementation of this proposal (page 106-11). It recognises ten critical success factors for effective transition and delivery as provided by a 2024 Grant Thornton Study: -

1. Proactive Planning
2. Continued Public Services
3. Resident Centric Design and Communication
4. Transparent Governance
5. Set a coherent Vision and Align Transformation
6. Staff Support and Inclusive Culture
7. Integrate Technical and Cultural Change
8. Future Workforce Planning
9. Financial Stability
10. Rigorous Oversight and Assurance

3.7.29 Stakeholders have been engaged throughout the entire LGR process to ensure residents' and businesses' views are represented in the future of Worcestershire. That engagement is proposed to continue to build understanding of the expected changes and strengthen trust between the new councils and their communities. Strong engagement with staff and colleagues is also seen as critical to the successful transition and delivery of unitarisation due to the insights they would be able to provide. This engagement was started during the proposal writing and will need to be built on further to effectively deliver change.

3.7.30 This approach is central to the proposal, which is people centred. Local services will be co-designed with local people to deliver the services they want, rather than services perceived to be cheaper but which do not meet their needs. This reduces the risk of multiple interactions and long-term unsustainable service provision.

3.7.31 The proposal provides draft phases of implementation and priority activities that are being developed under the headings of: -

1. Prepare covering the period November 2025 – June 2026
2. Design covering the period July 2026 – May 2027
3. Transition covering the period June 2027 to March 2028
4. Go-Live covering the period April 2028 onwards.

3.7.32 Page 152-154 of the proposal discusses Governance and workstreams noting that the north and south unitary model will have a supportive and clear governance structure sitting behind it, allowing them to make key decisions that best support Worcestershire. The set up of governance boards and key workstreams will support the monitoring of progress and identify any risks early in the process supporting mitigation attempts.

3.7.33 The following workstreams have been identified as supporting implementation of the new unitary authorities. Governance and Decision Making will sit as an overarching workstream due to its importance in delivering change and a safe working environment: -

- People
- Technology
- Finance
- Contracts and legal
- Property and Estates
- Data Management
- Communications and Engagement

- Service Continuity and Delivery

Summary of Proposed Governance Arrangements

3.7.34 The commissioning councils (see page 39 of Appendix 1) propose to initially use the county council divisions and double the number of councillors currently representing county wards to make up the number of new unitary councillors as an interim measure for the elections in May 2027 resulting in the following: -

- One-unitary (if the Government selects this model): 114 councillors (5,388 residents per councillor).
- North and south (two-unitary): 114 councillors, composed of:
- North Worcestershire: 54 councillors (5,389 residents per councillor)
- South Worcestershire: 60 councillors (5,387 residents per councillor).

3.7.35 Longer-term in the north and south model, following Boundary Commission Reviews, there is the opportunity for each new unitary council to further increase the number of councillors for the 2031 elections to bring each council into line with the national average for unitary councils of 4,600 residents per councillor. This would not be possible with a one unitary model because the number of councillors would exceed the Boundary Commission's guidance of 100 as the maximum size of a council.

3.7.36 The following figures are based on estimates subject to Boundary Commission review: -

- North Worcestershire: 63 councillors (4,619 residents per councillor)
- South Worcestershire: 70 councillors (4,617 residents per councillor)

3.7.37 In terms of ensuring effective representation and delivery of services at local level, there is a strong emphasis in the proposal on the setting up of Neighbourhood Area Committee. Members are referred to Section 5 – Criteria 6 of the proposal, which is discussed in summary in paragraph 3.7.26 above.

3.7.38 As set out on pages 97-8 of the proposal, the model is designed based on the following framework: -

1. Two New Unitary Councils - North Worcestershire and South Worcestershire will provide the strategic backbone, resources and coherence while keeping decision-making local.
2. Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) - democratic forums where Worcestershire residents, councillors and partners set priorities, influence service design and hold councils to account.
3. Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs) - operational multi-agency teams delivering services across Worcestershire, aligned to local priorities and prevention-focused outcomes.

3.7.39 Together, these pillars form a continuous chain of accountability, from street to strategy, ensuring decisions, service delivery and engagement are fully integrated."

3.7.40 The proposal further states (on page 98) that: -

NACs will bring decision-making closer to communities, acting as democratic forums where councillors, partners and residents shape local priorities. Their core functions include: -

- Aligning council and partner activity with local needs.
- Holding devolved budgets to move beyond advisory roles.
- Translating community insight into operational delivery (via Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs).

3.7.41 NACs will be shaped around natural communities and local identity rather than fixed population bands, ensuring each reflects how residents experience their place. While many areas may align broadly with populations typical of other neighbourhood governance models, the two-unitary approach provides flexibility to design smaller or more tailored NACs where geography, rurality or community identity make this appropriate.

3.7.42 The proposal further states (see page 98) that, strong neighbourhood governance ensures that Worcestershire residents know how to raise the issues that matter most and trust that their concerns will be acted on. By giving councillors the mandate and tools to respond at the right level, communities can see a direct link between their voice and local action.

4.0 CHALLENGES AND RISKS

4.1 The north and south model robustly deals with a number of challenges and risks: -

a) Efficiency and Complexity of Transformation

4.1.1 The proposal includes a safe, balanced and realistic transition plan, with comprehensive day one planning to consider the extended timeframe to deliver LGR in comparison with past programmes such as in Cumbria.

4.1.2 The two-unitary model builds on existing shared services and proposes a hybrid approach to future service delivery to avoid duplication. Financial modelling shows a 3.9 year payback period based on high-level costs and savings. Enabling functions will be streamlined within each council, and collaboration will continue where scale is beneficial.

4.1.3 Prevention-led services delivered at neighbourhood level will reduce demand; this is the only way to guarantee true long-term financial sustainability.

b) Population Viability and Strategic Planning

4.1.4 The government's 500,000 population figure is a guideline only. Both councils begin at sustainable levels and are projected to exceed 300,000. There is limited evidence to suggest that smaller unitary councils will be less efficient, less sustainable or less effective due to their size. Shared service delivery functions across Worcestershire and closer collaboration through Neighbourhood Area Committees will support strategic planning.

c) Needs and Funding Imbalance

4.1.5 Demographic differences between north and south are minimal. There are distinct additional needs in the north related to deprivation; however, Fair Funding reforms will help address disparities in any potential funding imbalances. The ability for funding reforms to support targeting of local issues, such as in the north will be enhanced in the north and south model.

d) Service Fragmentation and Continuity Risks

4.1.6 A safe transfer protocol will ensure no gaps in service and seamless care for vulnerable residents. Ordinary Residence will be determined at least six months before vesting day, with clear principles and joint governance to avoid disputes. Shared safeguarding boards and a single public health function will maintain strategic continuity, and local intelligence will support faster, targeted responses and delivery

of support. The shared service arrangements would be put in place where appropriate to provide seamless continuity to service delivery.

e) Service Access and Consistency

4.1.7 Locally accessible services will be delivered through community hubs, working with voluntary and community sector partners and town and parish councils. Clear and simplified access channels will serve the new councils, ensuring clarity and ease of access. Shared strategic functions and neighbourhood governance will maintain consistent standards and equity in service access.

f) Workforce and Market Pressures

4.1.8 Shared strategic functions will be retained where scale is needed, including commissioning and market management. This supports the ability to attract specialist staff and negotiate contracts effectively. If transition is well-managed, there is no evidence to suggest workforce challenges will increase.

g) Partnership Disruption

4.1.9 Strategic partnerships will be preserved through shared boards and functions. Neighbourhood-level homelessness support will continue, integrated with housing and care. The two councils will collaborate on commissioning and specialist services, retaining efficiency and continuity across Worcestershire.

h) Democratic Representation and Local Identity

4.1.10 The north and south model reflects distinct cultural and economic profiles and strengthens local identity and accountability. Ceremonial heritage will be retained across both councils. Public engagement showed over half of respondents preferred the north and south model, citing stronger community connection. The north and south model also allows lower councillor to resident ratios, allowing councillors to be local to the areas they serve.

5.0 The position of other councils in Worcestershire

5.1 As Members will be aware, there has not been unanimity of approach to LGR as between Worcestershire County Council and

the six District Council in Worcestershire. In the lead up to the submission deadline of 28th November the other Councils are due to meet to consider LGR proposals on the following dates: -

Malvern Hills District Council	18th November
Bromsgrove District Council	19th November
Worcester City Council	25th November
Wychavon District Council	19th November

5.2 As referenced at paragraph 2.5 Worcestershire County Council and Wyre Forest District Council have to date indicated a preference for a County wide unitary authority. The dates of their council meetings that are to consider their LGR proposal/s are: -

Worcestershire County Council	6th November Full Council 20th November Cabinet
Wyre Forest District Council	12th November Full Council

5.3 Work was originally carried out for the County Council by consultants from Pricewaterhousecoopers ("PWC") who produced an analysis looking at the County model and north/south model in March 2025. PWC have continued to be engaged and have produced a final proposal paper based on a County wide model. A link to the report to members of the County Council is included in the background papers section of this report

5.4 As set out in paragraph 2.2, the approach of exploring separate north and south unitary models i.e. a "two unitary model" has been under consideration by this Council and by Bromsgrove District Council, Worcester City Council, Malvern Hills District Council and Wychavon District Council. Each of those Councils will be considering a report on the final submissions accompanied by the proposal document in Appendix 1 at their meetings on the dates listed in the table above.

5.5 It is not necessary for the same final proposals to be put forward by all the councils in an existing two-tier area. The main elements to achieve robust final proposals are that the plans are well thought out and articulated, evidence based, supported by public consultation and able to demonstrate compliance with the six criteria set out at paragraph 2.4.

6.0 Next steps

6.1 At the current time the outcome of consideration of final proposals is not expected to be notified by MHCLG to the Councils concerned until July 2026 at the earliest. This is based on the statement that Councils "could" be notified before the summer recess of Parliament which starts on 22nd July 2026[1].

6.2 As set out in Appendix 1 officers and Members will continue to be involved in preparatory steps toward the implementation of re-organisation from November 2025 onwards until notification of the decision. Although at that stage the final outcome will not be known, there will be many aspects that officers can continue to work on that will be relevant going forward regardless which model is approved by MHCLG.

6.3 Priority implementation activities are described and are being further developed on pages 110–111 of Appendix 1 covering the phases of: -

a) Prepare: November 2025 – June 2026.
b) Design: July 2026 – May 2027
c) Transition: June 2027 – March 2028
d) Go Live: Apr 2028 - onwards

6.4 There will be an element of collaboration between the two unitary authorities required alongside individual unitary authority actions.

7.0 OTHER LOCAL MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

7.1 As Members will be aware, a report was taken to Electoral Matters Committee on 21st November 2025 setting out some wider implications of LGR in terms its impact on neighbourhood governance in the Borough. The report set out the options as follows: -

- That if no further action was taken, then based on the current intentions as expressed by the government, and the contents of the proposal, the role of neighbourhood governance after vesting day would be carried out by newly created Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs).
- That in addition to the setting up of future NACs, it would be an option to appoint Charter Trustees for the Borough prior to vesting day. This would enable the civic and ceremonial traditions of the Borough to be maintained in unparished areas following the dissolution of the Council on Vesting Day.

[1] Summary of the local government reorganisation process - GOV.UK
House of Commons recess dates - UK Parliament

- That a third option to consider was whether a Community Governance Reviews should be carried out to consider the creation of new parish or town councils in the area, or alterations to existing parish council boundaries.

7.2 The outcome of the meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee on 21st October was that Members decided to take no further action at this time regarding holding a Community Governance Review. Members noted that arrangements would be introduced for effective neighbourhood governance post vesting day via the creation of NACs. Members were keen to preserve the civic identity of the Borough and recommended that officers be instructed to explore in more detail the option of appointing "Charter Trustees" for the Borough and that a further report, including costings and a timetable for appointing Charter Trustees, be presented to Council in due course.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The financial modelling within the draft proposal compares the costs and savings of the two options. These estimates have been reviewed in detail with all of the district S151 officers, at regular workshops with KPMG and are comfortable with the estimated costs and savings that have been identified.

8.2 The headline position is that recurring revenue savings for one unitary council are estimated to be £21.49m per year compared to £9.03m per year for two unitary councils. When one-off implementation costs are incorporated, the payback period for one unitary council is estimated at 1.4 years and this increases to 3.9 years for the two unitary council option.

8.3 Included within the financial modelling for two unitary authorities are estimated one off costs, which are estimated at £19.83m. These include projected disaggregation costs driven by the need to separate countywide services and realign them across new governance structures (£7.2m), together with transitional expenditure associated with programme management, ICT and system integration, workforce and organisation design, and one-off redundancy or transformation costs. It is understood that these implementation costs will have to be funded by the successor councils rather than central Government.

8.4 Whilst it is clear that one unitary council delivers more savings than two, there is a sustainable pathway with a focus on local delivery and

outcomes within the two unitary model. In reshaping services and supporting proactive transformation, residents and customers will see a more robust and efficient council in the future.

8.5 The one unitary model would likely cause sharp increases in terms of council tax across the Worcestershire area for residents in the South. This would be mitigated in the two unitary model. In terms of the north, there would be no difference in terms of a one unitary or two unitary approach due to the higher rates in this part of the county.

8.6 Local government in Worcestershire faces significant financial challenges in both the short and medium term. For 2025/26, the County Council could not set a balanced budget without the use of £15m of reserves and £33.6m of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS). The use of EFS is also expected and planned to be utilised in 2026/27. Despite being financially beneficial, LGR alone will not close the Medium-Term budget gap, and further savings may be necessary.

9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The existing legislation which enables local government reorganisations to be implemented is the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. This is the legislation which has been used previously to create county unitary authorities and was the legislation under which the invitation to submit plans for unitary local authorities was made by the government in January 2025.

9.2 As explained to Members in the previous reports on LGR, the government was intending to issue new legislation to support local government re-organisation and the introduction of Strategic Authorities and other aspects of devolution as described in the White Paper.

9.3 On 10th July 2025 the first draft of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill ("the Bill") was published. The bill is currently at the Committee Stage in the House of Commons, and it is not known when it is expected to come into effect.

9.4 Whilst the Bill contains detailed provisions in relation to the creation of Strategic Authorities, there is less detail on the issue of local government reorganisation. Some key points to note are: -

- The power to "direct" as well as invite councils to submit proposals for re-organisation has been re-introduced.
- It will no longer be possible for councils to operate a committee system and all councils currently operating under it will have to adopt new constitutions featuring leader and cabinet arrangements.
- Local authorities in England will be under a duty to make "appropriate arrangements" to secure the effective governance of any "neighbourhood area". The Secretary of State will have the power, by way of regulations, to define a neighbourhood area and to specify the parameters of what arrangements will be appropriate to meet this duty.

9.5 The Secretary of State has passed a series of generic regulations applicable to all re-organisations, under section 14 of the 2007 Act. These cover the common practical issues that arise when implementing a re-organisation including finance requirements, the transfer of assets and employees and other transitional arrangements and can be listed as follows: -

- The Local Government (Structural Changes) (Transitional Arrangements) (No.2) Regulations 2008/2867 (Transition Regulations).

- Local Government (Structural Changes) (Transfer of Functions, Property, Rights and Liabilities) Regulations 2008/2176 (2008 Regulations).

- Local Government (Structural and Boundary Changes) (Staffing) Regulations 2008 (Employment Regulations).

- Local Government (Structural Changes) (Finance) Regulations 2008/3022 (Finance Regulations)

9.6 When a proposal for a new unitary council has been agreed, the Secretary of State will issue specific regulations and orders under section 7 of the 2007 Act to create local arrangements to ensure a smooth implementation. These local regulations will cover a number of matters including: -

- Effective dates
- Establishment of a shadow authority and its membership
- Governance arrangements for shadow authority
- Duty to produce an implementation plan
- Duty of all councils to co-operate

- Arrangements for first elections
- Treatment of any specific assets or liabilities

10.0 OTHER - IMPLICATIONS

Relevant Council Priority

10.1 Any change to a new Unitary authority to either a two unitary model or a single countywide model will have a potential impact on the future of the current Redditch Borough Council priorities.

Climate Change Implications

10.2 There are no specific climate change implications.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

10.3 Please see Appendix 2 which provides an Equality Impact Assessment.

11.0 RISK MANAGEMENT

11.1 See previous section on “Challenges and Risks” at section 5 of this report.

11.2 Page 155-157 of Appendix 1 (“The Proposal”) sets out the implementation risks and mitigations. This section recognises change, and progress always brings an element of risk and therefore deals with the following matters to provide confidence in the approach being proposed: -

Operational Risks

- Complexity of disaggregating county delivered services
- Complexity of aggregating district delivered services
- Loss of expertise
- Existing council relationships pre-unitarisation
- Change fatigue in staff
- Multiple IT systems and data sources
- Programme slippage
- Capacity constraints

Financial Risks

- Disaggregation of accounting services
- Financial uncertainty

Reputational Risk

- Political differences

12.0 APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendices

Appendix 1	Transforming Worcestershire: Local government that works for people, powered by place and built for the future - The North and South Local Government Re-Organisation Proposal for Worcestershire
Appendix 2	Equality Impact Assessment

Background Papers

Report to Council dated 4th September 2025 – Local Government Re-organisation - Outcome of Options Appraisal Work

Report to Council dated 17th March 2025 – Local Government Re-organisation - Interim Plan Proposals for Worcestershire – Redditch

English Devolution White Paper - English Devolution White Paper - GOV.UK

Letter to all two-tier councils from Jim McMahon MP dated 16th December 2024

English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill published on 10th July 2025 –
English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill - GOV.UK

Worcestershire County Council – Link to proposal :Agenda for Council on Thursday, 6th November, 2025, 10.00 am - Modern Council

13.0 REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Council

17 November 2025

Portfolio Holder	Councillor Sharon Harvey, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Environmental Services	7th November 2025
Lead Director / Assistant Director	John Leach - Chief Executive Claire Felton – Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services	7th November 2025
Financial Services	Debra Goodall – Assistant - Director of Finance and Customer Services and Interim Section 151 Officer	7th November 2025
Legal Services	Claire Felton, Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services	7th November 2025

This page is intentionally left blank

Transforming Worcestershire

Local government that works for people, powered by place and built for the future

Contents

Bromsgrove District, Malvern Hills District, Redditch Borough, Worcester City and Wychavon District Councils have worked together to develop this shared case for change for Local Government Reorganisation in Worcestershire.

Through collaborative discussion and joint analysis, the five councils recognise the need for a more efficient, financially sustainable, and responsive system of local governance that better meets the needs of communities across the county.

As a result of working collectively, the five councils have identified opportunities to reduce duplication, improve service delivery and strengthen strategic capacity while retaining local identity and accountability.

The collaborative approach that has been taken to develop this case for change reflects a shared commitment to shaping a future local government model that delivers better outcomes for the people, places and economy of Worcestershire.

Foreword

Worcestershire is a county of proud places and distinct communities. Our proposal for two new unitary councils is shaped by what residents, partners and stakeholders have told us they want: local government that is responsive, resilient and ready for the future.

Of those who expressed a preference for a one or two unitary council in our "Shape Worcestershire" public survey, commissioned by all six district councils, **62.5% supported a north and south model for local government**, while **only 37.5% supported a single unitary proposal**.

Our proposal is supported by both qualitative and quantitative evidence. It is informed by a detailed options appraisal and deep-rooted engagement through 32 exercises across a wide range of stakeholders, most importantly including residents from across the county.

Reasons for supporting the north and south model were clear: better local accountability, services that reflect the differences between North and South Worcestershire, and a structure that avoids the risks of a one-size-fits-all approach. Feedback was consistent across all areas and stakeholder groups and has directly informed the proposal we are putting forward.

The north and south proposal is the only Worcestershire proposal that captures and considers genuine engagement and feedback from stakeholders throughout the entire process.

The north and south model is a deliberate design that allows services to be shaped around the needs of each area while retaining the ability to collaborate where it ensures consistency and value for money, for example, in adult social care or children's services. This hybrid approach, combining local delivery with shared services for complex functions, ensures flexibility, efficiency and improved outcomes. It avoids the risk of defaulting to a 'continuing authority' model and culture that replicates existing structures and misses the opportunity for service transformation

We are proposing reform that enables better public services, clearer accountability and stronger relationships with communities. Working in partnership with residents, communities, and town and parish councils, the two councils will be embedded in place, with open and collaborative local leadership that understands local priorities and can respond quickly to changing needs.

This proposal is also about future-proofing local government and long-term financial sustainability. Financial sustainability is not just about short-term efficiencies, it is about reducing demand over time by improving outcomes, shifting focus towards early intervention and prevention, and investing in services that support long-term resilience.

We believe this model offers the best chance to deliver lasting change that works for people. It is grounded in evidence, shaped by engagement, and focused on building a stronger future for everyone in Worcestershire, both north and south.

We're shaping a thriving Worcestershire, north and south, where every community flourishes and public satisfaction drives everything we do.

Through bold local leadership and the power of devolution, we'll unlock opportunity, remove barriers, and deliver services that truly reflect the needs of our people and places.

By creating two dynamic councils rooted in local identity, we'll build vibrant, sustainable communities where residents and partners can grow, connect, and succeed.

This is our commitment: a local and responsive Worcestershire, driven by what works best for each unique area.

[to add photos and signatures of all Leaders]

Section 1: Executive Summary

Purpose and approach

This proposal sets out a bold future for local government in Worcestershire composed of two new unitary councils in the north and south of the county. This follows a detailed analysis and evaluation of both one unitary and north and south models against the six criteria set out by government.

Our response is aligned to the English Devolution White Paper, which outlines the government's strategy for streamlined local governance through Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). These reforms will significantly alter public service delivery in Worcestershire, replacing current two-tier council structures with unitary structures that will carry responsibility for all services previously split between counties and districts, and new strategic authorities with devolved powers across the broader region.

In our proposed north and south model, the new North Worcestershire Council will be made up of Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre Forest, and South Worcestershire Council will consist of Malvern Hills, Worcester City and Wychavon.

North Worcestershire and South Worcestershire have distinct cultures, histories, and local identities. This is something to be proud of, and this proposal sets out how building upon these foundations will deliver a stronger and more sustainable future for the people of Worcestershire.

Our 'Shape Worcestershire' public engagement, which had an estimated reach across all channels of approximately 200,000, showed that the north and south model is the preferred option among residents, with **62.5% of respondents supporting it** when expressing a preference between one or two unitary councils.

Two unitary councils were seen as the best option for delivering key outcomes across improving local services, supporting local identity, and strengthening community engagement.

Worcestershire context

Worcestershire is a diverse and resilient county with a proud history. It has a strong and varied economic base across distinct geographies covering urban centres, market towns and rural areas.

Its location at the heart of the UK, combined with its natural assets and sectoral diversity, positions it as a county with a distinctive identity and a strong platform for growth. Its diversity across the north and south requires tailored interventions to support ambitions and address local challenges.

The north and south of Worcestershire are inherently different. The north is more urban and industrial with strong social and economic ties to the West Midlands. The south has a more rural and service-oriented economy with strong links to the South West of England and Warwickshire. These differences are reflected in local economies, transport patterns, and even accents.

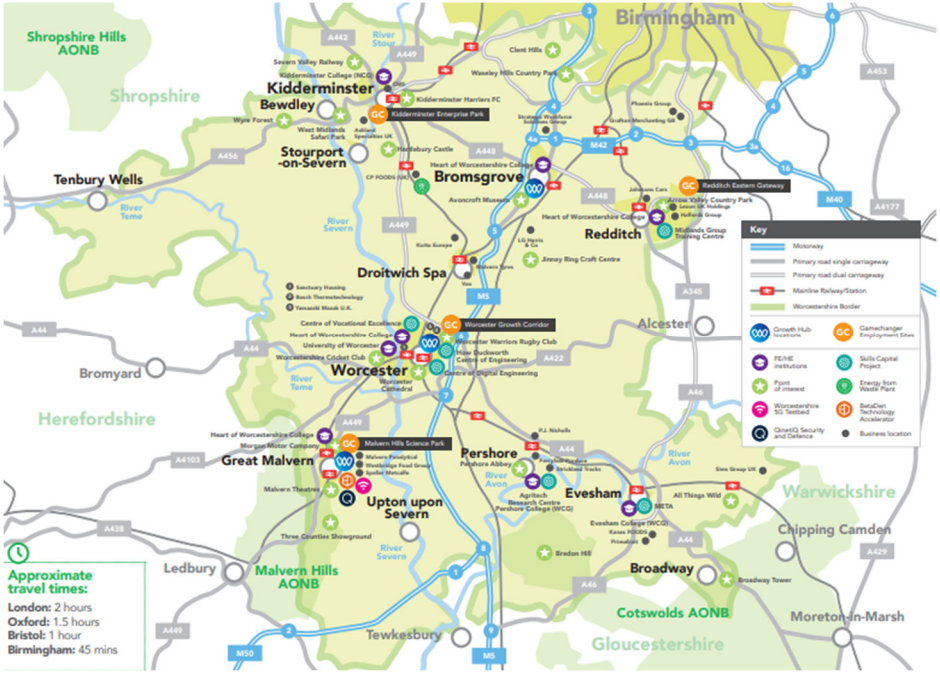
Worcestershire currently operates under a two-tier system with six district councils and a county council. Concerns have been raised about service quality, particularly in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision, following critical Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) findings. There are also growing concerns about the financial position of the county council, given its need for Exceptional Financial Support (EFS).

Worcestershire is not currently part of the Devolution Priority Programme. Work is ongoing to identify the right model for devolution, with a future Strategic Authority under consideration. Unlocking devolution is seen as essential to investing strategically in transport and infrastructure.

The county faces challenges including skills shortages, housing pressures and transport connectivity. LGR offers an opportunity to reset and deliver place-based transformation. A north and south model would enable more locally

focused delivery, better reflect distinct identities, and address concerns raised during our comprehensive public engagement.

Figure 1.1. Worcestershire's Plan for Growth 2020-2040[1]



The scale of the challenge in Worcestershire

Worcestershire is facing escalating service pressures. Financial instability, rising demand in adult and children's social care, and systemic issues in SEND, housing, and transport are stretching the current system beyond its limits.

The two-tier structure has struggled to respond effectively. Fragmented governance and reactive service models have led to duplication, inefficiency, and poor outcomes for service users.

Key challenges faced in Worcestershire
Adult social care demand is forecast to grow by 57% among over-65s by 2038, placing unsustainable pressure on services and budgets.
43.7% of respondents believe the current system **does not support strong community engagement** and **prefer a two-unitary model to improve local connection.**
Residents report **delays and confusion in resolving local issues** due to the current two-tier system and remote service structures.
The **proportion of residents aged 65+ is expected to rise** from 24.2% in 2025 to 27.6% by 2035, increasing demand for care and safe housing.
Worcestershire has the highest rate of looked-after children among county councils, 87 per 10,000 compared to a 60 average (with 1,044 children in care).
Qualification levels vary significantly across the county, 25.9% Level 4 attainment in Redditch vs. 38.8% in Malvern Hills, limiting access to skilled jobs and training.
South Worcestershire has **only 1.71 years of housing land supply**; Redditch faces **housing deprivation and homelessness** and is developing its council stock.
Gross Value Added (GVA) per hour ranges from £25.20 in Wyre Forest to £42.30 in Bromsgrove, reflecting **unequal economic performance and distinct sector strengths across districts.**

The proposed north and south model offers a clear way forward. It enables locally accountable leadership, embeds prevention at neighbourhood level,

[1] Worcestershire's Plan for Growth 2020-2040

and tailors services to the distinct needs of communities across Worcestershire.

In responding to each of the above challenges, we pledge to deliver the following local outcomes. They represent how things will be different for the people of Worcestershire in a north and south model:

1. **Public services shift from crisis to prevention**
2. **Communities feel more connected and empowered**
3. **Local services respond faster to everyday issues**
4. **Vulnerable adults live healthier, happier, and safer lives**
5. **Children and families supported to stay together**
6. **Young people have better access to skills and jobs**
7. **Better housing supports healthier lives**
8. **People and businesses benefit from stronger local economies**

Our vision for responsive, resilient and renewed local government for Worcestershire

This proposal is about future-proofing local government and providing long-term sustainability for the people of both North and South Worcestershire.

It was vitally important to incorporate the views of our residents, members, communities, officers, and partners in the process and ensure that our approach was focused on what would be different in the future. Our vision for LGR reflects this deep and considered engagement.

"We're shaping a thriving Worcestershire, north and south, where every community flourishes and public satisfaction drives everything we do.

Through bold local leadership and the power of devolution, we'll unlock opportunity, remove barriers, and deliver services that truly reflect the needs of our people and places.

By creating two dynamic councils rooted in local identity, we'll build vibrant, sustainable communities where residents and partners can grow, connect, and succeed.

This is our commitment: a local and responsive Worcestershire, driven by what works best for each unique area."

How the north and south model meets the government's six criteria

We conducted a detailed options appraisal to determine the most suitable model for Worcestershire, assessing both options against the government's six criteria.

As set out in the summary table below, the north and south model for Worcestershire is presented as strongly meeting five of the six criteria. While the north and south model is rated medium for 'Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks' under Criteria 2, this is mitigated through a proven track record of collaborative leadership, retained and enhanced shared services, and a phased transition plan that safeguards critical services and enables long-term transformation. This model is seen as highly effective in establishing a single tier of local government by creating sensible geographies, fostering strong local connections, and improving democratic representation.

Figure 1.2. Summary of north and south model scored against government criteria

North and south model	Scoring against criteria		Why the north and south model meets the government's criteria
	**1: Establishing a single tier of local government**	**H**	✓ Enables a tailored focus on distinct economic strengths and opportunities ✓ Reflects unique urban and rural geographical differences ✓ Strengthens democratic accountability and representation
	2: Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks	**M**	✓ Balances scale of population with the ability to work effectively at a local level ✓ Drives efficiencies coupled with driving down demand and costs ✓ Enables targeted transformation to design future-proof organisations
	3: High quality and sustainable public services	**H**	✓ Delivers services at an optimal scale, from strategic to local, through a hybrid model ✓ Builds on existing strengths of shared services and local service delivery ✓ Drives long-term sustainability through shifting focus from crisis to prevention
	4: Working together to understand and meet local needs	**H**	✓ Shaped by detailed engagement with residents, staff, members, and partners ✓ Aligns with the preferred model expressed by 63% of residents ✓ Reflects the distinct local identities and cultural profiles of the north and south
North Worcestershire: Bromsgrove Redditch Wyre Forest	**South Worcestershire:** Malvern Hills Worcester Wychavon	**5: Supporting devolution arrangements**	**H**	✓ Represents the distinct needs of the north and south at the strategic level ✓ Balances council size and scale across constituent strategic authority members ✓ Enables clear and simple governance arrangements
		6: Stronger community engagement and	**H**	✓ Embeds community empowerment through NACs (Neighbourhood Area Committees) and INTs (Integrated Neighbourhood Teams) ✓ Enables resident-led decision-making and tailored local services ✓ Builds on proven district-led approaches to early intervention and prevention

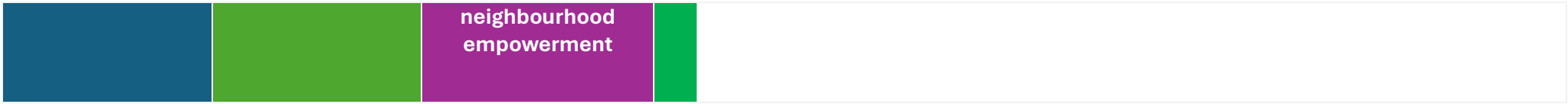


Figure 1.3. Summary of one unitary model scored against government criteria

One unitary Model		
		Bromsgrove Malvern Hills Redditch Worcester Wychavon Wyre Forest
1. High	2. High	3. High
4. Medium	5. High	6. Medium

The one unitary model prioritises efficiency and scale, meeting the guiding population principle and forecasting the highest financial savings with the shortest transition cost payback period. It aims to simplify service delivery and maintain existing pathways for social care and health, providing a foundation for coordinated economic development and supporting regional devolution arrangements.

However, this model faces challenges in addressing concerns about the loss of localism, remote decision-making, and diminished community involvement, with public feedback strongly indicating a preference for the two-unitary model.

This model requires careful governance to balance local and regional priorities and to ensure high-quality public services across diverse areas. The challenge of aggregating place services that rely on local work forces and key logistical locations bring their own complexities and risks to service disruption.

Case for change: Why two councils is right for Worcestershire

The table below sets out the key reasons why the north and south model is right for Worcestershire. It compares the benefits of two councils with the potential limitations of a one unitary model across governance, service transformation, economic growth, and public engagement. This makes a compelling case which is backed up with evidence and the support received from residents, staff and partners through in-depth and ongoing engagement.

Two councils are right for Worcestershire because they:			Comparison to a one unitary model
1	**Reflect the clear preference of key stakeholders in Worcestershire**	• **62.5%** of total responses expressing a preference **favour the north and south model** • The **only Worcestershire proposal that captures and considers genuine engagement and feedback from stakeholders** throughout the entire process, with over **4,200 responses** including residents, staff, members, partners, and town and parish councils	• **Only 37.5%** of survey respondents expressing a preference selected the one unitary model as their preference • The one unitary model has **not been subject to public engagement** and has **not been developed in tandem with elected members**
2	**Drive long-term financial sustainability through a focus on outcomes**	• Focuses on **neighbourhood-based preventative services**, enabling co-designed support that shifts **delivery from crisis to prevention** • Drives long-term **financial sustainability through focus on reform** and **sustainable savings**, not short-term efficiencies • Delivers synergy with the Local Government Outcomes Framework (LGOF) • District Councils' Network (DCN) research shows **smaller councils** are able to deliver services **more efficiently and effectively**	• **Risks continuing with an approach** that has struggled to resolve financial pressures, leading to the need for EFS • While reorganisation may deliver short-term efficiencies, it **does not offer the long-term sustainability** that comes from genuine place-based, prevention-focused delivery
3	**Keep decision making local and close to communities**	• **Decision-making stays close to communities** by giving opportunity for **lower resident-to-councillor ratios** when compared to the one unitary model • Elected members are **more accountable and responsive** to residents' needs	• **Weakens democratic representation, distancing elected members from communities** • Reduces the likelihood that local needs are reflected in decision-making

4	**Unlock a relational approach to working with local partners**	• **Preserves local identity** while empowering communities and partners to shape local priorities • Champions **community-led services** that strengthen democratic participation and **reflect local needs**	• **Too large to maintain meaningful neighbourhood influence** • **Weakens democratic accountability** and **erodes the trust**, **relationships** and **local intelligence** built over time
5	**Reflect the unique geographies and local identities of North and South Worcestershire**	• **South Worcestershire combines large, dispersed rural areas** with 200k+ residents in **urban centres** • **North Worcestershire** has rural elements but **is more urban** and closely linked to the West Midlands • **45.7% of respondents**[2] believe the north and south model **best supports local identity**	• **Applying a blanket solution** that risks **overlooking varied commuting patterns, transport demands, and local infrastructure challenges** • Public engagement shows only **20.3% of respondents**[3] felt the one unitary model best supports local identity
6	**Enable tailored economic and place strategies to unlock growth**	• Enables **tailored economic strategies for North and South Worcestershire,** reflecting long-standing regional strengths and opportunities • **Supports effective planning** for housing and infrastructure, building on existing arrangements such as the South Worcestershire Development Plan (SWDP)	• **Imposes a one-size-fits-all approach to economic development, investment, and skills planning** across a diverse county • **Dilutes the ability to respond** to the distinct economic profiles, sectoral strengths, and workforce challenges of North and South Worcestershire
7	**Unlock devolution through balance and flexibility**	• Supports regional economic growth by **offering balanced representation and flexibility to collaborate** within future strategic structures • **Maintains population parity** with neighbouring areas and enables **distinct voices from north and south** to influence how devolved funding is deployed	• Population and economic weight **risks overshadowing smaller partners,** undermining balanced representation • Scale of a single council could necessitate **more complex governance arrangements** to avoid democratic imbalance within the strategic authority
8	**Maximise the opportunity to transform service delivery models**	• **Maximises the opportunity** to transform service delivery, particularly in social care through **neighbourhood-based care** in partnership with the voluntary and community sector (VCS)	• **Risks defaulting to 'continuing authority' model** and/or culture that replicates existing structures and misses the opportunity for service transformation

[2] Shaping Worcestershire public engagement campaign and survey 2025
[3] Shaping Worcestershire public engagement campaign and survey 2025

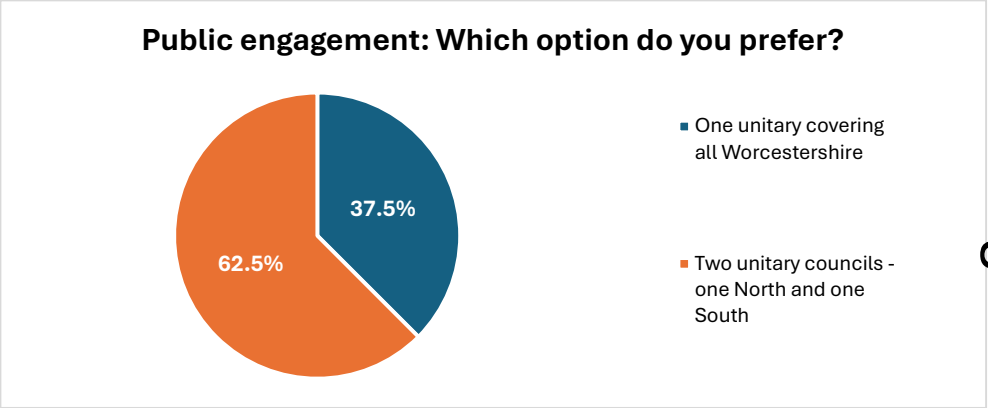
		• **Hybrid approach to service delivery will balance local and regional delivery**, with services disaggregated only when safe, legal, and optimal	• **Centralised approach is unlikely to deliver effective service redesign** or meet the distinct needs of Worcestershire's people and communities
9	**Reflect balanced needs and enable targeted local delivery**	• North and south have **meaningful differences** that shape local service demand needs • **Enables tailored, proactive service planning** using local intelligence, supporting early intervention and neighbourhood-based delivery	• **Challenges in tailoring services** across a diverse geography • Risk of **reduced responsiveness** and **continued rising cost pressures** in high-demand areas that require a local and prevention-led approach
10	**Support a fairer and more proportionate approach to council tax harmonisation**	• Allows each new council to harmonise rates within its own geography, **avoiding steep increases** for areas with historically lower rates • **Reduces the risk of disproportionate rises** for the larger population in South Worcestershire, where current rates are lower and the tax base is broader	• Likely to require **harmonisation to the highest existing rate** (i.e. Redditch), resulting in **sharper increases for a greater number of residents** • Applies a **blanket approach** that **ignores local tax profiles** and **creates inequity** across communities

Extensive support for a north and south model

The preference for a north and south model has been clearly expressed through extensive public engagement which was carried out by all district councils in Worcestershire.

This is the only proposal being submitted from across the county that has listened and can demonstrate meaningful and extensive stakeholder engagement throughout the entire drafting process.

Figure 1.4. Public engagement demonstrating 62.5% respondents' preference for two unitary councils in comparison to 37.5% for one unitary council [total 3241 respondents][4]



In a survey conducted across the commissioning councils, **67% of staff selected 'two unitary authorities' as their preference**. In addition, the

[4] Shaping Worcestershire public engagement campaign and survey 2025

majority of district councillors across five of the six councils in the county voted in favour of the north and south model, reflecting the overwhelming feeling that a one unitary model would not benefit the communities of Worcestershire.

Financial case for change

There is growing concern about the precarious financial position across Worcestershire, driven largely by the scale and fragility of Worcestershire County Council's budget and reliance on EFS.

The scale of rising costs, increasing demand, and funding constraints are too large to deal with through reorganisation alone. Financial sustainability is ultimately not about efficiencies delivered via economies of scale, and councils across Worcestershire have already worked hard to secure efficiencies from shared services, management teams, and ways of working.

The north and south model is projected to generate an estimated £9.03m in recurring revenue savings by consolidating and reducing duplication, streamlining service delivery, and achieving economies of scale in staffing, procurement, and infrastructure. This will achieve a payback period of 3.86 years.

This analysis does not recognise the true value of reform, which extends beyond efficiencies to improving service outcomes, local accountability, and long-term financial sustainability.

The north and south model embraces the once-in-a-generation opportunity to design new organisations that are modern, efficient and fit for the future, focusing on being prevention-led to drive true financial sustainability.

Figure 1.5. Financial modelling summary of options

Costs and savings	North and south model	Key features
Gross reorganisation savings (£m)	(£16.23m)	Achieves a credible and sustainable gross savings while retaining local identify and operational resilience through two balanced unitary councils. Reflects existing maturity of shared services and collaboration across districts and proposed sharing of services in the hybrid future delivery model. Implementation costs comparable to one unitary model but deliver greater long-term alignment to place-based delivery. Offers strong platform for preventative reform, community integration, local engagement and outcomes over time which will drive genuine long-term financial sustainability.
Disaggregation costs (£m)	£7.20m	
Recurring revenue savings (£m)	(£9.03m)	
One-off implementation costs (£m)	£19.83m	
Estimated payback period	3.86yrs	

How we will implement LGR

The implementation of the north and south model in Worcestershire will take place in four structured phases:

1. **Prepare:** Nov 2025 – June 2026
2. **Design:** July 2026 – May 2027
3. **Transition:** June 2027 – March 2028
4. **Go-Live:** April 2028 onwards

Success hinges on close collaboration, robust programme management, and prompt mobilisation, underpinned by a comprehensive governance framework with boards and workstreams to monitor progress, manage risks, and ensure effective decision-making. Implementation will draw on lessons from past LGR programmes and prioritise stakeholder engagement, ensuring residents, officers, members, and partners are all bought-in and aligned.

Conclusion

The case for two councils in Worcestershire is clear. The north and south model:

- **Supports long-term financial sustainability** through **prevention-led reform and neighbourhood-based services**
- **Reflects the strong and consistent preference** of residents, staff, and partners across the county
- Delivers **stronger local accountability and decision-making**, with councillors closer to the communities they serve
- Enables **tailored service delivery and planning** that responds to the distinct needs of North and South Worcestershire
- Embraces the **opportunity for genuine transformation**

It is the only option shaped by genuine engagement, backed by evidence, and designed to deliver better outcomes for Worcestershire.

Section 2: Purpose and Worcestershire context

This section includes:

Purpose of this report

This section sets out the case for reform in response to national policy, outlines the rationale for a north and south model, and explains why a north and south model best reflects Worcestershire's geography, identity and existing partnerships. It summarises the options considered and introduces the proposed configuration, providing the foundation for the detailed evaluation that follows.

Responding to government

The English Devolution White Paper (16 December 2024) outlines the government's strategy for streamlined local governance. This aims to shift power from central government to local and regional bodies, replace existing two-tier local government with unitary authorities, and create new combined authorities with devolved powers in transport, housing, and skills.

These reforms will significantly alter public service delivery in Worcestershire. Upon completion of the LGR programme, Worcestershire's county council and its six district councils will be replaced by unitary structures that will carry responsibility for all services.

Two unitary councils, north and south, for Worcestershire

Following a detailed options appraisal process and significant engagement with members, residents, staff and partners, we believe that the north and south model set out in this proposal is the best option for a strong, responsive and resilient local government for Worcestershire.

The north and south of Worcestershire are inherently different. The north is more urban and industrial with strong social and economic ties to the West Midlands. The south has a more rural and service-oriented economy with strong links to the South West of England and Warwickshire. These differences are reflected in local economies, transport patterns, and even accents.

Three options were considered in our options appraisal:

1. A single unitary
2. Two unitary councils with complete service disaggregation
3. Two unitary councils with shared services for some critical services

A three-unitary option was not considered due to lack of viability in meeting the size, scale, and coherence required by government. Doing nothing is also not an option, given the urgency of the challenges facing the system and the need for LGR and devolution to support system-wide change and improvement.

In the proposed north and south model, the new North Worcestershire will consist of Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre Forest, while South Worcestershire will consist of Malvern Hills, Worcester City and Wychavon respectively.

