Transforming Worcestershire

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

The case for North and South Worcestershire councils

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.

Middle: View from Bredon Hill, Wychavon | *Right:* Kidderminster, Wyre Forest

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 model in our "Shape Worcestershire" public survey, commissioned by all six borough, city and district councils, **62.5% supported a north and south model for local government**, while **only 37.5% supported a single unitary proposa**l.

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 unitary 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.

Our vision

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.

Bromsgrove District Council
Councillor Karen J. May

Malvern Hills District Council
Councillor John Gallagher

Redditch Borough Council
Councillor Sharon Harvey

Worcester City Council
Councillor Lynn Denham

Wychavon District Council
Councillor Richard Morris

Section One:
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 exercise, 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.

Top right: Forge Needle Museum, Redditch *Left:* Footpath sign in Broadway, Wychavon

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).

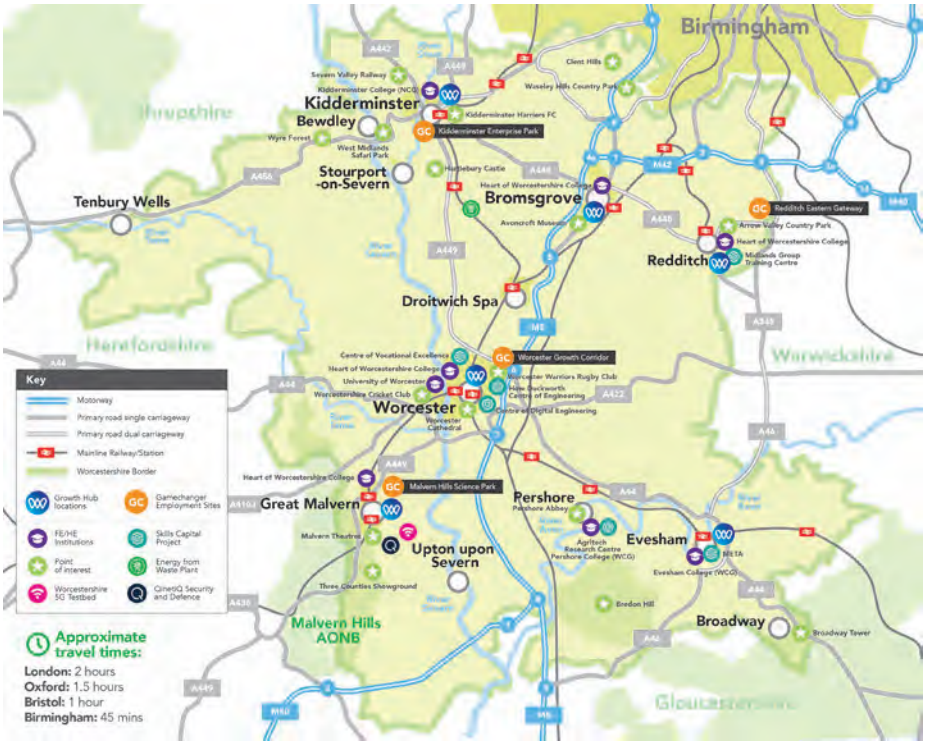
Worcestershire is not currently part of the Devolution Priority Programme. Work is ongoing to identify the right model for devolution, with a future Strategic Authority under consideration.

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.

"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."

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



1 Worcestershire's Plan for Growth 2020–2040

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 mean for all English county local authorities of 58 per 10,000 (with 1,044 children in care).
Qualification levels vary significantly across the county, with 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, 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:

"Worcestershire is facing escalating service pressures ... are stretching the current system beyond its limits."

- Public services shift from crisis to prevention
- Communities feel more connected and empowered
- Local services respond faster to everyday issues
- Vulnerable adults live healthier, happier, and safer lives
- Children and families supported to stay together
- Young people have better access to skills and jobs
- Better housing supports healthier lives
- 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, below, 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.

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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.

"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."

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.

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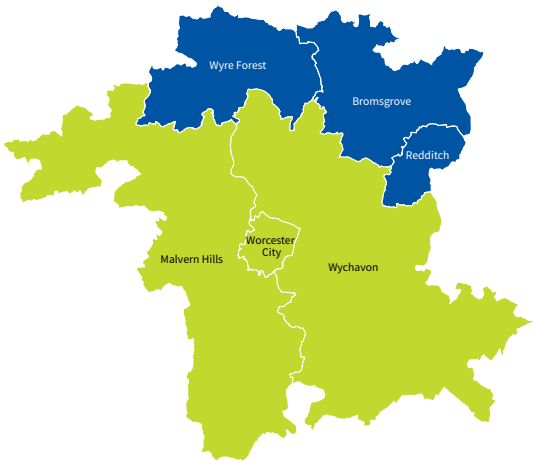
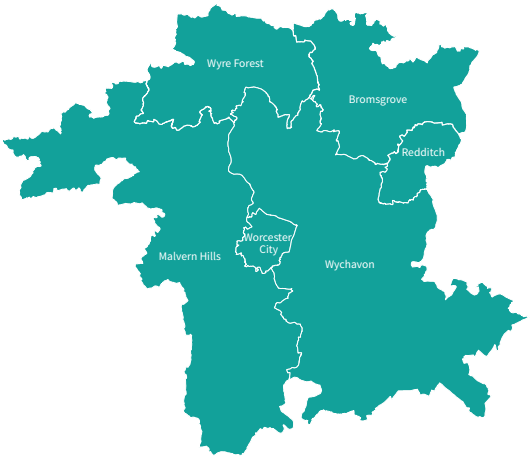
View of Worcestershire from the Malvern Hills

Figure 1.2 Summary of north and south model scored against Government criteria



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
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 neighbourhood empowerment	**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
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.

> "The two unitary model would enable more localised decision making, and would better reflect health and wellbeing needs of different communities. It could facilitate innovation and partnership at a neighbourhood level."
>
> - Droitwich, Ombersley & the Rurals PCN

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

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

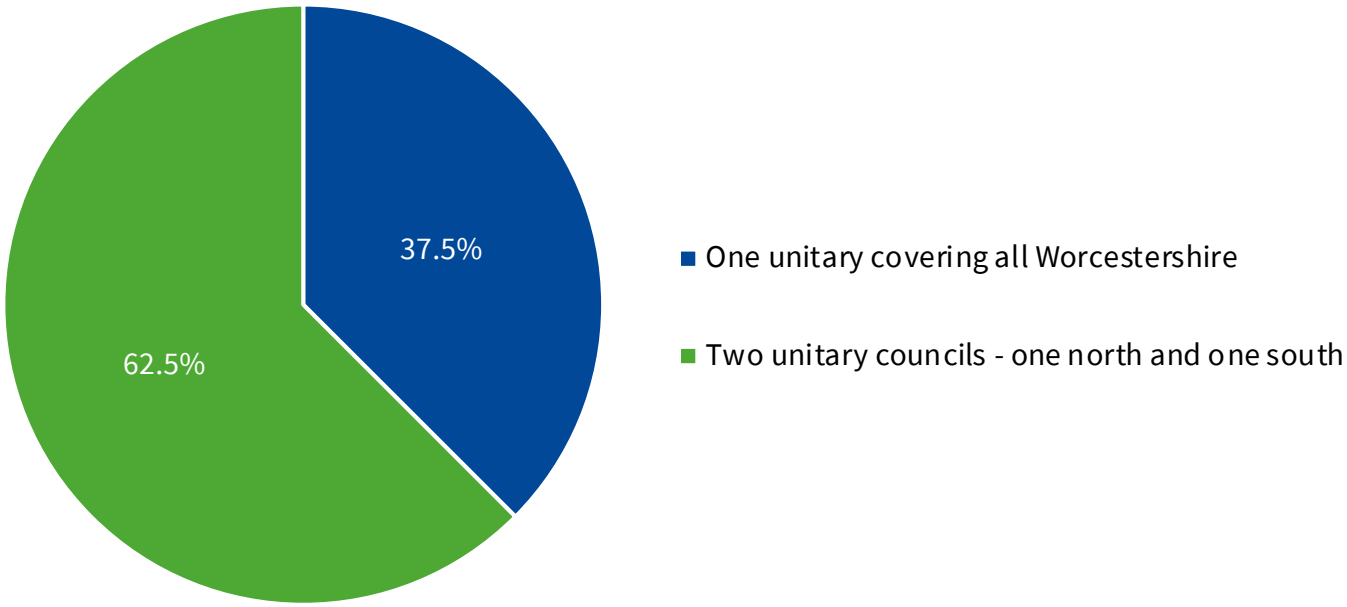
Two councils are right for Worcestershire because they:			Comparison to a one unitary model
6	**Enable tailored economic and place strategies to unlock growth**	Enables **tailored economic strategies for North and South Worcestershire,** reflecting long-standing regional strengths and opportunities **Supports 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) **Hybrid approach to service delivery will balance local and regional delivery**, with services disaggregated only when safe, legal, and optimal	**Risks defaulting to 'continuing authority' model** and/or culture that replicates existing structures and misses the opportunity for service transformation **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 3,241 respondents][4]



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

"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."

4 Shaping Worcestershire public engagement campaign and survey 2025

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 3.9 years.

