

Electoral Matters Committee

21 October 2025

Local Government Reorganisation: Future Local Governance in Redditch

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Jane Spilsbury, Portfolio Holder for Performance, Engagement and Governance
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Assistant Director	Claire Felton, Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services
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Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	N/A
Relevant Council Priority	All
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to RECOMMEND

- 1) One of the following options, as detailed in this report, to ensure robust neighbourhood governance arrangements following Local Government Reorganisation:**
 - i) OPTION 1: That officers be instructed to take no further action at this stage to provide for future local neighbourhood governance arrangements in the Borough; or**
 - ii) OPTION 2: 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; or**
 - iii) OPTION 3: That officers be instructed to proceed with a Community Governance Review for the unparished areas of the Borough. This process be initiated in accordance with the timetable set out in Appendix 1 and a further report on the outcomes of the process be presented to Council on this subject in due course.**

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Members are also asked to RESOLVE to NOTE: -

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

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In December 2024 the Government published the English Devolution White Paper which confirmed the Government's intention to restructure local government in England, particularly in two-tier areas, through the creation of new unitary authorities.
- 2.2 Redditch Borough Council is currently working alongside Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills, Worcester City and Wychavon District Councils to prepare and submit a final proposal for local government reorganisation in November 2025. This submission will propose the creation of two unitary councils covering the north and south of Worcestershire.
- 2.3 Worcestershire County Council and Wyre Forest District Council are also preparing final submissions, which will propose the establishment of a single unitary authority for the whole of Worcestershire.
- 2.4 At this stage, it is not known what the final structure for Worcestershire will be. Following statutory consultation, and subject to parliamentary approval, ministers are expected to decide which proposal will be approved and implemented and may make modifications as a result of consultation. On the current indicative timetable, a decision will be announced in early summer 2026.
- 2.5 In addition to Local Government Reorganisation, the Government's English Devolution White Paper also references neighbourhood governance arrangements in local areas.
- 2.6 Regardless of which Local Government Reorganisation proposal is approved, there will be a need for significant structural changes in the Borough, including neighbourhood governance arrangements. Members are therefore invited to consider what local neighbourhood governance arrangements may be most appropriate for the Borough in order to maintain civic identity and ensure effective community-level

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representation within any future unitary authority. Consideration of these issues may also strengthen the Council's case in the proposals submitted to Government.

- 2.7 The Government defines a neighbourhood area as 'any area of specified description that falls within the authority's area'. Throughout this report, the terms *neighbourhood governance* and *local governance* are therefore used interchangeably.

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

Neighbourhood Area Committees (Corresponds with Option 1)

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

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

- 3.3 The Government's vision therefore is for Neighbourhood Area Committees or forums, to be established by the new unitary authority, with the purpose of strengthening local representation and community

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engagement. It should be noted that the decision about establishing Neighbourhood Area Committees would be made by the future unitary authority rather than by Redditch Borough Council.

- 3.4 The definition and interpretation of “appropriate arrangements”, and how this relates to Neighbourhood Area Committees is currently unclear. However, it is expected that Neighbourhood Area Committees could provide a structured forum for Councillors to engage with local communities and consider local priorities. Depending on the scope of delegation from the unitary council, their role could include:

- Providing a forum for discussion of issues affecting the local area.
- Making recommendations to the unitary authority on matters of local concern.
- Exercising delegated decision-making powers where these are granted.
- Managing small budgets to support local services or community projects.
- Strengthening the link between communities and the unitary authority to ensure that local voices are heard.

- 3.5 These Committees would not be statutory councils in their own right and would not have the ability to raise a precept. Their effectiveness would depend on the powers, responsibilities and resources delegated to them by the unitary authority.

- 3.6 In summary, Neighbourhood Area Committees are expected to provide the main mechanism for community-level governance within the new unitary structure. However, their powers would depend on delegation from the unitary authority, as well as the contents of any secondary legislation provided by Government. The arrangements described in this section of the report are those which would come into place following Local Government Re-organisation if Members chose to take no further action in accordance with Recommendation 1(i).