Figure 2.1. Map of Worcestershire and proposed unitary configuration

Figure 2.2 – Population figures of proposed new unitary authorities

Unitary	Areas	Population (2024)[5]	Population (2032) / growth from 2023	Population (2047) / growth from 2023
North Worcestershire	Bromsgrove Redditch Wyre Forest	293,445	300,113 2.27%	314,356 7.13%
South Worcestershire	Malvern Hills Worcester City Wychavon	327,915	345,053 5.23%	373,506 13.90%

Why the north and south model

The proposed composition of the north and south model reflects the historic and recognised distinction between the north and south of Worcestershire:

- **Unique cultures and economies**: The north and south of Worcestershire are distinctly different places.
  The north looks to Birmingham and the West Midlands, and is a hub for advanced, high-value manufacturing, engineering, and business services, steeped in history with Redditch famous for its needle making and being one of the first new towns.
  The south looks inwards to Worcester City and outwards to Herefordshire, Gloucestershire, and Warwickshire, and is more focused on cyber, defence, and agricultural industries.
- **Existing structures and partnerships**: District councils in both North and South Worcestershire have a strong and sustained history of collaboration. This includes joint policies and strategic planning across housing, tourism, development and regeneration. Importantly, four of the six councils (two in the north and two in the south) have operated shared council functions for many years. These shared services span IT systems, leadership structures and operational delivery, demonstrating a proven, experienced and sustainable track record in joint working. This foundation provides confidence in the ability of the proposed north and south model to deliver coherent and efficient services from day one and proves that the districts already function effectively across boundaries.

The north and south model offers the strongest fit for Worcestershire's geography, identity and existing ways of working. It builds on established partnerships and recognises the distinct character of the north and south. By aligning with current structures and local priorities, it enables a smoother transition and more effective delivery of services tailored to each area's needs.

The collaboration of five of the six district councils in the preparation proposal demonstrates the ability to work together with an agreed purpose and shared commitment to deliver the best services possible for the local people of Worcestershire. In addition, input from Wyre Forest District Council was provided as part of the 'Shape Worcestershire' public engagement.

The structure of this document

This proposal sets out the background and context for Worcestershire, highlighting both the opportunities presented by LGR and devolution, and the challenges these reforms aim to address.

It summarises the options appraisal process, which led to the recommendation of a north and south model, and sets out a clear vision for unitary government in Worcestershire. The report concludes with a high-level implementation plan, outlining immediate priorities and long-term steps.

The main content is structured around the six government criteria, providing a clear narrative for why the north and south model is the best fit for Worcestershire.

A detailed qualitative evaluation against each criterion is included in Section 4, with the full options appraisal approach and scoring set out in Appendix 2.

[5] Population estimates for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics

Worcestershire context

Worcestershire is a diverse and resilient county, with a strong rural economy, growing sectors like advanced manufacturing and cyber, and significant tourism value in South Worcestershire, coupled with business and professional services and precision engineering in North Worcestershire. However, challenges in skills, housing, transport and service delivery persist. The current two-tier system is under strain, particularly at the county level, in delivery of adult and children's services, and residents have voiced clear priorities around infrastructure, local services and council tax. LGR offers a chance to address these issues through a more responsive, locally focused model, building on the successes and track record of district level, and therefore place-based delivery.

Worcestershire the place and its economy

Worcestershire is a county of diversity and resilience, with a strong and varied economic base that spans urban centres, market towns, and expansive rural landscapes.

North Worcestershire (comprising the areas covered by Bromsgrove, Redditch, and Wyre Forest Councils) is seen as having a more urban landscapes contrasting South Worcestershire (comprising the areas covered by Malvern Hills, Worcester City, and Wychavon Councils) where it is well known for its rural and green landscapes. Micro-businesses form the backbone of the Worcestershire economy, accounting for 77% of all enterprises, and this broad foundation helps insulate the county from sector-specific economic shocks.[6]

The county's rural character is vast, with 86% of its geography classified as rural[7]. These areas are home to 27% of the population and contribute 30% of local employment, particularly in smart farming and construction.

Meanwhile, professional services continue to expand, supported by a business environment that benefits from joined-up support through Worcestershire's Growth Hub and a track record of successful enterprise zone development.

Tourism plays a vital role in Worcestershire's economy, generating nearly £690 million annually[8]. The county's rich natural and cultural assets, including Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, heritage sites, and attractions like the Severn Valley Railway and West Midlands Safari Park make North Worcestershire a particularly strong contributor to this sector.

Bromsgrove, located in the north of the county, exemplifies Worcestershire's strategic connectivity. Its close ties with Birmingham, the Black Country, and Solihull shape infrastructure, transport, and employment patterns. Investments and improvements to motorway junctions and rail services reflect the importance of these cross-boundary relationships in supporting regional mobility and economic integration.

Worcestershire's location at the heart of the UK, combined with its natural assets and sectoral diversity, positions it as a county with a distinctive dual identity and a strong platform for sustainable economic growth, characterised by the differences in experience in the north and the south of the county.

Local government landscape

Worcestershire currently operates under a two-tier system with seven councils: six borough, city and district councils (Bromsgrove, Redditch, Wyre Forest, Malvern Hills, Worcester City, and Wychavon) and Worcestershire County Council, which delivers upper-tier services.

This system has led to concerns about service quality against countywide provision, particularly among district councils, who are witness to the findings of Ofsted and the CQC. Ofsted and CQC have identified "widespread and/or systematic failings" in services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), requiring urgent action [April 2024].[9]

[6] Worcestershire's Plan for Growth 2020-2040
[7] 2021 Rural Urban Classification - Office for National Statistics
[8] WLEP-Worcestershire-Economic-2024-A4-report-FINAL.pdf
[9] Area SEND inspection of Worcestershire Local Area Partnership, April 2024

Our resident engagement has highlighted priorities around infrastructure planning, maintaining local services and facilities, and council tax levels. There is concern that larger unitary authorities could dilute service quality due to stretched budgets, staff shortages and increased bureaucracy. The DCN's analysis[10] related to population size and council performance reinforces these concerns, finding no compelling evidence that larger councils deliver better outcomes or offer greater efficiency. Instead, the findings suggest that smaller unitary authorities are often better placed to deliver effective, sustainable and responsive services. This aligns with feedback from our extensive engagement, which indicates a clear preference for smaller unitary councils which are seen as more agile and capable of understanding and meeting community needs.

Figure 2.3. Current boundary lines in Worcestershire

Figure 2.4. Characteristics of areas in current boundary lines

Council	Population (2023)[11]	Geography (sq km)[12]	Councillors	Net Revenue budget (£m)[13]
Bromsgrove	101,685	217	31	15.3
Redditch	87,847	54	27	13.5
Wyre Forest	103,913	195	33	15.7
Worcester City	106,671	33	35	13.2
Malvern Hills	83,227	557	31	10.7
Wychavon	138,017	664	43	13.0
Worcestershire County	621,360	1,741	57	495.6
Total	**621,360**	**1,741**	**257**	**577.0**

Devolution in Worcestershire

Devolution is the transfer of powers and funding from national to local government to ensure that decisions are made closer to local people, communities and businesses.

In January 2025, the government confirmed that Worcestershire was not on the list for the Devolution Priority Programme, which would have accelerated the transfer of powers from central government to a strategic authority.

At present, we are working with partners across Worcestershire to determine the right model for devolution in the region, including the potential footprint of

[10] DCN's analysis on LGR population size and council performance, October 2025

the future Strategic Authority. Worcestershire needs to unlock devolution to invest more strategically in transport and infrastructure across the region.

There are several potential options which have all been considered within *Section 4: Criteria 5* of this report.

Challenges to be addressed through LGR

Worcestershire faces a range of challenges affecting residents, services and places. These include skills shortages, housing pressures, and transport and connectivity issues. While these are not unique to the county, they require local solutions tailored to Worcestershire's specific needs.

LGR provides an opportunity to reset and deliver place-based transformation. New unitary councils would have the scale, resources and delivery capability to address regional priorities more effectively. A north and south model would also give greater voice to areas that have historically felt overlooked, with smaller, locally focused councils better placed to reflect distinct identities and needs.

Loss of local representation was a key concern raised by residents in the Shape Worcestershire survey. Larger unitary boundaries risk diluting local voice and visibility and therefore exacerbating the democratic deficit that leads to a more disengaged and fragmented society which is less content. The proposed north and south model mitigates this by aligning with existing economic geographies, cultural ties and joint working arrangements, helping ensure all communities remain represented.

What our residents have told us is important

Results of our engagement were clear on the things that residents prioritise:[11]:

- Infrastructure planning, e.g. roads, schools, health (64%)
- Maintaining or improving local services and council-owned facilities, e.g. community centres, sports grounds, arts centres, museums, etc. (59%)
- Council tax levels (45%)

"Education, NHS services, mental health support and free activities for all is at the top of my list and needs to be priority." – Redditch resident

Survey data shows that residents believe two unitary councils will better improve services (45%), support local identity (46%) and strengthen community engagement (44%). In contrast, the one-unitary model is seen as remote, less representative and more likely to dilute local priorities.

This proposal sets out how LGR can support the development of a sustainable, locally tailored model of government for Worcestershire. It outlines the opportunity to restructure services, address long-standing challenges, and improve outcomes for residents.

[11] Shaping Worcestershire public engagement campaign and survey 2025

Section 3: Our vision for responsive, resilient and renewed local government for Worcestershire

Our vision for responsive, resilient and renewed local government for Worcestershire

This section sets out a shared ambition for a successful Worcestershire, built on strong local places and responsive public services. It introduces local outcomes focused on improving lives, transforming services, and enabling open, community-led leadership. The vision will guide decision-making and ensure future structures reflect the needs and priorities of Worcestershire's communities.

We're shaping a thriving Worcestershire, north and south, where every community flourishes and public satisfaction drives everything we do.

Through bold local leadership and the power of devolution, we'll unlock opportunity, remove barriers, and deliver services that truly reflect the needs of our people and places.

By creating two dynamic councils rooted in local identity, we'll build vibrant, sustainable communities where residents and partners can grow, connect, and succeed.

This is our commitment: a local and responsive Worcestershire, driven by what works best for each unique area.

Creating the best public services for Worcestershire

LGR is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform public services and not just replicate what already exists or exacerbate existing issues on an increased scale.

Two new councils for north and south Worcestershire will shift services from crisis to prevention, embedding delivery in places and building on the deep relationships and trust held by the district councils.

Our ambition is clear that Worcestershire should have the best public services in the UK. Every child, adult and family should receive the support they need, to live safely and independently. Services will be designed around people and places, promoting wellbeing, building resilience and deliver long-term outcomes.

Services will be delivered at the right scale, based on what works best. Integrated neighbourhood teams will bring professionals together around individuals and families, breaking down siloes and improving access to support. This north and south model ensures strong leadership, clear accountability, and robust governance for high-risk services.

Our guiding principles related to people services put people first, prioritise prevention, value local connections and streamline delivery to make services agile, efficient and responsive. *For more information see Section 4: Criteria 3.*

In delivering our shared ambition from Worcestershire, our proposal will deliver the following eight local outcomes:

1. **Public services shift from crisis to prevention:** Neighbourhood based preventative services will reduce long-term demand, improve outcomes and enable earlier, more effective support for residents.
2. **Communities feel more connected and empowered:** Neighbourhood level decision-making and stronger partnerships with town and parish councils and VCSEs will increase civic participation, trust, and pride in place.
3. **Local services respond faster to everyday issues:** Smaller, locally focused councils will deliver more responsive services, resolving issues such as fly-tipping, potholes, and graffiti more quickly and effectively.
4. **Vulnerable adults live healthier, happier, and safer lives:** Targeted housing improvements will reduce hospital admissions and care costs, with fewer people living in cold or unsafe homes and fewer children exposed to damp and mould.
5. **Children and families be supported to stay together:** Families at risk will be supported sooner, reducing the number of children entering care and shortening time spent under protection plans, helping children thrive in safe, stable homes.
6. **Young people have better access to skills and jobs:** Tailored economic strategies will strengthen links with local employers and education providers, boosting training and employment opportunities across North and South Worcestershire.
7. **Better housing supporting healthier lives:** Tailored housing strategies will build on district strengths to increase the supply of energy-efficient, affordable homes and reduce homelessness, helping people live healthier, more stable lives in communities they know and trust.
8. **People and businesses benefit from stronger local economies:** Tailored economic strategies and closer links with employers and education providers will boost skills, create jobs, and support inclusive growth across North and South Worcestershire.

How this vision and local outcomes were developed

Our vision was developed collaboratively by Chief Executives and Leaders from the five commissioning councils, Bromsgrove, Redditch, Malvern Hills, Worcester, and Wychavon and shaped by input from all 167 councillors across these councils.

The eight local outcomes were defined in response to some of the challenges currently facing Worcestershire. They reflect how life will improve for residents under a north and south model. These outcomes were refined through multiple iterations to ensure they are both ambitious and achievable.

Both the vision and outcomes were informed by extensive stakeholder engagement, including resident surveys, to ensure community perspectives are embedded throughout.

How the vision will be used

Our vision provides a clear strategic direction for LGR in Worcestershire. It sets out a shared ambition for a thriving, responsive county. This will guide consistent decision-making, shape the design of future structures, and support effective engagement with residents and partners.

Why the north and south model is best placed to deliver on our vision

The north and south model aligns with the vision for a thriving, responsive Worcestershire by keeping decision-making close to communities, enabling tailored economic and place strategies and empowering local partners to shape services.

It reflects the distinct identities and geographies of north and south Worcestershire, supports neighbourhood-led transformation, and offers greater flexibility in managing local financial requirements.

With strong public support and a clear mandate from local councils, it provides the foundation for bold leadership, meaningful devolution, and improved outcomes for both residents and businesses.

What our residents have told us is important

"For effective service delivery, local knowledge of an area is crucial, to benefit all residents and businesses in the area. A huge unitary council will lose sight of this." – Wyre Forest Resident

Further detail on how the proposal meets the government criteria is provided in Section 4 with scoring and evaluation in Appendix 2: Options appraisal.

Section 4: How this proposal meets MHCLG's six assessment criteria

This case for change includes a section for each of the six government criteria:

Criteria 1: Establishment of a single tier of local government	• Two distinct and thriving economies • Two coherent and functional geographies • Effective structures for local government delivery
Criteria 2: Right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks	• Balanced and sustainable populations • Delivering efficiencies to support council finances • Minimising transition complexity and enabling transformation • Managing debt and establishing a firmer financial footing
Criteria 3: Delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens	• Creating the best public services for Worcestershire • Reforming services for the twenty-first century • Transforming adult services • Transforming children's services • Transforming wider local public services
Criteria 4: Working together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views	• The only model shaped by significant engagement with residents and partners • Two authorities grounded in local identity, culture, and history
Criteria 5: Structures to support devolution arrangements	• Joined up approach to unlock devolution across Worcestershire • Devolution options for Worcestershire
Criteria 6: Stronger community engagement and genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment	• Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment across Worcestershire • Building on best practice community engagement

Criteria 1: Establishment of a single tier of local government

This section includes:

Proposal section	Government criteria addressed	Case for the north and south model
Two distinct and thriving economies	**Criteria 1a.** Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area.	North and South Worcestershire have clearly defined economic profiles, with different sector strengths, workforce characteristics and investment priorities. A north and south model reflects these differences, enabling targeted growth strategies, tailored skills planning and locally relevant service delivery. Each council would operate from a stable and proportionate tax base, supporting financial sustainability. The model also strengthens democratic accountability and aligns with existing sub-regional planning structures, providing a coherent platform for future devolution.
Two coherent and functional geographies	**Criteria 1b.** Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs	The north and south model reflects the distinct urban and rural geographies of North and South Worcestershire, enabling tailored service delivery, transport planning and housing strategies. It avoids the operational complexity and spatial incoherence of a single unitary, supporting more responsive, place-based governance across manageable footprints.
Effective local government structures	**Criteria 1d.** Proposals should describe clearly the single tier local government structures it is putting forward for the whole of the area, and explain how, if implemented, these are expected to achieve the outcomes described	The north and south model provides a resilient and flexible governance structure, capable of adapting to future strategic and local challenges. It embeds neighbourhood leadership, strengthens democratic representation, and enables tailored service delivery. Public engagement shows strong support for this approach, particularly in rural areas. It avoids the risks of centralisation and creation of a democratic deficit and maintains trusted and effective local partnerships.
Criteria 1c - 'Proposals should be supported by robust evidence and analysis and include an explanation of the outcomes it is expected to achieve, including evidence of estimated costs/benefits and local engagement' - is delivered through all sections in this proposal.		

Two distinct and thriving economies

Criteria 1a. Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area.

North and South Worcestershire have clearly defined economic profiles, with different sector strengths, workforce characteristics and investment priorities. A north and south model reflects these differences, enabling targeted growth strategies, tailored skills planning and locally relevant service delivery. Each council would operate from a stable tax base, supporting financial sustainability. The model also strengthens democratic accountability and aligns with existing sub-regional planning structures, providing a coherent platform for future devolution.

Two distinct economic areas

North and South Worcestershire have distinct economic profiles. The Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEP) 2020–2040 Plan for Growth[12] recognises that the county comprises geographically diverse areas with unique economic bases and sector strengths, requiring tailored interventions to support growth and address local challenges. The LEP has struggled to deliver effectively at a countywide level, as the scale and diversity of Worcestershire make a single economic strategy difficult to implement.

While North Worcestershire is generally more urban and industrial in character, and South Worcestershire more rural and service-oriented, both contain their own distinctive mix of urban centres and rural communities.

The rural areas in the north, such as parts of Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest, differ in character and needs from those in the south, such as the dispersed villages of Malvern Hills or the agricultural landscapes of Wychavon. Likewise, the south includes significant urban populations, with Worcester City and major towns like Evesham and Droitwich Spa contributing to a vibrant urban economy.

This diversity within each geography reinforces the case for the north and south model, with each council able to tailor services and strategies to their unique blend of urban and rural needs, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach.

The north holds strong economic ties with Birmingham and the West Midlands, while the south is more closely linked to the South West of England and Warwickshire. These differences are reflected in the types of public services delivered and the infrastructure required to support them. Key industries in each of the areas are set out in the table below.

North Worcestershire	• **Advanced manufacturing and engineering innovation**: Redditch and Wyre Forest are hubs for precision engineering, light manufacturing, and automotive supply chains. Redditch has three times the national average employment in manufacturing. • **Business and professional services**: Bromsgrove has a strong presence in financial services and business administration services. • **Health and social care**: Wyre Forest and Redditch have significant employment in health, supported by local hospitals and care services. • **Retail**: Kidderminster and Redditch have established retail centres, with regeneration efforts underway. • **Logistics and distribution**: Proximity to the M42 and M5 corridors supports warehousing and logistics operations. • **Industrial land use**: Concentrated industrial estates in Redditch and Wyre Forest support SMEs and light industrial activity.

[12] Plan for Growth - Worcestershire LEP

South Worcestershire	
	• **Advanced manufacturing:** Wychavon and Worcester are home to major manufacturers including Bosch, Mazak, and GTech. Wychavon's Worcester 6 site demonstrates its attractiveness to high-value industrial investment. • **Cyber security and defence:** Malvern Hills hosts a nationally recognised cluster of high-tech SMEs, particularly in cyber and defence, centred around Malvern Hills Science Park. • **Logistics and light manufacturing:** Wychavon supports growth in logistics and manufacturing, with strategic employment sites such as Vale Park and Worcestershire Parkway. • **Smart farming and food production:** Wychavon is home to major food producers and smart farming businesses. • **Education and skills:** Worcester is a regional education hub, anchored by the University of Worcester and further education colleges. • **Healthcare:** Worcester has a strong healthcare sector, centred around Worcestershire Royal Hospital, including a new medical school at the university. • **Tourism and hospitality:** Malvern Hills and Wychavon benefit from natural landscapes and heritage tourism, while Worcester, as a historic cathedral city, adds significant cultural and visitor appeal. • **Strategic employment land:** Wychavon has most developable employment land in the county, positioning South Worcestershire as a key driver of future economic growth.

What our residents have told us is important

"The two authorities proposed serve two distinctly different communities. South Worcestershire is primarily a rural community, whilst North Worcestershire is primarily an urban industrialised region. These regions have two different requirements in terms of housing, transport and other related issues which therefore require different approaches to their administration." – Malvern Hills District resident

"I feel we would receive a more personalised approach within our regions of Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre as a north unitary. Our needs may be vastly different to those in the south..." – Bromsgrove resident

Alignment with the Industrial Strategy

The Government's Industrial Strategy[13] identifies eight sectors with the greatest growth potential over the next decade and a critical role in supporting economic security, resilience, net zero, and regional growth. Of these, five are particularly relevant to Worcestershire's future plans and are already embedded in the county's economic landscape:

1. **Advanced Manufacturing:** Evident across both north and south, with major employers such as Bosch, Mazak, and GTech in Worcester and Wychavon, and precision engineering hubs in Redditch and Wyre Forest.
2. **Creative Industries:** Emerging clusters in Malvern and Worcester, supported by local talent and infrastructure.
3. **Digital and Technology:** Malvern Hills hosts a nationally recognised cluster of high-tech SMEs, particularly in cyber and defence.
4. **Defence:** Malvern's Science Park is a key centre for defence-related innovation and enterprise.
5. **Professional and Business Services**: Worcester and Bromsgrove have growing sectors supported by strong connectivity and skilled workforces.

[13] The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy 2025 - GOV.UK

These sector strengths reinforce the need for place-based leadership and tailored growth strategies through a north and south model.

Balancing variance in economic activity to focus investment on growth

Economic data across Worcestershire reveals significant variation in productivity, workforce composition, skills, and fiscal capacity between districts. When districts are grouped into north and south geographies, these differences reduce and become more coherent and manageable.

For example, the county-wide variance in GVA per hour stands at 17.1%, but when grouped by north and south, the variance drops to just 3.2% in the south. Similar reductions in disparity are seen in employment rate (from 12.6% county-wide to 9.2% within the north), economically active population (13.1% county-wide vs. 9.3% in the south), and Level 4 skills (12.9% county-wide vs. 10.5% in the north).

This demonstrates that the north and south each represent more internally consistent economic geographies.

A north and south model enables each new council to concentrate investment decisions within a more defined economic geography. This allows for more responsive and locally relevant planning reflects the distinct economic realities of each area, rather than attempting to reconcile the more complex disparities that exist at the county level. It means decisions are also more attuned to the needs of residents, communities and businesses.

Each new council would also be well-positioned to contribute to regional economic priorities through collaboration within the Strategic Authority.

Figure 4.1.1. Variance in key economic indicators

	County-wide variance range	North variance range	South variance range
Proportion of working age adults[14]	8.4%	3.4%	8.2%
Level 4 skills[15]	12.9%	10.5%	5.8%
Employment rate (16-64)[16]	12.6%	9.2%	8.1%
Economically active (16-64)[17]	13.1%	3.8%	9.3%
GVA per hour[18]	17.1%	17.1%	3.2%

Evidence of the success of separate economic development and planning across the north and south geographies already exists, as per the case study below on the SWDP. The creation of two new unitary councils builds upon and formalises existing relationships and structures to enable investment and growth.

Case Study – South Worcestershire Development Plan (SWDP)[19]

South Worcestershire councils have been engaged in joint working to produce a joint Development Plan (SWDP) since 2007. The current SWDP guides development up to 2030, and the emerging review (SWDPR), which will extend the Plan to 2041 and is likely to be adopted in Spring 2026.

SWDP is a shared strategic framework which governs housing and employment land delivery across the south of the county and is a clear example of sub-regional economic planning already operating successfully.

[14] Working age population - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures
[15] Skill levels distribution across the UK - Office for National Statistics
[16] Employment and employee types - Office for National Statistics
[17] Economic activity status, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics
[18] Subregional productivity in the UK - Office for National Statistics
[19] South Worcestershire Development Plan 2016

SWDP and the SWDPR aim to direct development to the most sustainable locations and reduce the need to travel to meet day-to-day needs of residents. This has resulted in locating sustainable urban extensions at the edge of Worcester City at Worcester South and West, to meet most of the identified required growth for the area. North of the city is not considered to be a sustainable location for growth.

Evidence gathered on housing, travel to work and retail trends, as well as consultations conducted with businesses suggests a relatively tight network of business relationships, validating that South Worcestershire is a self-contained and functional economic area.

Comparison to the one unitary model

A one unitary model would need to manage a broader and more diverse economic landscape. The higher county-wide variance across indicators such as GVA, employment, and council tax base suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach would struggle to respond effectively to localised needs. The single unitary would need to balance level 4 skills ranges of 25.9% in Redditch with 38.8% in Malvern Hills. It risks diluting focus and creating generic strategies that fail to address the distinct challenges of North and South Worcestershire.

The north and south model enables sharper strategic alignment, clearer accountability, and more responsive governance. It reflects the real economic geography of the county and provides a stronger foundation for place-based leadership. By grouping areas with more coherent economic characteristics, each council can tailor interventions to local needs while still collaborating across boundaries where shared opportunities exist.

What our local businesses and VCS have told us is important

"Malvern Civic Society endorses the creation of two unitary councils for Worcestershire, given the diverse social, economic and commercial interests across the county area. This structure would enable more agile and integrated strategic planning across all council functions, tailored to the distinct needs of the county's north and south." – Malvern Hills Business / VCS

Education, skills and economic inclusion

Skills shortages remain a key barrier to economic growth across Worcestershire. There is significant variation in qualification levels, with Level 4 attainment ranging from 25.9% in Redditch to 38.8% in Malvern Hills. These differences require tailored approaches to skills development and inclusion.

Access to education is uneven for example, students in Redditch often have to travel to Worcester or Birmingham for certain courses, which creates practical barriers and limits opportunity. This is particularly challenging given the county's low-wage economy and lower education levels in some areas, making it essential to take an aspirational and locally focused approach.

Each council will be able to build strong local partnerships with colleges, training providers and employers to address specific skills needs. In North Worcestershire, this includes vocational pathways aligned to its industrial base and initiatives such as the Innovation Centre in Redditch. In South Worcestershire, the presence of a university and higher skills levels support growth in professional services, education and health.

Improving access to training for young people is critical, particularly for those who currently travel outside their area for education and employment. The aim is to create local opportunities so that young people can stay, build careers and contribute to local economic growth. This includes pathways that allow them to return and grow industry and skills locally.

This aligns with national policy priorities on youth unemployment and work and health, which emphasise the importance of engaging directly with communities, schools, Primary Care Networks (PCNs), VCS organisations, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and employers. The north and south model enables each council to work in an integrated but manageable way with these partners, supporting joined-up approaches to tackling barriers to employment, particularly for residents with health conditions, disabilities or those returning to work. Two councils will also be better placed to advocate

for their areas within the strategic authority and ensure that local needs are represented.

This place-based approach also supports inclusion. Councils will work collaboratively with education and skills providers to improve accessibility, raise aspirations and target areas with lower attainment and economic activity.

The model is underpinned by the neighbourhood governance framework.

For more information surrounding Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) and Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs) and how they will provide the operational and democratic infrastructure required see Section 4: Criteria 6.

Case studies below evidence how district-led initiatives already align to government policy and how two councils will strengthen this further.

Case Study 1: Youth Guarantee – Local Delivery Infrastructure

The government's Youth Guarantee offers guaranteed paid work to eligible young people on Universal Credit for 18 months without earning or learning. This reinforces the need for strong local delivery infrastructure. Councils will be well placed to work with DWP, employers and community organisations to identify eligible young people and provide tailored support aligned to local labour market conditions.

Case Study 2: Adult Skills Fund – Tailored Learning for Local Outcomes

The Adult Skills Fund (ASF) supports adult learners to gain skills that lead to employment or further learning, with recent reforms expanding eligibility and focusing on health, wellbeing, and community resilience.

Although ASF will be commissioned by the Strategic Authority, the two-unitary model enables North and South Worcestershire councils to better influence commissioning decisions and ensure provision reflects local priorities. This includes employer-designed programmes, support for parents and carers, and targeted interventions in areas with lower attainment.

By working closely with colleges, care providers, and employers, each council can shape provision that meets local workforce needs and aligns with national programmes like Get Britain Working.

Comparison to the one unitary model

A one unitary model would require a one-size-fits-all approach to economic development, investment, and skills planning across a diverse county. This risks diluting the ability to respond effectively to the distinct economic profiles, sectoral strengths, and workforce challenges of North and South Worcestershire.

It would struggle to maintain close connections with local organisations, including schools, VCS groups and community networks. Operating at county scale risks weakening the ability to deploy services effectively on the ground. The model would require complex internal sub-divisions to replicate district-level responsiveness, but without the appropriate mandate or resourcing.

A north and south model enables each council to focus on its specific economic context, ensuring more targeted investment, tailored skills strategies, and stronger local partnerships that reflect the needs and opportunities of each area. It allows councils to work directly with partners, build on trusted relationships and respond quickly to community needs.

Given the role of Strategic Authorities in economic development, investment and skills planning, tailored economic strategies for North and South Worcestershire will be essential to effectively drive and influence how devolved funding will be deployed by the Strategic Authority to meet local needs and maximise the benefit of local opportunities.

Appropriate tax base

The north and south model provides a financially sustainable starting point for both unitary councils. Each has a sufficient council tax base to support core service delivery and future investment. South Worcestershire accounts for approximately 55% of the county's total council tax base, with 120,896 Band D equivalent properties compared to 100,154 in the north. This reflects the south's broader residential footprint and higher property values, contributing to stronger revenue-generating potential and economic resilience.

The business rate base further reinforces this position, with total rateable values of £244.5 million in the north and £293.4 million in the south. These figures indicate strong commercial activity and a reliable source of non-domestic revenue in both areas.

The range of Band D council tax levels is narrower in the north (£27.06) than in the south (£91.24), suggesting greater consistency in fiscal policy across northern districts. A north and south model allows each council to retain and manage its existing tax base and rate structures independently, avoiding disruption and complexity associated with harmonisation.

Comparison to the one unitary model

A one unitary model would require the merging of these distinct fiscal profiles into one consolidated structure. This introduces significant political and operational risks.

Harmonising council tax across areas with different economic capacities and service demands could result in substantial increases for residents in lower-tax districts, triggering public resistance and reputational challenges. The baseline rate would need to be set by the shadow authority, and while increases would be constrained by referendum limits, the perception of unfairness could undermine trust and support for the new structure.

The north and south model offers a more practical and politically sustainable solution. It preserves local accountability, enables targeted fiscal planning, and ensures financial decisions remain aligned to local economic conditions and service needs, without imposing blanket changes that risk alienating communities.

Figure 4.1.2. Number of Band D equivalent dwellings, Band D rates and yield (£'m)[20]

Existing districts	2025/26 tax base	Current district Band D precept (£)	Current county Band D (£)	Total Band D (£)	District total: current council tax yield (£'m)
Bromsgrove	38,360	257.48	1,615.71	1,873.19	**71.855**
Redditch	26,456	277.64	1,615.71	1,893.35	**50.090**
Wyre Forest	35,338	250.58	1,615.71	1,866.29	**65.951**
Malvern Hills	33,558	182.60	1,615.71	1,798.31	**60.348**
Worcester	33,571	219.45	1,615.71	1,835.16	**61.608**
Wychavon	53,767	128.21	1,615.71	1,743.92	**93.766**
Total	**221,050**				**403.618**

Due to historic decisions on council tax rates, authorities in the north of Worcestershire have higher rates than those in the south. At the same time, southern districts benefit from a larger council tax base and a higher proportion of properties in Bands F to H, giving them a structural advantage in the north and south model.

Under the north and south model, harmonisation would occur within each geography. This enables a more proportionate and locally sensitive approach. Residents in the north, where rates are already higher, would likely see smaller increases. In contrast, harmonisation in the south would be managed within a lower baseline, avoiding steep rises.

[20] Council Tax Requirement (CTR) data for Billing Authorities in England, 2024-25 and 2025-26, MHCLG

Comparison to the one unitary model

In a one unitary model, harmonisation is assumed at the highest existing rate across the entire county. This would result in significantly higher increases for a larger proportion of the population in the south, where current rates are lower. **This would place a disproportionate burden on southern residents**.

The two-unitary model offers a fairer and more manageable transition, reducing the risk of sudden and uneven tax rises and supporting financial sustainability across both geographies.

Two coherent and functional geographies

Criteria 1b. Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs

The north and south model reflects the distinct urban and rural geographies of North and South Worcestershire, enabling tailored service delivery, transport planning and housing strategies. It avoids the operational complexity and spatial incoherence of a single unitary, supporting more responsive, place-based governance across manageable footprints.

Two distinct geographies

The north and south model reflects the practical geography of Worcestershire, balancing urban and rural needs across two coherent footprints.

The geographic footprint of each proposed council is distinctly different, but operationally manageable in its own right. North Worcestershire covers 466 km^2, while South Worcestershire spans 1,254 km^2.

Figure 4.1.3. Map of Worcestershire

Figure 4.1.4. Population density of Worcestershire

	North Worcestershire	South Worcestershire	Worcestershire
Population (2024)[21]	293,445	327,915	621,360
Geographic area (sq km) (2023)[22]	466	1,254	1,741
Population density (people per sq km) (2023)	630	261	357

North Worcestershire is more urbanised with rural pockets, with a population density of 630 people per km^2 and only 12.6% of residents living in rural output areas. South Worcestershire is more rural in character with a lower population density of 261 people per km^2 and 35.2% of residents living in rural areas. However, the south also contains around 200,000 people living in its towns and cities and so has a unique dispersion of rural communities and concentrated urban centres.

The variation between the north and south supports the case for two councils that can design and deliver services suited to their distinct geographies. For example, in the south, it ensures that rural needs, such as transport, digital connectivity and access to health and care can be addressed directly, without being diluted within a larger, more urban-focused authority. This is further

[21] Population estimates for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics

[22] Standard Area Measurements for Administrative Areas (Dec 2023) in the UK

exemplified by the existence of the SWDP[23]. *For more information regarding the SWDP see Section 4: Criteria 1a.*

The geographic distinctions between North and South Worcestershire align with the economic differences outlined in *Criteria 1a*. Tailored economic strategies for the north and south will be essential to effectively drive and influence how devolved funding will be deployed by the Strategic Authority to meet local needs and maximise the benefit of local opportunities.

Comparison to the one unitary model

A one unitary model would need to manage a significantly larger and more varied geography, combining dense urban centres with dispersed rural communities across 1,741 km^2. This scale risks creating an overly large rural authority that is difficult to manage operationally, or a fragmented urban structure that lacks spatial coherence due to the differences in rural communities between the north and south.

Travel and transport connectivity

Transport planning in Worcestershire is currently led by the county council through the Local Transport Plan[24], which sets out long-term priorities for connectivity, congestion reduction and sustainable travel.

District-level investment reflects local geography and need, from urban regeneration in Redditch and Worcester, to rural mobility and active travel in Malvern Hills and Wychavon. Rail connectivity and investment is also considered related to north and south corridors in Worcestershire.

What our residents have told us is important

"Towns in Worcestershire vary significantly, some being in mainly rural areas while others are more industrialised. The needs of the residents in those towns are very different. North Worcestershire residents need reliable transport links to the urban centres of Birmingham and Wolverhampton for work, education and training. Although commuter traffic may have reduced post Covid with more people working from home, the economic hubs of Birmingham and the West Midland metropolitan area have a strong effect. In South Worcestershire, the gravitational pull of the large cities is less marked so the travel to work factor is more localised." – Bromsgrove resident

Bromsgrove and Redditch align with Birmingham and West Midlands commuter routes, while Worcester, Malvern Hills and Wychavon focus on east-west and regional connectivity. Worcestershire Parkway is a key rail hub in the south, improving access to London and the South West.[25]

There is limited direct connectivity between North and South Worcestershire with limited public transport options and those that do exist are unevenly distributed across the county. Rail infrastructure is orientated towards Birmingham which leaves indirect services linking the north with the south. In addition, bus services are also limited with infrequent timetables, especially in rural areas making cross county journeys inconvenient.

The north and south model also aligns with existing commuting patterns across North and South Worcestershire, which shows limited cross-district travel to work patterns. This supports the case for distinct transport and employment strategies tailored to local needs. *Further detail on travel to work patterns is in Section 4: Criteria 4.*

Comparison to the one unitary model

A one unitary model would require uniform transport planning across a large and varied geography, risking generic strategies that overlook local needs. It would need to address urban congestion in Worcester, rural accessibility in Malvern Hills, and limited cross-county travel links. The scale and complexity of this would reduce responsiveness and hinder targeted infrastructure investment aligned to local commuting and service access patterns.

Meeting local housing needs

Housing planning and delivery responsibilities currently lie with the borough, city and district councils within the county. The county's long-term vision for housing is guided by the Worcestershire Housing Strategy 2023–2040[26], which emphasises the need to deliver affordable, energy-efficient homes while also

[23] South Worcestershire Development Plan 2016
[24] The Local Transport Plan | Worcestershire County Council
[25] Worcestershire's Plan for Growth 2020-2040
[26] Housing Enabling Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023 - 2026

preserving the distinct character of Worcestershire's towns, villages, and landscapes.

Each area in Worcestershire faces different pressures in terms of housing supply, land availability, and service demand. Examples include:

- Housing targets vary across the county: Annually 1,794 homes required in North Worcestershire and 2,181 in the south.
- The disparity in five-year housing land supply is more pronounced: North Worcestershire has 4.7 years of supply, while South Worcestershire has only 1.71 years.
- Housing deprivation levels are consistent across both areas: Index of Multiple Deprivation score is 5 (as per scoring from options appraisal).[27]

In the north, housing challenges are shaped by land constraints, regional pressures, and uneven supply. In the south, challenges are more rural in nature and relate to affordability, land availability, and development viability. Specific challenges for each area are set out in the table below:

North Worcestershire

- **Bromsgrove** faces difficulties maintaining its five-year housing land supply, triggering the 'tilted balance' in planning decisions and prompting an early Local Plan review. The district is heavily constrained by Green Belt land, and with limited brownfield opportunities, some Green Belt release will be necessary to meet future housing demand.
- **Wyre Forest**, although performing strongly with a 9.3-year housing land supply, links its delivery closely to regeneration efforts in Kidderminster and surrounding areas, which may face infrastructure and economic challenges.
- **Redditch** is unique in retaining its own council-owned housing stock and actively developing sites through its housing growth programme but cannot meet its full housing need within its boundaries. It currently has only 2.8 years of deliverable land and relies on neighbouring Bromsgrove to accommodate 3,400 homes

South Worcestershire

- **Malvern Hills** struggles with high property values and limited land supply, particularly in rural areas, which restricts affordable housing delivery. The district also has disproportionately low levels of private rental accommodation, increasing demand pressures.
- **Worcester City** faces significant land constraints within its administrative boundary and relies heavily on urban extensions and brownfield redevelopment to meet housing and employment needs. The city experiences high and growing demand for affordable and family housing, driven by population growth and limited development space.
- **Wychavon**, while actively pursuing strategic growth areas such as Worcestershire Parkway, has a very constrained housing land supply of just 1.1 years and faces the challenge of balancing its rural character with the need for affordable and family housing. The emerging South Worcestershire Development Plan Review (, due for adoption in Spring 2026, will provide sufficient dwellings to ensure a five-year housing land supply is in place.

Despite these pressures, North Worcestershire presents several opportunities. Redditch's ownership of housing stock and its regeneration focus is a major strength and offers a foundation for expanding social housing across the north, building on the around £41m investment in stock which is underway. Bromsgrove contributes to Birmingham's unmet housing need through developments such as the Longbridge scheme, and its Local Plan review provides a chance to align growth with the emergence of the new unitary councils. Wyre Forest's strong delivery record and emphasis on sustainable, community-led housing make it well-positioned to support future

[27] English indices of deprivation 2019 - GOV.UK

growth, particularly through town centre regeneration and diverse housing types.

However, South Worcestershire also offers promising opportunities in relation to housing. Malvern Hills supports housing delivery through community-led schemes and exception site policies, and the refreshed South Worcestershire Local Plan due in Spring 2026 will provide updated evidence on housing and employment land supply. Worcester City's Housing Enabling Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023–2026 outlines a coordinated approach to increasing supply through mixed-tenure and repurposed housing, supported by partnerships with registered providers. Wychavon is taking bold steps to address its housing challenges, including its first council-led housing development in decades, a £4.5 million scheme with Rooftop Housing Group in Offenham.

These differences reinforce the case for a north and south model, enabling tailored planning and delivery approaches that reflect local demand and unlock constrained sites.

What our local businesses and VCS have told us is important

"The three south Worcestershire LAs already work closely on a number of projects, policies and strategies and have far more in common than with the north LAs. … Redditch has its own housing stock and a single unitary would mean all LAs having a Housing Revenue Account, which would have significant implications for temporary accommodation and carry significant associated risks in terms of asset and investment liability." – Worcester City

Comparison to the one unitary model

A single unitary council would be responsible for managing housing and homelessness across a large and diverse area, combining urban centres with rural communities. This scale risks reducing responsiveness to local housing pressures, particularly where land is limited or affordability is a challenge. Delivery could be delayed due to the need to revise inherited Local Plans, and families may be relocated across the county, disrupting local ties and wellbeing. There is also concern that people in social housing could be moved far from their communities due to property availability. The future of Redditch Borough Council's housing stock may be questioned, as its retention as council housing could conflict with wider county-level social housing provision and present a financial incentive to sell.

Historically, county-wide housing approaches have struggled to deliver effectively, often overlooking local context and undermining outcomes linked to housing, such as health and social care.

Case Study – Redditch Housing Investment

Redditch Borough Council owns and manages 5,397 council properties, with a further 624 leased, making it the only district in Worcestershire with retained housing stock. A £40.975 million capital investment programme was agreed in 2023, with a proposed increase to £66.685 million for 2025/26–2029/30. This local control enables targeted support for vulnerable communities, particularly in North Worcestershire where deprivation is more concentrated. The north and south model strengthens the case for differentiated housing strategies, allowing Redditch to retain and expand its landlord function to support regeneration, resilience, and place-shaping priorities.

Meeting local employment needs

Responsibility for employment land delivery sits with the borough, city and district councils in Worcestershire. Employment land requirements differ drastically, with 112 hectares in North Worcestershire and 313.8 hectares in the south.

As set out in Criteria 1a, there are major differences in the nature of employment across the north and south. These differences reinforce the need for differentiated planning and delivery approaches to meet local demand and unlock employment growth, particularly if the target of 25,000 additional jobs is going to be achieved.

In the north, further strategic alignment between the three districts, building on existing relationships, could unlock broader economic growth opportunities. In the south, there is already natural alignment driven by the SWDP which will continue to strengthen.

North Worcestershire

- **Bromsgrove** and **Redditch** already have strong cross-boundary planning which seeks to alleviate some of their respective issues such as green belt constraints in Bromsgrove and workforce retention due to high out-commuting rates.
- **Redditch** has three times the national average employment in manufacturing, requiring tailored industrial space.
- **Redditch** also shares space outside of Worcestershire, for example the Eastern Gateway site with Stratford-on-Avon, highlighting its links further north.
- **Wyre Forest** is delivering its employment land allocation through sites like Lea Castle Village and mixed-use regeneration in Kidderminster and is on track to meet Local Plan targets by balancing town centre regeneration with new employment zones. Further release from Green Belt likely to be required in next local plan.
- High demand for industrial units between 5,000 and 25,000 sq ft, with limited stock causing business relocation.

South Worcestershire

- **Worcester** has limited capacity for large-scale employment land due to constraints on land availability and relies on urban extensions and cross-boundary sites to meet demand.
- **Wychavon** has demonstrated strong performance in delivering employment land within the district at major sites such as Worcester 6 and Vale Park. It also has some of the largest employment land allocations in the county.
- **Malvern Hills** is delivering effectively through the SWDP and whilst these employment sites provide for larger employers in the technology sector, a lack of smaller units has been recognised as a constraint to economic growth.
- There is a shortage of Grade A office space and small units for tech start-ups, particularly in **Malvern Hills** which hosts several high-tech SMEs in cyber and defence.

Case Study – Worcestershire Parkway

Worcestershire Parkway has been identified by Government as one of twelve potential new towns in England, with dedicated taskforce support to accelerate delivery. It is central to the emerging SWDP, which sets out ambitions for 10,000 new dwellings and significant employment land. This is progressing through the SWDP review and represents one of the county's key geographical areas to accelerate housing growth.

The site is a strategic growth lever for South Worcestershire, with infrastructure already in place and planning consents advancing. It supports both local and regional priorities by aligning housing and employment delivery, enabling growth in logistics, advanced manufacturing, and office space.

A north and south model protects the integrity of the SWDP and ensures nationally significant growth sites like Worcestershire Parkway are delivered effectively. It enables South Worcestershire to maintain control over strategic planning, respond to regional pressures, and balance housing and employment growth without compromising local priorities. A one unitary model risks undermining these benefits by diluting place-based governance and disrupting established planning arrangements.

Meeting environmental and sustainability needs

Worcestershire's green landscape and its rural and urban communities make environmental protection and climate adaptation essential, not only for ecological resilience but also for long-term economic growth and progress towards net zero. Local groups across the county play a vital role in enhancing biodiversity, reducing carbon footprints and connecting residents with nature. Their efforts must be supported through responsive governance that enables place-based action.