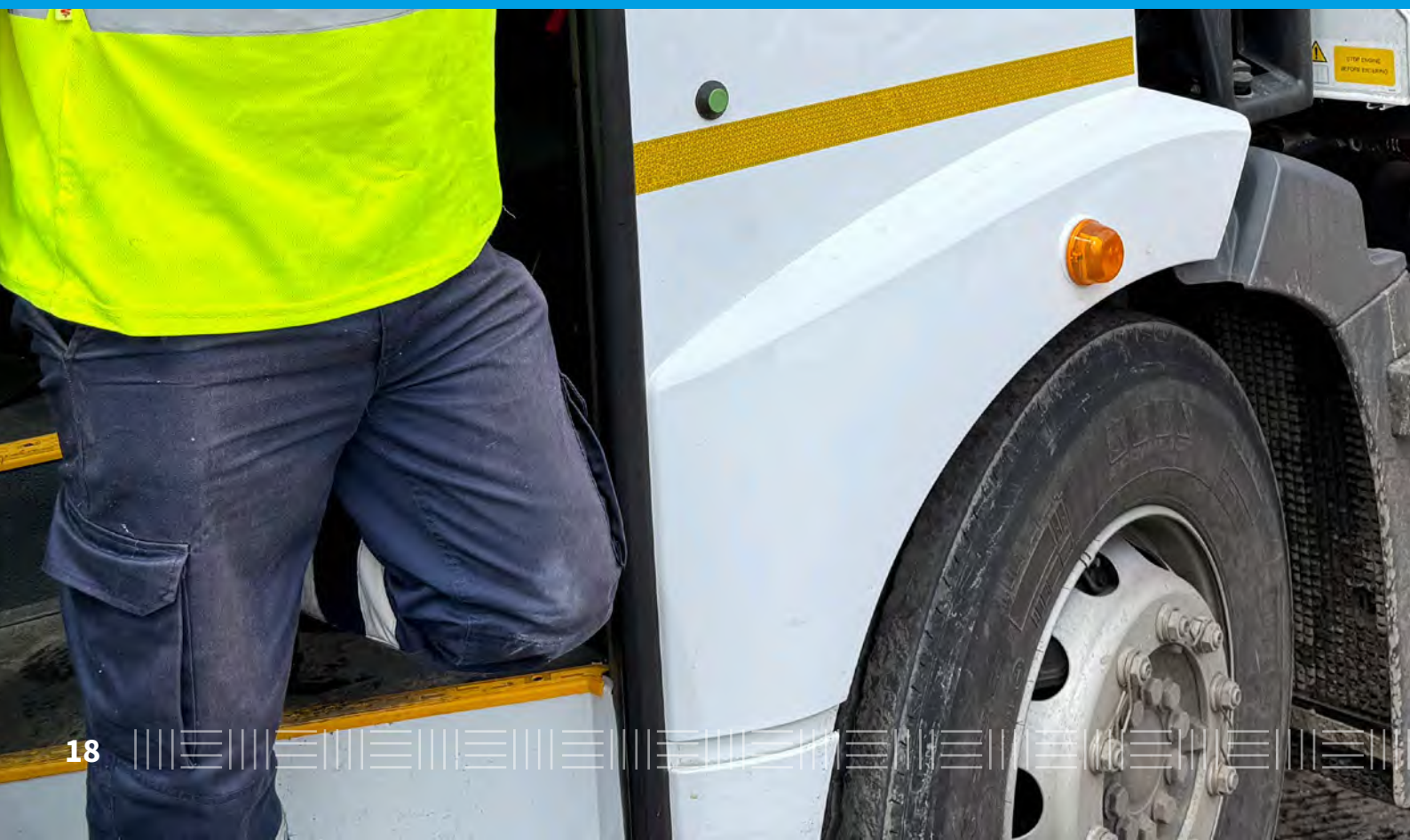
This analysis does not recognise the true value of reform, which extends beyond efficiencies to improving service outcomes, local accountability, and long-term financial sustainability.

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 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	3.9yrs	

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



How we will implement LGR

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

Prepare: Nov 2025 – June 2026

Design: July 2026 – May 2027

Transition: June 2027 – March 2028

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

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.

Left: Craig, a member of Malvern Hills' waste and recycling team

Section Two:
Purpose and Worcestershire context

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 six borough, city and 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.

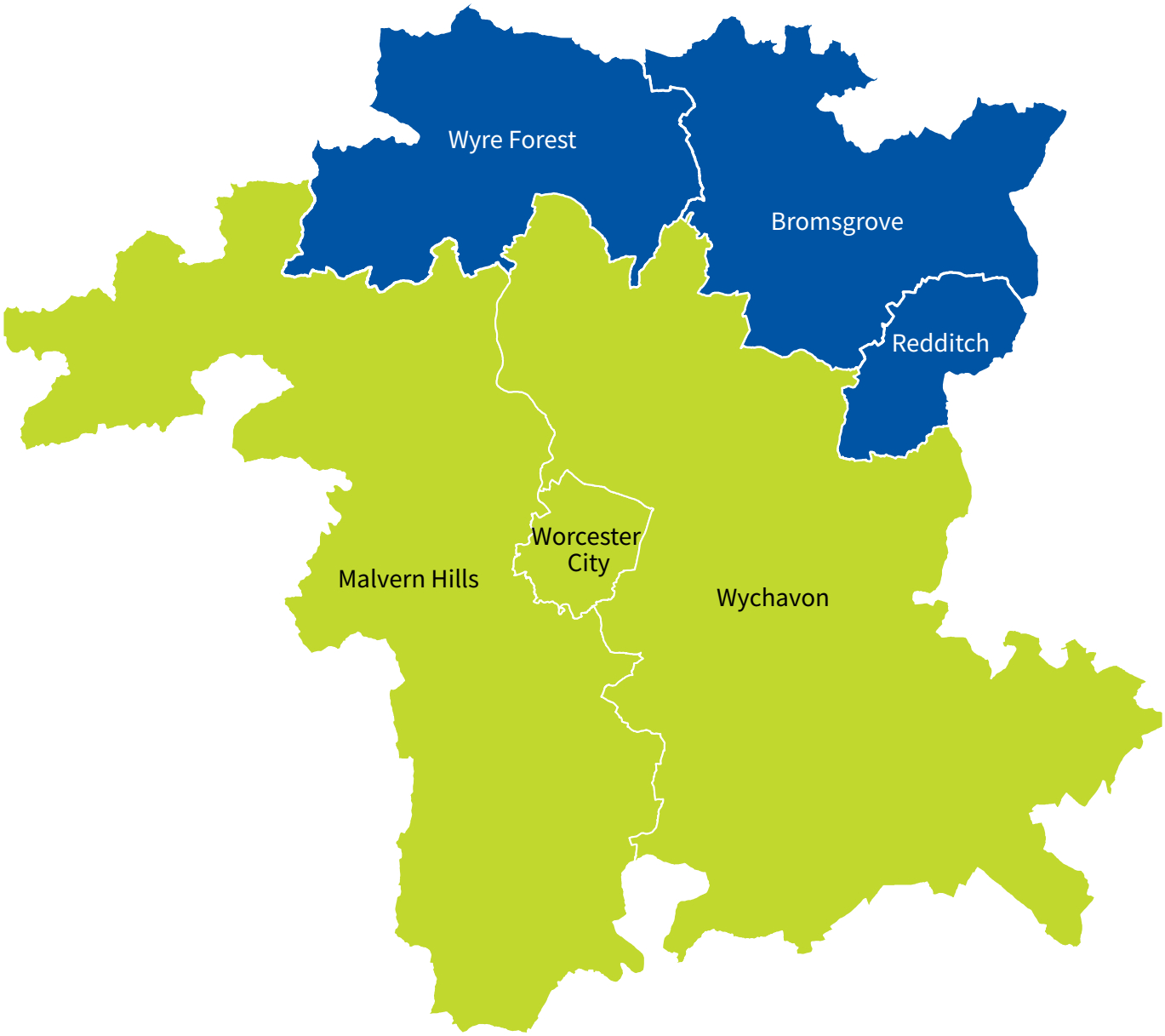
Three options were considered in our options appraisal:

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

Top: Cows on Chapter Meadows, Worcester
Left to right: Redditch Market | the Malvern Hills | Kidderminster, Wyre Forest

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 council configuration



"The north and south model reflects the historic and recognised distinction between the north and south of Worcestershire."

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 and outwards to Herefordshire, Gloucestershire, and Warwickshire, and is more focused on cyber, defence, and agricultural industries.

Existing structures and partnerships:
Borough, city and 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 borough, city and districts already function effectively across boundaries.

"Importantly, four of the six councils (two in the north and two in the south) have operated shared council functions for many years."

5 Population estimates for England and Wales – Office for National Statistics

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 borough, city and district councils in the preparation of this proposal demonstrates the ability to work together with an agreed purpose and shared commitment to deliver the best services possible for Worcestershire residents and businesses. 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 local 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.

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 more urban landscapes contrasting with South Worcestershire (comprising the areas covered by Malvern Hills, Worcester City, and Wychavon Councils) which 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 Natural Landscapes (formerly 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.

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

Left: The Guildhall, Worcester

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 borough, city and 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]

"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]."

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.

"The DCN's analysis related to population size and council performance reinforces these concerns, finding no compelling evidence that larger councils deliver better outcomes or offer greater efficiency."