Charter Trustees (Option 2)

- 3.7 Members may wish to consider whether additional local governance arrangements are needed to ensure continuity of civic identity and/or representation in the Borough following Vestment Day for the new unitary authority. In addition to Neighbourhood Area Committees, the option of appointing Charter Trustees could also be considered. While Neighbourhood Area Committees are intended to provide a mechanism for localised governance within the unitary structure, Charter Trustees could operate in parallel to ensure that the civic and ceremonial

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traditions of the Borough are maintained where no parish or town council currently exists.

- 3.8 Charter Trustees can be put in place when a Borough or District with historic civic functions is abolished and there is no parish or town council to take them on. They are provided for in legislation and allow those civic traditions to continue through a group of councillors drawn from the area concerned.
- 3.9 The role of Charter Trustees is to safeguard civic and ceremonial traditions, such as the mayoralty, regalia, and historic property. These responsibilities are ceremonial in nature and do not extend to wider service delivery or community governance. It should also be noted that Charter Trustees are unable to own land or buildings.
- 3.10 Membership would usually consist of councillors of the principal authority representing wards, or divisions that make up the unparished area of the former Borough. The Trustees must elect a Mayor and Deputy Mayor annually and have the ability to raise a modest precept to cover civic expenses.
- 3.11 To explore this option further, consideration would need to be given to which civic and ceremonial functions, property and regalia should be transferred to the Charter Trustees upon the dissolution of the Borough Council.
- 3.12 Taken together, Government plans for Neighbourhood Area Committees alongside Charter Trustees may provide sufficient arrangements for local governance in the Borough, particularly in preserving both area-level governance and civic identity. This approach follows wider Government sentiment for reorganisation and would be consistent with the Council's wider position in supporting proposals for two unitary authorities in Worcestershire, which seek to balance effective strategic governance with meaningful local accountability.
- 3.13 Further work would have to be carried out by officers to bring a full report to Council on the details of appointing Charter Trustees, including the process to be followed and seeking authorisation to set up a budget to cover the anticipated costs. Members are referred to Recommendation 1(ii) which details the actions required should this option be selected.

Parish / Town Councils (Option 3)

- 3.14 If Members wish to consider arrangements that provide a broader role in local governance, the alternative would be to consider commencing a Community Governance Review (CGR) to explore the creation of

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parish councils. Parish and town councils are the most local tier of government in England. Legally, there is no difference between a parish council and a town council. Both are corporate bodies created under the Local Government Act 1972 with the same statutory powers and duties. The distinction is simply that a parish council may, by resolution, choose to call itself a town council and adopt the style of town Mayor.

- 3.15 Parish councils have a range of powers to provide and maintain local facilities and services. These can include allotments, parks and open spaces, cemeteries, bus shelters, community centres and events. They have the power to raise their own funding through a precept as part of council tax and must operate within the same financial and audit framework as other local authorities.
- 3.16 While parish councils can own property and employ staff, they must remain financially sustainable. Any transfer of assets or responsibilities from a principal authority must therefore be supported by an appropriate level of resources to ensure the new council can meet its obligations.
- 3.17 It should be noted that there is no requirement for any area to be parished. In many urban areas, local governance is provided entirely by the principal authority without parish councils. Where parish or town councils are created, they take on responsibility for certain local matters and operate as an additional tier of governance within the area.
- 3.18 The statutory process by which new parish/town councils can be created is a via a CGR.

Community Governance Reviews (Option 3)

- 3.19 A CGR is the statutory process by which a principal council can review and, if appropriate, establish or amend parish governance arrangements. The process is governed by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and associated guidance.
- 3.20 A CGR can consider a range of options, including:
 - The creation of new parishes and parish or town councils
 - The alteration or abolition of existing parishes
 - Changes to the name of a parish
 - Alterations to parish boundaries
 - Changes to the electoral arrangements of a parish, including the number of councillors and the warding of the parish.
- 3.21 Redditch Borough is currently unparished in its entirety, apart from Feckenham parish, located in the south of the Borough. A CGR would

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therefore provide the Council with the opportunity to consider whether new parish councils should be established in other parts of the Borough, including the potential creation of a Redditch Town Council.