South Worcestershire benefits from a shared strategic framework through the SWDP[28], which embeds environmental principles into future development, supporting nature as a key feature of urban as well as rural environments. In contrast, North Worcestershire's councils operate separate environmental plans. A north and south model enables tailored environmental strategies that reflect the distinct landscapes and priorities of each area. It allows South Worcestershire to build on the SWDP, while enabling North Worcestershire to coordinate environmental efforts across districts, strengthening delivery, accountability, and alignment with net zero ambitions.

Local authorities have a statutory responsibility to monitor, assess, and improve local air quality. Since air quality objectives will not be met, the whole of the Worcester City and parts of the Wyre Forest District Council and Bromsgrove District Council areas have been declared Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA). Worcester City's 2024-2029, Wyre Forest's 2025-2030 and Bromsgrove's 2025 -2030 Air Quality Action Plans (AQAP) set out the priorities for improving air quality. By bringing together the management of local transport infrastructure, electric vehicle charging, active travel and public transport, the north and south model will enable the councils to operate at a local level and focus resources in those areas most in need of environmental improvement actions.

Case Study – Worcester Nature Forum

Facilitated by the City Council, the Worcester Nature Forum brings together a broad collective of stakeholders focussed on biodiversity at a local level. Members include the Worcester Canal Group, Wildlife Trust, Worcester Community Garden, Worcester Environmental Group and local landowners including University and Cathedral, alongside statutory organisations many of which have a wider geographical focus including the Environment Agency. By concentrating on local issues, and linking volunteer resources with external and peer support, a range of initiatives and projects have been completed, driven by local people. These include a waymarked walking and cycling route around Worcester's green spaces and wildlife corridors, encouraging sand martin's and swifts back into the city, a community gardening and education facility, establishing verges and other spaces as wildflower habitats. The forum members have also had a significant role in shaping local authorities' strategies and plans.

This demonstrates the power of locally driven environmental action. Success is rooted in strong community identity, local knowledge, and responsiveness to place-specific needs supported by the enthusiasm and drive of local people. A north and south model enables councils to support and scale similar initiatives by aligning with the distinct environmental priorities and ambitions of their local communities and areas.

Comparison to the one unitary model

A single unitary would need to manage environmental planning across a large and diverse geography, risking diluted local priorities and slower delivery. It would risk not engaging local people and maximising their ambition and energies to deliver real benefits for nature. It would struggle to respond effectively to varied environmental risks, particularly flooding, which is more severe and widespread affecting rural and urban communities in the south compared to more concentrated flooding in the north. Towns like Tenbury Wells have faced repeated flooding, with the Town Council recently unable to secure insurance, highlighting the need for locally tailored responses such as the recently completed physical defences at Bewdley.

[28] South Worcestershire Development Plan 2016

Effective structures for local government delivery

Criteria 1d. Proposals should describe clearly the single tier local government structures it is putting forward for the whole of the area, and explain how, if implemented, these are expected to achieve the outcomes described

The north and south model provides a resilient and flexible governance structure, capable of adapting to future strategic and local challenges. It embeds neighbourhood leadership, strengthens democratic representation, and enables tailored service delivery. Public engagement shows strong support for this approach, particularly in rural areas. It avoids the risks of centralisation and creation of a democratic deficit and maintains trusted and effective local partnerships.

Future proof and flexible governance at each level

The north and south model offers a governance structure that is both resilient and adaptable, designed to meet future challenges at a strategic level, working with the future Strategic Authority, while enabling transformation at local levels delivered by each unitary authority.

At a community and neighbourhood level, the model embeds neighbourhood governance through Neighbourhood Area Committees and Integrated Neighbourhood Teams, which will ensure transparent and accountable leadership. These structures will empower residents and local partners to shape priorities and service delivery. *Further detail is provided under Section 4: Criteria 6*.

Public engagement has shown strong support for this approach. Nearly half of residents (62.5%) and 70% of Town and Parish councils favour the north and south model, citing clearer accountability and stronger community connections. This is particularly important in rural areas, where concerns about losing local voice under a single large authority are most acute. *Further detail is provided under Section 4: Criteria 4 and Section 4: Criteria 6*.

While decisions on future Strategic Authority arrangements have not yet been made, the north and south model provides a balanced and adaptable foundation for whichever devolution pathway is agreed. *Further detail about devolution is provided under Section 4: Criteria 5*.

Comparison to the one unitary model

A one unitary model risks undermining trusted local governance by dissolving established district identities and partnerships. Centralised decision-making across a large and diverse geography would reduce responsiveness to local needs and weaken accountability.

Ward councillors already report being overstretched and expanding their responsibilities across wider areas which would also provide a larger range of services would be unmanageable. This would likely lead to an overreliance on Town and Parish Councils and other community-level structures, which may lack the capacity to absorb additional responsibilities.

Neighbourhood Area Committees, while intended to bring decision-making closer to communities, are unlikely to be sufficient and could inadvertently recreate district-level structures. The model may also create tensions between urban and rural priorities and limit the ability to tailor services effectively. Over time, the absence of place-based leadership could constrain reform and innovation, making it harder to respond to evolving community and regional challenges.

Role of the Strategic Authority

As part of wider national reforms to streamline and strengthen local governance, the introduction of a Strategic Authority represents significant evolution in how Worcestershire will plan, invest and deliver outcomes at scale.

The creation of a strategic tier will complement LGR by providing a coherent framework for collaboration across the two new local authorities.

The Strategic Authority will:

- Provide strategic leadership on issues that **extend beyond individual council boundaries**

- Co-ordinate **long-term planning for transport, infrastructure, housing growth, skills, net zero, and wider economic development**
- Oversee the **alignment of skills, transport and investment strategies** across the county
- Drive p**ublic service reform and partnership working** across local government, health and other partners

Overall, establishing a Strategic Authority alongside a north and south model will enable Worcestershire to combine strong, locally responsive governance with co-ordinated strategic leadership ensuring decisions are made at the right scale to deliver sustainable growth and better outcomes for communities.

For more information on the role of the Strategic Authority, see Section 4: Criteria 5.

Efficient, effective and locally focused democratic arrangements

The commissioning councils propose to initially use the county council divisions and double the number of councillors currently representing county wards to make up the number of new unitary councillors as an interim measure for the elections in May 2027 resulting in the following:

- One-unitary (if the Government selects this model): 114 councillors (5,388 residents per councillor).
- North and south (two-unitary): 114 councillors, composed of:
    - North Worcestershire: 54 councillors (5,389 residents per councillor)
    - South Worcestershire: 60 councillors (5,387 residents per councillor).

Longer-term in the north and south model, following Boundary Commission Reviews, there is the opportunity for each new unitary council to further increase the number of councillors for the 2031 elections to bring each council into line with the national average for unitary councils of 4,600 residents per councillor. This would not be possible with a one unitary model because the number of councillors would exceed the Boundary Commission's guidance of 100 as the maximum size of a council.

These figures are based on estimates subject to Boundary Commission review.

- North Worcestershire: 63 councillors (4,619 residents per councillor)
- South Worcestershire: 70 councillors (4,617 residents per councillor)

Councillors have shared that in their current roles there are high expectations and demand for their availability, stretching their capacity. The north and south model reduces the geographic areas councillors would be responsible for and allows for a more appropriate resident-to-councillor ratio to be applied that also accounts for future growth of North and South Worcestershire.

Boundary Commission reviews after 2027 will help to maintain democratic integrity and ensure representation remains proportionate and effective. These arrangements will also be dependent on capacity, capabilities, and structures of town and parish councils. *Neighbourhood governance arrangements are explored further in Section 4: Criteria 6.*

Comparison to the one unitary model

If the one unitary model establishes the maximum number of councillors permitted for a unitary council (i.e. 100 councillors, as per LGBCE guidance), this will result in 6,142 residents per councillor.

With ward councillors already feeling stretched at the ratio of 1:2,400, it would be unmanageable for them to support residents in the way expected of them. This would result in an overreliance on town and parish councils and community level structures.

Figure 4.1.5. Proposed councillor numbers for 2031 elections (subject to LGBCE) review

Unitary	Current councillors (district and county)	Future councillors (estimate)	Current councillor to resident ratio	Future councillor to resident ratio
North Worcestershire	116	63	1:2,509	1:4,619
South Worcestershire	140	70	1:2,309	1:4,617
TOTAL	**256**	**133**	**1:2,400**	**1:4,618**

When considering the ratio of councillors to residents, it's important to consider the geographic area to ensure effective representation. Councillors are tasked with representing their communities, and when these areas are as large and diverse as county divisions, it becomes challenging to capture a representative view. North and South Worcestershire, with their distinct rural and urban characteristics, highlight this challenge. Establishing two unitary councils, each with potential for a lower councillor to resident ratio and for smaller, single member wards at the 2031 elections, would enable councillors to fulfil their roles effectively and better represent the diverse populations across the whole of Worcestershire.

Case Study – Cumbria Case for Change

In 2015, Cumbria was part of the Government's priority programme of areas for devolution, leading it to form into two new unitary authorities: Cumberland and West Morland & Furness.

When reviewing councillor numbers, it was highlighted that the north and south model was able to retain local representation for communities without placing pressure on town and parish councils. They found that a smaller unitary model allowed greater local representation and the ability to develop effective functional relationships with the communities they serve.

What our residents have told us is important

"The north and south of the county are different, one more urbanised and the other more rural, with slightly different needs. By having two unitary authorities' localism can still exist, with decisions made by relatively local people." – Bromsgrove resident

Criteria 2: Right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks

This section includes

Proposal section	Government criteria addressed	Case for the north and south model
Balanced and sustainable populations	**Criteria 2a.** As a guiding principle, new councils should aim for a population of 500,000 or more **Criteria 2b.** There may be certain scenarios in which this 500,000 figure does not make sense for an area, including on devolution, and this rationale should be set out in a proposal	The north and south model creates two balanced councils with populations exceeding 300,000 by 2032, ensuring both scale and sustainability. It reflects distinct demographic needs such as higher proportions of children in the north and older adults in the south while enabling tailored local services and shared strategic functions.
Sustainable and prudent delivery of efficiencies	**Criteria 2c.** Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils' finances and make sure that council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money	The financial model shows that the north and south model offers the level of savings required by consolidating and reducing duplication, streamlining service delivery and unlocking economies of scale in staffing, procurement and infrastructure, delivering an estimated £9.03m in recurring revenue savings.
Balancing safe transition with maximising transformation	**Criteria 2d.** Proposals should set out how an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects	The north and south model embraces the once-in-a-generation opportunity to design new organisations that are modern, efficient and fit for the future. This model manages transition costs through leveraging existing budgets and capital receipts to fund invest-to-save activities, while enabling long term transformation through digital innovation, integrated service reform and scalable governance that supports sustainable public service delivery.
Long-term approach to financial sustainability	**Criteria 2e.** For areas covering councils that are in Best Value intervention and/or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals must additionally demonstrate how reorganisation may contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing and what area-specific arrangements may be necessary to make new structures viable	There is growing concern about the precarious financial position across Worcestershire, driven largely by the scale and fragility of Worcestershire County Council's budget and need for EFS. The county's budget is dominated by high-cost services and without a change in delivery model, these pressures will continue to grow. The north and south model is built to focus on prevention.

		It is well known that for every £1 spent on prevention £3.17 is saved on adult social care.[29]

[29] Earlier action and support: The case for prevention in adult social care and beyond | Local Government Association

Balanced and sustainable populations

Criteria 2a. As a guiding principle, new councils should aim for a population of 500,000 or more
Criteria 2b. There may be certain scenarios in which this 500,000 figure does not make sense for an area, including on devolution, and this rationale should be set out in a proposal

The north and south model creates two balanced councils with populations exceeding 300,000 by 2032, ensuring both scale and sustainability. It reflects distinct demographic needs such as higher proportions of children in the north and older adults in the south while enabling tailored local services and shared strategic functions.

Right-sized populations that enable growth

The north and south model offers a strong and balanced population base that supports long-term sustainability and growth. The current population in North Worcestershire is 293,4451 rising to 300,113 in 2032 and 314,356 in 2047. The current population in South Worcestershire is 327,915 rising to 345,035 in 2032 and 373,506 in 2047. Both areas exceed the current average population size of existing unitary authorities[30] (around 273,700) and provide a solid foundation for efficient service delivery, financial resilience and strategic capacity.

While the model does not meet the government's 500,000 population guideline, government feedback has confirmed that alternative configurations are acceptable where there is a clear rationale. The distinct geographies, identities and service needs of North and South Worcestershire provide that rationale, enabling a structure that balances efficiency with local responsiveness.

DCN analysis[31] testing the link between population size and spending efficiency, financial sustainability and service performance concluded there is limited evidence to support the 500,000 population levels driving better outcomes for people. Where there is an apparent link between population size and outcomes, it more often favours smaller councils.

The north and south model enables services to be delivered locally where tailored approaches are needed and shared where consistency and scale are beneficial. This flexibility supports better outcomes and more sustainable services across a wide and diverse population.

What our residents have told us is important

"I work for (a large city council) and large unitary authorities don't work. Worcs has huge differences between north and south, with north being more urban and south rural. Trying to combine both their needs in one unitary would lead to one type being at loss. Two unitary authorities of c350k residents would work well." – Worcester City Resident

Distinct needs and service pressures

It is well-understood that the largest driver of demand for services in Worcestershire is demographics. North and South Worcestershire have meaningful differences that influence service demand.

The south has a slightly higher rate of looked after children and proportion of adult social care users. These differences are largely in proportion to population size and are expected to remain stable over time, with the gap in over-65s projected to increase to 27.6% by 2035.

According to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2019)[32], the north experiences greater deprivation in skills, health, crime and living environment, while both areas have similar levels of housing deprivation and pupil need,

[30] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_unitary_authorities_of_England
[31] Bigger is not better: the evidenced case for keeping 'local' government | District Councils' Network
[32] English indices of deprivation 2019 - GOV.UK

including identical Pupil Premium eligibility and comparable levels of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and SEN support.

These patterns strengthen the case for two councils that can shape local commissioning, early intervention and neighbourhood-based support around the specific needs of their populations. Each council will be better placed to use local intelligence to monitor trends, respond to emerging issues and plan proactively. Shared services for adults and children will continue to operate across both councils where appropriate, ensuring consistency, safeguarding continuity and economies of scale. *See further detail on this in Section 4: Criteria 3.*

Figure 4.2.1. Adult service users

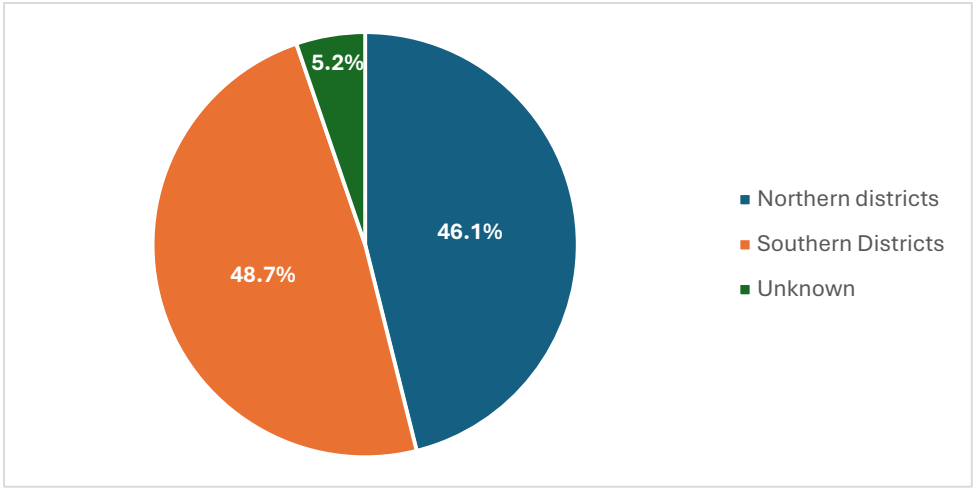
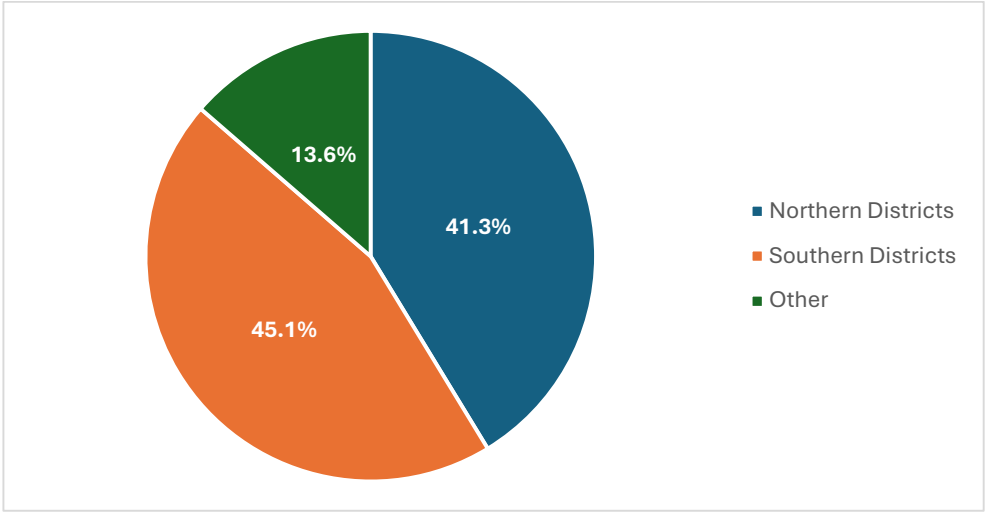


Figure 4.2.2. Number of children looked after by home address



Comparison to the one unitary model

The one unitary model meets the population threshold with a starting population of 614,185, rising to nearly 687,712 by 2047[33]. This would make a single Worcestershire unitary one of the largest councils in the UK.

A single council would need to manage a wide range of population needs across a diverse geography, which would challenge responsiveness and the ability to tailor services effectively. In high-demand areas such as SEND and adult social care, targeted support would be harder to deliver at scale, and cost pressures may increase over time from an already unstable base given financial pressures facing Worcestershire County Council.

The north and south model enables more effective planning and delivery across a wide and varied population. DCN evidence suggests that smaller unitary councils will be no less efficient, less sustainable or less effective due to their size.

[33] Subnational population projections for England - Office for National Statistics

Figure 4.2.3. Demographic data of Worcestershire

Metrics	North Worcestershire	South Worcestershire
Population (2024)[34]	293,445	327,915
Population (2032)[35]	300,113	345,035
Population (2047)	314,356	373,506
Age 0-15[36]	18.0%	16.4%
Age 16-64	59.5%	59.6%
Age 65+	22.5%	24.0%

Effective democratic representation

The north and south model enables effective democratic representation by aligning political structures with culturally coherent populations. Councillors will be better placed to understand and respond to local needs, supporting more targeted and outcome-focused service delivery. This is reinforced by the geographic and economic distinctions between north and south Worcestershire, as set out in *Criteria 1d*.

Comparison to the one unitary model

The one unitary model risks democratic deficit. Councillors would represent significantly larger populations, reducing the ability to respond to local concerns. A single authority may default to a one-size-fits-all approach, weakening the connection between residents and decision-makers.

Balance to unlock devolution

The north and south model supports strategic alignment and future devolution by offering two distinct voices for Worcestershire. This enables tailored representation of local priorities within any future Strategic Authority.

By 2047, the north and south unitary councils are projected to reach populations of 314,356 and 373,506 respectively, both well above the average size of existing unitary authorities (around 273,700). This ensures each council has sufficient scale to participate meaningfully in regional governance while remaining locally focused.

The north and south model also helps mitigate the risk of disproportionate influence within a future Strategic Authority. A single Worcestershire unitary with a population of over 620,000 would significantly outweigh Herefordshire (around191,000), who are likely to be included with Worcestershire, creating an imbalance in shared governance.

A north and south model allows for more equitable representation and supports options such as weighted voting or differentiated seat allocations. It also aligns with government guidance to avoid “devolution islands” and enables coherent integration of services across shared boundaries including fire and rescue, NHS, and police.

Comparison to the one unitary model

The one unitary model creates a single authority with significant population and economic weight, which risks overpowering smaller partners like Herefordshire. While it may offer strategic coherence, it undermines the principle of balanced representation and could complicate the formation of an equitable Strategic Authority. The scale of a single unitary may also necessitate more complex governance arrangements to avoid democratic imbalance.

[34] Population estimates for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics
[35] Subnational population projections for England - Office for National Statistics
[36] Population estimates for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland - Office for National Statistics

Sustainable and prudent delivery of efficiencies

Criteria 2c. Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils' finances and make sure that council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money

The financial model shows that the north and south model offers the level of savings required by consolidating and reducing duplication, streamlining service delivery and unlocking economies of scale in staffing, procurement and infrastructure, delivering an estimated £9.03m in recurring revenue savings.

Delivering efficiencies in Worcestershire

LGR is generally expected to improve financial sustainability over time, but it is not positioned as a solution to the broader financial pressures facing local government such as rising costs, increasing demand, and funding constraints.

The scale of challenge is too large to address through reorganisation alone. Financial sustainability is ultimately not about efficiencies delivered via economies of scale, and councils across Worcestershire have already worked hard to secure efficiencies from shared services, shared management teams, and wider ways of working.

Longer-term sustainability is about working in a fundamentally different way, which is community focused, prevention-led and works with residents and partners to reduce demand in the system. Benefits from a reduction in demand are not included in our proposal, but this will be the aim of all new unitary councils.

We set out our approach to the benefits associated with delivery of genuine Public Service Reform in Section 4: Criteria 3b.

Our approach to calculating the financial impact of LGR

Finance leads from the five commissioning councils have jointly reviewed and refined the financial model to produce a unified assessment of the two reorganisation scenarios for submission to central government.

The model is designed to assess, at a high-level, the financial implications of the proposed reorganisation options, enabling a direct comparison of projected savings, associated costs, and the expected payback period across the two options.

It incorporates estimates for savings, disaggregation costs, and implementation costs. These figures are informed by benchmarking against previous LGR programmes, the specific features of the proposed options, and the operational context of local government in Worcestershire.

While not all savings are strictly linked to integration, the assumptions used within this modelling are primarily focused on service delivery and integration.

Assumptions in financial modelling

This modelling isolates the impact of reorganisation, assuming all other factors remain constant. Assumptions are drawn from previous LGR cases and adjusted following review by finance leads.

Importantly, the current modelling does not imply that new councils will be bound to deliver specific savings targets. Budget-setting responsibilities post-vesting day will rest with the new authorities.

The pace and scale of savings after Day 1 will depend on decisions made by the new councils, particularly regarding transformation and wider public service reform.

Details of the assumptions and benchmarking methodology used in the financial modelling are set out in Appendix 3: Financial Case for Change.

The results of our financial modelling

Our financial modelling for the proposed north and south model shows:

- **One-off implementation costs** of £19.83 million
- **Annual disaggregation costs** of £7.20 million
- **Gross reorganisation savings** of £16.23 million
- **Recurring net revenue savings** of £9.03 million

- **A payback period** of 3.86 years

Projected costs and savings have been phased over time to reflect realistic delivery timelines, drawing on precedent from other local government reorganisations. In the north and south model, implementation costs are spread across two years, while savings are profiled over a five-year period.

Further detail is set out in Appendix 3: Financial case for change.

Comparison to the one unitary model

The one unitary model delivers an early financial payback within approximately 1.4 years, reflecting higher initial gross savings and no disaggregation costs. However, these efficiencies are largely dependent on a centralised structure that has historically struggled to deliver sustained transformation. While the model achieves a short-term return, it risks replicating existing financial vulnerabilities at a larger scale, limiting its long-term resilience.

The north and south model delivers a more balanced and sustainable trajectory. It is forecast to achieve full payback within approximately 3.86 years, excluding any additional benefits which may arise from future transformation activity. Although the payback period is longer, it combines achievable efficiencies with stronger local governance, operational resilience, and the ability to build on existing shared services. It provides a balanced route to financial stability and public value, with a clear opportunity to reshape services around people and place. It is a small price to pay for better quality service delivery and outcomes.

Viewing the financial modelling in context

While the one unitary model delivers higher gross savings (£21.49m vs £16.23m), this difference must be viewed in the context of the overall scale of public service expenditure in Worcestershire.

The total revenue budget across all councils is £577m, including £251.3m in Adult Social Care and £145.0m in Children's Services. The £5.25m difference in gross savings between the two models represents less than 1% of total expenditure and 1.75% of social care. It also equates to just £8.97 per resident.

In this context, the scale of savings is marginal compared to the cost of delivering core services. What matters more is whether the new councils can deliver services that are effective, sustainable and responsive to local needs.

Our assumptions on transformation are conservative in the financial analysis presented in this proposal. **We believe the north and south model has a greater ability to deliver sustainable transformation, and as an example, if a further 1% reduction in social care costs alone was achieved, this would deliver a payback period of 3.86 years.**

The north and south model is designed to embed prevention-led delivery, neighbourhood-based support, and stronger local accountability. These features are critical to managing demand and improving outcomes in high-cost services over time.

Figure 4.2.4. Cumulative financial benefit and payback period

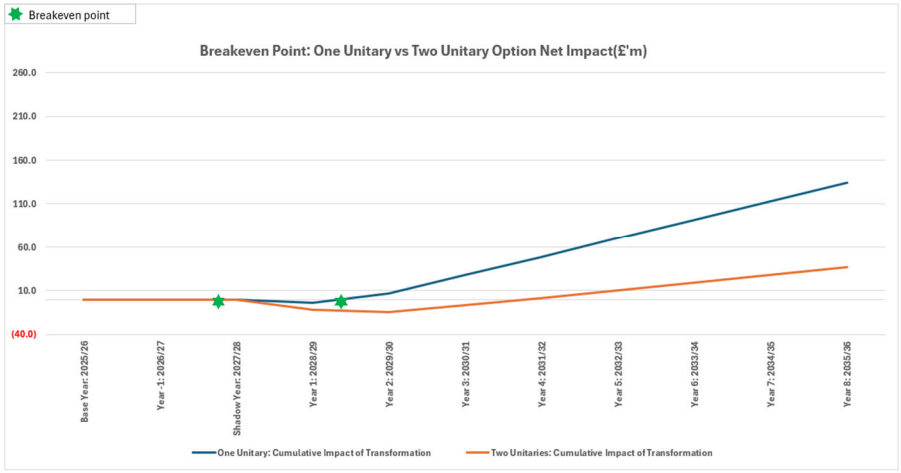


Figure 4.2.5 Financial modelling summary of options

LGR option	One-unitary council	Two-unitary councils
One-off implementation costs (£m)	£22.58m	£19.83m
Disaggregation costs (£m)	£0.00m	£7.20m
Gross reorganisation savings (£m)	(£21.49m)	(£16.23m)
Recurring net revenue savings (£m)	(£21.49m)	(£9.03m)
Estimated payback period	1.4yrs	3.86yrs
Key features of each option	Delivers higher theoretical gross savings, primarily from consolidation of senior leadership, back-office functions, and governance structures. No disaggregation costs due to full integration of services into a single authority. Additional implementation complexity in front-loading transformation and aggregating all services (the cost of which is not included in the above) into one new organisation and greater redundancy costs associated with workforce reduction. Financial benefits are relatively small in the context of total expenditure and rely on successful large-scale organisational change. Reflects a centralised delivery model with reduced local accountability and limited resilience to service or financial pressures.	Achieves a credible and sustainable gross savings while retaining local identify and operational resilience through two balanced unitary councils. Reflects existing maturity of shared services with collaboration across districts and proposed sharing of services in the future hybrid delivery model. Implementation costs comparable to one unitary model but deliver greater long-term alignment to place-based delivery. Offers a strong platform for preventative reform, community integration, local engagement and outcomes over time which will drive genuine long-term financial sustainability.

Balancing safe transition with maximising transformation

Criteria 2d. Proposals should set out how an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects

The north and south model embraces the once-in-a-generation opportunity to design new organisations that are modern, efficient and fit for the future. This model manages transition costs through leveraging existing budgets and capital receipts to fund invest-to-save activities, while enabling long-term transformation through digital innovation, integrated service reform and scalable governance that supports sustainable public service delivery.

Note: This section sets out some key elements of transition and transformation. *Refer to Section 4: Criteria 3* for further detail on how this impacts service delivery.

Embracing change and transformation

The north and south model embraces the once-in-a-generation opportunity to design new organisations that are modern, efficient and fit for the future.

In comparison to other LGR implementations, such as in Cumbria, there is a longer period of transition from decision on the future model to vesting day. This timeline provides the time and flexibility to take a transformative but safe approach from day one of implementation.

This proposal is aligned with the wider ambition for public service reform in Worcestershire. The two new councils will focus on delivering place-based and neighbourhood-focused services that are preventative and outcome-driven. Smaller footprints will enable services to be co-designed with communities, ensuring they are responsive to local needs.

This approach is designed to shift the system from reactive to preventative delivery, reducing demand and improving long-term outcomes. This is critical in achieving long-term financial sustainability, which cannot be delivered through short-term efficiencies alone. *Our approach to delivering Public Service Reform is set out in full detail in Section 4: Criteria 3.*

Managing transition and complexity

Local government reorganisation will inevitably involve a period of transition with a reduction from seven councils to two. This will require careful planning and coordination to ensure continuity of service delivery and to manage the complexity of change, but it should also mean we embrace the opportunity for change and transformation.

The north and south model recognises the risks associated with transition, particularly for critical services that are currently on improvement journeys, and sets out a phased approach to mitigate risks and associated costs. Whilst doing so, the north and south model also maximises the opportunity to deliver genuine transformation and improve outcomes for residents longer-term.

We also acknowledge the risk and complexity that changing demand pressures will bring in the future and believe these are mitigated by smaller and more responsive councils.

Transition costs (disaggregation and implementation) are set out in detail in Section 4: Criteria 2c and are underpinned by detailed financial modelling.

Disaggregation costs

Annual disaggregation costs of **£7.20m** (annual) are driven by the need to separate some county services and realign them across new governance structures.

These costs are minimalised due to the proposed approach to shared services as set out within Section 4: Criteria 3. This approach proposes countywide services will only be disaggregated where the rationale is clear and local delivery at a north and south level will lead to improved outcomes.

Where services are disaggregated, this will be phased over time, with early planning and risk identification supported by governance structures and operational transition teams.

The model of disaggregating services is well-established in LGR and will ensure clear accountability and safe delivery. The recent example in Cumbria is a prime example demonstrating how this can be done successfully.

Further detail on save transition of services is set out in Section 4: Criteria 3a.

Case Study – Cumbria Councils LGR disaggregation

In 2023, Cumbria underwent LGR, moving from a two-tier system of six district councils and one county council to two new unitary councils: Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council. This reorganisation was implemented across a large, sparsely populated rural county with significant geographic and demographic diversity.

The new councils chose to separate core services, including children's services and adult social care, under the leadership of their own directors and leadership teams. This enabled each unitary to focus on local priorities and deliver services tailored to their communities. At the same time, a number of shared services were retained where appropriate, including ICT and performance management functions, which had already been successfully operated jointly by districts prior to reorganisation.

The two unitary model allowed Cumbria to consolidate locality arrangements into more integrated and efficient forms of service delivery. Services were designed to reflect rurality and sparsity, improving responsiveness and efficiency. Strategic functions such as planning and economic development were aligned across the county through a Combined Authority, while frontline services remained embedded in communities.

Cumbria's experience demonstrates that a two unitary model can be successfully delivered in a complex setting, with clear benefits for service integration, local responsiveness, and financial sustainability.

Implementation costs

Implementation costs of **£19.83m** (one-off) are driven by transitional expenditure associated with programme management, ICT and system integration, workforce and organisation design, and one-off redundancy or transformation costs.

Some of these costs will be minimised by the shared service approach taken in the north and south model. A key driver is one-off redundancy costs, which will be minimised due to the retention of more of the workforce operating across the north and south, protecting and providing stability for critical services long-term.

The north and south model also benefits from the existing maturity of shared service arrangements across North and South Worcestershire, such as ICT, Revenues and Benefits, and Emergency Planning, which provide a strong foundation for managing complexity and minimising disruption. Leadership structures are also currently shared, with joint management teams in place across several districts.

Comparison to the one unitary model

The one unitary model has implementation costs of **£22.58m** in our modelling, marginally higher than the two unitary model.

The one unitary presents significant implementation risks and limitations that undermine its perceived simplicity. While it may appear administratively straightforward, the reality is a complex and disruptive aggregation of all district-level services into a single organisation. This 'big bang' approach would require harmonising multiple service models, IT systems, staffing structures and operational practices simultaneously, increasing the risk of service disruption and implementation failure. It would also result in greater workforce redundancy costs and disruption.

The one unitary model would also disrupt established and effective shared service arrangements that currently operate within North and South Worcestershire. These arrangements have been built over time and tailored to the needs of their respective geographies. Their dissolution would undermine trusted local governance and disrupt continuity, creating additional complexity and cost.

The north and south model offers a pragmatic and flexible approach to service delivery. It enables a hybrid model that combines shared delivery where scale is beneficial with local delivery where outcomes are improved. It builds on the existing and successful foundations of shared services across North and South Worcestershire.

Opportunities for transformation

The north and south model provides a credible platform for genuine transformation, particularly in high-cost areas such as adult social care and children's services. It enables a shift from reactive to preventative service delivery, with services designed around people and place.

We will consider the use of capital receipts to support transformation and invest-to-save initiatives. This flexible funding mechanism will be used to enable service redesign and to support the upfront investment required to deliver long-term efficiencies.

A £2 million saving is included in the financial model, attributed to service redesign. This is a conservative estimate and can be scaled further based on the ambition and decisions to be taken by future authorities. These savings are possible to achieve through:

- Restructuring service delivery models to reduce duplication and streamline operations.
- Aligning management structures to support integrated leadership and accountability.
- Embedding prevention-led approaches to reduce long-term demand on statutory services.
- Establishing Integrated Neighbourhood Teams combining professionals from health, social care, housing and the voluntary sector.
- Delivering neighbourhood-based preventative services tailored to local needs.
- Rationalising assets (including where appropriate development and use of multi-service hubs) and contracts to reduce overheads and improve value for money.
- Integrating digital platforms to enhance access, efficiency and service coordination.
- Commissioning services more intelligently and through a place-based approach, tailored to the distinct needs of North and South Worcestershire and supporting smaller providers.

Comparison to the one unitary model

The one unitary model is presented as a route to transformation and large-scale savings, but this claim is not supported by evidence. It assumes continuation of existing County Council structures, limiting the scope for genuine service redesign and constraining the ability to meet local needs or reduce demand. Unlike the north and south model, it does not include a comparable allowance for service redesign savings.

Financially, the County Council ended 2024/25 with a £6.2 million overspend across its £433.4 million budget and missed its £37.2 million savings target by £4.7 million. With the majority of the county's public service budget already held by Worcestershire County Council, the scope for further efficiencies is limited. Cost pressures in adult social care, children's services, SEND, and transport are demand-led and not easily resolved through reorganisation.

District councils already operate lean structures and shared services, so consolidating them offers only marginal efficiencies. The one unitary model risks overstating its savings potential while replicating existing financial vulnerabilities at a larger scale.

The real opportunity for Worcestershire lies in reshaping services around people and place, integrating prevention and community delivery. The north and south model enables this by building on existing shared services, supporting neighbourhood-based delivery, and embedding transformation in high-cost areas. It offers a more credible and sustainable pathway to better outcomes for residents.

Long-term approach to financial sustainability

Criteria 2e. For areas covering councils that are in Best Value intervention and/or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals must additionally demonstrate how reorganisation may contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing and what area-specific arrangements may be necessary to make new structures viable

There is growing concern about the precarious financial position across Worcestershire, driven largely by the scale and fragility of Worcestershire County Council's budget and need for EFS. The county's budget is dominated by high-cost services and without a change in delivery model, these pressures will continue to grow. The north and south model is built to focus on prevention. It is well known that for every £1 spent on prevention £3.17 is saved on adult social care.

Financial context in Worcestershire

There is growing concern about the precarious financial position across Worcestershire, driven largely by the scale and fragility of Worcestershire County Council's budget. Worcestershire County Council holds the majority of the county's public service funding and is currently in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS), with £33.6 million approved for 2025–26 and a further £43.6 million identified as potentially required in 2026–27. This support has been provided through a capitalisation directive, allowing the council to sell assets or borrow to meet its funding gap.

Worcestershire County Council ended the 2024/25 financial year with a £6.2 million overspend across its £433.4 million budget. It had set a savings target of £37.2 million but under-delivered by £4.7 million. The cost of providing services in 2025/26 is forecast at £495.6 million, an increase of £62.2 million from the previous year. This rise is driven by inflation and escalating demand in adult social care, children's services, SEND provision, and home-to-school transport. These pressures are significantly above inflation and not matched by increases in council tax or government funding.

While the six district councils are not in formal intervention and are in comparatively stronger financial positions, there is a shared concern across the county about the sustainability of the current system. The two-tier structure contributes to inefficiencies through duplication in governance and overlaps in service delivery. The county council's financial position highlights the need for reform.

Budget challenges

The forecasted total gross budget gap for all councils in the county will be £85.8mby 2027/28.

All existing councils will continue to focus on delivering savings and managing their ongoing budget gaps regardless of local government reorganisation. However, the starting point for all new councils is expected to be stretched, with ongoing need for savings to be identified.

Figure 4.2.6. Forecasted total gross budget gap by 2028/29[37]

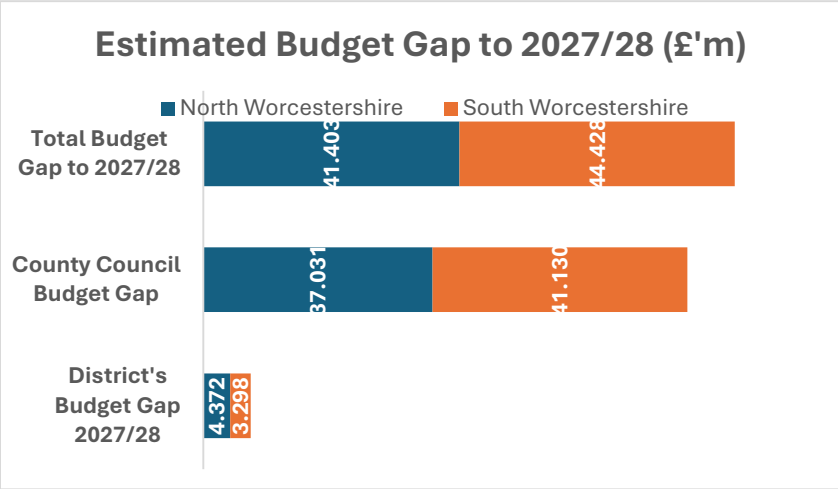
Proposed unitary council	Existing council	Budget gap 2026/27 (£'m)	Budget gap 2027/28 (£'m)
North Worcestershire	Bromsgrove	1.030	0.399
North Worcestershire	Redditch	0.435	0.345
North Worcestershire	Wyre Forest	1.536	3.628
South Worcestershire	Malvern Hills	0.014	0.047
South Worcestershire	Worcester	1.197	2.425

[37] Individual council budget setting reports

South Worcestershire	Wychavon	0.638	0.826
	Sub-total	**4.850**	**7.670**
	Worcestershire	63.674	78.161
	Total for county	**68.524**	**85.831**

Using population data, the estimated budget gap for Worcestershire County Council can be apportioned to the proposed unitary authorities to show the total estimated budget gap for the new councils.

Figure 4.2.7. Estimated budget gap by 2027/28[38]



In their shadow year, the new proposed unitary councils will be best placed to determine how to set future budgets based on localised priorities, revised funding settlements and taking into consideration existing budget pressures.

Funding reforms

Several reforms to the current system of funding are planned to be implemented by the Government from 2026/27. These include revisions to:

- Relative Needs Formulae
- Council Tax equalisation
- Rationalising the number of grants allocated outside of the Settlement Funding Assessment
- Resetting Business Rates

The impact of these reforms has not been factored into assumptions or analysis in this case due to the uncertainty on final decisions, impacts and transitionary arrangements.

Reserves levels[39]

Across Worcestershire councils, the total reserves identified as being available to fund LGR are £69.2m. This includes the full value of the Worcestershire County Council's general fund reserve of £19.2m.

Further discussions will be needed to decide the basis for allocation of county reserves across the new councils after reorganisation. The estimated allocation based on a population allocation is £33.1m to the northern unitary and £36.1m to the southern unitary.

It will be the decision of each new unitary to determine how to use its resources to fund the cost of reorganisation, which is likely to be through a mixture of use of reserves and capital receipts.

Figure 4.2.8. Reserve levels

Existing council	General fund (GF) balance (£'m)	Earmarked reserves (£'m)	Total reserves (£'m)
Bromsgrove	13.38	11.27	**24.65**
Malvern Hills	6.64	32.39	**39.02**
Redditch	6.87	17.96	**24.82**
Worcester	1.40	11.49	**12.89**

[38] Individual council budget setting reports

[39] Individual council statement of accounts

Wychavon	17.93	86.65	**104.58**
Wyre Forest	3.75	36.55	**40.30**
Sub-total	**49.97**	**196.30**	**246.26**
Worcestershire	19.20	93.80	**113.00**
County total	**69.17**	**290.10**	**359.26**

Due to the ring-fence on balances and available earmarked reserves for the Housing Revenue Account, these have not been factored into any financial analysis in this case.

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

As of the end of 2024/25, Worcestershire County Council reported a deficit related to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) of £98.2m.

Under LGR, shares of this deficit would be apportioned on an appropriate basis e.g. school pupil numbers to the proposed north and south unitary councils.

Deficits on the DSG is a national problem affecting county and unitary authorities. At the present time these are being managed through a statutory override which enables a technical adjustment in the statutory statement of accounts to hold these deficits without recognising the impact against General Fund resources.

A consultation is expected by the Government in 2026/27 on reforms to SEND, the root causes of deficits and to invite proposals for a resolution. Members of the Shadow authorities will need to carefully consider proposed reforms in light of their local circumstances.

Debt levels[40]

The external debt position reported across all councils is outlined below.

Figure 4.2.9. External debt position

Proposed unitary council	Existing council	Short-term borrowing (£'m)	Long-term borrowing (£'m)	Total borrowing (£'m)
North Worcestershire	Bromsgrove	0.0	0.0	0.0
North Worcestershire	Redditch	0.0	103.9	103.9
North Worcestershire	Wyre Forest	0.3	31.0	31.3
South Worcestershire	Malvern Hills	0.0	0.0	0.0
South Worcestershire	Worcester	0.0	15.1	15.1
South Worcestershire	Wychavon	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Sub-total	**0.3**	**150.0**	**150.3**
	Worcestershire	106.2	446.5	552.7
	County total	**106.5**	**596.6**	**703.0**

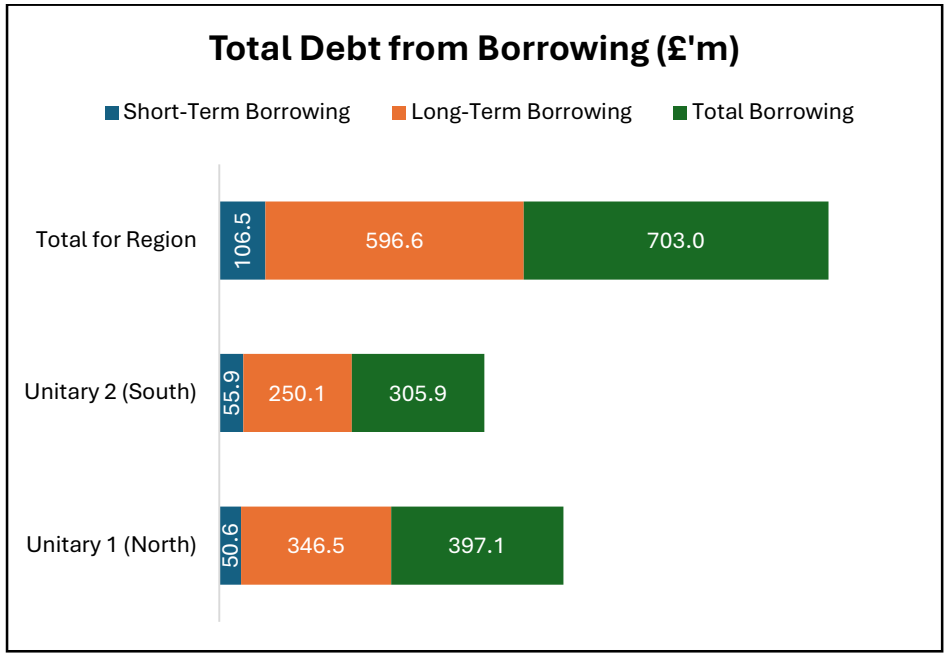
Note: *The majority of the debt from borrowing for Redditch relates to borrowing for the Housing Revenue Account.*

The majority of the debt belongs to Worcestershire County Council, which saw an increase of £45.7m in the most recent financial year, In contrast, the district councils have not increased their debt positions since the end of 2023/24. Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills, and Wychavon are among 32 councils that had no borrowings at the end of 2024/25. [41]

[40] Council provided data

[41] Worcestershire councils are sitting on £750m of debt | Worcester News

Figure 4.2.10 Total debt from borrowing



If the existing debt for the county was apportioned based on population, the total debt from borrowing in the proposed unitary councils would be as follows:

Figure 4.2.11. Total debt from borrowing for the region

	Short-term borrowing (£'m)	Long-term borrowing (£'m)	Total borrowing (£'m)
North Worcestershire	50.6	346.5	397.1
South Worcestershire	55.9	250.1	305.9
County total	**106.5**	**596.6**	**703.0**

As part of medium-term financial planning, the Shadow Authorities will need to carefully consider priorities for their respective capital programmes for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account and how to finance these by considering existing debt they inherited under LGR and impacts on revenue budgets from debt due to historic decisions.