9 Area SEND inspection of Worcestershire Local Area Partnership, April 2024
10 DCN's analysis on LGR population size and council performance, October 2025

Figure 2.3 Current boundary lines in Worcestershire

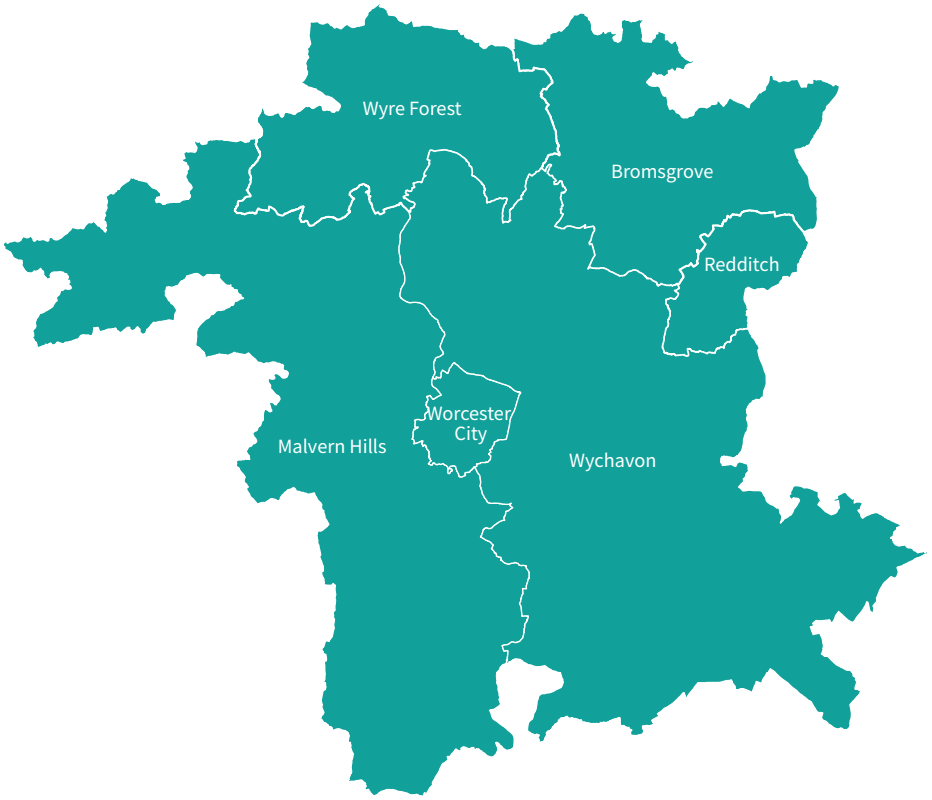


Figure 2.4 Characteristics of areas in current boundary lines

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

11 Population estimates for England and Wales – Office for National Statistics
12 Standard Area Measurements for Administrative Areas (December 2023) in the UK | Open Geography Portal
13 Local authority budget setting data and reports

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 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 for North and South Worcestershire 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.

"Worcestershire faces a range of challenges affecting residents, services and places... While these are not unique to the county, they require local solutions tailored to Worcestershire's specific needs."

Results of our engagement were clear on the things that residents prioritise:[14]

- 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%)

What our residents have told us is important

"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 local government for Worcestershire. It outlines the opportunity to restructure services, address long-standing challenges, and improve outcomes for residents.

14 Shaping Worcestershire public engagement campaign and survey 2025

Above: Cloverleaf road interchange, Redditch. © Smiffa2001

Section Three:
Our vision

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 unitary 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 current borough, city and 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 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.*

Left: Vale of Evesham asparagus visits Buckingham Palace, Wychavon
Right: Great Malvern Festival of Stories

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

- **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
- **Communities feel more connected and empowered:** Neighbourhood level decision-making and stronger partnerships with town and parish councils and Voluntary Community and Social Enterprises (VCSEs) will increase civic participation, trust, and pride in place.
- **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.
- **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.
- **Children and families 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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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, with all 167 councillors across these councils having the opportunity to feed their thoughts in.

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 not only ambitious but also achievable.

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

What our local businesses and VCS have told us is important

"The real strength of the two unitary model is that removing district councils does not magically get rid of the work they did, or the communication needed to plan and deliver that. It will allow us to take that work and gain economies of scale compared to current provision whilst also remaining local enough to be responsive."

– Citizens Advice Bromsgrove & Redditch

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 the commissioning councils, it provides the foundation for bold leadership, meaningful devolution, and improved outcomes for both residents and businesses.T

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

Above: Bromsgrove High Street

Section Four:
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 21st 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

Top: Garden waste collection team, Redditch | *Right:* Housing team, Worcester | *Left:* North East Worcestershire Lifeline Roadshow. A shared service between Redditch and Bromsgrove Councils, hosted by Redditch, provides Technology Enabled Care across the region

Criteria One:
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[15] 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.

15 Plan for Growth – Worcestershire LEP

North Worcestershire	South 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.	• **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

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 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[16] 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:

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.

Creative Industries: Emerging clusters in Malvern and Worcester, supported by local talent and infrastructure.

Digital and Technology: Malvern Hills hosts a nationally recognised cluster of high-tech SMEs, particularly in cyber and defence.

Defence: Malvern's Science Park is a key centre for defence-related innovation and enterprise.

Professional and Business Services: Worcester and Bromsgrove have growing sectors supported by strong connectivity and skilled workforces.

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.

16 The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy 2025 – GOV.UK

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[17]	8.4%	3.4%	8.2%
Level 4 skills[18]	12.9%	10.5%	5.8%
Employment rate (16–64)[19]	12.6%	9.2%	8.1%
Economically active (16–64)[20]	13.1%	3.8%	9.3%
GVA per hour[21]	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.

"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."

17 Working age population – GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures
18 Skill levels distribution across the UK – Office for National Statistics
19 Employment and employee types – Office for National Statistics
20 Economic activity status, England and Wales – Office for National Statistics
21 Subregional productivity in the UK – Office for National Statistics

Case Study – South Worcestershire Development Plan (SWDP)[22]

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.

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.

22 South Worcestershire Development Plan 2016

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 Civic Society

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)[23]

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.

23 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.

Top: Cripplegate, Henwick and Severn House with a view of the Malvern Hills, Worcester

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 km², while South Worcestershire spans 1,254 km².

Figure 4.1.3 Map of Worcestershire

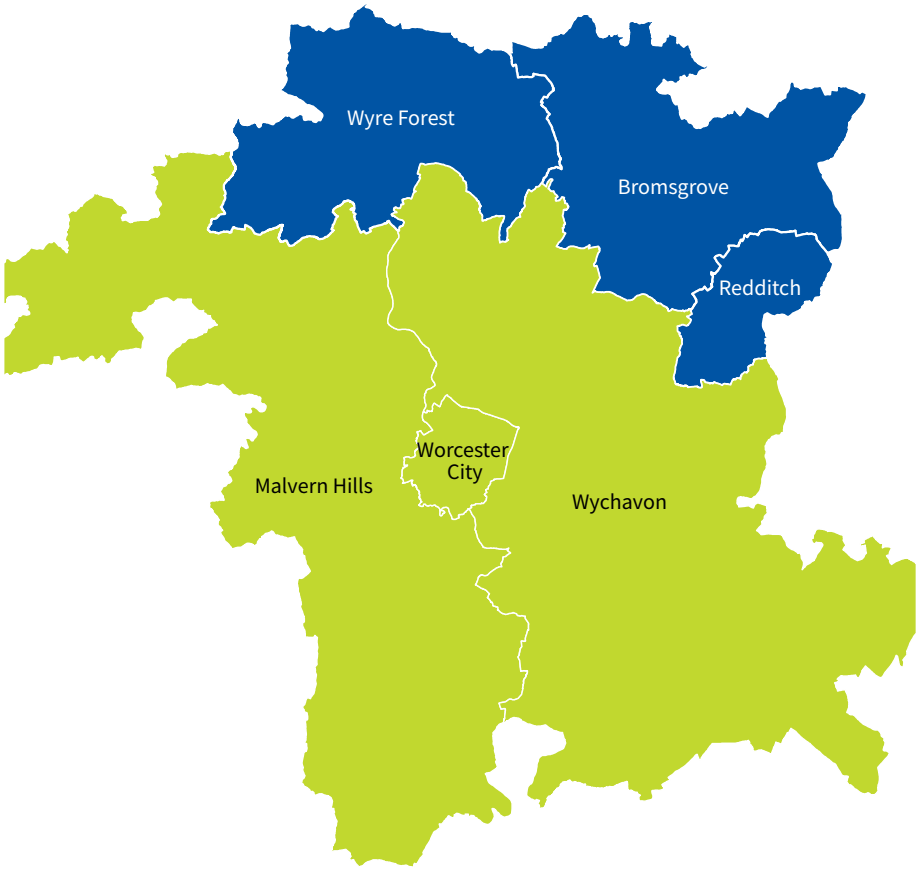


Figure 4.1.4 Population density of Worcestershire

	North Worcestershire	South Worcestershire	Worcestershire
Population (2024)[24]	293,445	327,915	621,360
Geographic area (sq km) (2023)[25]	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 exemplified by the existence of the SWDP.[26] 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.

24 Population estimates for England and Wales – Office for National Statistics
25 Standard Area Measurements for Administrative Areas (Dec 2023) in the UK
26 South Worcestershire Development Plan 2016

Travel and transport connectivity

Transport planning in Worcestershire is currently led by the county council through the Local Transport Plan,[27] 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.[28]

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.

27 The Local Transport Plan | Worcestershire County Council
28 Worcestershire's Plan for Growth 2020–2040

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.