- 3.22 The Council has discretion over the scope and terms of reference of a CGR, provided that it has regard to the need to ensure that community governance within the area reflects the identities and interests of local communities and is effective and convenient.
- 3.23 Once commenced, a CGR must usually be completed within 12 months. An indicative timetable, as well as some further information on the stages required when conducting a CGR, has been provided in Appendix 1. The timetable ensures adequate timing for robust consultation on draft recommendations.
- 3.24 The outcome is not predetermined: a review may recommend the creation of new parish/town councils but may also conclude that no changes are required.
- 3.25 Undertaking a CGR would have financial implications. Costs are likely to arise from consultation, engagement and publication requirements, as well as officer time. It should also be recognised that the process would require a significant allocation of officer resources, which may have an impact on wider Local Government Reorganisation workflows.
- 3.26 In addition, the statutory requirement for robust recommendations, supported by consultation and evidence, means that work on a CGR would need to commence immediately if Redditch Borough Council wished to see the process through to its completion within the available timeframe.
- 3.27 Should it be decided that Redditch Borough Council does not wish to commence a CGR at this stage, this would not prevent any future unitary authority from carrying out a review in due course, including consideration of parishing currently unparished areas.
- 3.28 There is also the potential that a petition could be received calling for Redditch Borough Council, or a future unitary authority, to undertake a CGR in Redditch. Should this occur, and should the petition be in receipt of signatures from at least 7.5 per cent of local electors (where there are more than 2,500 electors), then the relevant Council would then need to undertake that CGR.

Conclusion

- 3.29 In considering the options, Members should note that some form of neighbourhood governance will be a requirement under forthcoming

legislation, most likely taking the form of Neighbourhood Area Committees. This approach, alongside Charter Trustees, would align closely with the Government's plans for neighbourhood governance while also supporting the Council's wider submission for two unitary authorities in Worcestershire. In addition, this would also place less demand on resources when taking into consideration the wider requirements of planning for local government reorganisation. Although CGRs remain an option for creating parish or town councils, the timing, scope and resources of such a process would also need to be considered.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

Option 1 - Neighbourhood Committees

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

Option 2 - Charter Trustees

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

Option 3 - Community Governance Review

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

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- 4.3 Members should therefore note that the most immediate and material costs would arise from undertaking a CGR, while the costs associated with Charter Trustees are expected to be minimal in comparison.
- 4.4 Should members agree that option 3 (CGR) is the preferred option, it should be noted that this would have financial implications for the Council and a further report requesting additional funding would need to be prepared for members consideration. It is not possible at this stage to clarify what those financial costs would be, as this would be dependant on the Terms of Reference for any CGR undertaken and the manner of consultation.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

6. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS

Local Government Reorganisation

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

Relevant Council Priority

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

Climate Change Implications

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

Equalities and Diversity Implications

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

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 The principal risk relates to the allocation of resources to governance arrangements during a period of wider Local Government Reorganisation. CGRs in particular would require significant officer time and financial resources.
- 7.2 A further risk is that the Council's approach to neighbourhood governance could conflict with, or be perceived as inconsistent with, the proposals the authority submits to Government on unitary reorganisation. Care will therefore be needed to ensure that any decisions taken locally are aligned with the wider submission.
- 7.3 Financial risks arise from the relative costs of the options. A CGR would be considerably more expensive than appointing Charter Trustees, depending on the scope of consultation and potential involvement of external consultants. It should also be recognised that the outcome of a CGR is not predetermined. The review may ultimately recommend no

change, which could raise questions about the value of the resources invested.

- 7.4 Finally, there are risks linked to public engagement. A CGR requires extensive consultation, which may create expectations within communities that new governance arrangements will follow. Managing those expectations will be an important part of the process.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Community Governance Review: Process and Indicative Timetable

Background Papers

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill:

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

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

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

[Ministerial Statement made by Jim McMahon](#)

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

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

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9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder	Cllr Jane Spilsbury, Portfolio Holder for Performance, Engagement and Governance	10/10/2025
Financial Services	Debra Goodall	10/10/2025
Legal Services	Nicola Cummings	06/10/2025
Policy Team (if equalities implications apply)	N/A	N/A
Climate Change Team (if climate change implications apply)	N/A	N/A