Criteria 3: Delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens

This section includes:

Proposal section	Government criteria addressed	Case for the north and south model
Creating the best public services for Worcestershire	**Criteria 3a.** Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery, and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services	The north and south model will transform public services by shifting from crisis response to prevention, embedding delivery in places and neighbourhoods. Services will be managed at the right scale, with shared arrangements where appropriate and strong local leadership for high-risk services. This approach builds on existing collaboration, strengthens accountability, and enables tailored, resilient services that reflect the distinct needs of North and South Worcestershire
Reforming services for the twenty-first century	**Criteria 3b.** Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money	The proposed north and south model for Worcestershire aims to transform public services by enhancing local responsiveness, promoting prevention, and integrating with local partners, while ensuring robust governance and accountability for critical services like children's, adult, and public health.
Transforming adult services	**Criteria 3c.** Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety	Our proposal is that adult services are managed separately by North and South Worcestershire, each under the leadership of their own Director of Adult Services. The two councils would be established with a strong ethos and culture of collaboration, with shared services where it benefits vulnerable adults. This would include a single Worcestershire Safeguarding Adults Board.
Transforming children's services	**Criteria 3c. As above.**	Our proposal is that children's services are managed separately by North and South Worcestershire, each under the leadership of their own Director of Children's Services. The two councils would be established with a strong ethos and culture of collaboration, with shared services where it benefits service users and their families. This would include a single Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership Board

Transforming wider public services	**Criteria 3c. As above.**	The proposed two-unitary council model for Worcestershire aims to transform public services by enhancing local responsiveness, promoting prevention, and integrating with local partners, while ensuring robust governance and accountability for critical services like children's, adult, and public health.

Creating the best public services for Worcestershire

Criteria 3a. Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery, and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services

The north and south model will transform public services by shifting from crisis response to prevention, embedding delivery in places and neighbourhoods. Services will be managed at the right scale, with shared arrangements where appropriate and strong local leadership for high-risk services. This approach builds on existing collaboration, strengthens accountability, and enables tailored, resilient services that reflect the distinct needs of North and South Worcestershire.

LGR presents a once in a lifetime opportunity to **transform** services for the residents of Worcestershire, rather than just doing more of the same.

The model will ensure that key services, including adults and children's social care and public health are strong and resilient with clear leadership. Ensuring that young people and vulnerable adults have their needs listened to with appropriate and tailored responses delivered using resources wisely.

Our vision

Worcestershire will have the best public services in the UK

LGR will be a catalyst for change. We want every child, adult and family to have the support they need, when they need it, to live life safely, independently and with opportunity, preventing crisis, building resilience and promoting wellbeing in all our communities.

We will provide high quality services in places that residents are proud of being part of and feel they have a stake in. Two unitary councils - one in North Worcestershire and one is South Worcestershire - provides the best opportunity to do that.

Public services will be place and neighbourhood focused

Our services will be place-based by default, building on local strengths, assets and relationships. Two councils will avoid the remoteness of central services and build on the commitment to place and neighbourhoods that is engrained in the culture of the six district councils.

What our residents have told us is important

"Many council services are already operating on a north / south basis. A single Worcestershire unitary council will move residents and communities further away from the services they need. Currently there is inequity in the delivery of Worcestershire-wide services with some areas and communities receiving more resources and attention than others." – Redditch resident

Services will shift from crisis to prevention

Too many key services in Worcestershire are driven by crisis and are struggling to keep up with demand. Over time, a north and south model will shift services from crisis to prevention, by providing support early to vulnerable people, closer to their homes.

Services will be integrated in neighbourhood teams

Our approach will challenge the culture of siloes between services. Adult and children's services, primary care, housing and voluntary sector partners will come together in integrated neighbourhood teams. The north and south model is more conducive to integration by being closer to communities, being able to focus on relationships at a more local level.

Services will be delivered at the 'right' scale

We will ensure services are managed at the scale that is best for residents. This includes the following:

- Neighbourhood level – this describes recognisable local communities, where residents live and spend the majority of their time
- Unitary council level – the two new council areas of North and South Worcestershire, representing two distinct geographies
- County level – a footprint covering both North Worcestershire and South Worcestershire, the traditional county boundary
- Strategic Authority level – the regional footprint, where activity happens at a scale of around 2 million population. *The configuration of the Strategic Authority is still to be finalised, as described in Section 4: Criteria 5.*

We will take the approach that delivers the best outcomes for residents and provides them with value for money.

What our local businesses and VCS have told us is important

"More tailored services for each area. A unitary is too large, and I feel some areas/ services will be overlooked and get the poor end of the deal. north/south makes a lot more sense in both saving money and keeping local services running without being spread too thinly." - Redditch resident

We will ensure critical high-risk services are safe and legal, with clear accountability for performance

Our approach will ensure the safety of vulnerable people and put good governance and management at the heart of delivering public services to residents in Worcestershire. We will ensure clear lines of accountability through officers and elected members, and mechanisms to manage risk. This will lay a strong foundation for high quality services and realising the benefits of a more responsive two council model of local government in Worcestershire.

Our guiding principles

Driven by our vision to transform services, elected members set 10 guiding principles to determine our approach to services in the north and south model:

1. **It's about people:** Transform, design, plan and deliver all our services with and for all Worcestershire residents including young people and vulnerable adults.
2. **Governance and oversight:** Maintain and strengthen shared governance and oversight arrangements where risks span multiple service areas or geographies.
3. **Stability and continuity:** Maintain stability and continuity of service for individuals already receiving support, supporting workforce stability and leveraging existing networks and delivery arrangements.
4. **Prevention first:** Prioritise prevention-based service delivery at the most appropriate geographic level to address needs early and reduce escalation to more intensive or costly interventions. Ensure local access points to services for visibility and accessibility for the whole population.
5. **Specialist services:** Commission and deliver specialist, low-volume, or complex services on a shared basis across localities to ensure access to expertise, efficiency, and equitable access.
6. **Localised commissioning and procurement:** Commissioning and procurement should be tailored to the specific needs, priorities, and characteristics of each locality, with flexibility to operate at different scales and respond to emergencies rapidly.
7. **Reducing bureaucracy:** Establish integrated back-office support functions to enable efficient, secure, and consistent processes across all service areas, and remove unnecessary administrative barriers so services are agile, efficient and responsive to local needs.
8. **Data sharing and intelligence:** Enable consistent data sharing protocols and joint intelligence to support planning, delivery, and evaluation across units.
9. **Co-production:** Listening to and working with residents and voluntary sector, community, and health partners to strengthen prevention and provide services that work for people.
10. **Valuing family and community connections:** Services designed around the lived experiences of individuals, recognising family relationships and local connections and assets.

We will manage transition safely and without fragmenting services

We appreciate the challenges of managing change and the risks of unnecessary fragmentation of services. The transition of services to the north and south model will be carefully planned and managed over the two years up to April 2028. The implementation of the new councils will draw on good practice and lessons from recent reorganisations such as in Cumbria and Dorset.

The two councils will be established with a strong ethos and culture of collaboration. We will create our own 'safe transfer protocol' to ensure that there are no gaps in service, vulnerable people are given reassurance that

their care will be managed seamlessly, risks are anticipated, and any potential sticking points are discussed and agreed well in advance of day one.

For example, we will have clear principles around determining outcomes of cases of Ordinary Residence Determination, and a governance process with senior officers from both councils. This will prevent escalation of disputes to the Department of Health and Social Care and wasting money on legal proceedings.

Case study: Managing the transition of Local Government Reorganisation in Dorset and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole

The 2019 LGR in Dorset led to the creation of two new unitary authorities: Dorset Council, covering the rural county, and BCP Council, encompassing the largely urban areas of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

The transition to the two councils was managed through a 'safe transfer' protocol, allowing joint working in the period to vesting day and minimising disruption for service users. Oversight remained joint via pan-Dorset safeguarding boards. Both councils retained the same commissioned services arrangements initially, while beginning to manage their own assessment and social work teams independently.

We will build on a history of successful models of shared services and the track record of working together

Shared services have a long history in Worcestershire. District councils and the county council are used to collaborating across the established geographies of North and South Worcestershire. The culture and commitment of our local politicians means that they are pragmatic and work together, regardless of political stripe.

Among the six district councils, two of the three in North Worcestershire (Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council) and two of the three in South Worcestershire (Malvern Hills and Wychavon District Councils) share a senior leadership team.

It is anticipated that current north and south shared services would continue for the foreseeable future, pending review of service delivery once the new authorities are established.

What our local businesses and VCS have told us is important

"The councils in South Worcestershire already have a close working relationship and share services, therefore it seems very sensible to continue this with the design of the new unitary authority for the area." – Malvern Hills

Examples of successful existing shared services across the county and in North and South Worcestershire are described below.

Case Study – Successful shared services across Worcestershire

South Worcestershire Revenues and Benefits

Shared Revenues and Benefits has been running since 2007 and is hosted by Malvern Hills District Council. The service has 78 staff and manages tax collection, benefit administration, and welfare payments across three councils, ensuring financial sustainability and customer support. Unified systems and procedures, and advanced use of technology, provide a seamless customer experience. It has built strong community links with Citizens Advice, local housing associations, food banks, and voluntary groups.

North Worcestershire Water Resource Management

The North Worcestershire Water Management (NWWM) service was introduced as a shared service following the 2007 floods. The three councils recognised that by coming together, the service would be more resilient to respond to residents' needs. NWWM
deals with flooding, drainage, ordinary watercourses and surface water issue, aiming to reduce flood risk whilst protecting the water environment and encouraging sustainable water management.

Pan-county Worcestershire Regulatory Services

Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) delivers environmental health, licensing, and related regulatory functions across all six district councils in Worcestershire. WRS operates as a delegated service, with each partner council transferring functions to a Joint Committee managed by a Head of Service. They also carry out the Trading Standards function under a contract with Worcestershire County Council. WRS is hosted by Bromsgrove Council

for financial and staffing purposes, but is based in Wyre Forest's offices. The WRS shared service would continue under the north and south model.

Reforming services for the twenty-first century

Criteria 3b. Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money

The proposed two-unitary council model for Worcestershire aims to transform public services by enhancing local responsiveness, promoting prevention, and integrating with local partners, while ensuring robust governance and accountability for critical services like children's, adult, and public health.

The scale of challenge in Worcestershire

The scale of the service delivery challenge in Worcestershire is vast. The county council accounts for the largest proportion of cost and budget across Worcestershire, and their position is increasingly precarious, resulting in a need for Exceptional Financial Support in 2025-26 and likely 2026-27. *Further detail is set out in Section 4: Criteria 2e on the overall financial position.*

The core issues are driven by escalating demand in adult social care, children's services, SEND provision, and home-to-school transport. These are not marginal increases, they are structural and sustained:

- Children's social care costs have risen by **18%** over the past five years.
- A budgeted **£6.6m** increase in children's services due to demand, with gross expenditure rising **12%** to **£166m**.
- Placements and provision budget, covering demand-led placements, rose from **£65.8m** in 2023/24 to **£83.1m** in 2024/25 and now accounts for **over 50%** of the children's services budget.
- Average weekly placement costs increasing by **19%** in under a year to **£1,456** in 2022.
- Home-to-school transport costs are projected to rise **22%** from **£37.4m** in 2024/25 to **£45.8m** in 2025/26.
- Gross adult social care expenditure was **£309m** (net £145.8m after grants) in 2023/24.
- By 2038, demand for adult social care is projected to increase **57%** among adults aged 65 and over, and by **29%** among working-age adults (18-64).
- Between 2021 and 2025, Worcestershire experienced a **94.6%** increase in adult social care mental health caseloads, rising from **428** to **834** cases.
- Adult social care reforms are expected to bring over **1,600** additional self-funders into council-funded care, further intensifying pressure.
- Public Health budget for 2025/26 is **£40.6m**, mostly committed to commissioned services, leaving limited flexibility to respond to needs.

Further to this, the delivery of these services has not been effective in past years. An April 2024 SEND inspection, found that there were 'widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns about the experiences and outcomes of children'. Most care homes were rated Good by the CQC, but 21% required improvement. A small number were judged as 'Inadequate', an indicator of variable quality across the county.

Without a change in the way these services are delivered, pressures will continue to grow and spiral. Reorganisation efficiencies are minimal in comparison to the growing threat of spiralling frontline costs. This change requires genuine public service reform.

Comparison to the one unitary model

The one unitary model risks replicating the same structural issues that currently exist but on a larger scale, absorbing district financial resilience to temporarily offset unsustainable county-level costs.

The north and south model provides the structural and cultural foundations to deliver this reform effectively across Worcestershire. It enables services to be designed around people and places, not organisations, and supports a shift

from crisis response to prevention. This approach will improve outcomes, reduce long-term demand, and deliver better value for money.

How two councils will achieve public service reform

In the Spending Review 2025, the Government set out three principles that should underpin all delivery and change in government. These are set out in the table below, including how two councils will deliver them most effectively:

How two-unitary councils deliver the Government's principles for public service reform	
1. Integrate services: Organise services around people's lives	The north and south model for Worcestershire will facilitate stronger local relationships and more joined-up, person-centred services. This will build on the commitment to community stakeholders working together that is engrained in the culture of the six district councils. **Neighbourhood delivery models:** A greater focus on local places and communities will ensure services can work more closely together on smaller footprints. The two-council structure, with Neighbourhood Area Committees, will enable closer working with local NHS partners and the VCS, making it easier for residents to access support and for professionals to collaborate around individuals and families. **Single front door:** Each council will be able to develop a 'single front door' for public services in communities, where residents can access a range of support including housing, social care, health, benefits, in one location or through one system, reducing duplication, improving the experience of residents and achieving better outcomes.
2. Focus on prevention: Improve long-term outcomes for people and rely less on expensive crisis management	The north and south model for Worcestershire will shift services from a focus on crisis management to prevention, by providing support early to vulnerable people closer to their homes. This will be possible by challenging the status quo and building on the district councils' deep relationships, networks and trust with communities. **A change in culture:** A closeness to communities and focus on supporting people early on is embedded in the way the districts work with communities. This 'bottom-up' view will challenge the way many services are currently delivered and drive a shift in mindset, seizing the opportunity to reinvent local government. **Prioritising community prevention:** The two councils will each be responsible for prevention and early help services in their areas, including homelessness prevention and community centres currently run by the district councils. New Integrated Neighbourhood Teams will enable targeted, timely support, informed by local insight and co-designed with residents and partners in health, housing and community safety. **Valuing hyper-local relationships:** Our approach will support investment in local relationships and capacity, recognising that prevention is most effective when rooted in communities. Councils in North and South Worcestershire will be more agile than a one unitary model in piloting and scaling preventative approaches and tackling demand on high-cost statutory services over time.
3. Devolve power: Local areas understand the needs of their	The north and south model will be **place-based by default**, building on the commitment to communities that in engrained in the culture of the six district councils. Our proposal will avoid the remoteness of centralised services delivered across the whole of Worcestershire.

communities best, with services that are designed with and for people, in partnership with civil society and the impact economy	**Local democratic representation:** The north and south model provides a greater number of councillors per resident than a one unitary model, supporting more effective local representation and accountability. This is particularly valued by residents, as evidenced by the Shape Worcestershire engagement, where 62.5%, who expressed a view, preferred the north and south model. **Neighbourhood empowerment:** The north and south model includes robust community governance arrangements, through Neighbourhood Area Committees and strengthened town and parish councils. Communities will have real influence over local priorities, how local budgets are spent, and the design of service, with a principle that decisions are made as close as possible to the communities they affect. **Partnership with the VCS:** Both councils will invest in relationships with the local third sector, recognising their vital role in delivering services that reflect local needs, their closeness to the communities they service, and their critical role in prevention. This will draw on the district councils' deep knowledge, understanding, relationships, networks and trust with community-based organisations.

The impact of a prevention-led approach

Real change in Worcestershire will be rooted in a preventative approach to services delivered closer to neighbourhoods. This can only be achieved effectively through a north and south model, where services are locally led and build on the experience and success of district councils in delivering at community level.

Local case studies referenced in Section 4: Criteria 6 demonstrate how districts have successfully embedded neighbourhood-based models, with strong community engagement and tailored service delivery. These approaches are not only more responsive but also more effective in reducing demand and improving outcomes. National examples show how far this model can go in driving benefits when properly resourced and locally driven.

Case study	What they did	Benefits generated
Wigan: The Wigan Deal	The 'Wigan Deal' is an informal contract between the council and residents. It involves cross-organisational, collaborative working between frontline staff, community organisations, and residents. Services are delivered in multi-disciplinary teams on a neighbourhood footprint, made up of professionals from health, adult and children's social care, the police, housing and others. These teams work together to identify the most at-risk cohort of residents and then provide consistent engagement through key workers, to ensure individuals receive the care they need.	Delivered £180 million in efficiencies while maintaining low council tax. Improved service quality and resident satisfaction through integrated, person-centred support.
Northumbria: Changing Futures	Six councils collaborated to redesign frontline support for vulnerable individuals. Caseworkers were freed from administrative burden to focus on co-created, tailored interventions.	Reduced public service use dramatically for high-need individuals, with one case showing a drop from £450,000 to £1,932 in 18 months. Demonstrated the value of targeted, personalised support.

Leeds: ABCD	Rolled out ABCD across 17 sites, focusing on building community capacity and resilience. Partnered with local organisations to identify and mobilise community assets.	Returned up to £14.02 in social value for every £1 invested. Strengthened social cohesion and reduced reliance on formal services.
Somerset: Adult Social Care	Supported the development of 1,250 micro-providers to deliver flexible, community-based care. Enabled residents to access personalised support closer to home.	Delivered 30,000 hours of care weekly to 6,000 people. Enabled earlier hospital discharge, increased uptake of direct payments, and reduced costs through lower-cost care models.
Swansea: Local Area Co-ordination	Embedded Local Area Coordinators in neighbourhoods to support individuals and connect them to informal networks and community resources.	Returned £2 to £3 in savings for every £1 invested. Strengthened informal support systems and reduced demand on statutory services.
Westmorland and Furness: Community Micro-enterprise programme	Developed micro-enterprises to deliver care and support locally, tailored to community needs. Focused on retaining economic value within communities.	Created 26 jobs, improved care quality, reduced unmet need, and kept funding within local economies. Demonstrated the potential of small-scale, community-led provision.

Transforming adult services

Criteria 3c. Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety

Our proposal is that adult services are managed separately by North and South Worcestershire, each under the leadership of their own Director of Adult Services. The two councils would be established with a strong ethos and culture of collaboration, with shared services where it benefits vulnerable adults. This would include a single Worcestershire Safeguarding Adults Board.

Our vision for adult services

Our vision is a Worcestershire where ageing is not a limitation but an opportunity where people live fully, stay connected and flourish in their communities.

To realise our vision, the two councils will create an adult social care system that is preventative, locally responsive and partnership driven. We will listen to the voice of services users and their lived experience to shape services that work for them. Services will be designed around people's needs, ensuring support is timely, personalised and integrated across health, housing and voluntary sectors.

The two councils will establish separate adult services departments. Each council will have its own Director of Adult Services, with clear line of accountability to the Lead Member for Adult Services and Head of Paid Service.

What our residents have told us is important

" I am against a local authority becoming so large that it becomes distant from its residents... The savings come from when there is a good understanding of the customers you are serving - data and numbers will only tell you so much - you have to be closer to your communities to really get it, and if you don't really know your communities, you can't understand them and you certainly can't work with them to find solutions." – Bromsgrove resident

Assessment, care management and preventative neighbourhood-based services will be delivered by individual councils. There will be collaboration in commissioning, market management functions and specialist services (such as mental health, learning disability and occupational therapy). The councils will retain the operational arrangements around the Better Care Fund and Discharge to Assess pathways. Where there are shared services, these will be overseen by a joint committee supported by the two Directors of Adult Services and with equal member involvement from the two councils.

The two councils will share a pan-Worcestershire Safeguarding Adults Partnership Board.

Challenges and solutions in the north and south model are set out below.

1. Rising demand for services

Challenges	Why two councils?	Pitfalls of one council
An ageing population – Worcestershire's over-65 population is growing. In 2025 it accounts for 24.2% of all residents and is set to increase to 26.0% in 2030 and 27.6% in 2035[42]. This ageing trend is driving greater demand for care. **Increasing complexity of need –** Demand for specific services is rising sharply. For example, between April 2021 and September 2025, Worcestershire experienced a 94.6% increase in adult social care mental health caseloads, rising from 428 to 834 cases.[43]	**Localised solutions for different challenges:** North Worcestershire, with higher deprivation and workforce pressures, can focus on early intervention and workforce development, while South Worcestershire, with an older population, can prioritise preventative care and housing-with-care initiatives. **Leadership that 'knows its patch' better:** Two Directors of Adult Services for North and South Worcestershire will be able to build closer local relationships with stakeholders in communities. **Better integration with other neighbourhood services:** As they are closer to communities, two unitary councils can better align adult social care with NHS primary care, housing services and the voluntary sector in Integrated Neighbourhood Teams.	**More of the same:** one unitary council will continue the culture and approach of the existing services. It will be more difficult to address existing weakness and achieve genuine transformation. **A one-size-fits-all model:** one unitary council risks a one-size-fits-all model, limiting responsiveness and slowing decision-making at a neighbourhood level. **Reduced local accountability:** one unitary council risks diluting local oversight, reducing accountability at a community level and impacting quality of services. **Less accessible services:** one unitary council may struggle to implement services on a genuine neighbourhood footprint, reducing accessibility for marginalised groups and failing to prevent crisis.

2. Sustainability and stability of the care market, with low occupancy, staffing gaps and rising costs

Challenges	Why two councils?	Pitfalls of one council
Reliance on care homes – Worcestershire County Council reports 177 registered care homes, of which 133 cater to older people, providing a mix of residential and nursing provision[44]. Local Government Association data on long-term support (March 2025) indicates that 6,654 adults in Worcestershire were accessing long-term support. Of these, 69.4% were	**Place-based market shaping:** Provider fragility and variable demand across districts require a nuanced understanding to inform commissioning. Two unitary councils can support more intelligent commissioning, supporting smaller providers of care-home and domiciliary care.	**Overlooking variation and smaller providers:** one unitary council risks overlooking variation, increasing the risk of provider failure. Worcestershire County Council identifies market sustainability, as a weakness and critical priority for the next five years. **Less responsive to the market's needs:** one unitary council would face greater complexity, slower

[42] Analysis of Office for National Statistics Projections taken from Worcestershire County Council population dashboard (accessed 8 October 2025)
[43] Data quoted from Worcestershire County Council, Adult Care and Well Being Overview and Scrutiny Panel, September 2025
[44] Worcestershire County Council Adult care and well-being overview and scrutiny panel (4 December 2024) Care homes and independence focussed domiciliary care market position

supported through community-based care, below the England average of 72.9%. 20.9% (1,415) were supported in residential care, and 10.2% (690) in nursing care, above the national averages of 20.1% and 8.0% respectively[45]

Fragility of care providers – The Care Homes and Independence-Focused Domiciliary Care Market Position Statement (December 2024) highlights that the market is under sustained pressure from rising costs, workforce shortages, and a growing reliance on agency staff[46]. Temporary and permanent closures are reported, particularly in smaller or rural homes.

Responsive, innovative service models: Local oversight enables the design and implementation of tailored solutions, such as step-down units, wrap-around domiciliary support and neighbourhood-level preventative interventions.

Local workforce development and skills investment:
Creates a clear opportunity to invest in training and employment pathways for local people, particularly in the care sector. By working closely with further education colleges, universities, and care providers, each council can tailor vocational programmes to meet local demand and support residents into meaningful employment.

decision-making and reduced flexibility in adapting to local trends.

Delays caused by conflicting priorities between different areas: one unitary council may struggle to balance differing priorities across the county. Centralised structures risk slower rollout and misaligned solutions.

3. Maximising the potential of partnerships, to deliver a responsive, preventative adult social care

Challenges	Why two councils?	Pitfalls of one council
Building stronger partnerships to reduce pressure on adult social care services – Effective adult social care relies on strong partnerships with health, housing, VCSE organisations and communities. Worcestershire adult social care must be better integrated **Implementing Integrated Neighbourhood Teams –** Effective structure for integrated working is essential for preventative care, joined-up pathways and responsive neighbourhood-level interventions.	**Strong neighbourhood governance:** Two locally accountable councils can embed strong neighbourhood governance, co-designing services with VCSE organisations, town and parish councils and local communities. **Integrated health and prevention:** Integrated Neighbourhood Teams , founded on strong relationships with Primary Care, housing, VCS and other local providers, will allow more effective community-based services, reablement, and specialist placements that reflect local population needs.	**Weaker local relationships:** one unitary council will be less able to manage the diverse needs and asks of local areas. It is likely to seek relationships at a larger scale to speak for a range of communities, rather than treating each place individually. **Less robust community governance:** one unitary council will naturally look to make decisions at scale, reducing the influence of local communities and partnerships over their services. **Less effective integration:** Weaker relationships and governance at a community level will make integrated working more difficult, reducing the potential for

[45] LG Inform, Insights from Client Level Data (CLD): Long-Term Support in Worcestershire, accessed October 2025
[46] Worcestershire County Council Care homes and independence focussed domiciliary care market position (December 2024)

Evidence-based preventative impact: Two unitary councils can implement interventions in ways tailored to local populations and that capture local need. Neighbourhood-focused, partnership-led interventions improve outcomes, reduce hospital admissions and deliver high social return on investment. Examples include Home First, Seacroft Local Care Partnership (25% reduction in unplanned admissions) and East Staffordshire's social prescribing model (26% reduction in primary care demand)[47]. benefits in preventing crisis and providing higher quality more tailored support to people.

A north and south model will transform adult services and strengthen the wider system of support. Designing services around local communities in the north and south, focusing on prevention and integrating services, will ensure higher quality services for residents. Shared commissioning of complex, high-cost services, and retaining the operational arrangements around the Better Care Fund and Discharge to Assess pathways, will ensure consistency and value for money, while neighbourhood-level prevention and early help remain tailored to the distinct needs of each community.

Lived Experience: Reclaiming Control

"When I reached out to the social prescribing service, I was overwhelmed, struggling with my physical and mental health, stuck in unsuitable housing, and facing problems at work because of my condition.

The social prescriber contacted me quickly and was incredibly friendly, knowledgeable, and reassuring. With her support, I accessed talking therapies and got help from Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service to deal with my work situation. She also connected me with a Bromsgrove District Housing Trust support worker to address our housing issues.

Before, I felt like I was drowning under the weight of everything. Now, I feel calm, supported, and in control of my life again."

[47] https://www.nhsconfed.org/case-studies/seacroft-local-care-partnership & https://www.nhsconfed.org/case-studies/east-staffordshire-social-prescribing

Transforming children's services

Criteria 3c. Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety

Our proposal is that children's services would be managed separately by North and South Worcestershire, each under the leadership of their own Director of Children's Services. The two councils would be established with a strong ethos and culture of collaboration, with shared services where it benefits service users and their families. This would include a single Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership Board.

Our vision for children's services

Our vision is for Worcestershire to be the best place in the UK for children to grow up, where every child is safe, valued and empowered to thrive, and every family receives the support they need to flourish in their communities.

A north and south model will enable a shift to focus on prevention through place-based local early help services closer to communities. We will listen to the voice of children and young people. We will address historic weaknesses in quality and consistency through more localised leadership within the distinct geographies of North and South Worcestershire. Services in North and South Worcestershire will be more integrated, retaining key relationships with the NHS and police, whilst bringing a wider range of local partners together in the voluntary sector, primary care, housing and other services.

The north and south model will establish separate children's services departments. Each council will have its own Director of Children's Services, with clear line of accountability to the Lead Member for Children's Service and Head of Paid Service.

Safeguarding and children protection, early help, and education will be delivered by individual councils. There will be collaboration in commissioning and market management (including around SEND). Where there are shared services, these will be overseen by a joint committee supported by the two Directors of Adult Services and with equal member involvement from the two councils. The two councils will share a pan-Worcestershire Safeguarding Children's Partnership Board.

Key challenges in children's services in Worcestershire

Delivering children services at a county level isn't working. The consistency of arrangements for children's services has been an area of historic challenge, following the experience of running a children's trust and subsequent taking the service back in-house.

There are a total number of 242 schools in Worcestershire (178 primary, 16 middle, 30 secondary, 9 special and 7 pupil referral units). A total of 60% of these are academies, the vast majority of which are primary schools. The academies operate largely independently of the county council and there is a need to build and maintain effective relationships with them at a local level.

Our proposal for delivering children's services through two councils in North and South Worcestershire can address some of the long-standing challenges, such as those set out below.

1. Rising demand and costs

Challenges	Why two councils?	Pitfalls of one council
The highest rate of looked after children in any county in England – Statistics from 2023/24 show that there are 1,044 looked after children in Worcestershire. The rate for 2023/24 was 87 per 10,000, compared to nearest neighbours average of 60. Worcestershire has the highest rate of all county councils[48]. **Costs are continuing to increase –** Over the past five years, children's social care costs have risen by around 18%[49]. Worcestershire County Council has budgeted for a net budget increase of £6.6m in children's services.	**Place-based early intervention**: Early help services can be tailored to the distinct needs of North and South Worcestershire, allowing teams to focus on smaller, more manageable populations. **Leadership that 'knows its patch':** Two Directors of Children's Services ensure decisions are locally owned and performance is closely monitored. It is more conducive to better relationships with stakeholders in communities. **Detailed local intelligence to drive decision-making**: Two unitary councils can use their local knowledge, data and intelligence to monitor trends and hotspots in more closely, enabling more proactive planning to prevent crises (recognising the importance of families and children staying together where possible) and target high-cost areas effectively. **Responsive services that can react to need quickly**: Two councils' knowledge and relationships with local communities will mean they can respond to need quickly. A response to potential issues, for example local 'copycat incidents' in schools, can be spotted earlier and responded to.	**More of the same:** one unitary council will continue the approach of the existing service. Transformation in the culture and approach, including shifting to prevention, will be difficult to achieve. **Operating at scale and missing local nuance:** one unitary council will be more likely to make decisions at scale that are less tailored to local need, limiting responsiveness and missing opportunities to prevent escalation. **Less meaningful local relationships:** one unitary council has a greater distance between leadership and frontline delivery and is less conducive to relationships with stakeholders in communities. **More difficult to integrate across neighbourhood services:** Centralised management risks weaker alignment with local teams and makes it more difficult to genuinely integrate services with the NHS, housing and VCS.

[48] I LG Inform, Children in Need and Care in Worcestershire report for Worcestershire County Council: Written by LGA Research from Local Government Association, accessed October 2025

[49] https://worcestershire.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s57020/Appendix+2+-+Future+Worcestershire+Proposal.pdf

2. Ensuring stable and local care for looked after children

Challenges	Why two councils?	Pitfalls of one council
The placement market in Worcestershire is under pressure – Data shows a persistent shortage of appropriate local placements. In 2023/24, 19% of looked-after children were placed more than 20 miles from their home community[50]. Between April and July 2023, 72% of placements made were straight from home, indicating a potential lack of available kinship or foster care options to meet their needs. [51] **Costs of placements are rising sharply –** Trends in cost reflect both increasing demand and the complexity of children's needs. Total expenditure on looked-after children has increased substantially over the past five years, with the placements and provision budget, covering demand-led placements, accounting for over half of the total £138 million children's services budget. [52]	**Localised planning and commissioning:** Separate councils allow North and South Worcestershire to develop placement strategies tailored to their local populations, ensuring sufficient foster, kinship and residential placements close to children's homes. Evidence from DCN/Peopletoo show that there is no evidence that county councils are achieving lower unit costs because of greater buying power, putting greater weight on locally-tailored commissioning.[53] **Responsive allocation of resources:** Two councils can monitor placement trends and pressures on a more local footprint, responding quickly to rising demand or spikes in emergency placements, while optimising budgets to ensure sustainability. **Local leaders with stronger local relationships:** Local leadership will enable closer collaboration with schools, NHS services, voluntary sector partners and local providers, ensuring support around placements in joined-up and meet children's educational, health and social needs.	**Less sensitive to variation and local need:** children need placement in their communities. A one unitary council will make decisions on a county-wide basis, reducing the likelihood of appropriate local placements. **Managing county markets rather than local markets**: one unitary council will be less able to focus on building relationships with providers and capacity in local markets in North and South Worcestershire. It may be less responsive to small provider failure.

[50] LG Inform, Children in Need and Care in Worcestershire report for Worcestershire County Council: Written by LGA Research from Local Government Association, accessed October 2025

[51] Data taken from Worcestershire County Council's Meeting of Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Wednesday, 27th September, 2023 (Item 602.)

[52] LGR Data Request produced by Worcestershire County Council Performance Services, produced August 2025 (unpublished)

[53] DCN/PeopleToo, DCN CEx Devolution Forum Adults Social Care and Children's Services Lens, July 2025

3. Supporting children with SEND to thrive

Challenges	Why two councils?	Pitfalls of one council
Rising demand – The proportion of pupils with SEND has risen steadily over the past five years, from 16.6% in 2020/21 to 20.6% in 2024/25, compared to an average in county councils of 19.1% across England[54]. The proportion of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is 5.4%, slightly above the 5.1% average in other counties[55]. **Quality of provision –** Inspection outcomes highlight ongoing quality and consistency issues. A 2024 full SEND inspection by Ofsted reported that 'too many children and young people with SEND in Worcestershire wait an unacceptable time to have their needs accurately identified, assessed and met' and noted 'inconsistencies in how well different professionals share information and join up their approach'[56]. Transition to adulthood also remains a key gap. Many young people face barriers and a lack of coordinated pathways increases the risk of poor long-term outcomes. **School to home transport costs -** Costs of provision are rising. In 2024/25, home-to-school transport accounted for £45.8m, with a further £4.9m budgeted for 2025/26, reflecting growing demand and complexity. [57]	**Stronger relationships with schools:** A two council structure will allow professionals to build better links with local schools. A more local focus will facilitate a more direct relationship and dialogue to understand what works and where the gaps in services are. This will improve coordination, timeliness and consistency of support. **Better local information to support commissioning:** North and South Worcestershire councils can develop SEND provision tailored to the needs of their local populations, ensuring that specialist placements, support packages and therapies are available closer to children's homes. **Driving down cost in home-to-school transport:** Two unitary councils' deeper understanding of local geography will enable more tailored and efficient transport arrangements. Tighter management of local taxi contracts can help reduce costs, and there is a clear opportunity to explore joint commissioning with other public services and VCSE partners who also fund private transport for students and service users. **Improved transition pathways:** Across a smaller footprint, two councils allow for better planning for	**Less meaningful local relationships:** A one unitary model has a greater distance between children's services leadership, schools and local providers. They are less likely to have strong relationships in communities needed to bring together partners. **Reduced integration with services in communities:** Centralised management risks weaker operational alignment with local teams and less integrated services, missing chances to improve transition pathways or provide tailored support for families early on. **Weaker grip on local transport options:** A one unitary model will have a lower ability to understand and build relationships in local transport, reducing likelihood of controlling school-to-home transport costs.

[54] LG Inform, Local area Special Educational Needs and Disabilities report for Worcestershire County Council: Written by SEND Research from Department for Education, accessed October 2025

[55] LG Inform, Local area Special Educational Needs and Disabilities report for Worcestershire County Council: Written by SEND Research from Department for Education, accessed October 2025

[56] Ofsted (2024) Worcestershire County Council Area SEND Full Inspection report, published 15 July 2024,

[57] Figures from Worcestershire County Council 2025/26 Budget Book, provided by Worcestershire County Council

transitions to adulthood, including post-16 education, employment and supported living. Better relationships with community partners, local businesses, and with professionals more knowledgeable about who to go to in the community to build an effective plan, can ensuring young people with SEND have smoother, more consistent pathways.

A north and south model in Worcestershire provides the structural and cultural foundations for a more integrated, resilient and sustainable children's services. It will improve outcomes for children through prevention, focused action based on local knowledge, and drive genuine transformation across the county.

Transforming wider local public services

Criteria 3c. Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety

Our proposal is that public health services are managed jointly by North and South Worcestershire, led by a single Director of Public Health. The two councils would work together to continue the established relationships with the NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB) and strategic partners at a county-wide level, while continuing to build on the local relationships with commissioned partners.

Public health

Public health in Worcestershire is already a shared endeavour across Worcestershire between the two levels of local government, the NHS and a range of other providers in the voluntary sector and leisure. Worcestershire's total public health budget for 2025/26 is £40.6 million, covering all staffing, premises, transport and non-staffing costs before grants and other income are applied, most of which is spent on commissioned services[58].

The two councils will share a public health function, based within one of the councils. The two councils will share one Director of Public Health, reporting to a joint committee supported by the two council Heads of Paid Service, and with equal member involvement from the two councils.

There is a clear rationale for public health to be managed on a pan-Worcestershire footprint for three key reasons:

1 High risk issues in public health, including our recent experience of the pandemic, do not respect local government boundaries. A shared service ensures strategic coordination on the highest risk, highest impact events
2 Public health services currently commissioned include local budgets held by NHS providers, with referral pathways and interfaces that are well established. A joint service will maintain clear and consistent. relationships with these partners, addressing the ICB's concern that splitting the public health grant could mean services would be fragmented and require more resource to manage relationships.
3 Public health services are largely commissioned, delivered by a small core team, that already operates on a place-based model, with services such as health visiting, substance misuse, sexual health and lifestyle programmes delivered through local communities. Two councils delivering together can support and enhance these local relationships without duplicating or fragmenting the team.

Public safety

Public safety functions will be delivered separately by the two new unitary councils, but with a high level of collaboration between them. Each service will be managed by and report to a director in their council. This will offer consistency of relationships and process around coordinating emergency planning and civil resilience.

Accountability for the statutory function of community safety will be managed through the existing two Community Safety Partnerships in North Worcestershire and South Worcestershire working directly with the police, fire services and other responsible authorities to deliver local crime prevention/reduction strategies. The two partnerships will retain their links with the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Where existing shared functions are in operation and working well, including around Worcestershire Regulatory Services, already delivered as a joint function, they will be retained. Where there are new shared services, these will be managed by a joint committee or under a Service Level Agreement, as appropriate.

[58] Figures from Worcestershire County Council 2025/26 Budget Book, provided by Worcestershire County Council

Two councils will be able to support more responsive delivery through an enhanced level of neighbourhood working and increased integration with local agencies.

Homelessness

Two councils will allow the continuation of a neighbourhood level response to homeless prevention, currently delivered by the six district councils under a joint Worcestershire Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-2025.

Homelessness prevention and support will be provided in North and South Worcestershire by the unitary councils that also deliver housing and social care, creating the conditions for improvements in prevention, service integration, quality and outcomes.

Additionally, a neighbourhood level approach to homeless prevention has the potential to improve outcomes and limit demand on public services and provide appropriate face to face options, as per MHLCG guidance, for customers who would otherwise experience difficulties in accessing services. Links between the new unitary authorities and strategic authority responsibilities would need to be considered, given regional responsibilities for the coordination of homelessness services.

Lived Experience: From the Streets to Stability

"After leaving prison, I found myself in my late 50s with nowhere to go. My health was poor, physically and mentally, and I was battling substance use. I had inherited a property years ago, but outdated Land Registry records meant I couldn't access social housing. For a year, I sofa-surfed and slept rough, unable to navigate the system alone.

Maggs stepped in and helped me get legal documentation to prove I no longer owned the property. They worked with Cranstoun to support my recovery and stabilise my medication, and with my GP to arrange physiotherapy and hospital treatment. They even helped me with my Personal Independence Payment claim.

Because I couldn't use online systems, Maggs coordinated with Redditch Housing Solutions to place me on auto-bid and got me into No Second Night Out. When I finally moved into my tenancy, they helped me settle in, providing essentials like bedding and kitchenware, and even securing funding for a bed that suited my health needs.

Now I'm safely housed, supported, and no longer at risk of returning to the streets. I've gone from rough sleeping to having the tools to build a secure future."

Corporate/back-office services

Each council will have its own strategic back-office functions.

The councils will look for opportunities to collaborate, particularly around transactional services, where there is a strong case for more effective services or economies of scale.

Where there are shared services, these will be delivered through defined Service Level Agreements, overseen by a joint committee supported by the two council Corporate Services Directors.

Highways

Highway services will balance strategic planning at scale with local delivery. Strategic functions such as major roads, network planning and investment, will be managed jointly by the two councils in a shared service. In time, as arrangement for the Strategic Authority matures, we expect that some of these functions will transfer to them.

Maintenance and improvements will be locally-led, ensuring responsiveness to community needs and more tailored transport investment. This includes the response to specific issues, such as managing congestion.

This approach provides consistency and efficiency in planning, with flexibility for local priorities.

Transport

Transport is a key issue in Worcestershire. It is characterised by a commuter-based economy, with significant daily flows of residents travelling both within and outside the county for work. Data from the 2021 Census shows that 23% of residents across the county travel more than 10km to work, larger than the

national average of 18.7%[59]. However, travel between north and south is limited, reflecting the distinct economic geographies of the areas.

In North Worcestershire, key issues are managing congestion and improving connectivity to the West Midlands conurbation. In South Worcestershire, the focus is rural accessibility, improving links between places and improving Worcester's transport system and promoting sustainable travel options.

Transport planning will be undertaken by each council, with a high level of collaboration, supporting economic growth and sustainable communities. Local transport initiatives, including bus services and active travel infrastructure, will be managed by each council, allowing for tailored solutions to different challenges in towns and rural areas that reflects specific needs.

Waste

Waste services will continue the successful model of local collection and county-wide disposal. Waste collection will be managed by the two unitary councils on a local footprint to ensure continuity and reliability, prioritising value for money and maintaining the local knowledge of the workforce. Existing depots in the six districts will be retained.

Waste disposal will remain a shared service across Herefordshire and Worcestershire, to the end of the contract that runs to 2029. Beyond this point, there will be opportunities for wider regional collaboration to achieve economies of scale and new opportunities in recycling and reuse.

Our approach maintains efficiency and resilience, while enabling innovation and responsiveness at the local level.

[59] ONS data Travel to work, England and Wales: Census 2021

Criteria 4: Working together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views

This section includes:

Proposal section	Government criteria addressed	Case for the north and south model
The only model shaped by significant engagement with residents and partners	**Criteria 4a.** It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal **Criteria 4c.** Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, an explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed	There has been extensive and meaningful engagement to genuinely shape and define the future model for Worcestershire, ensuring the north and south model meets the expectations of those providing their support. The north and south model has clear majority support from residents who believe two unitary councils will better improve services (45%), support local identity (46%) and strengthen community engagement (44%). It also has a 70% support rate from local parish and town councils. The north and south model is the **only** proposal across the whole of Worcestershire which is built on the needs of our residents and partners.
Two authorities grounded in local identity, culture, and history	**Criteria 4b.** Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance	The North and South of Worcestershire have distinct cultural profiles, with the north more urban and industrial, and the south more rural and heritage focused. Public engagement shows strong support for a north and south model to preserve local identity and ensure decisions are made by leaders with local knowledge.

A model shaped by significant engagement with residents and partners

Criteria 4a. It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal
Criteria 4c. Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, an explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed

There has been extensive and meaningful engagement to genuinely shape and define the future of local government for Worcestershire, ensuring the north and south model meets the expectations of those providing their support. The north and south model has clear majority support from residents who believe two unitary councils will better improve services (45%), support local identity (46%) and strengthen community engagement (44%). It also has a 70% support rate from local parish and town councils[60]. The north and south model is the **only** proposal across the whole of Worcestershire which is built on the needs of our residents and partners.

The right option for Worcestershire

It is impossible to be confident the best option for Worcestershire is being put forward, without seeking the views of residents and stakeholders. That is why we decided early on extensive engagement was carried out to understand all views.

Our engagement spanned residents, partners, and staff across all six district councils of Worcestershire (including Wyre Forest). 'Shape Worcestershire' was a public engagement campaign and survey that ran during June and July 2025 to engage with residents.