Above: Laura, Planning Officer, Worcester

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,[29] which emphasises the need to deliver affordable, energy-efficient homes while also 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)[30]

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:

29 Worcestershire Housing Strategy 2023 – 2040
30 English indices of deprivation 2019 – GOV.UK

North Worcestershire	South 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.	**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 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.

Left: The 'Pepperpot', Upton upon Severn, Malvern Hills

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	South 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.	• **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 12 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.

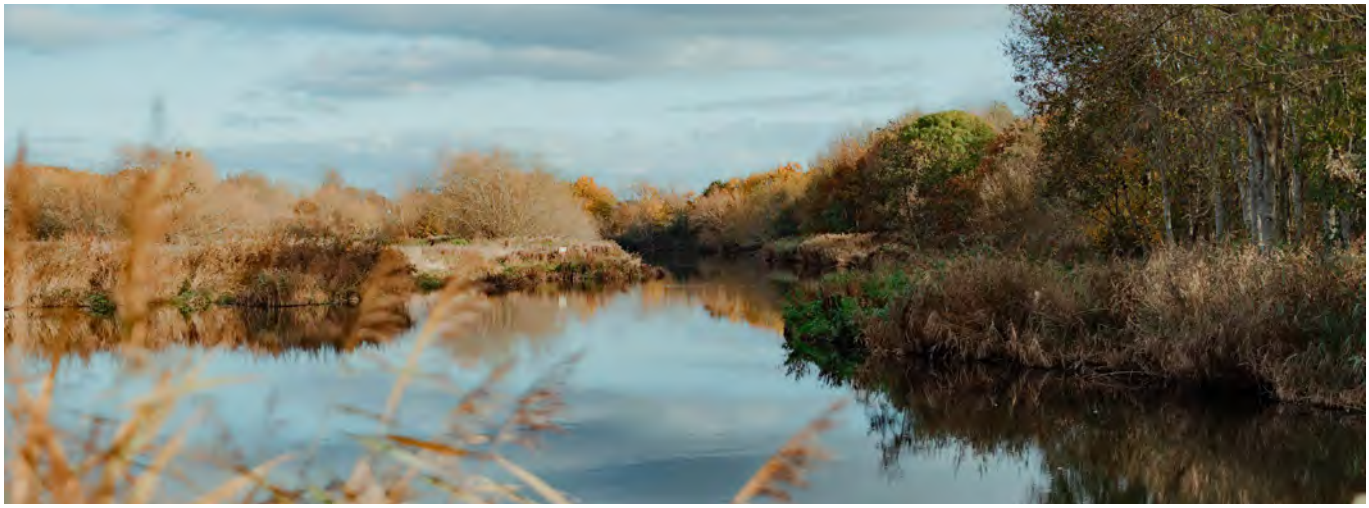
South Worcestershire benefits from a shared strategic framework through the SWDP,[31] which embeds environmental principles into future development, supporting nature as a key feature of urban as well as rural environments. In contrast, North Worcestershire's councils operate separate environmental plans.

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

31 South Worcestershire Development Plan 2016



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 focused 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.

Above: Avon Meadows, Pershore, Wychavon

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.

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.*

Left: Sue, Active Travel Officer, Malvern Hills

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 **public 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 and 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.

"Establishing two unitary councils, each with potential for a lower councillor to resident ratio ... would enable councillors to fulfil their roles effectively and better represent the diverse populations across the whole of Worcestershire."

"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

Brockhill area at night, Redditch

Criteria Two:
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.[32]

32 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[33] (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[34] 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.

"DCN analysis ... 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."

33 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_unitary_authorities_of_England
34 Bigger is not better: the evidenced case for keeping 'local' government | District Councils' Network

What our residents have told us is important

"I work for (a large city council) and large unitary authorities don't work. Worcestershire 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 around **350k** residents would work well."

– Worcester 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),[35] the north experiences greater deprivation in skills, health, crime and living environment, while both areas have similar levels of housing deprivation and pupil need, including identical Pupil Premium eligibility and comparable levels of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and SEND 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.*

35 English indices of deprivation 2019 – GOV.UK

Figure 4.2.1 Adult service users

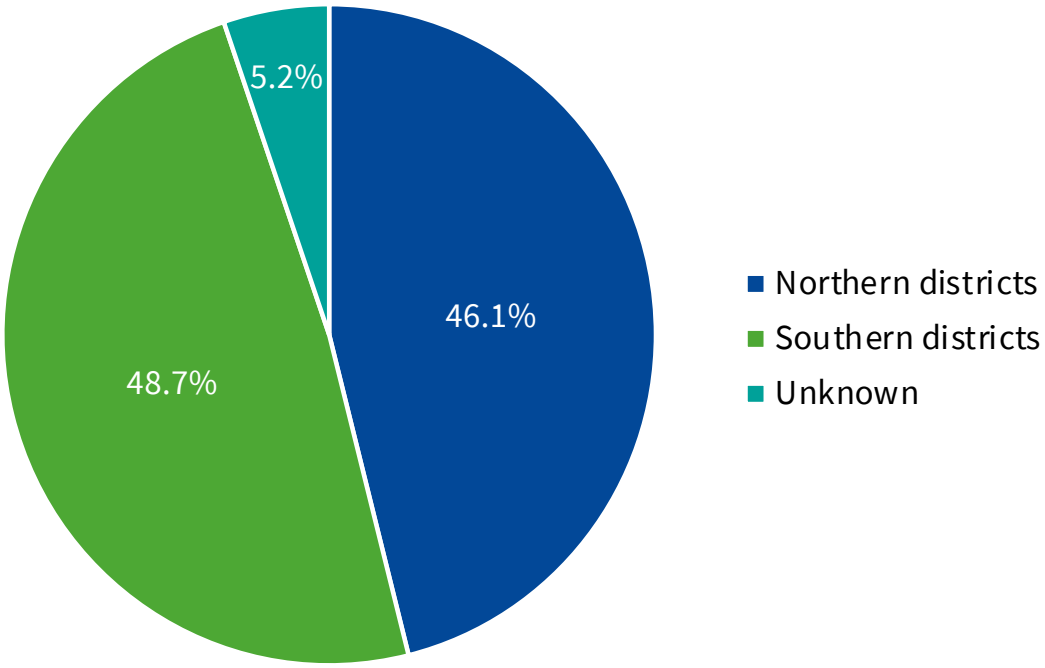
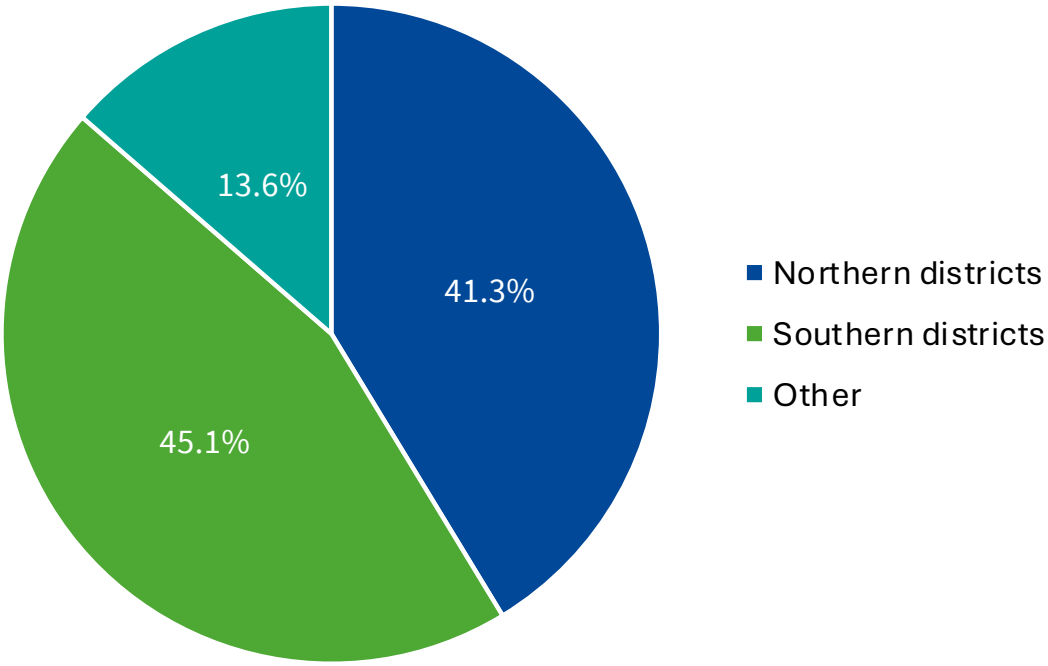


Figure 4.2.2 Number of children looked after by home address



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**.[36] 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.

Figure 4.2.3 Demographic data of Worcestershire

Metrics	North Worcestershire	South Worcestershire
Population (2024)[37]	293,445	327,915
Population (2032)[38]	300,113	345,035
Population (2047)	314,356	373,506
Age 0–15[39]	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.*

36 Subnational population projections for England – Office for National Statistics
37 Population estimates for England and Wales – Office for National Statistics
38 Subnational population projections for England – Office for National Statistics
39 Population estimates for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland – Office for National Statistics

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 (around 191,000), 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.

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 one 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 3.9 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 **3.9** 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 3.9 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.