Using a range of print and digital media, the campaign achieved an estimated reach across all channels of at least 200,000 approximately. This included more than 50,000 visits to the Shape Worcestershire website during June 2025, four-page wraps around local newspapers reaching all parts of Worcestershire and a county-wide Facebook reach of 56,700, with 88,800 views and 269 shares. The campaign has been highlighted as an example of best practice by the Local Government Association.

Over 700 staff were also surveyed across the commissioning councils, and 151 parish and town councils were contacted with 61 unique council responses through a County Association of Local Councils (CALC) survey. 32 engagement sessions were held to inform the options appraisal process and involved MPs, community organisations, system partners (NHS, Worcestershire County Council), leisure and housing providers.

Additional feedback was gathered from a wide range of organisations across Worcestershire, including emergency services, housing providers, health networks, voluntary and community sector groups, parish councils, and elected representatives each offering valuable insights shaped by their frontline experience and community engagement. This ensured they could contribute to the proposal's design and raise any concerns about the north and south model. It is important to note that this is the only proposal submitted from the Worcestershire area to be consistently shaped by stakeholder input throughout its development.

Understanding the priorities and needs of residents and partners

Through 'Shape Worcestershire', **4,249** responses in total were received across the county. The majority of the responses **(94%)** were from residents, with the remainder by businesses, parish and town councils, voluntary sector organisations and other stakeholders (schools, health providers, police, housing association). The feedback reflects strong public familiarity with the implications of LGR, with only **12% not having awareness of the plans proposed for Worcestershire.**

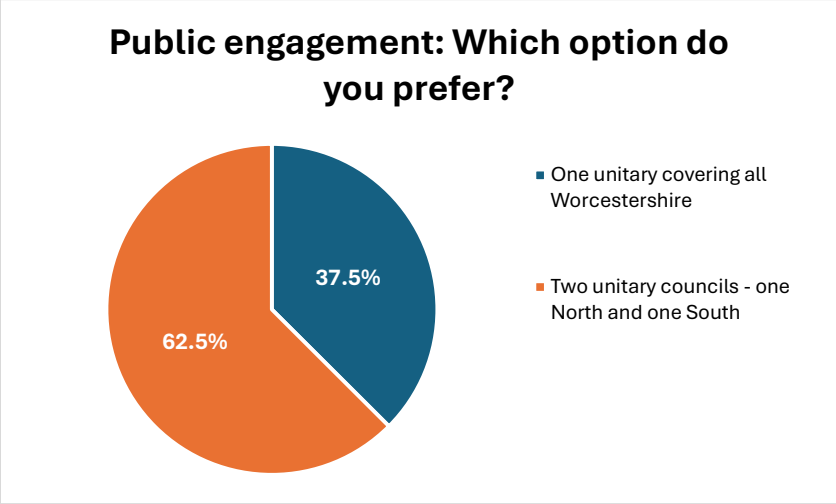
[60] CALC: LGR Survey Analysis

Engagement was undertaken through a range of channels, delivered through a blend of digital and in-person methods to maximise reach and accessibility of residents, businesses, non-profit organisations and service partners.

This approach specifically included multiple focus group sessions (11 across the whole of Worcestershire) that were able to provide valuable insights into the thoughts and experiences of residents and capture additional information that the survey would not have been able to.

Of those who expressed a preference for one or two unitary councils, there was a **clear preference recognised for the north and south model,** which **62.5%** of respondents selected compared to **37.5%** for a one unitary council.

Figure 4.4.1– Public engagement demonstrating 62.5% respondents preference for two unitary councils in comparison to 37.5% for one unitary council



The preference for a north and south model has been clearly expressed through extensive public engagement commissioned by all six of the district councils within Worcestershire.

Residents were also asked to identify what was most important to them, in terms of how councils are currently organised. The top five priorities were:

1 **Infrastructure planning (e.g. roads, schools, health):** 63%
2 **Maintaining/improving local services and council-owned facilities**: 59%
3 **How much council tax I pay**: 44.7%
4 **Impact on the local community and local identity**: 43.8%
5 **Access to local representation/councillors to get my voice heard**: 35.1%

This feedback has been critical in shaping this proposal, as it reflects residents' clear priorities such as infrastructure planning, local service delivery, and preserving community identity. It also confirms that the north and south model is not only preferred by the majority but also better aligned with the values, needs, and expectations of Worcestershire's diverse communities.

What our residents have told us is important

"The council should concentrate (on the) wellbeing of all inhabitants - health, education, safety, public transport, environment (Malvern Hills), homes, entertainment, wildlife protection, police & fire service & recycling & good broadband." – Malvern Hills resident

In addition, members of the commissioning councils voted in favour of the north and south model as the preferred option, reflecting the overwhelming feeling that a one unitary model would not benefit the communities of Worcestershire.

This is the only proposal being submitted for Worcestershire that has listened to residents and stakeholders, been shaped to respond to their concerns and can demonstrate meaningful and extensive stakeholder engagement throughout the entire drafting process.

What our residents have told us is important

“*I think the two unitary councils would enable more focused & suitable services for their residents. If it was a single authority I feel that some towns/villages may get forgotten or overlooked due to the sheer size of their authority." – Wychavon resident*

"For effective service delivery, local knowledge of an area is crucial, to benefit all residents and businesses in the area. A huge unitary council will lose sight of this." -Wyre Forest resident

Key themes that emerged from Shape Worcestershire engagement

'Efficiency and cost savings' vs. 'Local focus and identity'	There is a conflict recognised throughout with people who prefer the one unitary option recognising cost savings and efficiency benefits, and those preferring a north and south model recognising the benefits of localism and supporting the people within the county. Those supporting the north and south model largely recognise the balanced approach that allows for shared efficiencies while being able to maintain a local focus and offer place-based support. The north and south model is seen as being more reflective of local needs and better connecting councils to the community. The respondents who opposed the one unitary model see it as being too large, remote, and unrepresentative and that it could potentially worsen service delivery for rural areas.
Urban and rural difference	Residents highlighted differences between the economic context of the two sides of Worcestershire, with the north and south model better representing the diverse needs of North and South Worcestershire. There were fears that the needs of rural communities would not be addressed within one unitary and that they would experience unequal resource allocation.
Local accountability	Residents had a desire for clear and transparent governance with councillors who live in the areas they are representing. They wanted to feel as though the councillors knew the areas and would make the best decisions to support them, thus increasing their trust in their local council. There were also requests for better understanding of the new structures and accountability, which could be supported by improved communication during the process.
Localism and representation	With the current two-tier system, there is a strong focus on local identity of each of the individual areas and there is often open communication between decision-makers and the community. The north and south model is seen as being able to maintain these local connections and allow a local response to be brought to any concerns.
Service quality and fiscal concerns	Residents value discretionary services provided by their local councils, such as parks maintenance and leisure centres. These are seen as important points of connection for the community that bring mental and physical health benefits. Residents want to ensure these services stay funded and are delivered at a higher standard following LGR, and they see smaller geographic footprints created by the north and south model as a means of delivering increased support for local areas.
Planning, housing and environmental protections	Residents and the communities care about the local infrastructure and want to ensure that the development and transformation brought by LGR do not cause any undue strain on services. With South Worcestershire's tourism industry founded on its green landscapes, residents want to ensure their green spaces are supported and that the environment is cared for throughout transformation.
Transparency and trust	The reorganisation process presents opportunities for enhanced stakeholder engagement and communication. Addressing concerns around the speed of the LGR process, ensuring transparency and communicating the benefits, particularly in terms of service improvement rather than solely cost-cutting, will provide residents with greater confidence in the transformation.
Council tax and costs from reorganisation	Residents raised the importance of careful financial planning, specifically regarding council tax harmonisation and the management of associated costs. When reviewing the one unitary model, the north of Worcestershire has a higher average council tax currently opposed to the south, driving resident concerns over harmonisation efforts.

Engagement with staff

We have captured views from over 700 staff across the five commissioning councils that demonstrate a **67.5% preference for the north and south model** when asked which reorganisation option was preferred.

We will continue to engage with staff throughout the LGR process to ensure their views are considered. Our staff are closely connected to communities and often share perspectives that are just as relevant as those of residents, especially given the significant overlap between the two groups.

Engagement with town and parish councils

Parish and town councils have been engaged with throughout the proposal drafting process and they have provided insights into the views of residents and their experience collaborating with councils and the county. As part of this, engagement exercises were conducted through the district and borough councils themselves and a separate survey organised and run by CALC (parish councils representatives' body).

70% of town and parish councils support two unitary councils, particularly rural parish councils which fear losing their local voice under a single large authority. This is a significant majority of support from the parish and town councils showing the desire for place-based government that will be able to support each distinct area of Worcestershire.

There were some concerns raised related to funding, how this would be sufficient to secure priorities and how to deliver new responsibilities in a constrained funding environment. There was also positivity about the opportunities to secure localism, tailoring approaches and services to local needs and assets. Respondents were positive about empowering parish councils and communities, including asset transfer.

> **"***We support the proposal for two unitary authorities in Worcestershire. Being a large county, with diverse needs, having bodies responsible for the North and South is the best solution"*
>
> *Parish council in South Worcestershire*

Engagement with partners

Health

Herefordshire & Worcestershire (H&W) ICB initially indicated that it had concerns about the proposal for two unitary councils. These assumed that it would significantly increase the complexity and cost around managing the interface between health and social care, both in adult service and children's services. Following further engagement, the ICB set out the key areas essential for a collaborative approach across the county including Better Care Fund, Discharge to Assess pathways, public health ring fenced grant, children's services improvement work, and adult social care.

The north and south model addresses the points raised by health partners through delivering:

- Shared safeguarding partnership boards for adults and children, maintaining the continuity of strategic relationships. In particular, the safeguarding board is the main forum for partners' contributions to children's services improvement work.
- Public health as a county-wide shared service under a single Director of Public Health, maintaining the continuity of relationships and existing interfaces.
- A stronger neighbourhood model of care for adults and children through better integration with housing providers, primary care, family hubs and the voluntary and community sector. This will support the delivery of the NHS ten-year plan.
- A vision to strengthen investment in prevention, reducing the demand on the NHS overall by shifting the delivery model away from crisis.

Fire

Fire service colleagues emphasised the need for a consolidated and well-resourced approach to emergency planning, response, and recovery, particularly through ringfenced support for the Local Resilience Forum. They also highlighted the importance of sustained collaboration on planning, prevention, data sharing, and support for vulnerable people and victims, underpinned by clearly defined responsibilities in any new unitary structure.

Police

The Police and Crime Commissioner emphasised the need for streamlined structures and integrated strategic ambition across safeguarding and community safety priorities, supported by early and ongoing collaboration. Concerns were raised that a north and south model would introduce unnecessary complexity and risk, undermining effective partnership working and limiting the ability to deliver cohesive policing and public safety services.

How our proposal responds to concerns raised during stakeholder engagement

Some concerns have been raised in relation to the proposed north and south model for Worcestershire, particularly around service fragmentation, financial sustainability, and partnership working. A summary of these concerns is set out in the table below:

Key concerns raised and response		
Efficiency and complexity of transformation	Two councils may be more expensive and harder to manage. There are concerns about duplication of enabling functions, increased transition costs, and whether the model has enough scale to deliver transformational efficiencies.	The proposal includes a safe, balanced and realistic transition plan, with comprehensive day one planning to consider the extended timeframe to deliver LGR in comparison with past programmes such as in Cumbria. The north and south model builds on existing shared services and proposes a hybrid approach to future service delivery to avoid duplication. Financial modelling shows a prudent four-year payback period based on high-level costs and savings. Enabling functions will be streamlined within each council, and collaboration will continue where scale is beneficial. Prevention-led services delivered at neighbourhood level will reduce demand. This is the only way to guarantee true long-term financial sustainability.
Population viability and strategic planning	Smaller population sizes may not meet government guidelines and could limit strategic planning for services like health, transport, and skills. Fragmentation may isolate providers from natural population flows.	The Government's 500,000 population figure is a guideline only. Both councils begin at sustainable levels and are projected to exceed 300,000 by 2031. There is limited evidence to suggest that smaller unitary councils will be less efficient, sustainable or effective due to their size. Shared service delivery functions across Worcestershire and closer collaboration through Neighbourhood Area Committees will support strategic planning.
Needs and funding Imbalance	The north has higher service needs while the south has a stronger tax base. This creates a risk of unequal funding, higher council tax in the north and difficulty in achieving long-term financial sustainability.	Demographic differences between north and south are minimal. There are distinct additional needs in the north related to deprivation; however, Fair Funding reforms will help address disparities in any potential funding imbalances. The ability for funding reforms to support targeting of local issues, such as in the north will be enhanced in the north and south model.

Service fragmentation and continuity risks	Disaggregating county-wide services could disrupt continuity of care, increase complexity in determining Ordinary Residence, and delay critical responses. Safeguarding and crisis response may be less flexible. Shared services such as adult social care and pooled budgets with the NHS may become harder to manage.	A safe transfer protocol will ensure no gaps in service and seamless care for vulnerable residents. Ordinary Residence will be determined at least six months before vesting day, with clear principles and joint governance to avoid disputes. Shared safeguarding boards and a single public health function will maintain strategic continuity, and local intelligence will support faster, targeted responses and delivery of support. The shared service arrangements would be put in place where appropriate to provide seamless continuity to service delivery.
Service access and consistency	Risk of postcode lottery or confusion over boundaries. Concerns about consistency of service standards and access across both councils. A single council is seen as better able to ensure uniformity and preserve ceremonial heritage.	Fewer boundaries between district services than now such as planning and housing. Locally accessible services will be delivered through community hubs, working with voluntary and community sector partners, and town and parish councils. Clear and simplified access channels will serve the new councils, ensuring clarity and ease of access. Shared strategic functions and neighbourhood governance will maintain consistent standards and equity in service access.
Workforce and market pressures	Recruiting and retaining staff in high-need areas may be harder. Disaggregating shared services could increase competition and costs in the external care market. Smaller councils may struggle to attract specialist staff or negotiate large contracts.	Shared strategic functions will be retained where scale is needed, including commissioning and market management. This supports the ability to attract specialist staff and negotiate contracts effectively. If transition is well-managed, there is no evidence to suggest workforce challenges will increase.
Partnership disruption	Fragmenting existing partnerships may complicate commissioning, funding, and emergency response. A single council is seen as better placed to preserve and strengthen these relationships.	Strategic partnerships will be preserved through shared boards and functions. Neighbourhood-level homelessness support will continue, integrated with housing and care. The two councils will collaborate on commissioning and specialist services, retaining efficiency and continuity across Worcestershire.
Democratic representation and local identity	Concerns that two councils may reduce democratic connection or be politically divisive. Some residents prefer no change or feel uninformed. There are also concerns about creating artificial boundaries that undermine Worcestershire's traditional identity.	The north and south model reflects distinct cultural and economic profiles and strengthens local identity and accountability. Ceremonial heritage will be retained across both councils. Public engagement showed over half of respondents preferred the north and south model, citing stronger community connection to their local area and near neighbours. The north and south model also allows lower councillor to resident ratios, allowing councillors to be local to the areas they serve.

Summary

We have based our proposal on meaningful and inclusive engagement. We have been transparent in seeking and addressing concerns of individuals and organisations. Through the research conducted, a north and south model is preferred by Worcestershire residents members and staff of the councils within Worcestershire, and town and parish councils.

The concerns raised by partners, such as health partners, police, VCS, about the north and south model have been addressed throughout this proposal. Our proposal aligns with the preferences of residents and has set strong foundations to secure continuing engagement as we develop LGR. Our ongoing engagement will be crucial to ensuring a safe and strong transition to the new arrangements.

What our residents have told us is important

"I believe two unitary councils is the best of the available options for Worcestershire residents in terms of local representation and accountability, service provision and being able to effectively respond to local needs and priorities." – Worcester City resident

Two authorities grounded in local identity, culture, and history

Criteria 4b. Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance

The north and south of Worcestershire have distinct cultural profiles, with the north more urban and industrial, and the south more rural and heritage focused. Public engagement shows strong support for a north and south model to preserve local identity and ensure decisions are made by leaders with local knowledge.

Worcestershire's culture and heritage

Worcestershire is shaped by its rich historical legacy and diverse geography; encompassing market towns, rural villages, and urban centres that reflect centuries of cultural development. Its deep historical identity is rooted in the area's pivotal role during the English Civil War, and this legacy is preserved in numerous listed buildings, heritage sites and museums.

The county's cultural landscape is further enriched by the natural beauty of the Malvern Hills, designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the artistic legacy of Sir Edward Elgar, and the iconic River Severn and River Avon. These elements continue to inspire a strong sense of place and pride among local communities within the county.

What our residents have told us is important

"Senior leadership and members should be mindful of each area's cultural identity, identities which clearly fit better as a two unitary solution." – Worcester City resident

Across the district councils, there is a shared commitment to preserving Worcestershire's historic character and community values, reinforced by calls to protect local identity and cultural relevance, particularly through place-sensitive housing development, regeneration initiatives and continued support for locally rooted organisations and decision-making.

Two distinct regional identities and cultures

The 'Shape Worcestershire' public engagement showed **45.7%** of respondents identified the north and south model as best for supporting the retention of local identity, local knowledge, and community character. A north and south model helps protect local pride and unity by ensuring decisions are made by leaders who understand their communities.

What our residents have told us is important

"I feel we would receive a more personalised approach within our regions of Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre as north unitary. Our needs may be vastly different to those in the south..." – Bromsgrove resident

"We have more in common with areas to the West and South of Malvern Hills than to Bromsgrove and Redditch and the north." – Malvern Hills resident

The districts of Worcestershire each have their own diverse features and characteristics; however, there is clear alignment and separation between those in the north and those in the south. The north is more urban and industrial focused with strong social and economic ties to Birmingham and the Black Country. The south has a more rural and service-oriented economy with strong links to South West England and Warwickshire. *For more information on the identity of the two areas see Section 4: Criteria 1.*

What our residents have told us is important

"Both regions are radically different in services they require, North Worcestershire is a very diverse array of villages and towns that requires a distinctly different council to the South." – Wyre Forest resident

The key and distinct features of North and South Worcestershire include:

North Worcestershire

The north of Worcestershire has a strong shared heritage in the light manufacturing industry from the creation of needles to nail making and carpet weaving.

. There is a strong link between North Worcestershire and the West Midlands with their heavy manufacturing industry.

- **Bromsgrove** has an industrial heritage in nail-making and engineering, strong links to Birmingham, and a

leisure and culture strategy focused on parks and green spaces, sports, and arts.

- **Redditch** is a historic centre for needle manufacturing, now diversified into advanced manufacturing and engineering for automotive and aerospace (including UK-NSI Co Ltd, Lear Corporation and Mettis aerospace). It features a diverse population, refurbished Town Hall, Innovation Centre, Palace Theatre, Forge Mill Needle Museum, green spaces, and a cultural strategy focused on inclusion and regeneration.
- **Wyre Forest** boasts a rich industrial and architectural heritage, including carpet manufacturing in Kidderminster, Georgian architecture in Bewdley, canal networks in Stourport, and the Severn Valley Railway, an iconic example of preserved industrial heritage.

South Worcestershire

South of Worcestershire is known for being a visitor destination of the Midlands, its green landscapes and agricultural roots linking the three areas. The historical industries differ from the north with the south focusing on the making of gloves and porcelain.

- **Malvern Hills** is known for its natural beauty, strong arts and culture community, and assets like Malvern Theatres.
- **Worcester** has over 2,000 years of history, including a Civil War site, and a cathedral which is a cornerstone of identity, artistry and community not only for Worcester but the wider Midlands. It is a university city with a strong festival culture exemplified by the Three Choirs Festival.
- **Wychavon** features an agricultural heritage, market towns, local produce festivals (e.g., Pershore Plum, Evesham's British Asparagus Festival), and community-led cultural programming and investment in venues such as Number 8 and The Regal.

Case Study – ReNEW Project

The ReNEW project, delivered by Redditch and Bromsgrove councils is a standout example of how locally led initiatives can unlock creative potential and deliver lasting impact.

With £550k from Arts Council England and support from local partners, ReNEW is nurturing 30 young artists, connecting up to 100 cultural organisations, and engaging thousands of residents, particularly those underrepresented in arts and heritage.

Through bold public art, mobile events, and digital storytelling, the project is building pride of place, strengthening the cultural sector, and laying the foundations for a community-owned cultural strategy by 2028. This success demonstrates the power of place-based leadership and reinforces why a north and south model, rooted in local identity and responsive to distinct community needs is the right choice for Worcestershire.

Travel to work patterns across Worcestershire

Worcestershire has significant daily flows of residents travelling both within and outside the county for work. Data from the 2021 Census shows that 23% of residents across the county travel more than 10km to work, which is further than the national average of 18.7%. North and South Worcestershire each function as a relatively self-contained geography with limited travel between the areas. This is due in part to limited transport networks and connectivity.

North Worcestershire is closely integrated with the West Midlands, particularly Birmingham. Bromsgrove has the highest out-commuting rate in the county at 68%, primarily to Brimingham and Solihull, followed by Redditch and Wyre Forest at 47%. These areas rely heavily on rail and road links to external employment centres, reinforcing the need for transport policies that support connectivity and reduce income leakage.

What our residents have told us is important

"North and South Worcestershire do not have much in common. A North and South Worcestershire has a lot of merit. The three northern districts look to Birmingham and Bromsgrove and Redditch already have a combined officer team. The three southern districts are centred on Worcester and have been working together on certain functions notably planning for several years." – Worcester City resident

Connectivity corridors to South Worcestershire have a more balanced live-work pattern. Worcester acts as a central employment hub, with 56% of its residents working locally. Malvern Hills and Wychavon show more regionally distributed commuting with 55% and 52% of residents commuting out, including links to Hereford and Cheltenham.

Feedback received from Bluwave Community Transport highlights how a north and south model would better reflect Worcestershire's varied commuting and mobility needs. Smaller, locally focused councils are seen as more capable of tailoring transport solutions, such as urban mobility in Redditch and rural access in Malvern Hills while improving visibility, coordination, and responsiveness across communities.

Comparison to the one unitary model

A one unitary model would need to accommodate highly varied commuting patterns and transport needs across a large and diverse geography. This risks diluting the ability to respond effectively to local infrastructure challenges, particularly in areas with high external commuting or dispersed rural populations.

The north and south model enables more targeted planning and investment, aligned to the distinct transport profiles and economic needs of North and South Worcestershire.

Criteria 5: Structures to support devolution arrangements

This section includes:

Proposal section	Government criteria addressed	Case for the north and south model
Joined up approach to unlock devolution across Worcestershire	**Criteria 5b.** Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution.	Worcestershire councils are aligned in their ambition for early devolution and are actively exploring strategic options for a Mayoral Strategic Authority that builds on the strengths of a north and south model, reflects local structures, and delivers economic and public service benefits for residents and partners as quickly as possible.
Devolution options for Worcestershire	**Criteria 5c.** Proposals should ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities	Worcestershire councils have identified three primary options for a future Mayoral Strategic Authority, each offering strategic potential for growth, public service reform and alignment with government criteria, while recognising the need for further agreement with neighbouring areas.
Criteria 5a. Proposals will need to consider and set out for areas where there is already a Combined Authority (CA) or a Combined County Authority (CCA) established or a decision has been taken by the Government to work with the area to establish one; how that institution and its governance arrangements will need to change to continue to function effectively; and set out clearly (where applicable) whether this proposal is supported by the CA/CCA /Mayor.		

Joined up approach to unlock devolution across Worcestershire

Criteria 5b. Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution.

Worcestershire councils are aligned in their ambition for early devolution and are actively exploring strategic options for a Mayoral Strategic Authority that builds on the strengths of a north and south model, reflects local structures, and delivers economic and public service benefits for residents and partners as quickly as possible.

Role of the Strategic Authority

A Strategic Authority for Worcestershire is expected to:

- Provide strategic leadership on issues that **extend beyond individual council boundaries**
- Co-ordinate **long-term planning for transport, infrastructure, housing growth, skills, net zero,** and **wider economic development**
- Oversee the **alignment of skills, transport and investment strategies** across the county
- Drive **public service reform and partnership working** across local government, health and other partners

Economic challenges and opportunities in Worcestershire

Worcestershire faces a range of economic challenges that require coordinated strategic intervention. These include productivity gaps, uneven skills attainment, and infrastructure constraints that limit growth. At the same time, there are clear opportunities to unlock investment, improve connectivity, and align skills provision with emerging sector needs.

A Strategic Authority with devolved powers would enable targeted responses to these issues, allowing Worcestershire to shape transport, housing, and skills strategies that reflect local economic realities. By embedding economic development within a devolved framework, the county can accelerate inclusive growth and ensure that reform delivers tangible outcomes for residents and businesses.

Worcestershire's current position

Worcestershire stands at a strategic crossroad - within a network of potential partner areas which are also approaching reorganisation, and with significant potential to harness the benefits of a comprehensive devolution deal as an extension of upcoming LGR. This 'Heart of England' zone provides a range of potential future devolution footprints, which need further detailed exploration to establish an agreed way forward after LGR proposals have been submitted.

The residents and businesses of Worcestershire should start to benefit from devolution as soon as possible, to prevent the county from being left further behind as many other areas already benefit from devolved powers and funding, and others begin to access these through the Devolution Priority Programme. The county council did not pursue a county deal so there is nothing in place in terms of devolution currently.

Councils across Worcestershire have jointly undertaken analysis of potential strategic, economic and public sector delivery links across the wider region, and a range of options are being considered.

Many of our neighbouring councils currently managing the process of LGR alongside us and we are exploring options together. We recognise that the statutory process for forming a Strategic Authority is separate from the structural changes order to implement local government reorganisation, but also the need to begin development of this next stage of the process.

Support for a devolved Worcestershire

All of Worcestershire's councils support the need for devolution to happen as quickly as possible. There is a shared ambition to establish a Mayoral Strategic Authority at the earliest date, with full range of powers, functions and funding from the outset. This would include an active role in the work of

Integrated Care Boards. Mayoral elections should be held as early as possible, likely by May 2028 but as early as May 2027 if possible.

A unitary structure for Worcestershire would play an effective part in a Strategic Authority covering the whole of the county. This would be larger than Worcestershire with partner authorities and regions yet to be agreed. We do not want a sub-optimal solution although we recognise that other significant reforms may be required to deliver our aspiration.

Relation to wider public service reform

None of the options that we have considered in the following section provide full alignment with other public sector boundaries, including the shape of ICB clusters. The government will therefore need to be ready to bring forward changes to other public services whatever footprint of Strategic Authority is agreed for Worcestershire and Herefordshire.

Government policy set out in the Devolution White Paper is that mayors should take on the role of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and signals the Government's readiness to align boundaries if need be. The English Devolution Bill includes powers that would allow Ministers to make such changes.

Worcestershire's councils want a mayor and Strategic Authority with full powers and the ability to drive closer working between public services in the Strategic Authority area and public service reform. All the options that remain would involve the need to reconfigure police force areas so that the mayor can assume the role of the PCC. We recognise that this would involve significant disruption and cost that would be a consequence of the government's policy on devolution, not of LGR.

Devolution should examine a single police force for the Strategic Authority's footprint, and we commit to working with other councils and the PCCs of relevant police force areas on that approach.

The next PCC elections are due in May 2028. There is sufficient time for the Government to secure changes by that date and avoid the need for a further round of PCC elections. Worcestershire and other partner areas should not have to wait until 2032 to secure a mayor with full powers. However, if alignment cannot be achieved by May 2028, another option is to extend the term of office of relevant PCCs for one year to allow time for boundary realignment while avoiding the cost of an election.

Devolution options for Worcestershire

This section describes how the unitary model for Worcestershire meets government criteria:

Criteria 5c. Proposals should ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities

Worcestershire councils have identified three primary options for a future Mayoral Strategic Authority, each offering strategic potential for growth, public service reform and alignment with government criteria, while recognising the need for further agreement with neighbouring areas.

Future devolution for Worcestershire

Whichever footprint is determined in future, it is likely that this would include Herefordshire. Historical governance links, industrial commonalities and shared heritage between Herefordshire and Worcestershire support this outcome, with the potential to accelerate delivery of public service reform through common boundaries.

Industrial profiles using the Business Base for each area show commonalities with Herefordshire, Gloucestershire and Warwickshire. Combining these factors, with Worcestershire's growing prominent in advanced manufacturing and cybersecurity would provide a resilient multifaceted economy capable of withstanding economic shocks.

Links with Birmingham and the wider metropolitan area are strong in the north of the county where commuter routes and business linkages are well established. However, there is a lack of alignment with the rest of Worcestershire, where the metropolitan economy is seen as distant and physical connections with the West Midlands Combined Authority's area are challenging.

Viable options for Worcestershire

We consider that there are three most viable options for the footprint of a Strategic Authority focussed on growth, although recognising that other areas may have differing preferred solutions for their areas. These are summarised below.

	Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire	**Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire**	**Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Warwickshire**
Positives	This proposed devolution footprint offers a viable population of just under 1.5 million, which is expected to exceed the recommended threshold through projected housing growth. The three counties share commonalities in industrial structure, including advanced manufacturing, cyber, and professional services, supporting a coherent economic	This option has a population of just under the recommended 1.5 million, which would soon be exceeded with projected housing growth. The three counties share commonalities in industrial structure and growth priorities. They are also all house cathedral cities which enjoy a shared cultural heritage through the Three Choirs Festival.	This would have a population of a little over 2m. In addition to the features mentioned in the other options, this option offers strategic opportunities through its focus on the M5, M42 and A46 growth corridors. These corridors are vital for economic expansion and connectivity, positioning the region advantageously for development and

	geography and enabling a joined-up approach to growth. Strategic transport corridors including the M5, M40, M42 and A46 provide strong connectivity and investment potential across the footprint. The footprint aligns with existing ICB clusters and offers a manageable scope for police and fire service integration, allowing the mayor to take over two fire and rescue services and assume the role of Police and Crime Commissioner. Warwickshire's governance maturity and proximity to Coventry's innovation assets strengthen the case for collaboration and early delivery of devolved powers.	The M5 growth corridor between the West Midlands and Bristol is strategically advantageous, supporting development along a vital transport link. This arrangement would allow the mayor to take over the two fire and rescue services.	investment. It would allow the mayor to take over three fire and rescue services.
Negatives	Restructuring police services would involve splitting West Mercia Police and merging the part covering Herefordshire and Worcestershire with Warwickshire Constabulary, enabling the mayor to be the police and crime commissioner for the entire area. Restructuring police services would involve splitting West Mercia Police and merging the part covering Herefordshire and Worcestershire with Warwickshire Constabulary. Herefordshire and Worcestershire ICB clusters with Coventry and Warwickshire, creating partial overlap with the WMCA area. The quality and availability of travel links across the area vary, although the footprint enjoys a significant degree of self-containment as a functioning economic geography, particularly around the M42 corridor.	This arrangement would necessitate splitting West Mercia Police and merging the part covering Herefordshire and Worcestershire with the Gloucestershire Constabulary, enabling the mayor to serve as Police and Crime Commissioner for the entire region. There is poor alignment with existing ICBs in their current clusters, which would requiring adjustment if they are to match the Strategic Authority's footprint. The quality and availability of travel links across the area vary but the area enjoys a significant degree of self-containment as a functioning economic geography, with a notable strength in the cyber and defence sectors.	There would be a need to split West Mercia Police and potentially merging the part covering Herefordshire and Worcestershire with either Gloucestershire and/or Warwickshire Constabulary to consolidate under one or two Police and Crime Commissioner roles. Wider re-clustering of ICBs may be necessary. While it aligns with most of the Herefordshire & Worcestershire and Coventry & Warwickshire ICB cluster, Gloucestershire is currently aligned with Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire. The quality and availability of travel links across the area vary but the area enjoys a significant degree of self-containment as a functioning economic geography.

Summary	The Herefordshire, Worcestershire, and Warwickshire footprint offers the strongest strategic fit for devolution. It combines a viable population, coherent economic geography, and manageable public service realignment. It enables early delivery of devolved powers, aligns with government criteria, and reflects the ambitions of local partners. This makes it the most practical and impactful option for unlocking growth and reform across the region.	The Herefordshire, Worcestershire, and Gloucestershire devolution option offers a holistic approach to aligning economic growth priorities and cultural heritage, with strategic advantages along the M5 corridor. However, the complexities involved in police and healthcare service realignment, pose considerable challenges.	This model offers significant economic opportunities along major growth corridors and could deliver integrated management of emergency services. However, the complexities involved in police and healthcare service realignment, pose considerable challenges.

During this process the following options have also been considered and we would be open to discussing these options further with government if they were minded to consider them:

	Seek inclusion in the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)	**Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire (inc. Stoke)**	**West Mercia and Warwickshire**	**West Mercia**
Positives	The northern part of Worcestershire has strong economic, strategic and commuter connections with Birmingham, the Black Country, and Solihull. This indicates existing linkages that could facilitate collaboration and development.	This would have a population of around 2m. This devolution option provides opportunity for administrative consolidation and oversight in emergency services, with the mayor assuming control over two fire and rescue services.	Serving a population of 1.9 million, this option aligns with government guidelines and aligns well with public service boundaries. It would allow the mayor to become the police and crime commissioner for West Mercia and Warwickshire police as well as take over the responsibilities of the three fire and rescue authorities (Hereford & Worcester, Shropshire and Warwickshire). There is industrial structure alignment across this footprint, providing opportunities for cohesive economic strategy and growth.	Opting for a devolved arrangement based on the West Mercia footprint would enable strong alignment with some public service boundaries and allow the mayor to become the police and crime commissioner for West Mercia and take over the responsibilities of Hereford & Worcester and Shropshire fire and rescue authorities. The industrial structure across West Mercia demonstrates reasonable alignment, which could benefit economic planning and collaboration across sectors within the footprint.

Negatives	This is not the case with the remainder of the county or for Herefordshire. For example, there are strong flows from Wychavon to Gloucestershire. The WMCA is already significantly larger than the indicated population of 1.5m and we are aware that other areas, such as Warwickshire, can demonstrate even more strongly that they are part of the WMCA's functioning economic geography. Additionally, the Mayor and MHCLG are discouraging any changes to WMCA at present.	Worcestershire shares a small border with Staffordshire, but economic ties across this footprint are distinctly less strong than other options. There is a lack of commonality between regions such as the far north of Staffordshire and the southern part of Herefordshire. This option would necessitate splitting West Mercia Police to merge the parts covering Herefordshire and Worcestershire with Staffordshire Constabulary, to allow the mayor to take on the police and crime commissioner role for the whole area. Re-clustering ICBs is impractical, leaving Shropshire and Telford isolated with no viable clustering opportunity.	There is alignment with most of the Herefordshire & Worcestershire and Coventry & Warwickshire ICB cluster but wider re-clustering would be required, because Shropshire and Telford are currently aligned with Staffordshire and Stoke. The quality and availability of travel links across the area vary but the area enjoys a reasonable degree of self-containment as a functioning economic geography.	The population at 1.3 million falls short of the suggested figure of 1.5 million but it encompasses a large geography with significant rural areas. Another challenge is the misalignment with existing integrated care boards, necessitating them to be clustered to align with the West Mercia footprint. The quality and availability of travel links across the area vary but the area enjoys a reasonable degree of self-containment as a functioning economic geography. This option lacks the motorway growth corridors that are the feature of other options.
Summary	This option does not align well with the criteria set out in the Devolution White Paper, particularly those concerning functioning economic geography. It also provides poor alignment with other public services, such as police and integrated care boards. Consequently, this option has been ruled out as viable for Worcestershire's devolution strategy.	This option would require significant reorganisation of other public services, which present logistical challenges, compounded by weak economic linkages and geographic disparities that hinder regional cohesion.	This option features strategic alignment of public services and economic structures, presenting a possible framework for regional governance but with potentially weaker economic alignment than other options. The required re-clustering presents challenges that need careful management.	This footprint provides an option for aligning public services and economic structures, promising improved governance and economic coordination. However, the advantages must be weighed against critical challenges such as population size, more limited growth opportunities and the need to realign ICB footprints.

Criteria 6: Stronger community engagement and genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment

This section includes:

Proposal section	Government criteria addressed	Case for the north and south model
Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment across Worcestershire	**Criteria 6a.** Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged	Our proposal for a north and south model with two unitary councils embeds community power through Neighbourhood Area Committees and Integrated Neighbourhood Teams. This structure enables resident-led decision-making, tailored local services and preventative delivery. The Shape Worcestershire public engagement survey evidences strong public and parish/town council support for two unitary councils.. This model ensures strategic coherence while maintaining local accountability and responsiveness.
Building on best practice community engagement	**Criteria 6b.** Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement	District councils across Worcestershire have a strong, proven track record of delivering responsive, preventative and locally tailored services over many years through deep community knowledge and strong partnerships. These examples show how local government can adapt to varied needs, foster resident voice and drive better outcomes. A north and south model preserves this agility and proximity to residents and communities.

Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment across Worcestershire

Criteria 6a. Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged

Worcestershire's proposal for a north and south model with two unitary councils embeds community power through Neighbourhood Area Committees and Integrated Neighbourhood Teams. This structure enables resident-led decision-making, tailored local services and preventative delivery. Shape Worcestershire survey evidence shows strong public and parish/town council support for two councils over a single unitary. This model ensures strategic coherence while maintaining local accountability and responsiveness.

Evidence from the Shape Worcestershire and CALC survey highlights widespread support for a north and south model. Results made it clear that residents and local town and parish councillors value decision-making remaining close to communities , reinforcing the need for strong neighbourhood-level structures for decision-making and delivery within a two unitary structure.

What our residents have told us is important

"I think the two unitary councils would enable more focused & suitable services for their residents. If it was a single authority I feel that some towns/villages may get forgotten or overlooked due to the sheer size of their authority." – Wychavon resident

The five commissioning district councils of this proposal are committed to developing thriving neighbourhoods, building on excellent practice, where people can work together to achieve a good quality of life.

Through the creation of Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) and Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs), residents, local partners and town and parish councils will have meaningful influence over local priorities, budgets and service delivery.

At the heart of Worcestershire's vision is a clear golden thread: People, Place, Prevention. Every decision, initiative and structure is designed to:

- Ensure residents' voices shape local priorities (People)
- Ensure services are tailored to the needs of each neighbourhood (Place).
- Reduce demand on services by addressing root causes early from social isolation and community cohesion/safety to health inequalities (Prevention)

This approach is only possible with the north and south model.

Comparison to the one unitary model

A one unitary model for Worcestershire would be too large to maintain meaningful neighbourhood influence, weakening democratic accountability and eroding the relationships, trust and local intelligence that have been built over more than 50 years.

It would centralise decision-making across a diverse geography, making it harder to respond to local needs and maintain strong links between councillors and communities. With up to 6,142 residents per councillor, representation would be stretched, reducing responsiveness, increasing the risk of remote governance and damaging local democracy.

Three pillars for community power

We have co-designed a model that puts community power at the centre, informed by engagement undertaken with **over 4,200 residents, 69 town and parish councils and focus groups** including representatives from the VCSE, health, police, business representatives and staff. This is structured around three interlocking pillars:

1. **Two new unitary councils** – North Worcestershire and South Worcestershire will provide the strategic backbone, resources and coherence while keeping decision-making local.
2. **Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs)** – Democratic forums where Worcestershire residents, councillors and partners set priorities, influence service design and hold councils to account.

3. **Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs)** – Operational multi-agency teams delivering services across Worcestershire, aligned to local priorities and prevention-focused outcomes.

Together, these pillars form a continuous chain of accountability, from street to strategy, ensuring decisions, service delivery and engagement are fully integrated.

What our residents have told us is important

"Two councils would promote more responsive governance, accountability, and tailored services." – Wychavon resident

Why the north and south model works best for Worcestershire

Two councils provide the strategic scale to coordinate services while maintaining strong neighbourhood-level influence through:

- Resourced NACs and INTs to translate community priorities into tangible outcomes.
- Multi-agency coordination across both councils to deliver early intervention and preventative services.
- Strategic coherence for health, social care, housing and community safety, with flexibility to respond to local variation.
- Stronger democratic accountability, with residents and town/parish councils valuing locality over structure and highlighting the risks of remote decision-making under a single authority.

Comparison to the one unitary model

A one unitary model would struggle to tailor services to the distinct needs of North and South Worcestershire. It risks applying uniform approaches that overlook local variation in demographics, deprivation and service demand. Under this model there will always be the dilemma of prioritising resources to go to one geographical area over another, leading to a north/south divide.

This is the current experience through the existing county council arrangement for local government. A north and south model provides greater opportunity for equality within the system and for Worcestershire as a whole.

Residents have expressed concerns about diminished community involvement, marginalisation of rural areas and the loss of non-statutory services. Over time, the lack of place-based leadership could constrain reform and innovation, making it harder to adapt to evolving community and regional challenges.

What our residents have told us is important

"I feel we would receive a more personalised approach within our regions of Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre as north unitary... By stripping away our current system and potentially moving to one main council, I fear that as a population, we would lose our collective voices." – Bromsgrove resident

Neighbourhood Area Committees

NACs will bring decision-making closer to communities, acting as democratic forums where councillors, partners and residents shape local priorities. Their core functions include:

- Aligning council and partner activity with local needs.
- Holding devolved budgets to move beyond advisory roles.
- Translating community insight into operational delivery (via INTs).

They will be shaped around natural communities and local identity rather than fixed population bands, ensuring each reflects how residents experience their place. While many areas may align broadly with populations typical of other neighbourhood governance models (30,000 to 50,000), the north and south model provides flexibility to design smaller or more tailored NACs where geography, rurality or community identity make this appropriate.

This flexibility allows North and South Worcestershire to demonstrate a stronger connection to local people and places - a defining strength of this model.

Strong neighbourhood governance ensures that Worcestershire residents know how to raise the issues that matter most and trust that their concerns will be acted on. By giving councillors the mandate and tools to respond at the right level, communities can see a direct link between their voice and local action.

Focus group feedback emphasised the importance of evidence-based decision-making, inclusive participation and the need for support and training

to enable broader engagement; particularly for those less confident in navigating governance structures.

Focus group insight

"Decision-making must be transparent and accessible. If people can see the link between their voice and action, trust grows."

The effectiveness of Neighbourhood Area Committees depends on strong, representative local governance beneath them. Town and parish councils form the foundation of this structure – the most local tier of democracy, directly accountable to communities.

The following section sets out how these councils, alongside local joint committees and parish clusters, will be embedded as statutory partners within Worcestershire's north and south model.

The role of town and parish councils

Town and parish councils represent an important tier of community voice within Worcestershire's governance landscape. Town and parish councils provide vital grassroots leadership and are directly accountable to their local electorates. Under the north and south model, they will remain key partners in engagement and community delivery, working alongside NACs and INTs to ensure that local insight and initiative inform wider decision-making.

This proposal does not rely on the creation of new town and parish councils. In areas that are currently unparished but have Mayors, Charter Trustees will ensure continuity of civic functions and local representation. Over time, the new unitary councils may explore opportunities for community governance reviews, but these would be locally led and contingent on resident support.

The two new unitary councils will prioritise establishing effective NACs as the principal mechanism for local democratic decision-making. Town and parish councils, where they exist, will be represented within NACs, ensuring their perspectives and local networks contribute directly to neighbourhood priorities, without duplicating statutory local government responsibilities.

What our residents have told us is important

"Having worked on a parish council for many years I am not happy with the district council being abolished. However, having to accept this I am fully supportive of two unitary councils as I feel one single one would be too remote from the day-to-day activities of such a huge area. I cannot see that local democracy would be improved in having one body to represent Worcestershire and would not be able understand local issues at a parish level. The number of parishes a single authority would have to deal with would mean services would be too distant and accountability would be reduced." – Bromsgrove resident

Local Governance Charter

A Local Governance Charter is proposed to be co-developed between the two new councils, CALC and town and parish councils, setting out principles of:

- **Subsidiarity** – Decisions made at the lowest effective level.
- **Co-design and consultation** – Early and meaningful engagement in policy and service design.
- **Fair representation** – Clear routes for town and parish councils to contribute to NACs and locality structures.
- **Transparency and accountability** – Defined mechanisms for reporting, review and collaboration.

This charter would seek to formalise the partnership while ensuring the distinct roles of the two unitary councils and local councils are respected.

Parish clusters and joint service delivery

Where smaller parishes lack scale, clustering arrangements may be encouraged to support shared service delivery or representation. Such clusters could operate under Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) that define:

- Membership, governance and decision-making principles.
- Resource contributions and financial arrangements.
- Shared service delivery scope.
- Review and collaboration mechanisms.

Representation from clusters will be accommodated within NACs where appropriate, ensuring local voice is embedded while avoiding unnecessary complexity or duplication.