Left: Bridge Street, Evesham, Wychavon

Figure 4.2.4 Cumulative financial benefit and payback period

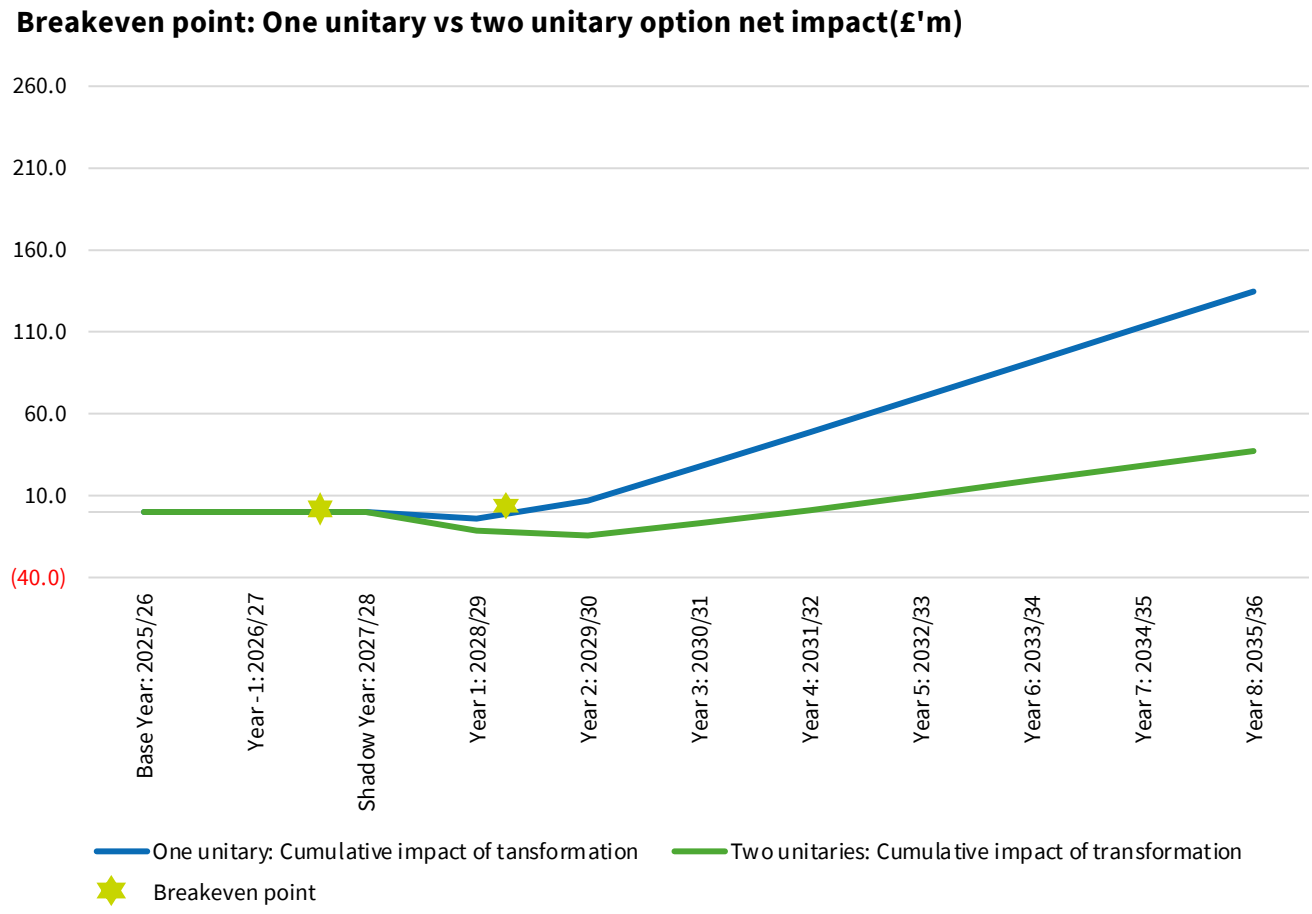


Figure 4.2.5 Financial modelling summary of options

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	3.9yrs
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.

Left: Harris brushes, Bromsgrove

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.*

"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."

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 model 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

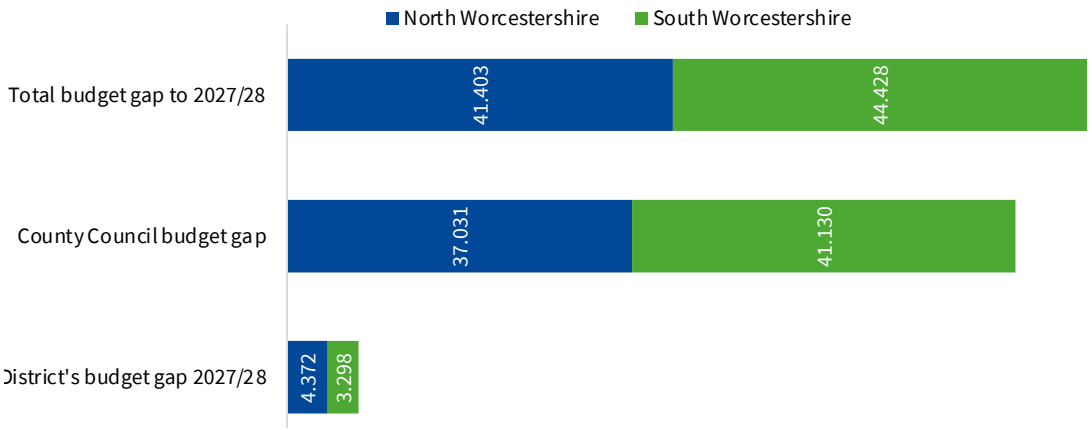
The forecasted total gross budget gap for all councils in the county will be £85.8m by 2027/28. All existing councils will continue to focus on delivering savings and managing their ongoing budget gaps regardless of local government reorganisation. However, the starting point for all new councils is expected to be stretched, with ongoing need for savings to be identified.

Figure 4.2.6 Forecasted total gross budget gap by 2028/29[40]

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
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[41]



40 Individual council budget setting reports
41 Individual council budget setting reports

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.

Above: High Street, Worcester

Reserves levels[42]

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
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.

42 Individual council statement of accounts

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[43]

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**

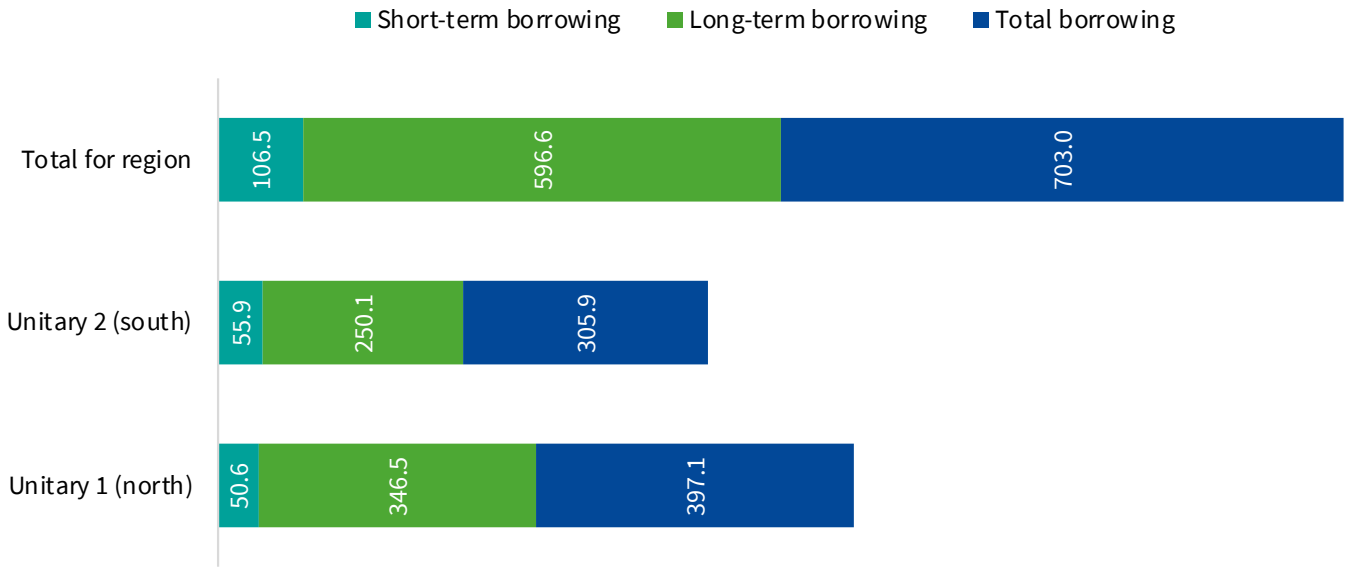
Note: The majority of the debt from borrowing for Redditch relates to borrowing for the Housing Revenue Account.

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.[44]

43 Council provided data

44 Worcestershire councils are sitting on £750m of debt | Worcester News

Figure 4.2.10 Total debt from borrowing (£'m)



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. *Appendix 3 provides additional detail on the financial case for change.*

Royal Enfield, Redditch

Criteria Three:
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 21st 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 adult and children's social care and public health are strong and resilient with clear leadership. It will ensure 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 crises, building resilience and promoting wellbeing in all our communities.

We will provide high quality services in places that residents are proud to be part of and feel they have a stake in. Two unitary councils – one in North Worcestershire and one in South Worcestershire – provide 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 borough, city and district councils.

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

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 and able to focus on relationships at a more local level.