Asset and service transfer

Drawing on lessons from Cornwall, future consideration could be given by the two unitary councils to enable larger or more capable town and parish councils to take on local assets and services, where there is a clear case and local agreement to do so.

Any such transfers would require:

- Clear Service Level Agreements (SLAs).
- Sustainable funding and associated income streams.
- Technical and professional support (HR, legal, financial) during transition.
- A phased handover to build capacity and ensure continuity.

Smaller or rural areas may instead adopt Local Joint Committees (LJCs), comprising elected members, parish representatives and residents, with modest delegated budgets and joint decision-making powers. These LJCs would feed into NACs, ensuring hyper-local priorities and community insight are reflected in broader neighbourhood governance.

Civic and ceremonial functions

To maintain civic identity and heritage:

- in partly or wholly unparished areas with Mayors, Charter Trustees will ensure continuity of civic functions and regalia.

This will align with the broader NAC framework, maintaining local representation.

Capacity building

Recognising variation in parish resources and expertise, the success of Worcestershire's neighbourhood model depends on strong and well-supported NACs as the principal mechanism for local decision-making and delivery.

To achieve this, both NACs and their local partners, including town and parish councils, LJCs and community organisations, will receive tailored support to ensure consistent capability, confidence and connectivity across the county.

This ensures that both NACs and their local partners have the tools and capacity to deliver locally led governance effectively.

Evidence of proven neighbourhood governance approaches

The north and south model builds on proven neighbourhood governance approaches from across the UK that demonstrate how devolved, place-based structures, similar to NACs, can balance local voice with strategic accountability:

- **Durham (2011)** – Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) operate at neighbourhood scale, linking elected members, town and parish councils, VCSE and residents to set local priorities, closely mirroring the NAC model.
- **Shropshire (2009)** – Local Joint Committees (LJCs) provided delegated budgets (£17k -£71k) and community commissioning powers. Worcestershire's NACs will build on these principles, providing strategic oversight above LJCs.
- **Cornwall (2009)** – Demonstrated successful asset and service devolution with strong local support, providing transferable lessons for selective future asset transfer via NAC coordination.
- **North and West Northamptonshire (2023–24)** – Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) at populations of around 30-50,000 coordinate health, care and wellbeing services, illustrating the benefits of neighbourhood-level delivery.

These examples show that formalised, devolved partnerships with clear accountability deliver stronger localism, better coordination and measurable community impact.

Integration with Neighbourhood Area Committees

Governance layers

- NACs provide the primary neighbourhood forum for residents and elected members to discuss priorities, inform service delivery and feed into the strategic work of the new unitary authorities.
- Town and parish councils and clusters act as statutory partners within NACs, ensuring grassroots insight informs neighbourhood-level decisions.
- LJCs operate below NACs, focusing on hyper-local issues and feeding into NAC agendas to maintain community voice.

Responsibilities

- Services or assets that town and parish councils can manage efficiently (grounds, halls, allotments, small-scale highways) may be delegated through SLAs or transferred, while NACs retain strategic oversight and accountability.
- NACs act as the coordination and liaison point between parish-level activity and the unitary council, ensuring local delivery aligns with strategic priorities.

Linking budgets and service delivery

- NACs will operate with delegated budgets from the new councils to support local projects and community priorities.
- Town and parish councils will continue to raise and manage their own precepted budgets, maintaining statutory independence while aligning activity with NAC priorities where shared outcomes exist.
- Parish clusters or LJCs may jointly commission using their own or delegated funds, with NACs providing oversight to ensure transparency and alignment.

This arrangement preserves parish autonomy while fostering coordination and shared accountability

Feedback and review mechanism

- NACs will provide a forum for sharing progress, learning and good practice across parish clusters, LJCs and community partners. The emphasis will be on collaboration and transparency, not formal accountability.
- Town and parish councils will retain direct accountability to their electorates, choosing to participate in NAC reviews to strengthen alignment and mutual learning.

This ensures continuous improvement and shared responsibility for outcomes while respecting the independence of each democratic tier.

Integrated Neighbourhood Teams

INTs are the operational arm of neighbourhood governance, delivering services that reflect the priorities set by NACs. Together, NACs and INTs form a continuous loop of accountability and empowerment. Residents will shape local priorities, and INTs translate these into tangible, locally tailored outcomes.

Operating within NAC footprints, INTs bring together professionals from social care, public health, housing, planning, police and VCSE sectors to deliver joined-up, preventative services.

Their core functions include:

- Coordinating multi-agency teams to deliver integrated support aligned to local priorities.
- Using local intelligence, data and co-design with residents to shift services from reactive to preventative.
- Delivering flexibly and iteratively, adapting to changing needs and evaluating impact.
- Embedding transparency through regular community engagement and clear reporting mechanisms.
- Strengthening partnerships across statutory, voluntary and community sectors to ensure seamless service delivery.
- Ensuring residents can see how their input translates into action, reinforcing trust and accountability.

INTs ensure that services are designed around lived experience and local need, not organisational silos. This approach enables early intervention, strengthens partnerships and improves outcomes for residents.

Focus group insight

"Even one unitary would need sub-divisions; two unitaries naturally enable neighbourhood governance."

While NACs and INTs provide the structural foundation for local decision-making and service delivery, their success will be measured by the outcomes they deliver for residents. Across Worcestershire, district-led initiatives already demonstrate how devolved governance, place-based coordination and multi-agency collaboration can improve lives.

Case studies in the following section show how this model delivers tangible benefits in prevention, integration and community voice. From wellbeing hubs and targeted grants to collaborative service delivery, these examples highlight the value of local insight, trusted relationships and responsive action. They

also illustrate the risks of losing this agility and connection under a one unitary model.

The north and south model preserves and strengthens this approach, enabling neighbourhood governance to drive meaningful, measurable impact across Worcestershire.

Comparison to the one unitary model

A single unitary would face significant challenges in implementing neighbourhood governance at scale. Without the structural clarity and autonomy of two councils, delivery teams risk being stretched thin across a large and diverse geography. This could lead to inconsistent service standards, slower response times and reduced capacity for local innovation.

The model would likely require complex internal sub-divisions to replicate the responsiveness of district-level structures, but without the democratic mandate or resourcing to do so effectively.

Building on best practice community engagement

Criteria 6b. Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement

District councils across Worcestershire have demonstrated the ability to deliver responsive, preventative and locally tailored services through deep community knowledge and strong partnerships. These examples show how local government can adapt to varied needs, foster resident voice and drive better outcomes. A north and south model preserves this agility and proximity to residents and communities.

Strengthening the case for a north and south model

As district councils, for more than 50 years we have consistently demonstrated our ability to deliver locally responsive services that reflect the needs and priorities of our communities. Through wellbeing hubs and integrated initiatives, we provide preventative support shaped by local insight. Our deep relationships and trusted networks enable us to respond quickly to emerging challenges, while targeted grants and strong partnerships help sustain and enhance delivery. Most importantly, we empower residents to shape local priorities and influence decisions that matter to them.

Across Worcestershire, we are already delivering neighbourhood-based models that work. For specific examples of community engagement, see the table of case studies below.

Comparison to the one unitary model

A single unitary would struggle to replicate this level of granularity, responsiveness and local trust. The evidence from the examples below shows that creating a two-unitary structure would preserve the agility, community connection and place-based insight that drive better outcomes for residents.

Case studies evidencing best practice community engagement	
Case study 1: Wychavon Wellbeing Hubs – Prevention through localised support	Wychavon District Council has developed a network of wellbeing hubs in Pershore, Evesham and Droitwich, each shaped by local insight and evolving community needs. In Pershore, the hub emerged from collaboration between the town council and local GPs to reduce pressure on surgeries by offering signposting and a social space to tackle isolation. Evesham's hub expanded to include a family hub and crisis support facilities, including an examination room and washing facilities for those experiencing homelessness. In Droitwich, the hub on the Westlands estate focused on mental health support, responding to concerns raised by a local school about rising low-level mental health issues post-pandemic. These hubs demonstrate how district-level knowledge and relationships enable tailored, preventative services that respond to specific local challenges. A north and south model preserves this agility and ensures that neighbourhood-level delivery remains embedded in community priorities.
Case study 2: Malvern Hills Community Hubs for Wellbeing – Building place-based networks	The Malvern Hills District Health Collaborative brings together partners from health, housing, leisure, VCSE and public services to improve wellbeing through community hubs. The Help Centre at Malvern Town Football Club, located in one of the district's most deprived areas, began as a digital drop-in but organically evolved into a multi-agency support hub. Residents now access services from housing teams, employment support, NHS health checks, and more - all in a familiar, welcoming space. When Worcestershire County Council lost its venue for the Malvern family hub, the collaborative quickly repurposed a district-run community centre to preserve local provision. This response highlights how district-

	level partnerships and place-based leadership can protect vital services. A north and south model enables this responsiveness and ensures that local networks continue to thrive.
Case study 3: Worcester City District Collaborative – integrated service delivery	The Worcester City District Collaborative is a multi-agency partnership delivering joined-up services across health, social care and community support. It focuses on three areas: tackling loneliness, supporting early years and reducing health inequalities. Activities range from signposting and awareness campaigns to targeted interventions in areas like Old Warndon and Brickfields. Partners include NHS bodies, VCSE organisations, the City Council and education providers. The collaborative's ability to respond to local health data and coordinate across sectors demonstrates the value of district-level integration. Two councils will retain this capacity to align strategic oversight with neighbourhood delivery.
Case study 4: Bromsgrove – Sunrise Project: Person-centred prevention	The Sunrise Project in Bromsgrove offers intensive, personalised support for residents facing complex challenges. Officers work across housing, health, education, benefits and safeguarding to address root causes and stabilise lives. Over ten years, the project has maintained 100% satisfaction, with residents reporting transformative outcomes - from securing housing and school places to resolving financial instability. Resident feedback: "When I met my support worker, my life was very chaotic… I now have a place to call home, my children are in school, and my finances are settled. I felt listened to… the service made a big difference to my life."
	This model shows how locally rooted, preventative service design can reduce long-term demand and improve wellbeing. A two-unitary structure supports this approach by maintaining close proximity to communities and enabling tailored interventions that reflect local need.
Case study 5: Wyre Forest District Council - Community builders creating the ripple effect	Wyre Forest District Council's Community Builders lead on Asset-Based Community Development, helping residents harness local skills and networks to build stronger communities. They support grassroots initiatives - from youth cafés and warm spaces to community gardens and BMX track improvements - often unlocking external funding from partners like West Mercia Police and the Screwfix Foundation. Acting as the council's local face, Community Builders bridge gaps between services and residents, fostering trust and civic pride. Their work shows how district-level engagement enables authentic community connection. A north and south model protects this proximity and ensures continued investment in local capacity.
Case study 6: Redditch Family Hubs: Early Help embedded in communities	Redditch Borough Council delivers locally embedded Family Hubs commissioned by the county council. These hubs bring together NHS, social care and VCSE partners to support families early, reducing crisis demand. Located on school sites and embedded in communities, they offer whole-family support tailored to local needs. This model reflects the strengths of district-led delivery, trusted relationships, local insight and integrated support. Under two councils, this approach can be expanded and adapted to meet the distinct needs of North and South Worcestershire.

Summary

The case for two unitary councils is clear. Residents, town and parish councils have consistently supported a north and south model that keeps decision-making close to communities. Neighbourhood Area Committees and Integrated Neighbourhood Teams will give people influence over local priorities, budgets and services.

This structure embeds the golden thread of **People, Place and Prevention**, ensuring services are locally accountable, tailored to neighbourhood needs, and focused on early intervention.

A north and south model is built on what matters most to Worcestershire: identity, connection, and community-led change.

What our residents have told us is important

"I believe residents would be better served with smaller, more easily accessible councils and council services. Local government works well at a local level. The larger the area covered, the loss of local knowledge inevitably follows." – Malvern Hills resident

Lived experience: From Crisis to Confidence

"When I arrived in Redditch, I was homeless, a single parent from Pakistan with a one-year-old daughter and nowhere to turn. My health visitor told me about the Family Hub drop-in at the library, and that moment changed everything. At the drop-in, I met a DWP advisor who helped me with benefits, got a referral from the foodbank, and spoke to a housing worker who listened and acted. I was also given information about English classes and activities I could do with my daughter. It wasn't just practical help, it was hope.

Today, I have a home of my own. I've been supported to furnish it, manage my money, and build a new life. I'm happier, more confident, and I feel part of a community. I never imagined there was so much support out there. Our life is just so much better."

Section 5: Implementation plan*

* Implementation planning will continue to evolve in line with government thinking and guidance. These proposals are therefore indicative at this stage and subject to change.

This section includes:

Building on LGR experiences of other councils

Approach to implementation

Governance and workstreams

Building on LGR experiences of other councils

Effective implementation of the Local Government Reorganisation programme relies on robust planning, sound governance, and active engagement. This approach, informed by insights from other sectors, outlines key success factors. It is designed for deliverability and resilience, with stakeholder engagement being crucial for its triumph, fostering transparency, trust, and alignment throughout the transition process.

We will seek to draw on the experiences of past LGR programmes to set the county up for success. Having strong principles that delivery teams and the new councils can refer to are key for supporting a successful transition into the north and south model for Worcestershire.

Principles for successful LGR delivery

Evidence from past reorganisations and the 2024 Grant Thornton study[61] highlights ten critical success factors for effective transition and delivery, these are presented in no particular order:

Proactive Planning	Continued Public Services	Resident-Centric Design & Communication	Transparent Governance	Set a Coherent Vision & Align Transformation	Staff Support & Inclusive Culture	Integrate Technical & Cultural Change	Future Workforce Planning	Financial Sustainability	Rigorous Oversight & Assurance
Early mobilisation enhances risk management, establishes clear timelines, and ensures service continuity.	*Guaranteed continuous service provision through effective operational handovers and robust contingency strategies.*	*Structures and services that prioritise resident needs, complemented by timely and easily understandable communication.*	*Implement open decision-making processes, featuring visible leadership, defined responsibilities, and strong program oversight and controls.*	*A single, shared vision should guide all change activity to avoid duplication and fragmentation.*	*Engage staff early, provide support during transitions, and empower them to contribute to the organisation's future.*	*Address both the structural and procedural aspects ("hard" elements) alongside behaviours, values, and leadership ("soft" elements).*	*Assess current and projected staffing requirements to ensure the availability of appropriate personnel for future delivery.*	*Achieve cost-effectiveness without compromising service quality, supported by sound financial forecasting.*	*Foster confidence through strong program management, diligent risk monitoring, and clear channels for issue escalation.*

[61] Learning from the new unitary councils

Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholders have been engaged throughout the entire LGR process to ensure residents', businesses' and partners' views are represented in the future of Worcestershire. That engagement will continue to build understanding of the expected changes and strengthen trust between the new councils and their communities.

Strong engagement with staff and colleagues is critical to the successful transition and delivery of unitary councils due to the insights they would be able to provide. This engagement was started during the proposal writing and will need to be built on further to effectively deliver change.

This approach is central to our proposal, which is people centred. Local services will be co-designed with local people to deliver the services they want, rather than services perceived to be cheaper but which do not meet their needs. This reduces the risk of multiple interactions and long-term unsustainable service provision.

Once the proposal is confirmed, a comprehensive engagement plan will be developed. This will ensure clear, timely consultation and engagement and place stakeholder perspectives at the centre of delivery. Engagement will include residents, businesses, non-profit organisations, councillors, employees, external service providers, and service users such as council housing tenants and children and young people. Their involvement is essential to shape and deliver the most effective and efficient services.

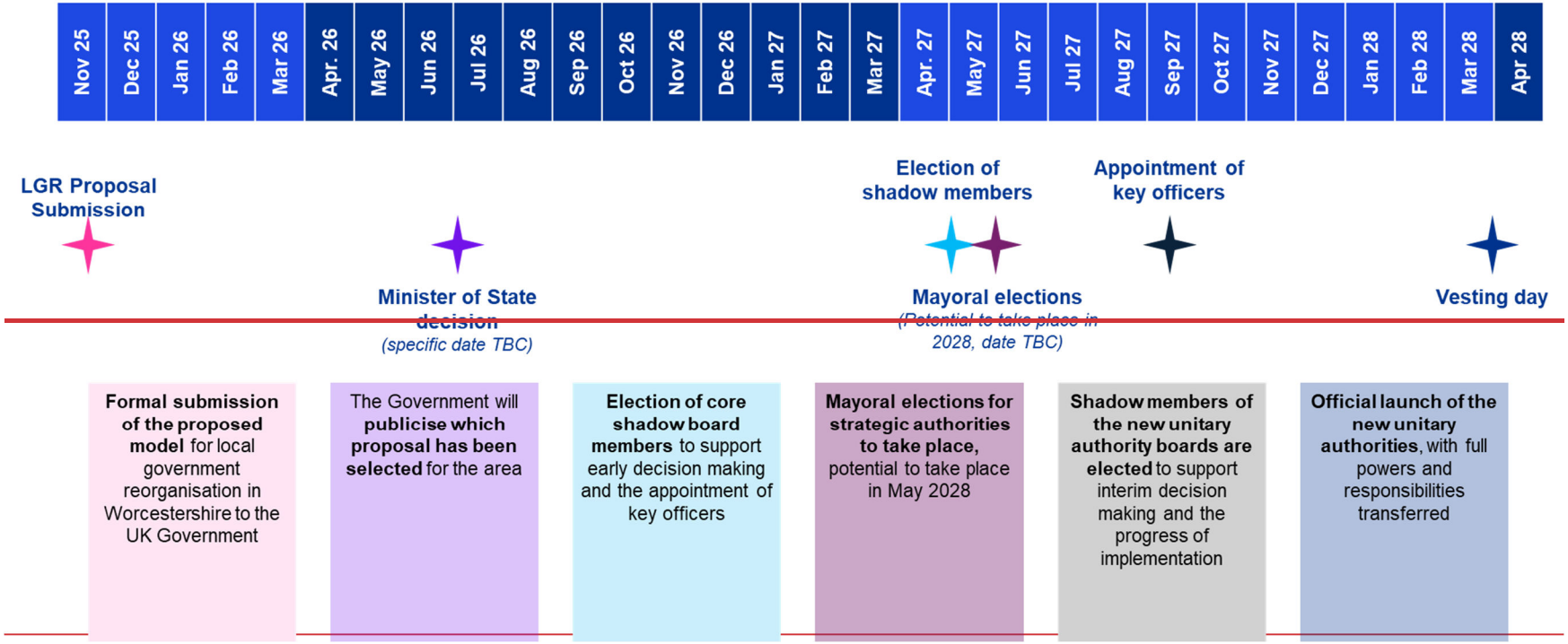
Approach to implementation

The implementation will proceed through four distinct phases, from initial preparation to the final go live. The primary objectives are a secure transition and sustainable long-term transformation. Achieving successful implementation will require close collaboration among the future unitary councils, robust programme management, and prompt mobilisation. This approach guarantees uninterrupted service delivery while the changes are being enacted.

High-level implementation plan

Implementation will be structured across four key phases, running from November 2025 to April 2028 onwards. The preparation phase will continue seamlessly from the proposal development, allowing for an efficient transition into the design phase once a decision is made. Following the anticipated decision point in Summer 2026, design activities will accelerate to support the transition phase. This will begin when the joint committees, as defined in the Structural Changes Order, will be responsible for taking forward important implementation activities in advance of the election of shadow councils and the appointment of key officers. The joint committees may exist on an informal basis doing preparatory work even before the Structural Changes Order is in place. The Government's target is for Vesting Day to occur on 1 April 2028, providing a two-year window to deliver the LGR programme, there will be a go-live phase following Vesting Day to support the transition to the new unitary council structure ensuring services are continued and begin work on post-go-live transformation.

Figure 5.1. Key dates timeline



Phases of implementation and priority activities

The table below sets out the priority implementation activities in further detail, there will be an element of collaboration between the two unitary authorities required alongside individual unitary authority actions.

Phase	Priority activities	
1. Prepare *Nov 2025 – Jun 2026*	**Joint collaboration** - Secure government decision and expand the programme in alignment with partners. - Establish foundational programme governance, financial controls, and clear responsibilities. - Confirm future service requirements and detailed service planning for the new unitary authorities, ensuring services will be able to continue delivery from the onset. - Define and agree the scope of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)-related decisions with existing councils. - Communicate to residents and partners the current position and outline of next steps. - Strategic authority proposals will be submitted in early 2026 - Development and beginning of an implementation plan for the new Strategic Authority	**Individual unitary authority** - Baseline current data across councils to plan for merging all data systems. - Agree upon a comprehensive communications and engagement strategy for stakeholders and the public. - Develop a detailed change management and communications plan specifically for staff to bring them on the change journey. This work is underway, for example the LGR Routes programme in Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council that is helping to keep staff informed, engaged and supported in order to successfully navigate through LGR. This is as well as an established Devolution Board covering all departments across the councils. - Develop a high-level implementation plan, timeline, and critical path with dedicated project management teams for each of the new unitary authorities.
2. Design *Jul 2026 – May 2027*	**Joint collaboration** - Plan and deliver elections for shadow authorities for the new unitary areas. - Potential for 2027 Mayoral elections, more likely May 2028)	**Individual unitary authority** - Election for Shadow Authority members held - Expand programme management and establish robust risk management and quality assurance frameworks. - Initiate detailed work on ICT infrastructure, systems, ICT and people strategies, and comprehensive contract reviews. - Create workforce transition plan, engaging early with unions and communications team to develop a strategy that effectively shares information with the workforce team regarding progress of LGR and bringing them on the journey.

		- Create organisation and service blueprints to align services and identify early transformation opportunities and risks. - Conduct options appraisals for key service areas, shaped by neighbourhood and resident engagement to deliver locally tailored solutions. - Prepare for critical legal and governance decisions, setting a strong corporate governance framework including committee structures and decision-making processes. - Ensure compliance with the Structural Changes Order and legal assurance processes. - Develop the new financial model and budget framework for the unitary authorities
3. Transition *Jun 2027 – Mar 2028*	**Joint collaboration** - Communication between the two unitary authorities to share best practices on resolving legacy issues	**Individual unitary authority** - Shadow Authorities will appoint Chief Executives, deliver comprehensive member induction, establish decision timetables, and conduct system testing. - Officer leadership will recruit leadership teams, finalise service planning, develop robust financial plans, and prepare for Day 1 readiness. - Agree constitution and decision-making frameworks. - Implement the detailed change management plan for staff, including communication, consultation, and training. - Execute the ICT migration and integration plan in-line with the ICT strategy, ensuring all critical applications are operational and secure. - Finalise legal and contractual arrangements for the new unitary councils. - Launch public awareness campaigns to work with residents and businesses on the future council services. - Establish Day 1 command centre for monitoring, issue resolution, and rapid response during the initial launch.
4. Go-Live *Apr 2028 - onwards*	**Joint collaboration** - Dissolution of Unitary Transition Programme Board and Executive Steering Group - Establishment of the strategic authorities	**Individual unitary authority** - Ensure stability and continuity of services from Day 1. - Monitor and manage performance through internal measures and public feedback - Maintain ongoing internal and external communications regarding progress and service changes. - Shift focus to delivering post-LGR transformation priorities. - Embed new governance, culture, and leadership arrangements.

Day 1 Requirements

To prioritise activities, it was important to identify key absolute requirements for day 1 that would allow the new unitary authorities to take on their responsibilities from vesting day in 2028. The below activities were identified as being required for the services to avoid disruption.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Minimum requirements for Day 1</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Activities which will support the initial running of the new unitary authority.</td></tr>
<tr><td>• Clear vision and strategy: Both unitary councils must have a defined overarching direction to guide initial operations.
• Strong governance processes: This is vital to support decision making during the transition process and the organisation of the new unitary.
• Agreed terms and conditions: To support the recruitment of staff for the new unitary authorities
• Bringing service leads together: To compare policies and processes, enabling identification of alignment opportunities.
• Service integration – data: Existing data structures reviewed and aligned to support unified service delivery.
• Service integration – people: Staff must be kept informed through regular updates and training to prepare for new ways of working.</td><td>• People integration: Ensure teams feel aligned with the culture of the new unitary, with a drive to meet the vision and strategy.
• Skills and capacity mapping: The new unitary councils must identify and fill any gaps in skills and capacity to support transition.
• Contract mapping: Reviewing existing contracts will help identify integration opportunities and ensure continuity of service.
• Financial and commercial arrangements: Plans must be in place to transfer financial responsibilities from existing councils to the new authorities.
• Systems procedures: Agreement on operating systems for core functions should be agreed and sourced.</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">Ambitions for Day 1</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Activities which will create a more efficient day 1 for the running of the new unitary councils</td></tr>
<tr><td>• Creation of Unitary Delivery Groups: Teams of specialists from both unitary councils who will support the delivery of LGR and share best practices across councils.
• Development of a plan for further transformation: LGR is the starting point - councils should agree a roadmap for ongoing transformation and improvement.</td><td>• Harmonisation of policies and procedures: Initial alignment of key policies will support developing a unified identity and clarify processes for staff and citizens.
• Branding of new councils: Physical and visual branding to be launched as well as cultural branding that will support the narrative of working environments to attract colleagues.</td></tr>
</table>

Post vesting-day ambitions	
Stretch targets that will support building two successfully integrated councils	
• **Fully integrated service delivery model:** Supports the new unitary area with seamless services for all citizens. • **Enhanced and consistent ways of working:** Ensures all staff use aligned processes through integration and training. • **Consistent functional processes:** Improves structure, reliability and effectiveness by reducing errors. • **Single, secure system for each unitary:** Enables cross-service delivery while protecting sensitive data. • **Cross-system integrated governance:** Provides strong oversight and accountability through unified reporting. • **Single data system:** Ensures data integrity and continuity across services with one secure source of truth.	• **Positive supportive culture:** Building a strong culture takes time but this will bring a better working environment, ensuring a positive experience for colleagues and in turn a better outcome for residents and citizens of Worcestershire. • **High levels of staff engagement:** This brings additional insight into the councils allowing best practice to be shared, and more positive experiences from colleagues • **Co-location:** Bringing teams together physically fosters collaboration, streamlines operations, and builds a unified identity for the new council. • **HR alignment:** Post-transformation ensuring harmonisation with HR on terms and conditions and implementing voluntary and compulsory redundancy programmes as required.

Appendix 1: Approach to developing this proposal

Detailed walkthrough of the approach taken in developing this proposal through interim plan development, stakeholder engagement, options appraisal, vision and outcomes setting, financial modelling and implementation planning.

This proposal has been shaped through stakeholder engagement, detailed options appraisal, and financial modelling. It reflects resident priorities and sets out a clear rationale for the recommended north and south model, supported by design principles and viability analysis.

Development of the interim plan

The interim plan was jointly published in March 2025 by all seven Worcestershire councils. It captured initial shared thinking on future structures under Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). Following further appraisal, councils could not align on a single preferred option.

Despite these differences, collaboration has remained strong. Councils have worked together through the Worcestershire Leaders Board, supported by a collaboration agreement. Formal letters were issued to County Council colleagues confirming the outcome of district council decisions in September and further encouraged collaboration with the five commissioning councils for the County Council and Wyre Forest District Council to support a single proposal for a north and south model for local government in Worcestershire, based on the compelling evidence made available through our options appraisal.

This proposal builds on that joint work and reflects a shared commitment to openness, evidence-led planning and constructive engagement across all councils.

Engagement with our stakeholders

This proposal has benefitted from deliverable investment in extensive stakeholder engagement across Worcestershire between June and July 2025, recognising that people are at the heart of local government. This process gathered both quantitative and qualitative information from 32 engagement sessions involving:

- Members of Parliament from all six Worcestershire constituencies
- Leaders and Chief Executives from each district council and Worcestershire County Council
- Group and full member briefings with commissioning councils
- Senior Management Teams from commissioning councils

Three thematic sessions were also held, focusing on health and wellbeing, economy and environment, and community engagement. These brought together representatives from organisations such as the ICB, West Mercia Police, the University of Worcester, local colleges, and various community businesses, and housing groups. Discussions centred on long-term aspirations, local characteristics, service improvements, and effective community engagement.

A public engagement exercise in June 2025 received 4,249 responses, 94% of which were from residents. Additional engagement included staff surveys and 14 focus groups with residents, housing tenants, town and parish councils, and VCSE representatives.

In addition, as part of our approach to developing this proposal for two new unitary councils in Worcestershire, we issued a stakeholder feedback document to a wide range of strategic partners, including MPs, senior leaders from health, policing, fire and education, voluntary and community sector organisations, housing and leisure providers, and all town and parish councils. This engagement invited reflections on how organisations would work with the proposed councils and sought input to strengthen the submission. The feedback process, coordinated by the leaders of Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills, Redditch, Worcester and Wychavon councils, aimed to ensure this proposal was collaborative and locally responsive.

The outputs from these activities informed a set of design principles that reflect a broad consensus on the ambitions and characteristics that should

shape future local government structures, services, culture and priorities following LGR in Worcestershire.

Options appraisal and focus on the north and south model

An in-depth analysis was conducted of three options for Worcestershire: a one unitary model and two variations of a north and south model – one with shared services and one with full disaggregation.

The north and south model was selected based on its strong alignment with resident preferences and its ability to deliver place-based services tailored to the distinct needs of North and South Worcestershire. It builds on existing local identities, economic geographies and joint working arrangements, offering a more balanced and locally responsive structure.

Developing the vision and principles for LGR

The vision and guiding principles for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) were developed collaboratively through member briefing sessions and discussions with Chief Executives and Leaders from the District Councils of Bromsgrove, Redditch, Malvern Hills, Worcester and Wychavon. Throughout there have been briefing and input sessions open to all councillors across the five commissioning councils including the opportunity via Group Leaders to comment on the final draft proposal. This inclusive approach has been deliberately followed recognising and respecting the role of councillors as democratically elected representatives of their community.

Resident input from public engagement was incorporated to ensure community perspectives were reflected. The vision and principles were refined through several iterations to ensure they were both ambitious and deliverable. *Further detail is provided in Section 4*.

Financial modelling

The financial modelling process followed a consistent, structured methodology, grounded in learning from other Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) programmes and aligned with government guidance.

The basis for estimating costs and benefits was agreed through discussions with finance leads and a review of both national and local analysis. Three calculators, consistent with those used in other LGR cases, were applied to assess disaggregation costs, implementation costs, and gross revenue savings.

In addition to these core elements, the modelling included a review of council reserves and council tax bases to assess the wider financial viability of each option. This ensured that the proposed model is not only deliverable in terms of transition costs and savings, but also sustainable in the long term.

Further detail on assumptions, savings profiles, and payback periods is provided in Appendix 3.

Implementation planning

Implementation planning started from looking at examples of best practice from unitary authorities that had undergone the transition previously, such as the councils in Cumbria. Taking the learnings from those unitary authorities allowed a four-phased approach to be identified that will take place from November 2025 to April 2028.

Details on the approach are included within Section 5 of this report.

Appendix 2: Options appraisal

Detailed information on the approach to identifying and shortlisting the options for evaluation, a high-level summary of the demographics for each of the options, and a summary of the scoring for the six government criteria developed as part of the options appraisal in Summer 2025.

This section includes:

Identifying and shortlisting options for evaluation

Following an initial agreement to explore two unitary council options for Worcestershire (a single council or the north and south model), an options appraisal was conducted using government criteria and stakeholder engagement, leading Bromsgrove, Redditch, Malvern Hills, Worcester and Wychavon to ultimately favour the north and south model, resulting in five of seven councils supporting this proposal.

Identifying options

In response to the LGR opportunity, work was immediately begun to identify potential options for Worcestershire. With several options identified, there was a discussion between the seven councils within Worcestershire where it was agreed that only two of those options were feasible:

- A singular unitary council for the whole of Worcestershire, with a population of 621,360.
- Two unitary councils in Worcestershire formed in the north (Bromsgrove, Redditch, Wyre Forest) with a population of 327,915 and the South (Malvern Hills, Worcester, Wychavon) with a population of 293,445[62.]

In the interim report, formal positions were summarised with Worcester and Malvern Hills having a strong preference for the two unitary option, Wyre Forest and Worcestershire County Council preferring the one unitary option, and Bromsgrove, Redditch, and Wychavon wishing to explore both options prior to coming to a decision.

When reviewing the north and south model, an opportunity was identified for two variants to be evaluated:

a. The transfer of all statutory and non-statutory services, functions and operating models to the two new unitary councils.
b. A shared service / hybrid model across both new unitary councils, with specific services jointly delivered and commissioned with all others delivered and commissioned solely by the new unitary council (including prevention and early help).

The identification of these variants fed into the options appraisal to evaluate three different options for Worcestershire to find the best solution for Worcestershire.

After reviewing the options appraisal in detail, the undecided councils, Bromsgrove, Redditch, and Wychavon felt that the north and south model would better represent the residents of their districts and provide better opportunities and outcomes for Worcestershire as a whole.

Evaluation of options

For the options appraisal, a detailed review of the three options was carried out using the six core government criteria to assess the options against. A mixture of quantitative and qualitative data was used to analyse the options objectively. Significant stakeholder engagement took place to consider residents viewpoints and ensure they were listened to in this process that will impact their ways of living.

Each option was scored using a Red-Amber-Green (RAG) framework to indicate how well it aligned with the definition of “what good looks like”:

- **High (green)**: Fully meets the criteria.
- **Medium (amber)**: Partially meets the criteria.
- **Low (red)**: Does not meet the criteria.

This scoring was supported by a summary of evidence and rationale, drawing on both data and qualitative insights. The process ensured a consistent and transparent comparison of options against government expectations. The summary of this evaluation is provided below.

[62] Population estimates for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics

The two options analysed in this report

High level analysis of the demographics of the two models included within this report, our preferred north and south model, and the one unitary model proposed by Worcestershire County Council and Wyre Forest.

Figure 6.2.1. Unitary options under review and population figures

	North and south model	One unitary model
		

	North Wyre Forest, Bromsgrove, Redditch	South Malvern Hills, Worcester, Wychavon	Worcestershire Wyre Forest, Bromsgrove, Redditch, Malvern Hills, Worcester, Wychavon
Population 2024[63]	293,445	327,915	621,360
Population 2032	300,113	345,053	645,166
Population 2047	314,356	373,506	687,862

[63] Population estimates for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics

Geographic area (km²)[64]	466	1,254	1,741
Population density (people/km²)	629	261	357
Population in rural output areas[65]	12.6%	35.2%	23.9%
GVA (£ million)[66]	7,976	9,541	17,517
GVA per capita (£)	27,181	29,096	28,190

[64] Standard Area Measurements for Administrative Areas (December 2023) in the UK | Open Geography Portal
[65] 2021 Rural Urban Classification - Office for National Statistics
[66] Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics

Summary scoring and commentary against government criteria

The initial evaluation considered three models, but only two have progressed: a north and south model featuring a hybrid approach for shared services that benefit from economies of scale, and a one unitary model. The following provides a summary of the rationale for scoring both models against the six government criteria.

Figure 6.2.2. Summary scoring and commentary against government criteria

1. Establishing a single tier of local government	**North and south model**	**One unitary model**
	HIGH	**HIGH**
	• Creates sensible geographies and economic areas, allowing for tailored economic development and strong local stakeholder connections. • Offers a greater likelihood of adopting inherited housing plans and facilitates collaboration on housing delivery, with opportunities for place-based approaches. • Provides better democratic representation with a lower resident-to-councillor ratio, fostering closer links with local councils. • Balances taxation and local needs, with the Fair Funding Formula expected to benefit areas with higher inequality. • Requires collaboration between the two new unitary councils to align housing strategies and Local Plans with major infrastructure projects.	• Creates a single tier of local government aligned with existing regional service boundaries (Police, Fire, Integrated Care Board). • Establishes a foundation for coordinated economic development across the county, addressing local challenges and supporting regional priorities. • Requires careful consideration of governance to balance local, council, and regional investment priorities. • The new unitary council would need to manage the adoption, review, or potential withdrawal of inherited Local Plans, which could lead to delays and uncertainty in development. • Requires ensuring town and parish councils have the capacity for increased neighbourhood decision-making and addressing local governance in non-parished areas.
2. Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks	**North and south model**	**One unitary model**
	MEDIUM	**HIGH**
	• Does not meet the guiding principle of 500,000 residents per new unitary council, but the rationale including on devolution is clearly evidenced. • Forecast to achieve recurring net revenue savings of £9.03 million.	• Meets the guiding population principle with a population of approximately 621,000. • Forecast to achieve recurring net revenue savings of £21.49 million. • Has the shortest transition cost payback period of 1.4 years.

	• Has a longer transition cost payback period of 3.86 years. • Supports transformation through the design of new organisations and delivery models. • Enables council tax flexibility to reflect the distinct profiles and needs of North and South Worcestershire. • Focuses on long-term financial sustainability through prevention and demand reduction.	• One-off implementation costs are £22.58 million, with no disaggregation costs. • Demonstrates a high probability of withstanding financial shocks, indicating strong financial sustainability. • Risks overstating the scale of efficiencies achievable through centralisation.
3. High quality and sustainable public services	**North and south model**	**One unitary model**
	HIGH	**HIGH**
	• Improves service delivery through place-based leadership, fostering co-produced, person-centred services and targeted support for communities. • Enables strong relationships with local VCSE organisations and deeper insights into community needs for localised strategy and policy. • Provides agility for rapid public service reform, particularly at a neighbourhood level, and fosters long-term planning tailored to local needs. • Risks significant service disaggregation but also provides opportunity for complete transformation, particularly for adult social care and children's services. • Potential for more complex interfaces between councils and health services, risking responsiveness and quality, and adding system costs. • Requires clear lines of accountability between neighbourhood governance structures and councillors to offset the loss of local representation.	• Improves service delivery by avoiding fragmentation, maintaining existing pathways for social care, health, and SEND, and simplifying relationships with system partners. • Offers significant opportunities for public service reform at both system and council levels, integrating housing and benefits with social care and health. • Leads to reduced disruption for crucial services like adult social care, children's services, and SEND, with potential for improved prevention and integration. • Increased likelihood of minimal to no transformation from the current services • Requires establishing a clear strategic vision, strong leadership, and integrated working to ensure high-quality public services across diverse areas. • Faces challenges in operating at scale and across multiple systems, requiring effective neighbourhood governance to deliver locally specific services.

	North and south model	One unitary model
4. Working together to understand and meet local needs	**HIGH**	**MEDIUM**
	• Strong public preference (62.5%) for a north and south model of those who selected a model, citing local focus, democratic accountability, and community connections. • Significantly more respondents (69.2%) believe a north and south model best supports local identity compared to a one unitary model (30.8%) of those who selected a model. • Effectively addresses resident concerns about loss of localism, remote decision-making, and equitable resource allocation by delivering services locally. • Outperforms other options by blending local service delivery with financial efficiencies through a shared services model, offering improved value for money and integrated public services. • Addresses resident concerns about service quality, including fears of service decline and over-reliance on digital systems.	• Faces challenges in addressing the loss of localism and establishing clear accountability and governance structures. • Public engagement feedback indicates a preference for a north and south model (62.5%) over a one unitary model (37.5%). • Raises concerns among residents regarding diminished community involvement, remote decision-making, and potential marginalisation of rural areas. • Faces concerns about the impact on local community and identity, with only 20.3% of respondents believing it best supports local identity. • Raises fears among residents about service decline, especially for vulnerable people, and the loss of non-statutory services.
5. Supporting devolution arrangements	**North and south model**	**One unitary model**
	HIGH	**HIGH**
	• Creates additional opportunities for regional collaboration, with two new unitary councils broadly comparable in size to other constituent members in a Strategic Authority (e.g. Herefordshire at 191,000). • Provides a balanced and adaptable foundation for devolution, enabling tailored economic strategies and public service reform aligned to the distinct needs of North and South Worcestershire. • Supports early delivery of devolved powers by embedding neighbourhood governance and enabling each council to work directly with partners on transport, skills, housing and net zero.	• Possesses the economic power and scale to deliver regional priorities, aligning with MHCLG guidance for strategic authorities due to its significant population (c621,000). • Provides a strong foundation for economic growth by integrating key functions like economic development, skills, transport, and housing under a single authority. • Can act as a prominent regional public services place leader, maintaining joint working relationships and initiating change at scale to support regional priorities. • Risks imbalance within a new strategic authority if it is significantly larger than other constituent members (e.g., Herefordshire and Shropshire).

	• Builds on existing shared services and joint management arrangements, reducing duplication and supporting integrated delivery across the county. • Avoids the risks of centralisation and democratic deficit by maintaining trusted local partnerships and enabling place-based leadership. • Enables each council to advocate for its area within the Strategic Authority, ensuring local priorities are reflected in regional decision-making. • Shared services reduce the risk of splitting capacity and complicating boundaries for health, police and fire, while allowing differentiated approaches where needed.	• Needs to mitigate challenges from the north/south and urban/rural divides to ensure ambitious growth plans align with the diverse needs of all residents and businesses.
6. Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	**North and south model** **HIGH**	**One unitary model** **MEDIUM**
	• Creates clearer and more localised accountability, empowering residents to influence decisions and fostering a culture of ceding control to local leaders and communities. • Fosters a culture of "small wins" through tailored community engagement and promotes innovative community-led solutions, supported by strong VCSE partnerships. • Aligns with public preference for local focus and democratic accountability, with a significant majority believing it best preserves local identity. • Requires investment in local leadership capacity and sustained, equal investment in community engagement across all communities, including rural areas. • Emphasizes continued investment in relationships with VCSE organisations to support new community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment arrangements.	• Requires aligning neighbourhood and council governance structures to ensure clear and transparent accountability between neighbourhoods and a large unitary council. • Needs to establish a culture of community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment, with visible local leaders developing innovative approaches to devolve power, assets, and budgets. • Requires establishing bespoke and robust neighbourhood governance arrangements and committing to long-term investment in neighbourhood delivery models. • Needs to build on existing arrangements and leverage corporate intelligence from district councils to the unitary council. • Requires adopting a localised approach to commissioning and joint working with VCSEs, recognising varying scales of operation.

Appendix 3: Financial Case for Change

Supporting financial context for Government Criteria 2: Right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.

This section includes:

- **Financial context**
- **The financial position of new councils**
- **Approach to LGR financial modelling**
- **Financial modelling summary results**
- **Reorganisation savings**
- **Disaggregation costs**
- **Implementation costs**
- **Phasing and payback period**

Financial context

Understanding the current and future financial position of Worcestershire's councils provides the foundation for assessing the potential benefits of reorganisation.

National financial context

Across England, local government faces sustained financial pressure from rising demand, inflationary pressures, and constraints on central funding. Councils have increasingly relied on reserves to balance budgets, while service demand, particularly in Adults and Children's Social Care, continues to grow faster than core funding. Reorganisation offers an opportunity to address structural financial fragility and deliver efficiencies that enable long-term sustainability.

There continues to be uncertainty over long term funding arrangements, which have placed many councils in increasingly fragile financial positions. The growing number of Section 114 notices in recent years highlights the systemic strain across the sector, with pressures in Social Care, Housing and Temporary Accommodation, and Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficits now common drivers of instability.

At the same time, the absence of clarity on the Fair Funding Review, ongoing uncertainty over business rates reform and reset, and the limited scope of multi-year settlements have constrained council's ability to plan sustainably. Against this backdrop, LGR offers an opportunity to strengthen financial resilience through streamlined structures, integrated service delivery, and more sustainable use of resources over the long term.

The Worcestershire financial context

In Worcestershire these pressures are reflected in rising costs and limited financial headroom across both district and count levels. While the districts maintain relatively stable reserves and financial management practices, the County Council faces overspend in social care and SEND budgets.

Collectively, councils across Worcestershire manage over £1.1bn in net revenue expenditure and hold around £69.2m in general fund balances, underscoring both the scale of the system and the need for sustainable reform. It will be the decision of the new unitary councils to determine how to use its resources to fund the cost of reorganisation, which is likely to be through a mixture of use of reserves and capital receipts. The forecast total gross budget gap for all Worcestershire Councils by 2028/29 is £100.2m.

Figure 6.3.1. Net revenue budget across Worcestershire

Council	General Fund Balance (£m) as at 31 March 25[67]	Net Revenue Budget (£m)[68]
Bromsgrove	13.4	15.3
Malvern Hills	6.6	10.7
Redditch*	6.9	13.5
Worcester	1.4	13.0
Wychavon	17.9	13.6
Wyre Forest	3.8	15.7

[67] Individual council statement of accounts
[68] Medium Term Financial Plans 2025/26

Worcestershire County	19.2	495.6
TOTAL	**69.2**	**577.4**

**Redditch excludes the HRA reserves of £11.266m*

The financial position of new councils

Creating new unitary councils requires a clear understanding of the baseline financial position and demand context that will underpin their sustainability.