Left: Wyre Forest's Reception team briefing colleagues

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 single 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 VCS

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.

"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."

Our guiding principles

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

- **It's about people:** Transform, design, plan and deliver all our services with and for all Worcestershire residents, including young people and vulnerable adults.
- **Governance and oversight:** Maintain and strengthen shared governance and oversight arrangements where risks span multiple service areas or geographies.
- **Stability and continuity:** Maintain stability and continuity of service for individuals already receiving support, supporting workforce stability and leveraging existing networks and delivery arrangements.
- **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.
- **Specialist services:** Commission and deliver specialist, low-volume, or complex services on a shared basis across localities to ensure efficiency and equitable access to expertise.
- **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.
- **Reducing bureaucracy:** Establish integrated back-office support functions to enable efficient, secure, and consistent processes across all service areas. Remove unnecessary administrative barriers so services are agile, efficient and responsive to local needs.
- **Data sharing and intelligence:** Enable consistent data sharing protocols and joint intelligence to support planning, delivery, and evaluation across units.
- **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.
- **Valuing family and community connections:** Services designed around the lived experiences of individuals, recognising family relationships, 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 for 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. Borough, city and 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 borough, city and 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 VCS

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. 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 borough, city and 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. It also carries out the Trading Standards function under a contract with Worcestershire County Council. WRS is hosted by Bromsgrove 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 21st 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 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 its 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.

"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.

Above: Redditch and Bromsgrove's Place team enjoying a staff event

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.

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 borough, city and 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. This will reduce duplication, improve the experience of residents, and achieve 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 borough, city and 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 boroughs, city and 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 unitary councils will each be responsible for prevention and early help services in their areas, including homelessness prevention and community centres currently run by the borough, city and 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. The two 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 communities best, with services that are designed with and for people, in partnership with civil society and the impact economy: The north and south model will be **place-based by default**, building on the commitment to communities that is engrained in the culture of the six borough, city and district councils. Our proposal will avoid the remoteness of centralised services delivered across the whole of Worcestershire.

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 borough, city and 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 the borough, city and 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.	Dramatically reduced public service use 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 unitary 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.

"To realise our vision, the two unitary councils will create an adult social care system that is preventative, locally responsive and partnership-driven."

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 two 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.[45] 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.[46]	**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.

45 Analysis of Office for National Statistics Projections taken from Worcestershire County Council population dashboard (accessed 8 October 2025)

46 Data quoted from Worcestershire County Council, Adult Care and Well Being Overview and Scrutiny Panel, September 2025

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.[47] 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 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.[48] **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.[49] Temporary and permanent closures are reported, particularly in smaller or rural homes.	**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. **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.	**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 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.

47 Worcestershire County Council Adult care and well-being overview and scrutiny panel (4 December 2024) – care homes and independence focused domiciliary care market position

48 LG Inform, Insights from Client Level Data (CLD): Long-Term Support in Worcestershire, accessed October 2025

49 Worcestershire County Council Care homes and independence focussed domiciliary care market position (December 2024)

3. Maximising the potential of partnerships, to deliver 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. **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).[50]	**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 benefits in preventing crisis and providing higher quality more tailored support to people.

50 https://www.nhsconfed.org/case-studies/seacroft-local-care-partnership and https://www.nhsconfed.org/case-studies/east-staffordshire-social-prescribing

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 the 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."

– Bromsgrove resident

Above: Warm Spaces in Tenbury Wells, Malvern Hills

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 voices 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 services and Head of Paid Service.

Safeguarding and child 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 Children's Services and with equal member involvement from the two councils. The two councils will share a pan-Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership Board.

Key challenges in children's services in Worcestershire

Delivering children's 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 the county council subsequent taking the service back in-house.

There are a total number of 242 schools in Worcestershire (178 primary, 16 middle, 30 secondary, nine special and seven 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 a mean for all English county local authorities of 58 per 10,000, indicating Worcestershire has the highest rate of all English county councils.[51] **Costs are continuing to increase**: Over the past five years, children's social care costs have risen by around 18%.[52] 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 that 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 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.

51 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

52 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.[53] 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.[54] **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.[55]	**Localised planning and commissioning:** Separate unitary 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. Research by DCN/Peopletoo shows 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.[56] **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 joined-up support around placements and meeting 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.

53 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

54 Data taken from Worcestershire County Council's Meeting of Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Wednesday, 27th September, 2023 (Item 602.)

55 LGR Data Request produced by Worcestershire County Council Performance Services, produced August 2025 (unpublished)

56 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 in Worcestershire 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.[57] The proportion of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is 5.4%, slightly above the 5.1% average in other counties.[58] **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'.[59] 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.[60]	**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 costs 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 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 ensure young people with SEND have smoother, more consistent pathways.	**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.

57 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

58 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

59 Ofsted (2024) Worcestershire County Council Area SEND Full Inspection report, published 15 July 2024,

60 Figures from Worcestershire County Council 2025/26 Budget Book, provided by Worcestershire County Council

A north and south model in Worcestershire provides the structural and cultural foundations for more integrated, resilient and sustainable children's services. It will improve outcomes for children through prevention, focus 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 for other services.

Public health

Public health in Worcestershire is already a shared endeavour across the county 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.[61]

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 being fragmented and requiring more resource to manage relationships
3. Public health services are largely commissioned and 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.

61 Figures from Worcestershire County Council 2025/26 Budget Book, provided by Worcestershire County Council

Top: Our Cultural Heritage event, Worcester *Bottom:* Local outreach project, Wychavon

Public safety

Public safety functions will be delivered separately by the two 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 build strong links with the arrangements that are created to replace the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Where existing shared services are in operation, working well and already delivered as a joint function, such as Worcestershire Regulatory Services, 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.

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 borough, city and 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 two unitary councils that will also deliver housing and social care. This will create the conditions for improvements in prevention, service integration, quality and outcomes.

Additionally, a neighbourhood-level approach to homelessness prevention has the potential to improve outcomes and limit demand on public services and provide appropriate face-to-face options, as per MHCLG guidance, for customers who would otherwise experience difficulties in accessing services. Links between the two unitary authorities and strategic authority responsibilities would need to be considered, given regional responsibilities for the coordination of homelessness services.

Corporate/back-office services

Each council will have its own strategic back-office functions. The two 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 councils' corporate services directors.

Lived Experience: From the Streets to Stability

"After leaving prison, I found myself in my late **50**s 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.

"[Worcestershire charity] 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."

– Redditch resident

Above: Merstow Place young people's supported housing scheme in Evesham, Wychavon

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 arrangements for the Strategic Authority mature, 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%.[62] 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 reflect 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 borough, city and 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.

Further detail on how the north and south model will deliver high quality and sustainable public services is provided in Appendix 3.

62 ONS data Travel to work, England and Wales: Census 2021

Louise, City Centre Street Cleansing, Worcester

Criteria Four:
Working together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views

Section Four, Criteria Four: Working together in coming to a view that meets local needs

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.[63] 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 that the best option for Worcestershire is being put forward without seeking the views of residents and stakeholders. That is why we decided early on to carry out an extensive engagement programme to understand all views.

Our engagement spanned residents, partners, and staff across all six borough, city and district councils of Worcestershire (including Wyre Forest). 'Shape Worcestershire' was a public 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 made through a County Association of Local Councils (CALC) survey. 32 engagement sessions were held to inform the options appraisal process, involving MPs, community organisations, system partners (NHS, Worcestershire County Council), and leisure and housing providers.

63 CALC: LGR Survey Analysis

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.

Appendix 7 provides more detail on the engagement methods that were employed.

Understanding the priorities and needs of residents and partners

Through 'Shape Worcestershire', **4,249** responses in total were received from across the county. The majority of the responses **(94%)** were from residents, with the remainder made by businesses, parish and town councils, voluntary sector organisations, and other stakeholders (schools, health providers, police, housing associations). The feedback reflects strong public familiarity with the implications of LGR, with only **12% not having awareness of the plans proposed for Worcestershire.**

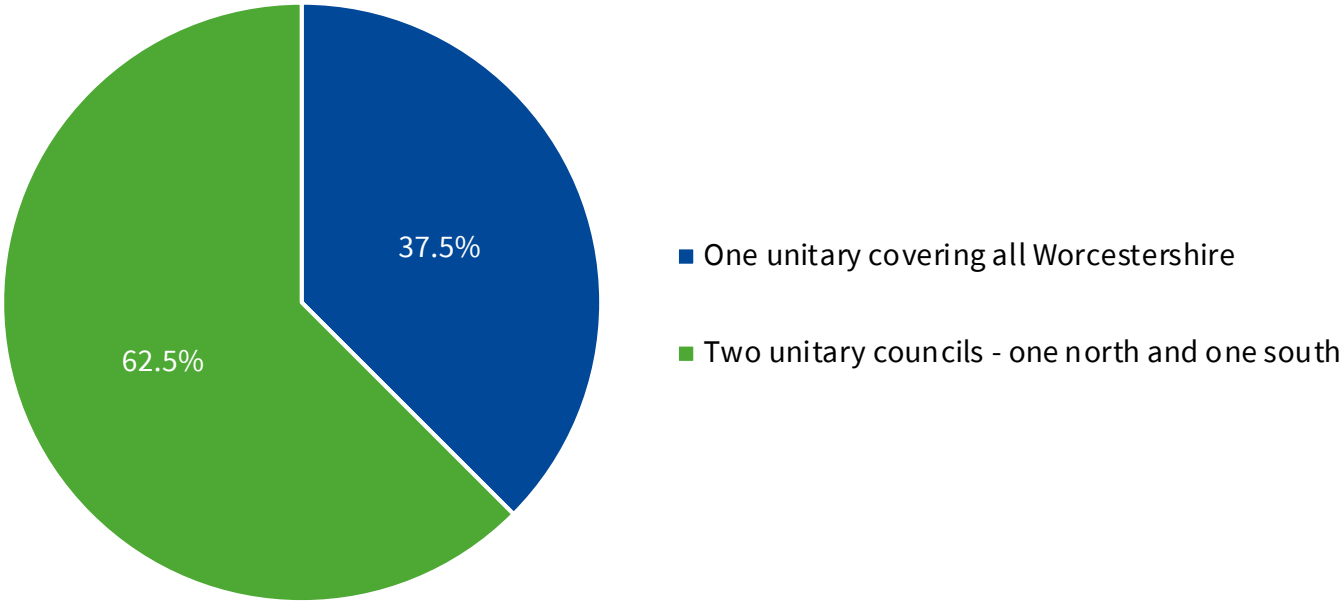
Engagement was undertaken through a range of channels, delivered through a blend of digital and in-person methods to maximise reach and accessibility for residents, businesses, non-profit organisations, and service partners.