Modelling key data sets for the new councils

The proposed north and south model has been assessed using the latest available financial and demand data, ensuring that assumptions reflect both local circumstances and national benchmarks. Each prospective unitary, north and south, has been modelled for revenue expenditure, reserves, council tax base, and key demand indicators, such as the number of children with care plans and clients receiving long-term support. This provides a balanced picture of the scale and demand across the two areas, enabling fair and proportionate resource allocation.

Figure 6.3.2 Key data comparison of the unitary model options regarding financials and demand

		North and south model	
		North	South
Financial	Net revenue expenditure (£m) * (2025/26)[69]	279.3	298.1
	Council tax base (number of band D equivalent properties) (2024)[70]	100,154	120,896
	General Fund Balance (£m) (2025/26)[71]	33.1	36.1
Demand[72]	% of students receiving SEN support	15%	14%
	% of students on EHCP	5%	5%
	% of adult social care users	46%	49%
	Claimants as a proportion of residents aged 16-64	3.2%	2.9%
	Average claimant count	3.3%	3.1%

[69] Provided by S151s / published budget reports
[70] MHCLG Council Tax Requirement Stats
[71] Individual Council Statement of Accounts
[72] Provided by authority

Approach to LGR financial modelling

The financial model has been developed using a consistent and transparent methodology aligned with national good practice.

Key elements of the financial calculations

The financial model provides a structured assessment of the financial implications of reorganisation, drawing on data from all Worcestershire councils, engagement with S151 Officers, and benchmarking from comparable LGR programmes. The analysis quantifies the estimated reorganisation savings, disaggregation costs, and implementation costs for both one unitary and north and south models, alongside a calculated payback period that reflects realistic delivery timelines.

All assumptions have been tested through an iterative review process with council finance leads to ensure that the modelling reflects both local conditions and national precedent. This iterative validation process has strengthened the credibility of the outputs and ensures alignment with the wider Case for Change.

Methodology and Data Inputs

The modelling combines bottom-up savings analysis and top-down cost estimation, supported by benchmarking against prior reorganisations (e.g. Dorset, Buckinghamshire, North Yorkshire).

- **Savings** were developed from the ground up through S151 engagement sessions, then challenged to reflect a more ambitious but achievable level of transformation. The final model includes £16.23m annual savings, with an ambition for £2.0m 'other transformation savings' driven by expanded opportunities for service redesign, joint commissioning, and demand management. Savings were calculated on a line-by-line basis with S151s, agreeing percentages of feasible savings informed through research into prior cases, overlaid with local context of prior year savings and deliverability of savings programme.
- **Implementation costs** were derived using a cost-per-head methodology, benchmarked to national averages, and validated through officer discussion. The final estimate of £19.83m reflects phasing across two years and includes allowances for workforce transition, IT and systems consolidation, estates rationalisation, and culture change. The cost-per-head methodology is informed from all cases for change back to 2009 and calculates inflated implementation costs. These have then been compared to a third-party calculation, and then costs are broken down by a series of savings levers.
- **Disaggregation costs** were reviewed in light of Worcestershire's strong base of shared services and collaboration. Following S151 review, costs were calculated downwards to £7.20m per annum, recognising opportunities to maintain and expand shared service arrangements, particularly in commissioning, specialist roles, and digital platforms, thereby avoiding duplication during transition. Again, disaggregation costs have been calculated on a line-by-line basis as a percentage of current costs, and informed by comparison with third party calculations,
- **Payback period** was calculated by profiling costs and savings, resulting in an estimated 3.86-year payback for the north and south model.

Validation and Assurance

The modelling has undergone multiple rounds of review and challenge by S151 Officers, focusing on the realism and local credibility of assumptions. Each cost and saving category are underpinned by documented assumptions, with detailed evidence retained for audit and submission purposes. This process ensures transparency and provides a robust evidence base for government consideration.

The methodology isolates the impact of reorganisation, assuming all other funding and demand factors remain constant. It therefore presents a clear, attributable view of the financial effect of reorganisation, separate from wider financial pressures or service reform initiatives already underway.

This approach provides a consistent, evidence-led view of the financial impact of reorganisation in Worcestershire. It balances ambition with deliverability, using locally informed data to ensure the model is credible, transparent, and aligned with best practice in LGR financial evaluation.

Financial modelling summary results

Our financial modelling provides a structured assessment of the potential impact of LGR in Worcestershire. It brings together estimates of implementation and disaggregation costs, recurring annual savings, and overall payback periods across the one- and north and south models. The analysis is designed to give and clear, evidence-based view of financial viability while recognising the true value of reform which extends beyond efficiency, to improving service outcomes, local accountability, and long-term financial sustainability.

Our financial modelling for the proposed option shows:

- **Implementation costs – £19.83m** one-off (£22.58m for one unitary): Both options incur transitional expenditure associated with programme management, ICT and system integration, workforce and organisation design, and one-off redundancy or transformation costs. While the one unitary option benefits marginally from reduced transition complexity, the north and south model's costs remain within the normal range of comparable reorganisations and are expected to deliver more sustainable local delivery arrangements.
- **Disaggregation or service realignment costs – £7.20m** annually (£0 for one unitary): These costs are driven by the need to separate countywide services and realign them across new governance structures. The north and south model benefits from the existing maturity of shared service arrangements, and the ability to retain joint commissioning or shared back-office functions where appropriate and beneficial. As a results, its disaggregation costs are more realistic and proportionate than would otherwise be the case in a fully disaggregated multi-unitary scenario.
- **Recurring annual savings – £16.23m** annually (£21.49m for one unitary): While the one unitary option achieves a higher theoretical level of savings through centralisation and reduced overheads, these are limited in proportion to overall budgets and rely heavily on untested transformation assumptions. The north and south model delivers a more credible, locally driven savings profile through sustained efficiencies, modernisation, and service transformation that can be implemented at pace and sustained over time.
- **Payback period – 3.86 years** (1.4 years for one unitary): Both models deliver payback within a timeframe consistent with national precedents (typically between 2-5 years). The north and south model, however, achieves this while maintaining stronger local governance and service alignment, providing a more balanced route to financial stability and public value.

On balance, while the one unitary model delivers marginally higher savings in absolute terms, these are limited in scale, uncertain in achievability, and dependent on a centralised approach that has historically underperformed.

With around 90% of the county's expenditure already managed by the County Council, the scope for significant new efficiencies through a single structure is limited.

By contrast, the north and south model offers a more credible and sustainable pathway, combining achievable efficiencies with greater local responsiveness, stronger democratic legitimacy, and the opportunity to build on existing shared service success. The real opportunity for Worcestershire lies not in short-term savings alone, but in reshaping services around people and place, integrating prevention and community delivery, and ensuring that every pound spent delivers better outcomes for residents.

Figure 6.3.3. Summary of financial modelling

LGR option	One unitary council	Two unitary councils
Gross reorganisation savings (£m)	(£21.49m)	(£16.23m)
Disaggregation costs (£m)	£0.00m	£7.20m
Recurring revenue savings (£m)*	(£21.49m)	(£9.03m)
One-off implementation costs (£m)	£22.58m	£19.83m
Estimated payback period	1.4yrs	3.86yrs
Key features of each option	Delivers higher theoretical gross savings, primarily from consolidation of senior leadership, back-office functions, and governance structures. No disaggregation costs due to full integration of services into a single authority. Additional implementation complexity in front-loading transformation and aggregating all services into one new organisation and greater redundancy costs associated with workforce reduction. Financial benefits are relatively small in the context of total expenditure and rely on successful large-scale organisational change. Reflects a centralised delivery model with reduced local accountability and limited resilience to service or financial pressures.	Achieves a credible and sustainable gross savings while retaining local identify and operational resilience through two balanced unitary councils. Reflects existing maturity of shared services and collaboration across districts and proposed sharing of services in the hybrid future delivery model. Implementation costs comparable to one unitary model but deliver greater long-term alignment to place-based delivery. Offers strong platform for preventative reform, community integrated, local engagement and outcomes over time which will drive genuine long-term financial sustainability.

*Recurring revenue savings = gross reorganisation savings less disaggregation costs

The calculation of each element of the financial model is explained within this report section.

Reorganisation savings

Reorganisation provides the opportunity to secure sustainable financial savins by streamlining structures, reducing duplication, and enabling service redesign.

Reorganisation savings (gross) definition: Reorganisation savings represent the estimated annual recurring efficiencies achievable through local government reorganisation, primarily arising from removing duplication between district and county functions, consolidating management and corporate services, and operating at greater scale. These savings are focused on integration of front-line and enabling services, rationalisation of governance and decision-making structures, and opportunities for transformation through joint commissioning, digital investment, and demand management.

The gross savings figure captures the full scope of reorganisation-related efficiencies before the deduction of disaggregation or transition costs. It does not assume wider public sector reform or additional transformation activity that may occur post-implementation, ensuring a clear and attributable view of benefits arising directly from reorganisation.

Method of calculation:

Reorganisation savings have been calculated using a bottom-up approach, developed in collaboration with S151 Officers across Worcestershire councils and benchmarked against financial data from previous Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) programmes.

- Each savings category was assessed on a line-by-line basis to determine the proportion of current spend that could be reduced or consolidated through reorganisation.
- Baseline expenditure data was drawn from financial data returns and statutory returns.

Reorganisation savings for each model

The resulting model produces a gross savings estimate of £16.23m per annum under the preferred north and south model, equivalent to approximately 1.5% of the combined net revenue budget.

Figure 6.3.4. Reorganisation savings summary

Model	Gross reorganisation savings (£m)
One Unitary	21.49
Two Unitary	16.23

Categories of saving

As part of benchmarking LGR revenue savings, categories of savings have been identified to provide an indication of the expected breakdown of savings.

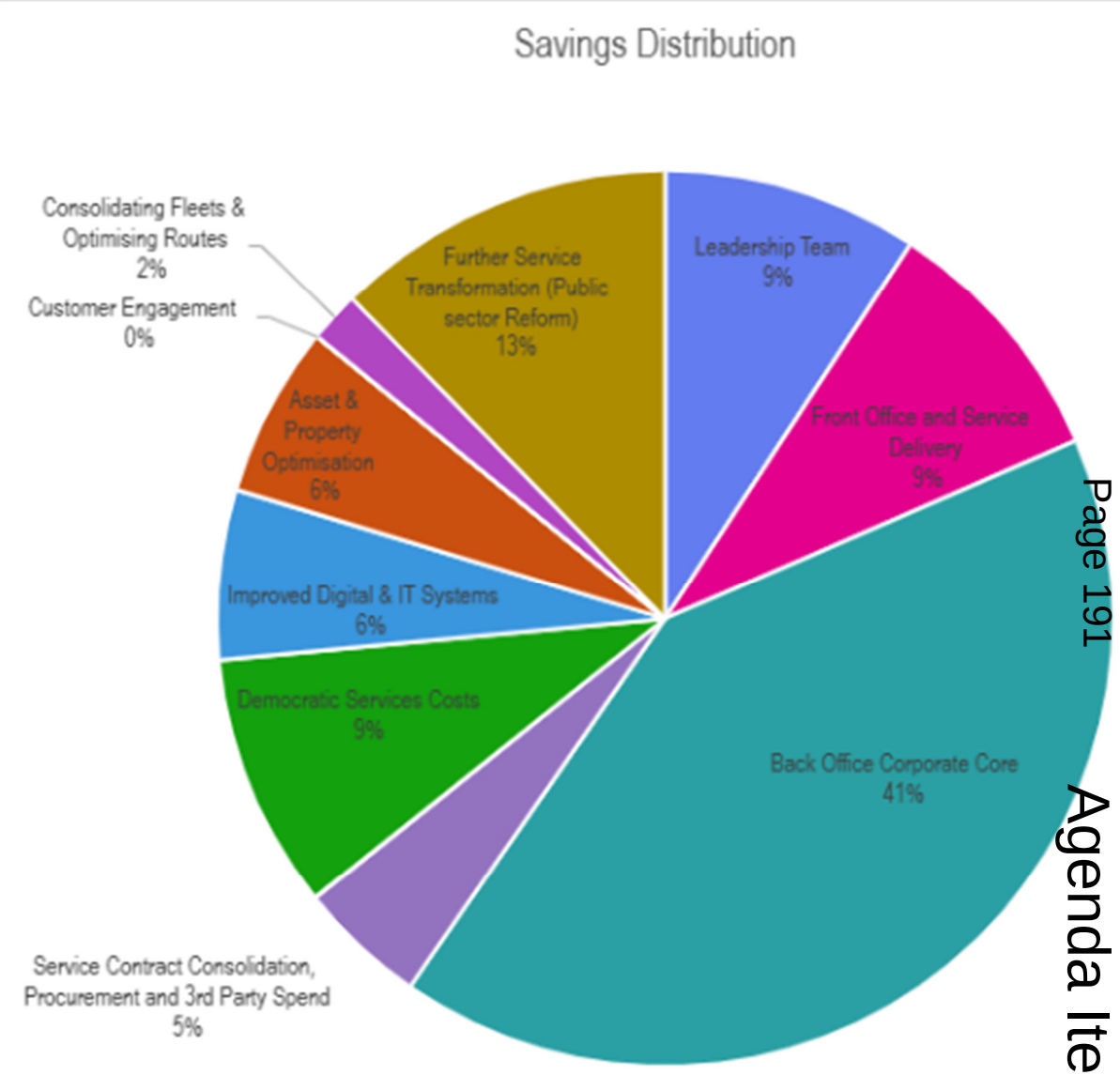
Figure 6.3.5. Savings category summary

Savings category	Description
Optimising Leadership	Reviewing the number of managerial roles to eliminate duplication and enhance operational efficiency, by merging similar responsibilities into fewer and more impactful positions.
Right Sizing the Organisation	Determining the right size of the organisation, proportionate to the services that are being delivered, offset by the costs of new technology and upskilling individuals. Reducing overall workforce through role consolidation and automation.
Consolidating Corporate Services	Consolidating corporate support functions, such as Human Resources (HR), Finance and Information Technology (IT) to streamline operations, enhance efficiencies and unlock savings.

Service Contract Consolidation	Understanding current and joint service arrangements between Councils, and what savings (or costs) may be incurred on consolidation. Determining the optimum sourcing arrangements for contracts that are either currently outsourced or could be outsourced. This will need to consider both financial and operational efficiency and will consider existing arrangements with third parties.
Procurement & 3rd Party Spend	Centralising procurement to determine resultant costs/savings through relative purchasing power and renegotiating terms with suppliers. Where appropriate, consolidating similar contracts for service delivery, presents an opportunity to renegotiate terms and achieve economies of scale with suppliers.
Proportionate Democratic Services	Reviewing the costs of democratic services (elections, committee support, etc.) to be proportionate to the new authority. Reducing the number of councillors and governance costs (e.g. committees, elections).
Improved Digital & IT Systems	Implementing unified digital platforms, automating repetitive tasks, streamlining workflows, and eliminating manual processes, can lead to significant time and cost savings. Unified platforms and systems rationalisation reduce licensing, support, and admin overheads.
Asset & Property Optimisation	Reviewing property portfolio to ensure alignment with the council's overall objectives and community needs.
Consolidating Fleets & Optimising Routes	Exploring consolidation of fleets and any route efficiencies, to reduce costs and minimise environmental impact. Reducing fleet size and improving vehicle routing to lower transport costs.
Future Transformation	Wider Transformation agenda and Public Service reform. Including enhancing customer contact facilities, determining the needs of citizens in the new authority and where appropriate self-service through digital channels (utilising where it offers benefits a digital by choice approach amongst other customer access routes), to improve customer engagement, satisfaction and drive operational efficiencies and cost savings.

The proportion of savings applied for the north and south model are outlined in the following chart, these will be considered in greater detail in the next phase of LGR.

Figure 6.3.6. Proportion of savings



Disaggregation costs

Disaggregation costs reflect the ongoing additional expenditure that may arise when dividing upper-tier services between more than one new unitary authority, balanced against existing and emerging shared service arrangements.

Disaggregation costs definition: Disaggregation costs are the estimated annual recurring costs that result from dividing county-level (upper-tier) services between multiple new unitary authorities. These costs reflect the potential duplication of management, systems, or service delivery functions where activities must be replicated across more than one organisation.

In the Worcestershire context, these costs have been carefully assessed to reflect the county's strong history of collaboration and shared service delivery. As a result, the estimated disaggregation costs are lower than in comparable reorganisations, recognising that existing and potential shared service foundations mitigate much of the duplication typically associated with multi-unitary models.

Method of calculation:

The disaggregation cost model has been developed using standard LGR financial methodologies, applied to Worcestershire service and cost bases.

- Costs were calculated as a percentage uplift on existing upper-tier service budgets, informed by benchmarks from other recent LGRs.
- Baseline data for Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Place Services, and Corporate & Support Services was taken from Worcestershire County Council's 2025/26 budget statutory return.

Disaggregation costs for each model

Following engagement with Section 151 Officers, the estimated annual disaggregation costs are expected to be £7.20m, providing a more locally realistic and evidence-based view of the likely financial impact.

Figure 6.3.7. Disaggregation summary

	Disaggregation costs (£m)
One unitary	0
Two unitary councils	7.2

Categories of disaggregation costs

All disaggregation costs are assumed to be incurred annually from Day 1 of the new authorities. The categories of disaggregation costs are:

Figure 6.3.8. Cost categories

Disaggregation cost category	Description
Adult social care	Duplication of some current adult social care management and staffing costs and potential for additional cost of commissioned spend.
Children's Services	Duplication of some current children's services management and staffing costs and potential for additional cost of commissioned spend.
Place services	Duplication of some current place services including management and staffing costs, and additional costs of commissioned spend.
Corporate and support services	Duplication of corporate & support services management, staffing and systems.

Implementation costs

Delivering change at scale requires upfront investment to achieve long-term efficiency, service improvement, and structural simplification.

Implementation costs definition: Implementation costs are the estimated one-off transition costs associated with moving to a new unitary model. These cover all expenditure required to establish the new councils, align systems and processes, and ensure continuity of service delivery through the transition period.

They include costs related to staff exits and redundancy, ICT and systems integration, estates rationalisation, workforce development, and the coordination and governance of the implementation process. Implementation costs are a standard feature of all local government reorganisations and represent the necessary investment to unlock future financial and operational benefits.

Method of calculation:

Implementation costs were calculated using a cost-per-head methodology, benchmarked against national averages from previous Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) programmes and refined through engagement with S151 Officers across Worcestershire.

- The methodology applies a cost-per-employee ratio to local workforce data, adjusted to reflect local pay structures, service complexity, and the north and south model configuration.
- Costs were phased over a two-year implementation period to reflect realistic delivery timescales, with expenditure front-loaded in Year 1 to support programme design and transition management.
- The final estimated implementation cost aligns closely with precedent from recent reorganisations, after adjusting for scale and inflation.
- The cost model includes allowances for culture and communication activities, as well as contingencies to manage implementation risk and programme slippage.

All assumptions have been reviewed by S151 Officers to ensure consistency with local workforce and systems baselines and provide a credible, deliverable view of transition expenditure.

Implementation costs for each model

The implementation cost estimate of £19.83m provides a prudent yet deliverable assessment of the investment required to implement the north and south model. The total has been validated through comparison with third-party benchmarks and national averages, ensuring alignment with precedent while reflecting local factors such as the scale of workforce change and the existing shared service base.

Importantly, implementation costs are non-recurring and are outweighed by the recurring savings projected from reorganisation.

Figure 6.3.9 Implementation cost summary

	Implementation costs (£m)
One unitary	22.58
Two unitary	19.83

Categories of implementation cost

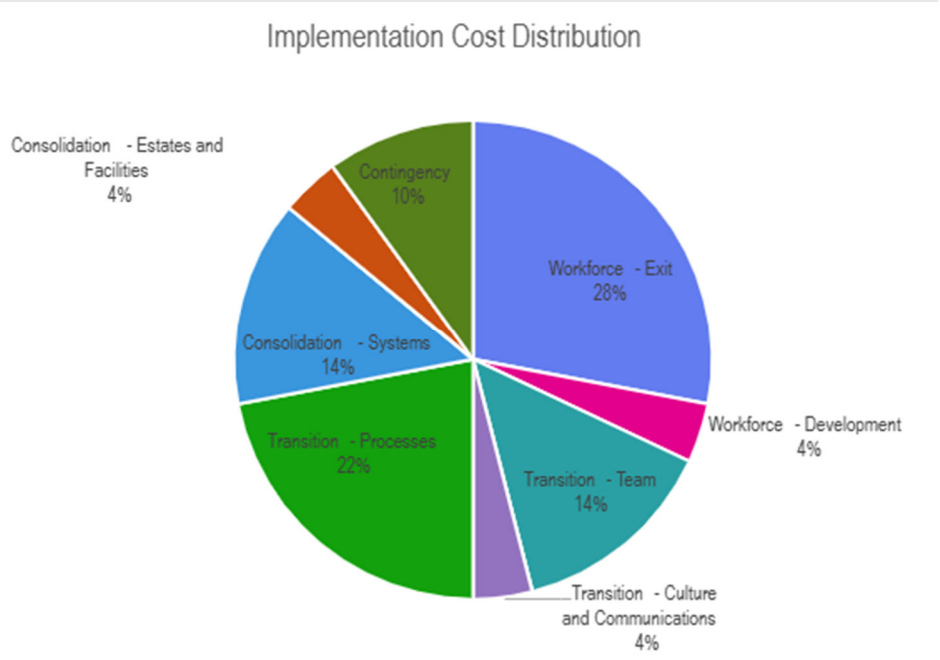
Categories of implementation costs are:

Figure 6.3.10. Implementation cost categories

Implementation cost category	Description
Workforce exit (including redundancy)	Compensation paid to employees as a result of restructuring/redundancies, including redundancy payments, pension strain, TUPE, salary harmonisation, and other contract termination fees
Transition Team	Implementation programme team including Legal, Contract Negotiation, Project and Programme Management, finance, and specialist support
Processes harmonisation	Work required to harmonise processes and facilitate effective service transition. This includes specific constitutional changes and developments, democratic transition, and new policies and procedures.
Estates and Facilities	Reconfiguration of buildings, costs of disposal, and termination fees on leases.
Systems consolidation	Alignment of systems and digital infrastructure, including merging systems, data migration, commonality of cyber security, and training for new systems.
Workforce development	Additional costs to upskill and reskill employees to adapt to new roles and responsibilities.
Culture and communications	Costs to develop communications, branding, training, and public information in relation to new authorities. This should inform the public, stakeholders, and employees of proposed changes and address concerns.
Contingency	Contingency to allow for prudence in estimates.

The proportion of implementation costs applied for the north and south model are outlined in the following chart, these will be considered in greater detail in the next phase of LGR.

Figure 6.3.11. Implementation cost distribution



Phasing and payback period

Profiling the timing of costs and savings to demonstrate the pace of financial return from reorganisation.

Payback period definition: The payback period represents the time taken to reach a net positive financial position following reorganisation, once all one-off implementation costs and recurring savings have been accounted for.

5-year net benefit / (costs) definition: The combined net benefit or cost of reorganisation over a five-year horizon, reflecting the phasing of both expenditure and savings.

Method of calculation:

The payback analysis profiles the timing of savings and costs using realistic delivery assumptions based on prior LGR experience. Implementation costs are spread across the shadow year and first two operational years, reflecting programme mobilisation, workforce transition, and systems integration activity.

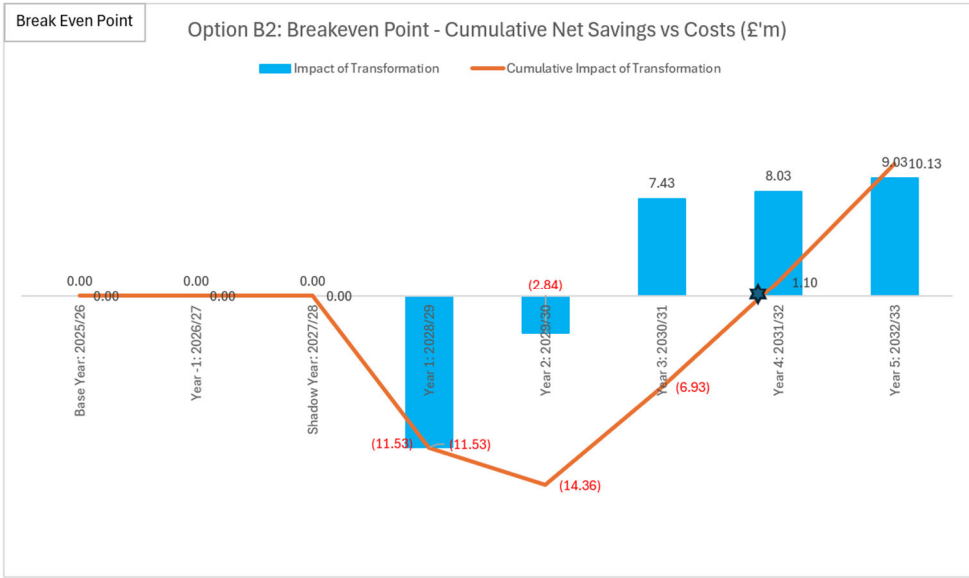
Savings are introduced on a phased basis, with partial realisation in Year 1 and full recurring savings achieved by Year 5, consistent with the time needed to embed organisational redesign and transformation.

Phasing and calculation of Payback Period

The financial model aggregates cumulative savings and costs across the five-year period to identify the point at which benefits outweigh expenditure.

For the Worcestershire north and south model, full payback is achieved within approximately 3.86 years. This reflects a prudent yet achievable trajectory consistent with national precedent.

Figure 6.3.12. Payback period calculations



Cumulative financial benefit and payback period by LGR options

The financial model annual net benefits and cumulative savings position is reflected in the table below across the initial five-year period, as outlined in the breakeven graphs above the one unitary model pays back in 1.4 years and the north and south model pays back in 3.86 years when benefits outweigh expenditure.

Figure 6.3.13. Cumulative financial benefit and payback period by LGR option

Modelling year	Financial year	One unitary		North and south	
		Net benefits (cost) by year (£m)	**Cumulative benefit (cost) (£m)**	Net benefits (cost) by year (£m)	**Cumulative benefit (cost) (£m)**
Shadow Year	**2027 / 28**	0	**0**	0	**0**
Year 1	**2028 / 29**	(4.1)	**(4.1)**	(11.5)	**(11.5)**
Year 2	**2029 / 30**	11.0	**7.0**	(2.8)	**(14.4)**
Year 3	**2030 / 31**	20.7	**27.7**	7.4	**(6.9)**
Year 4	**2031 / 32**	21.0	**48.7**	8.0	**1.1**
Year 5	**2032 / 33**	21.5	**70.1**	9.0	**10.1**

Appendix 4: Key data sets

Key data which is included throughout the document

Figure 6.4.1. Key data set for government criteria analysis: Demographics

Metric	Two unitary councils		One unitary council
	North Worcestershire	South Worcestershire	Worcestershire
Population (2024)[73]	293,445	327,915	621,360
Geographic area (sq km) (2023)[74]	466	1,254	1,741
Population density (people per sq km) (2023)	629	261	357
65+ Population (2023)[75]	66,139	76,957	143,096
Population 2032 estimate[76]	300,113	345,053	645,166
Population 2047 estimate	314,356	373,506	687,862

[73] Estimates of the population for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland - Office for National Statistics
[74] Standard Area Measurements for Administrative Areas (December 2023) in the UK
[75] Population aged 65 and over - ONS
[76] Subnational population projections for England - Office for National Statistics

Figure 6.4.2. Key data set for government criteria analysis: Financials

Metric	Two unitary councils		One unitary council
	North Worcestershire	South Worcestershire	Worcestershire
Total GVA (£m) (2022)[77]	7,976	9,541	17,517
GVA per capita (£) (2022)	27,181	29,096	28,190
Council tax base (number of band D equivalent properties) (2024)[78]	101,006	124,123	225,129

[77] Subregional productivity in the UK - Office for National Statistics
[78] Council Tax Requirement (CTR) data for Billing Authorities in England, 2024-25 and 2025-26, MHCLG

Council Tax band D (average) (£) (2023)[79]	2,307	2,239	2,273
Retained Business Rates (£million) (2024-25)[80]	245	293	538
Estimated budget gap	41.4	57.3	98.7
Short term borrowing[81]	50.6	55.9	106.5
Long-term borrowing	346.5	250.1	596.6
Total borrowing	397.1	305.9	703.0

Figure 6.4.3. Key data set for government criteria analysis: Housing and Homelessness

Metric	Two unitary councils		One unitary council
	North Worcestershire	South Worcestershire	Worcestershire
Homelessness Rate (per 1,000 Households) (Apr-Jun 2024)[82]	1.83	1.69	1.76
Unemployment rates (%) (Oct 23-Sept 24)[83]	2.89	2.97	2.93
Employment rate (18-64)[84]	81.9%	76.7%	79.4%
Economic activity (16-64)[85]	83.8%	78.2%	81.2%
Housing Delivery Test 2023 Measurement %[86]	1.73	1.33	1.53

[79] Sourced on individual council websites
[80] National non-domestic rates collected by councils in England: forecast 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK
[81] Data provided by councils
[82] Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK
[83] Unemployment - Office for National Statistics
[84] Employment and employee types - Office for National Statistics
[85] Economic activity status, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics
[86] Housing Delivery Test: 2023 measurement - GOV.UK

5-year housing land supply (years)[87]	4.7	1.71	3.3
Rough Sleeper Count (Autumn 2023)[88]	13	44	57
Number of Households in TA per 1,000 pop. Apr-Jun 2024[89]	0.98	0.69	0.83
Total number of households in B&B Hotels Apr-Jun 2024	32	51	83
Total number of households In TA in another local authority district Apr-Jun 2024	16	26	42

Figure 6.4.4. Children's Services and Education[90]

Metric	Two unitary councils		One unitary council
	North Worcestershire	South Worcestershire	Worcestershire
% of students receiving SEN support	15%	14%	15%
% of students on EHCP	5%	5%	5%
% of Children looked after	41%	45%	43%
Pupil premium	23%	23%	23%

* Most recent figures provided have been taken for all Metrics

[87] Sourced from each council's website

[88] Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2023 - GOV.UK

[89] Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK

[90] Provided by councils

Figure 6.4.5. Adult Services[91]

Metric	Two unitary councils		One unitary council
	North Worcestershire	South Worcestershire	Worcestershire
% of adult social care users	46%	49%	95%
Claimants as a proportion of residents aged 16-64	3.2%	2.9%	3.1%
Average claimant count	3.33%	3.10%	3.22%

* Most recent figures provided have been taken for all metrics

N.B. The % of adult social care users (source page 50 of the Options Appraisal document) 'South Worcestershire is responsible for 49% of all adult social care service users, compared to 46% in North Worcestershire.' These figures don't add up to 100% because some service users move into or out of the area during the reporting period may not be fully captured. In addition, deaths or temporary suspensions of service can cause small discrepancies in the numbers.

[91] Provided by councils

Figure 6.4.6. Demographic profile: Index of Multiple Deprivation (2019)

METRIC	Two unitary councils		One unitary council
	North Worcestershire	South Worcestershire	Worcestershire
Income	6	6	6
Employment	6	6	6
Skills	5	6	6
Health	6	7	6
Crime	6	7	6
Housing	5	5	5
Living environment	7	5	6

Source: Pg 84 Options Appraisal analysis (areas are ranked with 1 being the most deprived, 10 the least deprived)

Appendix 5: High quality and sustainable public services

Further detail on how the two unitary councils will provide high quality and sustainable public services

The proposed north and south model for Worcestershire aims to transform public services by enhancing local responsiveness, promoting prevention, and integrating with local partners, while ensuring robust governance and accountability for critical services like children's, adult, and public health.

Service area	Description	Accountability arrangements
Adult services	The two councils will establish separate adult services departments. Assessment, care management and preventative neighbourhood-based services will be delivered by individual councils. There will be collaboration in commissioning, market management functions and specialist services (such as mental health, learning disability and Occupational Therapy). The councils will retain the operational arrangements around the Better Care Fund and Discharge to Assess pathways.	Each council will have its own Director of Adult Services, with clear line of accountability to the Lead Member for Adult Service and Head of Paid Service. Where there are shared services, these will be overseen by a joint committee supported by the two Directors of Adult Services and with equal member involvement from the two councils. The two councils will share a pan-Worcestershire Safeguarding Adults Partnership Board.
Children's services, including SEND	The two councils will establish separate children's services departments. Safeguarding and children protection, early help, and education will be delivered by individual councils. There will be collaboration in commissioning and market management (including around SEND).	Each council will have its own Director of Children's Services, with clear line of accountability to the Lead Member for Children's Service and Head of Paid Service. Where there are shared services, these will be overseen by a joint committee supported by the two Directors of Adult Services and with equal member involvement from the two councils. The two councils will share a pan-Worcestershire Safeguarding Children's Partnership Board.
Public health	The two councils will share a public health function, based within one of the councils. A shared services ensures strategic coordination on health that do not respect local government boundaries, allows continuity in the relationships with the NHS and local partners, and acknowledges	The two councils will share one Director of Public Health. The Director will report to a joint committee supported by the two Heads of Paid Service, and with equal member involvement from the two councils.

	that public health is predominantly a commissioning function managed within a small team with existing processes and relationships.	
Homelessness	Homelessness prevention and support will be provided separately by the two unitary councils. This arrangement allows the continuation of the current neighbourhood level response to homeless prevention. The services will be part of the same organisational structure as housing and social care, facilitating greater integration.	Each homelessness service will be managed by and report to a director in their council. Cooperation between the councils will be managed through a pan-Worcestershire Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
Public Safety	Public safety functions will be delivered separately by the two new unitary authorities, but with a high level of collaboration between them. Each service will be managed by and report to a director in their council. This will offer consistency of relationships and process around coordinating emergency planning and civil resilience. Accountability for the statutory function of community safety will be managed through the existing two Community Safety Partnerships in North Worcestershire and South Worcestershire working directly with the police, fire services and other responsible authorities to deliver local crime prevention/reduction strategies. The two partnerships will retain their links with the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner.	Each service will be managed by and report to a director in their council. Accountability for community safety will be managed through the existing two Community Safety Partnerships in North Worcestershire and South Worcestershire which include West Mercia Police, Fire Services and other responsible authorities. The two statutory partnerships retain their links with the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner. Where there are shared services, these will be managed by a joint committee or under a Service Level Agreement, as appropriate.
Corporate support services	Each council will have its own strategic back-office functions. The councils will look for opportunities to collaborate, particularly around transactional services, where there is a strong case for more effective services or economies of scale.	Each council will have their own Corporate Services Director, with staff from services provided to their council reporting to them. Where there are shared services, these will be delivered through defined Service Level Agreements, overseen by a joint committee including the two council Corporate Services Directors.
Highways	Strategic functions such as major roads, network planning and investment, will be managed jointly by the two councils in a shared service.	Shared services will be overseen by a joint committee including the two council Directors and with equal member involvement from the two councils.

	Maintenance and improvements will be locally led, ensuring responsiveness to community needs and more tailored transport investment.	Local services will be managed by and report to a director in their council.
Transport	Transport planning will be undertaken by each council, with a high level of collaboration. Local transport initiatives, including bus services and active travel infrastructure, will be managed by each council, allowing for tailored solutions to different challenges in towns and rural areas that reflects specific needs.	Where there are shared services, these will be managed by a joint committee or under a Service Level Agreement, as appropriate. Local services will be managed by and report to a director in their council.
Waste	Waste collection will be managed by the two unitary councils on a local footprint. Existing depots in the six districts will be retained. Waste disposal will remain a county-wide shared service, to the end of the contract that runs to 2029.	Each council will manage its own waste collection services, under the leadership of a director. The county-wide waste disposal contract (including Herefordshire) will continue, with one of the councils taking a lead on managing the contract with the supplier.

Figure 6.5.1. Options for governance and management of public services in North and South Worcestershire

Case Study – Regional collaboration in foster carer recruitment, adoption, and residential placements

Across a number of areas of children's services, regional working is becoming established as the direction of travel in government policy. Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs) are expected to take responsibility for commissioning fostering, residential and secure care placements on a pan-local authority footprint. There are currently two pathfinder RCCs – in Greater Manchester and the Southeast. These will join up with Regional Adoption Agencies that already cover the whole of England and Fostering Recruitment Hubs that cover around two thirds of the county.

Regional working acknowledges that local authorities often find it difficult to forecast need and plan effectively. They lack the buying power to shape the market and invest in provision. Particularly where there are small numbers of children with complex needs, working at scale means offers options that would not be available to a single local authority.

Success will hinge on the mindset of local authority officers and politicians shifting to one of collaboration and sharing control. For many this will be a significant gear change, moving from a position where they have effectively competed with each other. Two councils in Worcestershire will add a strong joined-up voice to the region.

Case Study – Children's Services in Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council (formerly Cumbria Council)

In 2023, six district councils and Cumbria County Council were reorganised into two unitary councils, Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council. The new councils chose to separate core services under the leadership of their own Directors of Children's Services, alongside a number of shared services. Both councils are sparsely populated, covering very large rural areas with market towns. Key aspects of the approach include:

- Adoption of an early intervention and prevention Family Help locality offer implementing a partnership model of delivery, which includes Health partners, Police, Education, Local Authority, Voluntary and Community sectors working together to identify needs within families as early as possible.

- Clear governance arrangements through a Family Help programme Board, Safeguarding Partnership Board, Strategic Education Alliance and a SEND Partnership Board.

- Using community and partnership support to help deliver coordinated, connected and integrated family help through place-based family help hubs which include both a physical and virtual offer.

- Four shared services: out-of-hours, fostering, adoption and residential services, as well as a shared electronic recording system.

Case Study – Successful shared services across a South Worcestershire footprint

ICT Service

The ICT service provides support, infrastructure, security, business applications and digital transformation across the three councils. Formed in 2010, it is staffed by a team of 29 hosted in Wychavon. It is governed by a Management Board with Section 151 officers from each council. Costs proportionally shared based on each council's staffing levels. The shared model creates more resilience, allowing for significant investment in cybersecurity and infrastructure that would be unfeasible for a single council. As part of a single council, the service has the potential to take on more services and minimise licensing and integration challenges.

Case Study – Successful shared services across a North Worcestershire footprint

Building control

A shared service for building control across the three district councils - North Worcestershire Building Control (NWBC) - ensures construction projects meet minimum standards for health, safety, energy efficiency, and accessibility.

NWBC is hosted by Bromsgrove District Council. The collaboration brings together Building Control Departments
to provide a modern and flexible service, ensuring compliance with health and safety regulations.

Case Study – How Worcestershire's nine Family Hubs are providing effective early help to children in communities

Family Hubs are a 'one stop shop' for expectant parents and families with babies and children, bringing together agencies to make it easier to access support early in a child's life.

In Worcestershire, nine family hubs are commissioned by Worcestershire County Council but delivered locally by Redditch Borough Council in Bromsgrove and Redditch, Action for Children in Worcester City, Wychavon and Malvern Hills, and Barnardo's in Wyre Forest.

The service joins up support from the local voluntary sector, the NHS and social care. Several of the Hubs are located on school sites. Locally run and embedded in their communities, they provide a range of 'whole-family' support reduces the need for crisis intervention by statutory services.

Two unitary councils in Worcestershire will take inspiration from the district councils' experience of the Family Hub model to provide local, community-based support in a wider range of services.

Appendix 6: Feedback from other organisations

Please note that there is more to be added here before final submission

Letter from Herefordshire and Worcestershire ICB

Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care System

NHS
Herefordshire and Worcestershire

Kirkham House
John Comyn Drive
WORCESTER
WR3 7NS

The leaders of the five Worcestershire District Councils
Sent via email to

20th October 2025

Dear all,

Re: Local Government reorganisation in Worcestershire

Further to the Stakeholder Feedback document that you distributed last week I am writing to offer some further views on behalf of local NHS organisations. I did attend a session earlier this summer with Mutual Ventures Ltd who were supporting you with the development of these proposals, and followed that session up with some further feedback in writing. I have also written to Paul Robinson with some feedback to inform the County Council proposals.

It is clear that there are a range of views across the six District Councils and the County Council and that the final decision will be one for Ministers to take. This is clearly an extremely important piece of work for Worcestershire, and whilst this is not something that the NHS has a direct involvement in, I am happy to offer some further views in writing on behalf of the wider health and care system that I represent.

You will note from the previous correspondence that there is a clear view from local health organisations that a single unitary Council covering all of Worcestershire would be our preference. I notice from your documentation though that you do refer to an intent in your proposed two unitary model to working together at scale on the things that you believe are better done once at Worcestershire level. That is of significant importance in my opinion, and I would particularly stress the need to collaborate and have a single approach to the following:

- **Better Care Fund**
  The Better Care Fund is £86.41 million (25/26 budget) of funding that sits mainly within local NHS budgets but is in essence put to use jointly between the Integrated Care Board and the County Council to commission a range of jointly commissioned services, mostly focused on the interfaces between health and social care. The services that are funded through this arrangement include Community Hospital beds, Community and Integrated Nursing teams, all of the Discharge to Assess pathways that facilitate a timely discharge from hospital for thousands of patients a year and a range of specific support to local social care and domiciliary care services. It would be extremely complicated to unpick those long established and high functioning services and would probably result in a lot of disruption and service change if two unitary Councils wished to pursue different strategies in this area.

- **Discharge to Assess pathways**
  As mentioned the Better Care Fund provides resources that commission the range of 'Discharge to Assess pathways that support people to leave hospital promptly. These

patients do require some ongoing care or rehabilitation input, but the decision is taken that this can be delivered at home, in a Community Hospital or in a Nursing or Residential Care setting. There a team of people working across the NHS Trusts and Worcestershire County Council who assess patients needs and arrange the appropriate discharge pathway. For years Worcestershire has had amongst the lowest levels of delayed transfers of care in the country, and this is mainly because of the well established Discharge to Assess pathways. Any significant changes to this, or a requirement for hospital based staff to work to two different systems for North and South would complicate a process that works very well.

- **Public Health Ring Fenced Grant**
  Worcestershire County Council receives £35.79 (25/26 budget) million of funding each year from the Department of Health and Social Care and is required to used that money for public health functions as defined in the various relevant legislation. This includes a range of health promotion and prevention services, as well as core public health services such as support for patients with drug and alcohol addictions, health visiting and school nursing. The current package of services that are commissioned are included within local budgets held by NHS Trusts in some cases, and commission other providers in others. The referral pathways and interfaces with core NHS services are well established and effective. Dividing the Grant in two and the development of different thinking across North and South Worcestershire would add complexity to another relationship that works well.

- **Children's Services improvement work**
  Recent years have been challenging for Children's Services and the range of regulatory interventions have involved the NHS and Worcestershire County Council. As such there has been a real need to work jointly on a range of activity to deliver the required improvements for local young people. This work has largely been very successful and it has been pleasing to see the progress recognised in more recent inspections. It would a significant risk if the single improvement plan is required to be duplicated for two unitary areas, from an NHS point of view that would be difficult to service from a management perspective, and some of the more recent improvements could be jeopardised if the teams are distracted from the delivery of the current plan.

- **Adult social care**
  Demand continues to rise for adult social care and for the range of associated NHS services that are required to support people in receipt of care. The market place is volatile, and the NHS approach to commissioning packages of care for people in receipt of Continuing Health Care and Funded Nursing Care (both funded by the NHS) needs to be ever more closely aligned with the Council's commissioning. We need to co-operate on setting fair pricing and managing quality assurance, and we need to work together to develop a market place that can respond to what we need to commission for our patients and residents. It should be a priority that work continues to be joint work across the whole of the county.

There is lot of other joint NHS and local authority work that we need to progress and to develop our partnerships. It is impossible to cover all of the detail of that, but in general single approaches to population health data and understanding need, developing the local housing offer and supporting sustainable infrastructure investment that can facilitate the required levels of housing growth are all of real strategic importance.

Collectively we do face significant challenges right across public services and the next decade will clearly be an era of change and renewal, as we will have to try and seek to rebalance our capacity with the demand that continues to grow exponentially for some services. Part of that

will need to be achieved by working differently, removing duplication and increasing productivity, but we will also have to work alongside communities to understand how we can evolve the right thresholds for access to services and levels of support. From a health and care perspective, my view is that the ability to do that at the most strategic level and across a whole county such as Worcestershire will be important in ensuring consistency and equity. If that is not the outcome I do hope that a single approach can be considered for some of the issues that I have highlighted.

I hope that these views are helpful and can inform the final position and plans for this. The NHS locally will work with whatever structures emerge from this process and will continue to place great emphasis and value on our partnerships and joint working with local Government. Once the local reorganisation plans are finalised and have been approved by Ministers, I look forward to working with you and colleagues to develop the thinking in respect of the Strategic Mayoral Authority footprint, that will also be very relevant and significant for future health footprints and configurations.

Yours sincerely

Simon Trickett
Chief Executive
NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board and
NHS Coventry and Warwickshire Integrated Care Board

cc

Stephen Collman, Chief Executive Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
Ellen Rule, Chief Executive Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust

Summary of supporting evidence received from other organisations through feedback forms

Organisation	Evidence of support for north and south model
Worcestershire VCSE Alliance	Endorses acting as a system partner for both authorities, offering a unified VCSE voice while preserving local nuance. Highlight ability to co-design strategies, provide community insight, and support service integration and commissioning under the north and south model.
Heart of Worcestershire College	Supports the north and south model for Worcestershire as it enables tailored skills strategies, stronger local partnerships, and more responsive governance aligned to the distinct needs of North and South Worcestershire.
VCSE Alliance (Sector Response)	Sector feedback indicates preference for north and south model over single unitary due to better reflection of community demographics. Emphasises need for hyperlocal engagement and flexibility.
Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service	Supports north and south model with clearly defined responsibilities and resources. Notes importance of building new relationships and coordination across larger areas.
Rooftop Housing	Supports South Worcestershire unitary as aligned with operational area. Recognises logic of north/south split and benefits for housing delivery.
Citizens Advice Bromsgrove & Redditch	Strongly supports north and south model for maintaining local responsiveness and enabling a reset in service delivery. Highlights risks of a single authority being too large.
Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN)	Advocates for stronger VCSE role in north and south model. Warns against remoteness and one-size-fits-all approaches. Supports co-creation and local representation.
NewStarts	Supports north and south model for simplifying access to funding and information.
Droitwich, Ombersley & the Rurals PCN	Endorses north and south model for enabling localised decision-making and better alignment with health needs.
Alvechurch Community Larder	Supports north and south model for ensuring local service provision and avoiding centralisation.
Grimley Parish Council	Supports north and south model, sees opportunity to strengthen parish councils' role.
Severn Stoke and Croome d'Abitot Parish Council	Supports north and south model, with concerns about council tax harmonisation.
Cookhill Parish Council	Supports north and south model as best solution for a large county with diverse needs.

Appendix 7: Engagement method and participant profile

Summary of the methods used to engage with stakeholders and stakeholder profile

Local stakeholder engagement sessions

Over the period June-July 2025, 32 engagement meetings/sessions were undertaken, designed to inform the options appraisal.

Stakeholders engaged with during this process included:

- MPs for each of the Worcestershire constituencies (x6)
- Leaders, Deputy Leaders and Chief Executive Officers from each district council, in addition to Worcestershire County Council
- Group Leader meetings with each of the commissioning councils
- Full member briefings with each of the commissioning councils
- Senior Management Teams from each of the commissioning councils

Three thematic engagement sessions

- Health, wellbeing and system wide considerations (attended by representatives from the IBC, West Mercia Police, PCC, Worcestershire Healthwatch, Worcestershire County Council Public Health (Director) and Adult Social Care (Director of Adult Social Services).
- Economy, business, skills, leisure and environment (attended by representatives from the University of Worcester, leisure providers, Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, local colleges and economic development leads from the district councils).
- Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment (attended by representatives from Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils, Bromsgrove and Redditch Network, Citizens Advice Bureau, Young Solutions, Bromsgrove District Housing Trust, Act on Energy, Worcestershire VCS Alliance, Age UK and housing providers).

During each of these engagement sessions, key lines of enquiry were discussed, designed to identify a range of core ambitions and design principles to shape the future structure and functions of local government in Worcestershire:

- What does 'good look like in ten years' time', from perspectives of residents, businesses, public services and third sector organisations?
- What specifically needs to be kept / improved / created to achieve the above?
- What local characteristics (identity, culture, heritage) need to be considered?
- What mechanisms (existing or new) would contribute to ensuring effective community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment?

Public engagement exercise

The commissioning councils undertook a public engagement exercise during June and July 2025. This was carried out through various channels including:

- Social media (paid for and organic).
- Newspaper wraps on titles reaching every part of the county (with option to fill in paper survey).
- Posters and leaflets in community hubs.
- Digital radio campaign targeted at all Worcestershire communities
- Dedicated website with plain English explanation of the key issues and options as known at the time.

The campaign achieved an estimated reach of approximately 200,000 with more than 50,000 visits to the website during the period.
A total of 4,249 responses were received from across the county, with the majority (94%) being from residents.

The campaign has been highlighted as an example of best practice by the Local Government Association.

Other engagement activity

1. Staff surveys were undertaken
2. Facilitated 14 focus groups involving residents, housing tenants, town and parish councils and VCSE representatives
3. Structured feedback was given by VCSE organisations, parish and town councils, public sector partners such as the Fire and Rescue Service and Police and Crime Commissioner, housing providers, MPs, and community groups. Each of these offered insights on governance models, risks, opportunities, and how their organisations structures could better be supported by the north and south model

Figure 6.8.1. From 'Shape Worcestershire' survey table shows the breakdown of respondents

In what capacity are you responding? (If you would like to respond in more than one capacity, please complete a separate survey for each.)

	Answer Choices	Response Percent	Response Total
1	Resident	94.4%	4009
2	Business	1.5%	65
3	Parish/Town council	1.2%	52
4	Voluntary or community sector organisation	1.5%	63
5	Other, for example, school, health provider, police, housing association etc (please specify):	1.4%	60
		answered	4249

Appendix 8: Implementation planning continued*

* Implementation planning will continue to evolve in line with government thinking and guidance. These proposals are therefore indicative at this stage and subject to change.

Governance and workstreams

The north and south model will have a supportive and clear governance structure sitting behind it, allowing them to make key decisions that best support Worcestershire. The set up of governance boards and key workstreams will support the monitoring of progress and identify any risks early in the process supporting mitigation attempts.

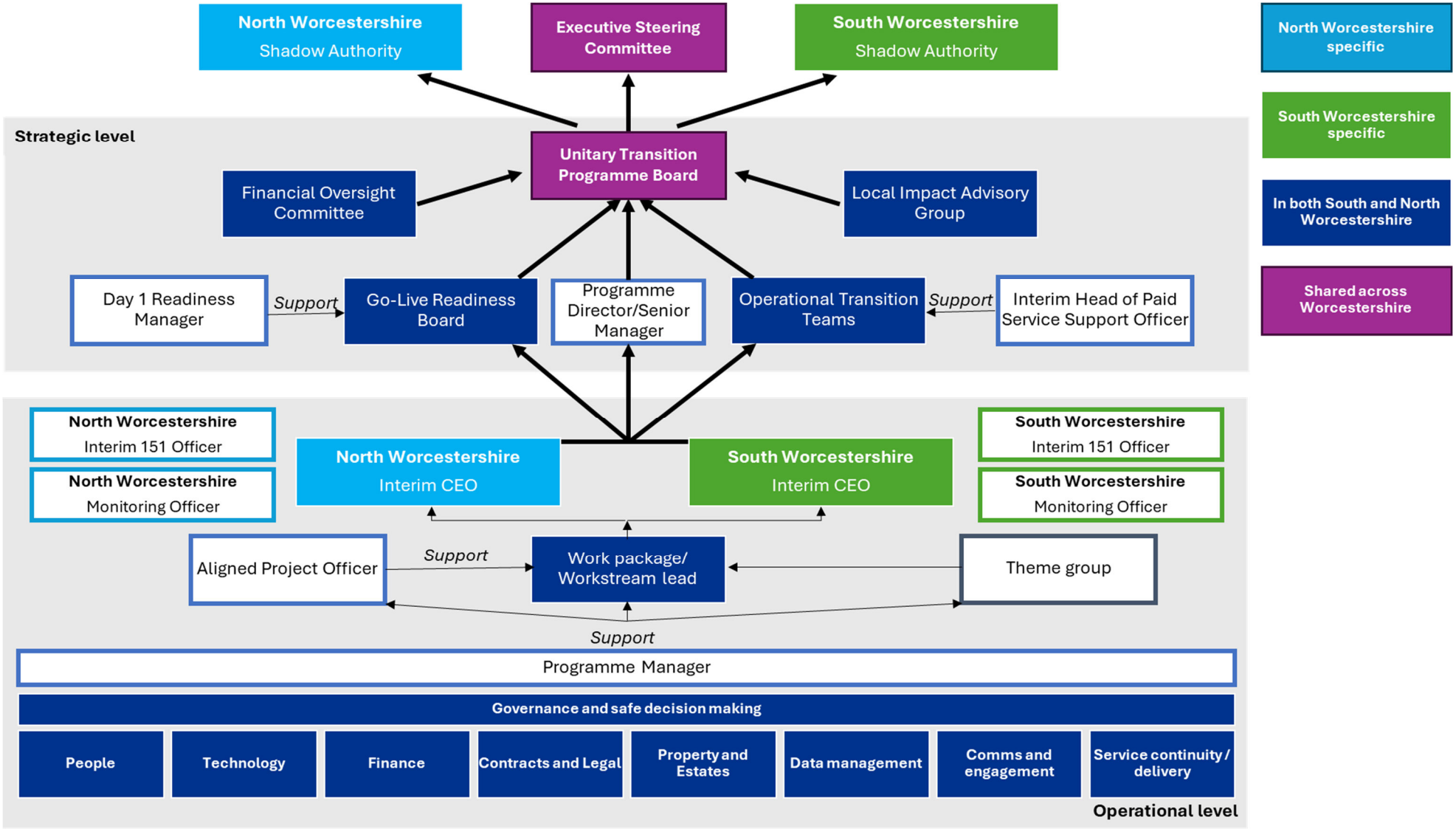
A comprehensive governance framework will be established to support the transition to the new north and south model. This framework will build upon existing structures, incorporating best practices and strengthening current relationships. New governance boards will also be introduced to ensure all elements of the transition are effectively managed and supported. The proposed governance structure includes:

- **Executive Steering Committee**: Strong collaborative relationships already exist among the Chief Executives across Worcestershire. These connections will be maintained and further developed as the county transitions to a north and south model.
- **Unitary Transition Programme Board**: Reporting to the Leaders Group, this board will be led by the Chief Executives of the new unitary councils alongside a Programme Director. It will be responsible for overseeing strategic matters and managing key risks.
- **Financial Oversight Committee**: These meetings will be held regularly to ensure sound financial management across councils.
- **Operational Transition Teams**: Operating as sub-groups under the Programme Board, these teams will focus on specific areas covering frontline and back-office service delivery such as elections, waste & recycling, social care, planning, and policy. Their importance will grow as Shadow Authorities are formed and interim Heads of Paid Service are appointed.

Shadow Authority Boards: Each new unitary authority will have its own board, led by the appointed Chief Executive. These boards will be tasked with reviewing and implementing strategies in preparation for full operational launch.

- **Local Impact Advisory Group**: Representatives from the newly clustered councils will provide local insights and ensure that the unique needs of each area are considered throughout the transition.
- **Go-Live Readiness Board**: This board will oversee preparations for the official launch, including monitoring progress against the programme plan, tracking milestones, and ensuring completion of all Day 1 activities.

Figure 5.2. Governance structure



LGR Implementation Workstreams

The below workstreams have been identified as supporting implementation of the new unitary authorities. Governance and decision making will sit as an overarching workstream due to its importance in delivering change and a safe working environment.

Governance and safe decision making

This workstream will be responsible for the constitutions of the new councils and ensuring that decision making is made consistently by establishing clear decision-making frameworks, defining accountability and ensuring effective communication channels are in place. This includes setting up steering committees, defining reporting structures, delegating and outlining escalation paths for issues and risks to aid decision. This workstream will also be involved in supporting the set-up of the strategic authority. It is vital to ensure that the right delegations are made to officers to carry out effective decision making.

	People	Technology	Finance	Contracts and legal	Property and estates	Data Management	Comms and engagement	Service continuity and delivery
Responsibilities	**Communicating with staff** about timelines and plans, **gathering comprehensive data** on all personnel, and **assessing their skills and capabilities**.	Forming a technology working group, **reviewing the existing infrastructure** (including security), and **gathering a single view of all systems** and **core system contracts**.	Forming a working group of S151 Officers, **reviewing required savings, gathering data** on companies, traded services, assets, policies, and treasury (including PFI), **agreeing on baseline budgets**, and **identifying pension costs, risks, and opportunities.**	**Data gathering** and **scenario planning** related to contracts and legal matters. **Carrying out due diligence checks** on all contracts and information before coming to conclusions.	**Data gathering** and **scenario planning** concerning property and estates.	**Data cleansing and management, setting up a data hub** to facilitate data sharing, **establishing a single taxonomy** for various data types (service, budget, HR), and **gathering data** across staffing, infrastructure, systems, contracts, policies, strategies, property, estates, and assets.	**Stakeholder mapping and strategy**, identifying or setting up **partner and provider forums, identifying communication channels**, and **identifying branding requirements**.	Have **representatives from all service lines** (each with their own sub-group) **alongside internal functions** (IT, Finance, Legal, etc) to **ensure strong service continuity** during the transition by having a **consistent communication** and **allow early flagging of risks and next steps.**

Implementation risks and mitigations

Change and progress always bring an element of risk to each new programme, and LGR is no different. Worcestershire, fortunately, have strong working relationships already which mitigates some risks seen in other areas, however there are still areas of concern.

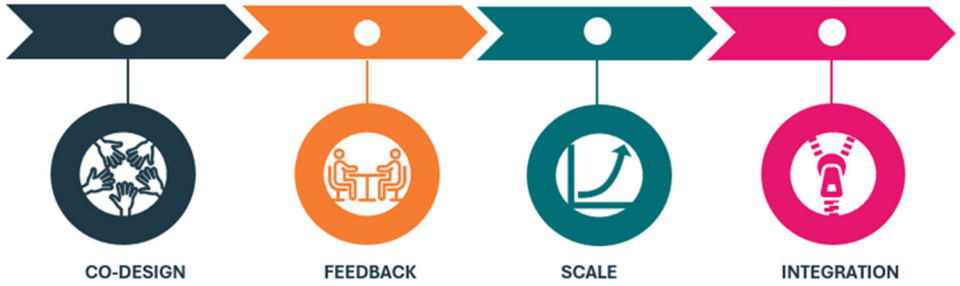
Risk			Impact	Likelihood	Mitigation
Operational	Complexity of disaggregating county delivered services	County council services will be disrupted through the movement to a north and south model, which could cause disruption of services posing a potential risk to service users.	Medium	Medium	Early planning to identify risks, using county council resources to share best practices and experience. There is already a number of county services delivered at a local level which will reduce some of the risk of disaggregation, but the new unitary authorities should remain vigilant.
	Complexity of aggregating district delivered services	Aggregating services will not just be combining them but harmonising different services standard, IT systems, and ways of working. This can be complex and also lead to service disruption and resistance from staff.	Medium	Medium	High levels of collaborative working reduces potential impact, high levels of communication and collaboration should remain to mitigate. Having strong governance processes will allow any risks to be escalated immediately and catch them before complexity increases.
	Loss of expertise	Experienced colleagues not moving to the new unitary authority, causing knowledge gaps or loss of best practice information.	Medium	Medium	Open communication and knowledge sharing early in the process with all colleagues so there is documentation of the knowledge they hold / it is passed to colleagues who wish to remain and support the new unitary authorities.
	Existing council relationships pre-unitarisation	The new unitary authorities will require a different type of working relationship as the new unitary authorities form, which may highlight culture clashes, disagreements over ways of working between the existing councils operating in Worcestershire.	High	Medium	Strong communication between all of the councils and a recognition that there will need to be compromise to ensure the best opportunity for the new councils. Collaboration and clear governance processes will support the foundations of the new working relationships.
	Change fatigue in staff	Staff may feel like change is being 'done to them' and that there is not proper communication and support, leading to	Medium	Medium	Engaging staff that are moving into the new unitaries in the design so they are helping develop the change and it does not feel like the change is happening to them. Increasing communication between the change team

		decreased morale and higher staff turnover.			and the rest of the business and allowing time for staff to ask questions and get involved if they wish.
	Multiple IT systems and data sources	Decisions to be made on which systems are retained and how to integrate data without impacting services (data migration, cybersecurity vulnerabilities_	High	Medium	Shared data systems are in place in South Worcestershire, having a dedicated workstream and early preparation will support North Worcestershire with the transition.
	Programme slippage	Tight timelines for implementation turnaround could lead to missed deadlines, increased costs, failure to deliver on time. There are a number of different factors (resource constraints, external factors, unforeseen complexities) which can lead to this.	High	Medium	Establishing clear governance procedures and tracking milestones will ensure timelines stay on track and highlight any delays at the first instance, allowing immediate intervention to take place.
	Capacity constraints	Staff will need to maintain current services while preparing for transformation creating capacity constraints, the dual burden can lead to burnout reducing quality of existing services, compromising the transformation effort.	High	Medium	Review roles, and share capacity where possible, bringing in external support to support colleagues. Hiring a team to carry out current roles allowing staff who are moving to the new unitaries to focus on the change and designing the new system
Financial	Disaggregation of accounting services	There are technical challenges of integrating the different accounting software used in the different councils, but also the risk brought data transfers leading to potential errors in reporting, delays in payments, invoices.	High	High	Early planning to identify key risk areas, and a dedicated project team to mitigate risks in the transition to one accounting system. Governance boards that can monitor the risks and where risks can be escalated to at first site are vital.
	Financial uncertainty	Financial pressures across the system, including unresolved DSG deficits, MTFS gaps and FFR challenges. This increases the difficulty in the ability to	High	High	Establish a dedicated financial oversight group within the LGR programme to monitor and manage financial risks across all authorities with clear escalation processes.

		make detailed plans for decision making.			Flexible planning teams that allow plans to be tailored as information becomes available.
Reputational	Political differences	Each of the current councils have councillors from different political parties which may result in clashes on decisions.	Medium	Medium	Elections will take place to elect new councillors that represent the new unitary authorities.

Roadmap for Worcestershire's NACs and INTs

This roadmap supports the approach set out in *Section 4: Criteria 6*. It outlines a phased, people-centred process for developing NACs and INTs across Worcestershire, built on co-design, evidence, and continuous improvement.



Phase 1 – Co-Design

When establishing NACs and INTs as Pathfinders, we defined several interrelated factors that should shape decisions:

- **Strategic Coverage:** Select Pathfinder NACs and INTs across both unitaries to reflect Worcestershire's urban and rural diversity.
- **Community Identity:** Respect existing community structures (e.g. strong parish councils) and avoid arbitrary administrative boundaries.
- **Local Engagement:** Co-design locations, principles and KPIs with residents, councillors and partners, using district councils' experience in asset-based community development.
- **Balanced Representation:** Ensure NACs and INTs reflect mixed demographics to support inclusive engagement and service delivery.
- **Accessibility:** Consider transport links and physical geography to ensure residents can access services and participate meaningfully.
- **Targeted Impact:** Focus INTs on areas where coordinated support can improve outcomes, including employment and access to services.
- **Alignment:** Coordinate with existing programmes (e.g. Pride in Place) to avoid duplication.
- **Data-Informed Design:** Use data to guide placement and evaluation.

Phase 2 – Iterative Test & Learn: Monitor Pathfinder NACs and INTs

- Evaluate performance, identify barriers and refine neighbourhood footprints.
- Test devolved budgets and decision-making processes.
- Gather feedback from residents, Town/Parish councils, VCSE partners and frontline staff.
- Focus on prevention outcomes: reducing demand on services through early intervention and targeted local support.
- Share lessons learned across neighbourhoods and both unitaries to build a strong, evidence-based approach.

Phase 3 – Scaling Across Worcestershire

- Expand NACs and INTs across all remaining neighbourhoods, ensuring both urban and rural needs are met.
- Support clustering in areas where Town and Parish councils can share resources efficiently.
- Embed local engagement tools: digital platforms, transparent reporting and dedicated officer support for all NACs.
- Strengthen cross-sector partnerships (VCSE, health, education, police, housing) in every locality.

Phase 4 – System Integration & Continuous Improvement

- Further integration of services (such as social care, public health, community safety) into INTs, while maintaining neighbourhood focus.
- Build local capacity for evidence-based decision-making and preventative action.
- Monitor and evaluate outcomes on prevention, integration and resident empowerment.
- Adjust NAC footprints and INT operations dynamically to reflect population shifts, emerging local needs and lessons learned.

Appendix 2 Equality Impact Assessment

Title of Service, Policy, Procedure, Spending Review being Proposed	**Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Proposal**
Name of Service Area	**Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer**
Name of Officer completing this assessment	**Claire Felton**
Date Assessment Started	**September Council date**
Name of Decision Maker (in relation to the change)	**Central Government**
Date Decision Made	**Spring/Summer 2026**

Please ensure the following:

- That the document is understandable to a reader who has not read any other documents and explains (on its own) how the Public Sector Equality Duty is met. This does not need to be lengthy but must be complete.
- That available support information and data is identified and where it can be found. Also be clear about highlighting gaps in existing data or evidence that you hold, and how you have sought to address these knowledge gaps.
- That the equality impacts are capable of aggregation with those of other EIAs to identify the cumulative impact of all service changes made by the council on different groups of people

Overview

Provide a clear overview of the aims of the service/policy/procedure and the proposed changes being made. Will the current service users' needs continue to be met? Why is the change being proposed? What needs or duties is it designed to meet?

Announced in the English Devolution White Paper (16 December 2024), the former Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution Minister in the Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government subsequently invited 21 areas (of which Worcestershire was one) to submit a proposal for a transition from the current two-tier structure to that of a unitary single tier local government structure, Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

The White Paper focuses on two areas of reform (i) widening devolution across England through the creation of Strategic Authorities to which centrally held Government powers would be devolved and (ii) a programme of LGR to create new unitary Councils, simplifying the current 'multi-level' structure of local government in two-tier areas.
Below is an abridged summary of the criteria shared by Government to shape proposals:-

Criteria 1) A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government. Proposals must aim to create a single tier of local government across the area, based on sensible geography, economy, and robust evidence.

Criteria 2) Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks. Councils should ideally serve populations of 500,000+ to ensure efficiency, resilience, and financial sustainability, with clear plans for managing costs and addressing financial challenges.

Criteria 3) Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens. New structures must improve public services, avoid fragmentation, and enhance value for money, especially in critical areas like social care and public safety.

Criteria 4) Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views. Local authorities must demonstrate meaningful local engagement, consider cultural identity, and show how local views have shaped the proposal.

Criteria 5) New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements. Proposals should align with or enable devolution, detailing impacts on existing or planned Combined Authorities and ensuring appropriate governance and population ratios.

Criteria 6) New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment. Plans must show how communities will be actively involved and empowered, building on existing engagement structures where relevant.

The report to which this Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) relates covers the response to that statutory invitation which requires full proposals for LGR to be submitted to government by 28 November 2025.

The proposal to be submitted by Bromsgrove District Council aims to replace the current two-tier system with two new unitary councils: North Worcestershire (Bromsgrove, Redditch, Wyre Forest) and South Worcestershire (Malvern Hills, Worcester City, Wychavon). It is designed to improve service delivery, financial sustainability, and local accountability. The change is driven by the need to address systemic challenges in service quality, financial pressures, and community engagement.

Who is the proposal likely to affect?	Yes	No
All residents	☒	☐
Specific group(s)	☒	☐
All Council employees	☒	☐
Specific group(s) of employees	☒	☐
Other – Provide more details below	☒	☐

Details

Outline who could be affected and how they could be affected by the proposal/service change. Include current service users and those who could benefit from but do not currently access the service.

The specific impacts of LGR are subject to the decision from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) expected in summer of 2026. Until the decision from Government is finalised in relation to which model of reorganisation will be present in Worcestershire specific impacts will vary. Further details on the direct impacts of LGR will be realised throughout the reorganisation process, particularly as part of the development of the implementation phase, including development of a detailed transition plan. The proposal affects all residents and council employees by restructuring service delivery and governance. Vulnerable groups, such as children, older adults, and those with disabilities, may be impacted by changes in social care, housing, and education services. The proposal aims to improve outcomes through prevention-led, place-based services.

Evidence and data used to inform your equality impact assessment.

What data, research, or trend analysis have you used? Describe how you have got your information and what it tells you.

Quantitative Evidence

In the creation of the full proposal a wide suite of data has been used to evidence the document outlining the strategic plan for reorganisation in Worcestershire. This evidence base will be included in the final proposals submitted to Government by 28th November 2025. At this stage, the Worcestershire protected characteristics data at a population level has been collated. The direct impact to specific demographics and accessibility considerations will be assessed as models are developed as part of implementation planning for the transition to the new Worcestershire Council. It is considered that the impact on people with protected characteristics will become clearer and will likely vary depending on the protected characteristic concerned, once the model for LGR has been decided and once we have moved to more detailed implementation planning involving specific areas.

Qualitative Evidence

Thirty-two engagement sessions involving key stakeholders has been undertaken. High level engagement with residents has taken place via a survey called "Shape Worcestershire" with 4,249 responses. At this state in the development of final proposals, respondents were asked generic questions such as what was important to them in terms of LGR and what did they see the challenges being. The impact of the changes on specific groups of people will be considered further, once the Government's decision on the form of local government for Worcestershire has been confirmed.

- Shape Worcestershire public engagement (4,249 responses)
- Ofsted and CQC reports on SEND and care services
- Demographic data (ONS projections)
- Financial modelling and service demand forecasts
- Local economic and housing data
- Mutual Ventures Options Appraisal considered by Full Council September 2025

We have undertaken extensive and regular engagement and consultation with employees regarding the process through a specifically designed LGR Routes campaign which has produced useful qualitative evidence on employees' feelings, fears and preferences.

Engagement and Consultation

What engagement and consultation have you undertaken about the proposal with current service users, potential users and other stakeholders? What is important to them regarding the current service? How does (or could) the service meet their needs? How will they be affected by the proposal? What potential impacts did they identify because of their protected characteristic(s)? Did they identify any potential barriers they may face in accessing services/other opportunities that meet their needs?

The public has been engaged through surveys and focus groups. Staff have been engaged through a range of internal channels. Over 700 staff responded to the staff surveys, sharing their hopes for the process, their concerns and their key issues. The ICT-led social media promotion for the Shape Worcestershire campaign achieved a countywide Facebook reach of 56.7k, with 88.8k views and 269 shares.

Below is a list of external stakeholders/groups that have been directly engaged:-

- Engagement with town/parish councils (supported by CALC) (70% support)
- Strategic partners: NHS, Police, Fire, Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector
- Feedback incorporated into proposal design

Loss of local representation was a key concern raised by residents in the Shape Worcestershire survey. Larger unitary boundaries risk diluting local voice and visibility and therefore exacerbating the democratic deficit that leads to a more disengaged and fragmented society which is less content. The proposed North & South model mitigates this by aligning with existing economic geographies, cultural ties and joint working arrangements, helping ensure all communities remain represented.

Results of our engagement were clear on the things that residents prioritise: -

Infrastructure planning e.g. roads, schools, health (64%)

- Maintaining or improving local services and council owned facilities e.g. community centres, sports grounds, arts centres, museums, etc (59%)
- Council tax levels (45%)
- Survey data shows that residents believe two unitary councils will better improve services (45%), support local identity (46%) and strengthen community engagement (44%). In contrast, the One-Unitary model is seen as remote, less representative and more likely to dilute local priorities.

[1] Shaping Worcestershire public engagement campaign and survey 2025

A hybrid model which includes shared services is proposed. The focus of the two unitary LGR proposal is on meeting the needs of all people, especially vulnerable adults and children and young people. Consideration of matters such as safeguarding are recognised as important in-service design ensuring accountability and arrangements for good governance are to be put in place. Given the early stages of the LGR process, the engagement that has been undertaken is in respect of the whole Worcestershire population with specific impacts on those with protected characteristics to be explored in detailed EIAs for specific workstreams and activities associated with LGR as part of the implementation planning for the transition to the new Worcestershire authority.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Due regard must be given to the three aims of the Equality Duty. This means that you must consciously think about the three aims as part of the process of decision-making. Consider the current service and any proposed changes, thinking about what issues may arise.

Equality Duty Aims	Evidence
Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation How does the proposal/service ensure that there is no barrier or disproportionate impact for anyone with a particular protected characteristic	The proposal includes safeguards for vulnerable groups and maintains safeguarding boards. It aims to reduce barriers by embedding services in communities and improving access. Policy options and implementation planning for the transition period will be developed with this consideration in mind, mitigating any disruption to services. Equality considerations need to be part of any new authority's development from the outset through inclusive service design principles.
Advance equality of opportunity between different groups How does the proposal/service ensure that its intended outcomes promote equality of opportunity for users? Identify inequalities faced by	Tailored services for North and South Worcestershire address local inequalities. Integrated Neighbourhood Teams will support early intervention and improve access to services. The focus on prevention will also be positive in advancing equality of opportunity. Equality considerations need to be part of any new authority's development from the outset through inclusive service design principles.

those with specific protected characteristic(s).	Digital innovation will be integrated into service design, providing a “digital by choice” approach that will run alongside other routes to access services.
Foster good relations between different groups Does the service contribute to good relations or to broader community cohesion objectives? How does it achieve this aim?	Policy options and implementation planning for the transition period will be developed with this consideration in mind. The proposal strengthens community engagement through Neighbourhood Area Committees and partnerships with town/parish councils and VCSEs. Equality considerations need to be part of any new authority’s development from the outset through inclusive service design principles.

Is there evidence of actual or potential unfairness for the following equality groups?

- Does the proposal target or exclude a specific equality group or community?
- Does it affect some equality groups or communities differently and can this be justified?
- Is the proposal likely to be equally accessed by all equality groups and communities? If not, can this be justified?

(It may be useful to consider other groups, not included in the Equality Act, especially if the proposal is specifically for them e.g. lone parents, refugees, unemployed people, carers)

Impact of proposal

Describe the likely impact of the proposal on people because of their protected characteristic and how they may be affected. How likely is it that people with this protected characteristic will be negatively affected? What are the barriers that might make access difficult or stop different groups or communities accessing the proposal? How great will that impact be on their well-being? Could the proposal promote equality and good relations between different groups? How?

If you have identified any area of actual or potential unfairness that cannot be justified, can you eliminate or minimise this?

What mitigating actions can be taken to reduce or remove this impact? (Include these in the action plan at the end of the assessment) Equal treatment does not always produce equal outcomes; sometimes you will have to take specific steps for particular groups to address an existing disadvantage or to meet differing needs.

Protected Group	Impact of proposal	Justification for any actual or potential unfairness identified	If you have identified any area of actual or potential unfairness that cannot be justified, can you eliminate or minimise this?
Age	Mixed (access to services may change)	The aim of LGR is to provide better outcomes alongside more effective and efficient service delivery for all, therefore, to be positively impacting all residents including those with protected characteristics. Detailed transition planning will follow the submission of the final proposal, in which detailed plans will be undertaken for each community of place and identity. These characteristics will be considered within individual EIA assessments for each initiative, therefore considered to be 'impact neutral' at this stage until further detailed plans are made. Ensuring services are accessible both physically and through public transport will also need to be considered as part of the final proposal, as will consideration for any digitally excluded communities.	• Maintain continuity of care, tailored strategies • Ensure accessibility in service redesign • Monitor service equity • Inclusive engagement • Monitor workforce impacts • Inclusive service design • Maintain continuity of support • Inclusive policies and training • No change to service access • Utilise key Voluntary and Community Sector partners to engage with specific groups • Maintain interpreting and translation opportunities • Additional support provided as appropriate to employees with a disability • Promotion of employee support services (e.g. EAP)

Disability	Mixed (access to services may change)	Place-based delivery improves responsiveness Ensuring services and information are accessible and that public transport is available will also need to be considered as part of the final proposal. The impact to the mental health of employees has to be prioritised during development and implementation. Relevant support should be provided to employees with a disability during the transition to a new authority.	
Transgender	Neutral	No direct targeting	
Marriage and Civil Partnership	Neutral	No direct targeting	
Pregnancy and Maternity	Neutral	No direct targeting	
Race	Neutral	No direct targeting- however we must ensure that any language barriers are considered when issuing key communications.	
Religion or Belief	Neutral	No direct targeting	
Sex (Male/ Female)	Neutral	No direct targeting	
Sexual Orientation	Neutral	No direct targeting	
Health Inequalities		Healthy living is a core outcome of LGR, aiming to increase life	

		expectancy through prevention and joined up approaches to health related services (health and social care).	

How will you monitor any changes identified?
At this stage ongoing assessment and analysis is being undertaken as part of the development of the transition/implementation programme, which is scheduled to commence by summer 2026 following a Government decision on the model of reorganisation for Worcestershire. • Quarterly performance dashboards • Key lines of reporting through appropriate democratic reporting lines and structures • Stakeholder feedback loops • Equality metrics in service reviews • Ongoing engagement with communities

The actions required to address these findings are set out below.

Action Required	By Whom	By When	Completion Date
Develop inclusive service design principles	Senior leadership	July 2026 – May 2027	
Monitor equality impacts during transition	Engagement & Equalities Advisor	June 2027 – March 2028	
Engage protected groups in service co-design	Policy Manager	July 2026 – May 2027	

Sign off on completion	Name	Signature	Date
Lead Officer completing assessment			
Equality Officer			

When you have completed this assessment, retain a copy and send an electronic copy to the Policy Team (Equalities) attaching any supporting evidence used to carry out the assessment.

This page is intentionally left blank

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Council

17th November 2025

Waiver of the Six Month Councillor Attendance Rule

Relevant Portfolio Holder		Councillor Jane Spilsbury, Portfolio Holder for Performance, Engagement and Governance
Portfolio Holder Consulted		Yes
Relevant Head of Service		Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services
Report Author Claire Felton	Job Title: Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services Contact email: c.felton@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk	
Wards Affected		Winyates
Ward Councillor(s) consulted		
Relevant Council Priority		Supported Governance
Non-Key Decision		
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.		

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

Council is asked to RESOLVE that:-

in accordance with Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972, Council approves Councillor Alan Mason's non-attendance at meetings until 7th May 2026 on the grounds of continued ill health and that the Council's best wishes be conveyed to him.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Councillor Alan Mason, has been unable to attend meetings recently, due to experiencing a period of ill health. The purpose of this report is to propose that Council approve his continuing absence for a period which exceeds six months up to 7th May 2026.

2.2 The extension would not prevent Councillor Mason from returning to attending meetings prior to this date, should he feel he is in a position to do so. However, this waiver of the six-month rule would provide greater flexibility.

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Council **17th November 2025**

---

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

3.1 Councillor Mason last attended a meeting, the Annual Council meeting, on 19th May 2025. There are not due to be any further Council meetings prior to the expiry of six months from this date, on 19th November 2025. Therefore, a request is being made at this Council meeting for Members to consider approving Councillor Mason's non-attendance until 7th May 2026.

3.2 Councillor Mason's term of office as a Councillor representing Winyates ward is due to end in May 2026.

3.3 As three Members represent Winyates ward, local residents will continue to be able to access support from a Borough Councillor representative.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no specific financial implications.

4.2 Councillor Mason does not hold a position that has a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA).

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 states that if a member of a local authority fails, throughout a period of six consecutive months from the date of their last attendance, to attend a meeting of the authority, they shall cease to be a member of the Council. An exception applies if their non-attendance has been approved by Council before the expiry of the six-month period.

5.2 Section 89 (3) of the Local Government Act 1972 states that "where a casual vacancy in any such office occurs within six months before the day on which the councillor whose office is vacant would regularly have retired, an election shall not be held" (unless the total number of vacancies on the Council exceeds one third of the whole number of Members). As Councillor Mason's current term of office is due to end in May 2026, as of 11th November there will be an election held for that seat within six months. Therefore, should Members choose not to approve the resolution detailed in this report, the seat will become vacant but no election will be held for this seat until May 2026.

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Council **17th November 2025**

6. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS

Local Government Reorganisation Implications

6.1 There are no implications for Local Government Reorganisation.

Relevant Council Priority

6.2 Management of Council business, including Member support, is conducted in such a way as to ensure that supported governance arrangements are in place at the authority.

Climate Change Implications

6.3 There are no specific climate change implications.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

6.4 Supporting Members in being able to take extended absence due to ill health will have a positive impact on the Council's general equality duty with regards to the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1 No specific risks have been identified.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Council **17th November 2025**

9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Jane Spilsbury, Portfolio Holder for Performance, Engagement and Governance	3/11/2025
Lead Director / Head of Service	Claire Felton, Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services.	29/10/25
Financial Services	Deb Goodall, Assistant Director of Finance and Customer Services	30/10/25
Legal Services	Nicola Cummings, Principal Solicitor - Governance	03/11/25

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE

6th November 2025

Medium Term Financial Plan Budget Update and Consultation Report 2026/2027 to 2028/29 – Business Rates Pool

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Ian Woodall – Portfolio Holder for Finance
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Debra Goodall
Report Author	Debra Goodall, Assistant Director of Finance and Customer Service Debra.goodall@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk
Wards Affected	All Wards
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	No
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	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 Executive Committee RECOMMEND that:-

1) **The Council approves joining the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Business Rates Pool for 2026/27**

2) **Authority for the decision on the financial arrangements be delegated to the Section 151 officer following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance.**

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 This report provides an update on the Medium-Term Financial Plan 2026/27 – 28/29 in respect of the Business Rates Pool for 2026/27.

2.2 Under the Local Government Finance Act 2012, local authorities are permitted to form business rates pools to manage Business Rates income collectively. Pooling allows councils to:

- Retain a greater share of business rates growth locally
- Reduce the levy payable to central government
- Share risks and rewards across a wider base
- Support regional economic development through collaborative investment

2.3 The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has invited Councils to indicate their preferred pooling arrangements for the financial year, 2026-27, with the deadline for submission of proposals for 2026-27 pools being 24th November 2026. Therefore, the Council needs to make an urgent decision as to the option of joining the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Pool. The Council was previously part of the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Pool so this would be a continuation. The other option the council has is:

- to not be in a Business Rates Pool and return a higher proportion of business rates growth (levy) to Central Government.

2.4 It is understood from other Districts across Herefordshire and Worcestershire that they will be entering the Pool for 2026-27, subject to a review of the figures across the area showing a positive benefit, enabling volatility risks to be shared with other councils and also additional financial benefits in terms of levy on business rates growth that was retained locally rather than paid over to the Government.

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

3.1 The Council therefore needs to determine whether it wishes to continue to participate in a Herefordshire and Worcestershire wide pool for the year 2026/27 only.

3.2 As a general principle the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Pool and other Pools locally operate on the principle that no council is worse off in the Pool than outside the Pool. This means that the amounts paid into the Pool by councils are limited to the levy amount that they would have otherwise paid to the Government. However, in the event of significant losses, as in the case of the revaluation of GP surgeries, then the amount available from the Pool may be less than would be available from the Government National safety net facility.

3.3 The most significant factor in the Council's decision regarding Pool membership from 1 April 2026 is our view on the probability of further significant business rate losses in Redditch. Based on current appeals outstanding we have no reason to suspect there will be such losses. We have already made reasonable provision for outstanding appeals and we are not aware of any changes which would lead to further significant losses.

3.4 There will be provision within the governance arrangements to ensure there is protection for Pool Members to ensure that there is no detriment to their position comparative to had they not joined the pool.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The arrangements for the business rates pool will continue to mitigate some but not all of the financial risk of the current business rates system. Work is currently ongoing at this point in time to assess whether the pooling arrangements (if approved) remain of overall financial benefit to this Council.

4.2 The precise impact on Council finances cannot be known as this will vary depending on a range of factors including whether business rates grow or contract, future appeals and mandatory reliefs.

Based on the information available to date, if the Council's position together with the overall position of the wider Herefordshire and Worcestershire family will be best protected by joining the proposed pool then it is recommended that the Council do so.

4.3 The proposed pool is only concerned with the money which is generated through the levy which would have been paid to central Government if the Pool members were not in the pool. The Pool is designed to continue to protect member authorities from the ups and downs that are likely to arise in Business Rate income in the future. These will have a direct impact on the amount of funding for the Council. It may be shown that by remaining in a pool, the Council can better protect against these variations and thus provide some protection to its base funding.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Any legal implications in relation to the business rates pool have already been assessed as part of previous work undertaken when the pool was originally established.

6. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS

Local Government Reorganisation

6.1 There are no implication at this stage arising from Local Government Reorganisation or Devolution

Relevant Council Priority

6.2 The proposals detailed in this report support the organisational priority of Financial Stability.

Climate Change Implications

6.3 There are no climate change implications as a direct result of this report.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

6.4 None as a direct result of this report.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1 The Government is currently in the process of making changes to business rates, due to apply from 2026/27 onwards and work is ongoing to assess the impact of this.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

AUTHOR OF REPORT

Name: Debra Goodall, Assistant Director of Finance and Customer Service
E Mail: Debra.goodall@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

RECORD OF DECISION TAKEN UNDER URGENCY PROCEDURES

SUBJECT: Appointment of an acting Section 151 Officer for Redditch Borough Council

BRIEF STATEMENT OF SUBJECT MATTER:

The position of Section 151 Officer is a statutory officer post. As such, the Council is required to nominate an officer under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 to be responsible for the proper administration of its financial affairs. The relevant wording states that: -"Without prejudice to section 111 above, every local authority shall make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs and shall secure that one of their officers has responsibility for the administration of those affairs." Section 113 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 requires that the officer appointed as the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) must be a member of a specified accountancy body.

The Council appointed a Section 151 Officer at a Council meeting held on 27th January 2025. The Officer who was appointed to this position has subsequently tendered his resignation from Bromsgrove District Council as his employing authority and will cease to be an employee on 1st November 2025. There is therefore a need to replace him as Section 151 Officer.

It is a legal requirement that the appointment of the Section 151 Officer, as a statutory officer, is made by full Council. This is set out in the relevant regulations (The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) Regulations 2001 (as amended) Schedule I Part II) which are reproduced in the Officer Employment Rules at Part 17 of the Constitution. Unfortunately, there are not due to be any Council meetings prior to 1st November 2025. This would also not provide sufficient time to follow the structured appointments process to employ a new permanent Section 151 Officer, involving the work of the Joint Appointments Committee.

In this context, it is proposed that a temporary arrangement should be made, whereby the existing Deputy Section 151 Officer, Debra Goodall, should be appointed as the acting Section 151 Officer for the Council. This will ensure both that the Council complies with statutory requirements and will ensure service continuity.

Members are asked to note that the temporary post will be evaluated in line with the Council's job evaluation scheme to take into account the additional responsibilities that will be covered by Debra Goodall. Any financial costs arising will be met from existing budgets.

Bromsgrove District Council is the employing authority for the position of Section 151 Officer. However, Redditch Borough Council is the employing authority for Debra Goodall. Subject to Members' approval of Debra Goodall's appointment on a temporary basis as acting Section 151 Officer, she will need to be made available by Redditch Borough Council under the shared services arrangements to perform such duties as are required by their post for Bromsgrove District Council.

It is proposed that this temporary appointment will continue until such time as a replacement Section 151 Officer commences employment with Bromsgrove District Council.

DECISION: To consider and agree the temporary appointment of an acting Section 151 Officer for the Council.

RESOLVED that

RESOLVED:

1) **To approve the temporary appointment of Debra Goodall as acting Section 151 Officer, to fulfil the purposes of Section 151 of the Local Government 1972, until such time as a replacement Section 151 Officer commences employment with Bromsgrove District Council; and**

2) **Subject thereto, Debra Goodall to be made available under the shared services arrangements with Bromsgrove District Council to perform such duties as are required in her capacity as acting Section 151 Officer for Bromsgrove District Council.**

(Council decision)

GROUNDS FOR URGENCY:

The Section 151 Officer appointed by the Council at a meeting held in January 2025 has given notice of his resignation from Bromsgrove District Council, as his employer, and his contract is due to expire at the end of October 2025. To ensure that Redditch Borough Council can fulfil the legal obligation to have a Section 151 Officer from 1st November 2025 onwards, there is a need for a decision to be taken urgently to appoint Mrs Debra Goodall as acting Section 151 Officer on a temporary basis. The appointment of a Section 151 Officer is a Council function and no Council meetings are due to take place prior to the end of the month. Therefore, an urgent decision is needed in respect of this temporary appointment.

DECISION APPROVED BY:

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

.....
(Signature) (John Leach - (CX)

Date: 30th October 2025

PROPOSED ACTION SUPPORTED *(amend as appropriate)*				
…….. (Signature)	***…….. (Signature)***	***…….. (Signature)***	***…….. (Signature)***	***…….. (Signature)***
(Block Capitals)	*(Block Capitals)*	*(Block Capitals)*	*(Block Capitals)*	*(Block Capitals)*
MAYOR *	**PF HOLDER**	**LEADER**	**LDR of the CONSERVATIVE** Group	**CHAIR O&S** Committee
Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:

Notes:

* In addition to the Executive decision above regarding the matter under consideration, the Mayor is signing to agree both that the Executive decision proposed is reasonable in all the circumstances

and to it being treated as a matter of urgency. This is to ensure that the call-in procedures as set out in Part 8 of the Constitution shall not apply where an Executive decision being taken is urgent.

This page is intentionally left blank