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 alone 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.

"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."

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 borough, city and 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:

- Infrastructure planning (e.g. roads, schools, health): 63%
- Maintaining/improving local services and council-owned facilities: 59%
- How much council tax I pay: 44.7%
- Impact on the local community and local identity: 43.8%
- 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

"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

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 and fire service, recycling, and good broadband."

– Malvern Hills resident

In addition, members of the commissioning councils voted in favour of the north and south model as their 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 and 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 the authority."

– Wychavon resident

Above: Norton Community Hub opening, Wychavon

Key themes that emerged from Shape Worcestershire engagement

‘Efficiency and cost savings’ vs. ‘Local focus and identity’

There is a conflict throughout the responses received, 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 value 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 currently has a higher average council tax compared 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 they were 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 of collaborating with borough, city and district councils, and the county council. As part of this, engagement exercises were conducted through the commissioning councils themselves and a separate survey organised and run by CALC.

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 and Worcestershire 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 letter from the Chief Executive of the Herefordshire and Worcestershire ICB is included in full in Appendix 6.*

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.

Additional feedback from other organisations is provided in Appendix 6.

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 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. 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.

Key concerns raised and response		
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.	The north and south model will mean fewer boundaries between district services, such as planning and housing, than now. 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 five commissioning councils, and town and parish councils.

The concerns raised by partners, such as health partners, police and 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 a Natural Landscape, 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 commissioning 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.

Left: Stourport Basin, Stourport-on-Severn, Wyre Forest

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 Forest 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.*

"45.7% of respondents identified the north and south model as best for supporting the retention of local identity, local knowledge, and community character."

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	South 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.	The 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 under-represented 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 two 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 Birmingham 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.

Above: Highway, Redditch

Criteria Five:
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.		

A 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 are currently managing the process of LGR 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.

"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."

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 a full range of powers, functions and funding from the outset. This would include an active role in the work of ICBs. 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 states that mayors should take on the role of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and signals the Government's readiness to realign boundaries if need be. The English Devolution Bill includes powers that would allow Ministers to make such changes, and the Policing Minister has recently confirmed that PCCs will be abolished at the end of their current terms in 2028.

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. The majority of options would involve the need to reconfigure police force areas so that the mayor can assume the duties of the PCC.

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, prior to the abolition of their posts, on that approach. There is sufficient time, prior to the abolition of PCCs in May 2028, for the Government to secure changes. Worcestershire and other partner areas should not have to wait until 2032 to secure a mayor with full powers.

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 prominence 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 south 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 the options summarised below re are three most viable for the footprint of a Strategic Authority focussed on growth. We recognise that the other counties may have differing preferred solutions for their areas.

	Positives	Negatives
Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire	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 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 duties of the PCC. Warwickshire's governance maturity and proximity to Coventry's innovation assets strengthen the case for collaboration and early delivery of devolved powers.	Restructuring police services would involve splitting West Mercia Police and merging the part covering Herefordshire and Worcestershire with Warwickshire Constabulary, enabling the mayor to take on the PCC powers for the entire area. Herefordshire and Worcestershire ICB clusters with Coventry and Warwickshire, creating partial overlap with the West Midlands Combined Authority (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.
Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire	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 also all house cathedral cities which enjoy a shared cultural heritage through the Three Choirs Festival. 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.	This arrangement would necessitate splitting West Mercia Police and merging the part covering Herefordshire and Worcestershire with the Gloucestershire Constabulary, enabling the mayor to take on the powers of the PCC 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.

	Positives	Negatives
Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Warwickshire	This would have a population of a little over 2 million. 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 investment. It would allow the mayor to take over three fire and rescue services.	There would be a need to split West Mercia Police and potentially merge the part covering Herefordshire and Worcestershire with either Gloucestershire and/or Warwickshire Constabulary, with the mayor assuming the PPC's powers. Wider re-clustering of ICBs may be necessary. While it aligns with most of the Herefordshire and Worcestershire and Coventry and 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.

Road signs on Worcester Bridge, Worcester

During this process the following options have also been assessed 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)
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 2 million. This devolution option provides opportunity for administrative consolidation and oversight in emergency services, with the mayor assuming control over two fire and rescue services.
Negatives	This is not the case with the south 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 of the West Midlands 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 weaker 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 PCC's powers for the whole area. Re-clustering ICBs is impractical, leaving Shropshire and Telford isolated, with no viable clustering opportunity.
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.

	West Mercia and Warwickshire	West Mercia
Positives	Serving a population of 1.9 million, this option aligns with Government guidelines and with public service boundaries. It would allow the mayor to assume the PCC's duties for West Mercia and Warwickshire police as well as taking 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 assume the PCC's powers 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	There is alignment with most of the Herefordshire and Worcestershire and Coventry and 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 ICBs, necessitating them to be clustered to align with the West Mercia footprint. The quality and availability of travel links across the area vary but it 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 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 Six:

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 and 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 the 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:

- **Two new unitary councils –** North Worcestershire and South Worcestershire will provide the strategic backbone, resources and coherence while keeping decision-making local.
- **Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) –** Democratic forums where Worcestershire residents, councillors and partners set priorities, influence service design and hold councils to account.
- **Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs) –** Operational multi-agency teams delivering services across Worcestershire, aligned to local priorities and prevention-focused outcomes.

"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. "

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 Forest 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.

"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 to 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.

Above: North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership roadshow, Bromsgrove

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."

Above: Customer Services, Wyre Forest

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.

Additional detail on the Roadmap for Worcestershire's NACs and INTs is provided in Appendix 8.

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.

"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."

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.

Left: CEPO team, Malvern Hills

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, Worcester 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 unitary councils will retain this capacity to align strategic oversight with neighbourhood delivery.

Top: Welland Theatre Group, Malvern Hills | *Bottom:* Canopies event space, Redditch

Case studies evidencing best practice community engagement	
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.

Left: Christmas market, Bromsgrove

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."

Left: Worcester Show | *Above:* Headless Cross Community Orchard Apple Day, Redditch

Section Five: 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.

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 to the north and south model for Worcestershire.

Principles for successful LGR delivery

Evidence from past reorganisations and the 2024 Grant Thornton study[64] highlights ten critical success factors for effective transition and delivery. These are presented in no particular order:

Proactive planning
Early mobilisation enhances risk management, establishes clear timelines, and ensures service continuity

Transparent governance
Implement open decision-making processes, featuring visible leadership, defined responsibilities, and strong program oversight and controls

Continued public services
Guaranteed continuous service provision through effective operational handovers and robust contingency strategies

Set a coherent vision and align transformation
A single, shared vision should guide all change activity to avoid duplication and fragmentation

Resident-centric design and communication
Structures and services that prioritise resident needs, complemented by timely and easily understandable communication

Staff support and inclusive culture
Engage staff early, provide support during transitions, and empower them to contribute to the organisation's future

64 Learning from the new unitary councils

Left: Street Cleansing team, Worcester | *Middle:* Parks team, Malvern Hills
Top right: Client Services team, Wychavon

Integrate technical and cultural change
Address both the structural and procedural aspects ("hard" elements) alongside behaviours, values and leadership ("soft" elements)

Future workforce planning
Assess current and projected staffing requirements to ensure the availability of appropriate personnel for future delivery

Financial sustainability
Achieve cost-effectiveness without compromising service quality, supported by sound financial forecasting

Rigorous oversight and assurance
Foster confidence through strong program management, diligent risk monitoring, and clear channels for issue escalation

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, in order to build understanding of the expected changes and to 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 in order 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

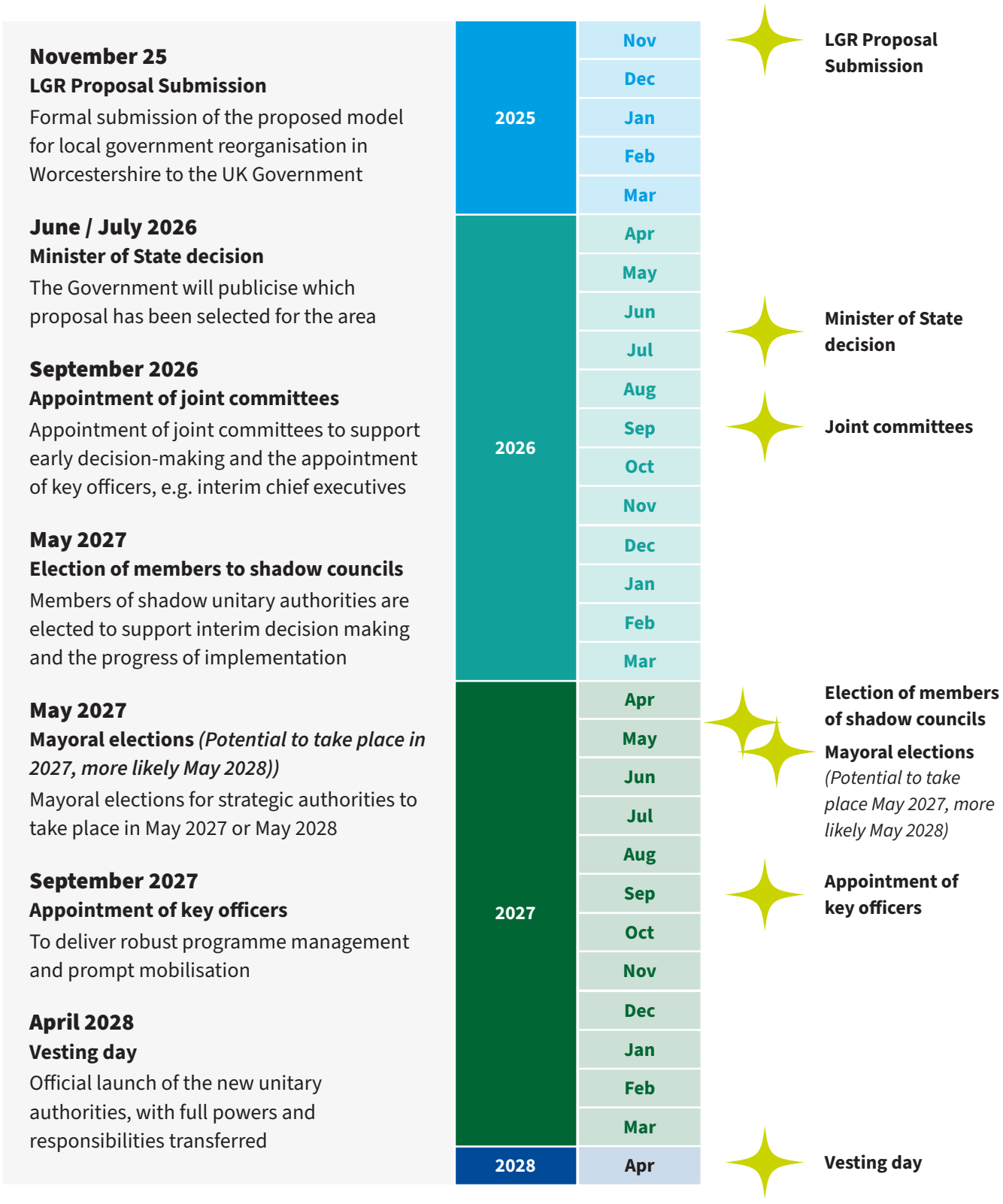
Implementation will be structured across four key phases, running from November 2025 to April 2028 onwards. The preparation phase will continue seamlessly from the proposal development, allowing for an efficient transition into the design phase once a decision is made. Following the anticipated decision 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. *Appendix 8 provides additional detail on implementation planning.*

Above: Redditch Innovation Centre CGI, Redditch

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 *November 2025 – June 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 LGR-related decisions with existing councils • Communicate to residents and partners the current position and outline of next steps • Submit strategic authority proposals in Spring 2026, subject to all councils agreeing and positive discussions with MHCLG. The ambition is to deliver devolution asap but it is recognised that Mayoral elections may not be possible until May 2028 • Develop and commence an implementation plan for the new Strategic Authority	**Individual unitary authority** • Baseline current data across councils to plan for merging all data systems • Agree 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 is keeping staff informed, engaged and supported in order to help them successfully navigate their way through LGR. This will be in addition to 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

Phase	Priority activities	
2. Design *July 2026 – May 2027*	**Joint collaboration** • Plan and deliver elections for shadow authorities for the new unitary areas • Establish Joint Committees for the proposed local authorities and associated governance infrastructure • Potential for 2027 Mayoral elections (more likely May 2028)	**Individual unitary authority** • Hold election for shadow authority members • Expand programme management and establish robust risk management and quality assurance frameworks • Initiate detailed work on ICT infrastructure and 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 regarding progress of LGR and brings 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

Phase	Priority activities	
3. Transition *June 2027 – March 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 one 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 one command centre for monitoring, issue resolution, and rapid response during the initial launch
4. Go-Live *April 2028 – onwards*	**Joint collaboration** • Formation of shadow authorities; dissolution of joint committees • Establishment of the strategic authorities (dependent on timeline for Mayoral elections)	**Individual unitary authority** • Ensure stability and continuity of services from day one • 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 one requirements

To prioritise activities, it was important to identify key absolute requirements for day one 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.

Minimum requirements for day use

Activities which will support the initial running of the new unitary authority

- **Clear vision and strategy:** Both unitary councils must have a defined overarching direction to guide initial operations
- **Strong governance processes:** These are vital to support decision-making during the transition process and the organisation of the two new unitary councils
- **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 to be kept informed through regular updates and training, to prepare for new ways of working
- **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 to be agreed and sourced

Ambitions for day one

Activities that will create a more efficient day one for the running of the new unitary councils

- **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
- **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

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 achieving more positive experiences for colleagues
- **Co-location:** Bringing teams together physically fosters collaboration, streamlines operations, and building a unified identity for the new council
- **HR alignment:** Ensuring harmonisation on terms and conditions, and implementing voluntary and compulsory redundancy programmes as required

Above: Pershore train station, Wychavon

Appendix One: 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 residents' 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 LGR. Following further appraisal, the 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 the five borough, city and district councils' decisions in September.

The letters encouraged collaboration with the five councils commissioning this proposal and asked Worcestershire County Council and Wyre Forest District Council to support a 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 borough, city and 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 residents' 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 LGR were developed collaboratively through member briefing sessions and discussions with Chief Executives and Leaders from the commissioning councils. 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 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 each council's 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 have 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 Two:
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.

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, Malvern Hills, , Redditch, Worcester and Wychavon to ultimately favour the north and south model, resulting in five of seven Worcestershire 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.[65]

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:

- The transfer of all statutory and non-statutory services, functions and operating models to the two new unitary councils.
- 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 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.

65 Population estimates for England and Wales – Office for National Statistics

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":

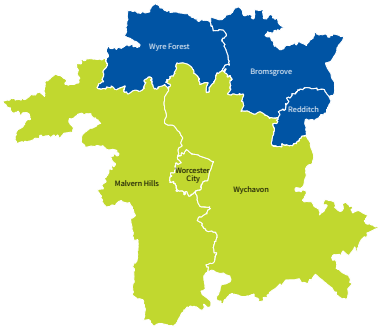
- **High (green):** Fully meets the criteria
- **Medium (amber):** Partially meets the criteria
- **Low (red):** Does not meet the criteria

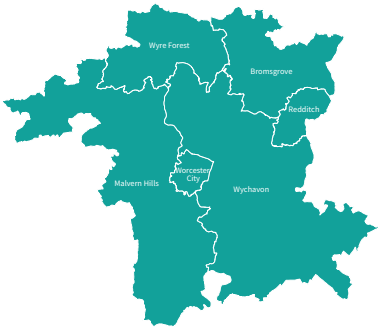
This scoring was supported by a summary of evidence and rationale, drawing on both data and qualitative insights. The process ensured a consistent and transparent comparison of options against Government expectations. The summary of this evaluation is provided below.

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 District Council.

Figure 6.2.1 Unitary options under review and population figures





	North and south model		One unitary model
	North Bromsgrove, Redditch, Wyre Forest	**South** Malvern Hills, Worcester, Wychavon	**Worcestershire** Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills, Redditch, Worcester, Wychavon, Wyre Forest
Population 2024[66]	293,445	327,915	621,360
Population 2032	300,113	345,053	645,166
Population 2047	314,356	373,506	687,862
Geographic area (km2)[67]	466	1,254	1,741
Population density (people/km2)	629	261	357
Population in rural output areas[68]	12.6%	35.2%	23.9%
GVA (£ million)[69]	7,976	9,541	17,517
GVA per capita (£)	27,181	29,096	28,190

66 Population estimates for England and Wales – Office for National Statistics
67 Standard Area Measurements for Administrative Areas (December 2023) in the UK | Open Geography Portal
68 2021 Rural Urban Classification – Office for National Statistics
69 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. Has a longer transition cost payback period of 3.9 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.	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. 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.

4. Working together to understand and meet local needs	
North and south model	**One unitary model**
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%) among those who selected a model. Effectively addresses residents' 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 residents' 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. 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.	Possesses the economic power and scale to deliver regional priorities, aligning with MHCLG guidance for strategic authorities due to its significant population (approximately 621,000). 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). 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	**One unitary model**
HIGH	**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. Emphasises 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 the borough, city and district councils to the unitary council. Requires adopting a localised approach to commissioning and joint working with VCSEs, recognising varying scales of operation.

Appendix Three:
Financial case for change

Supporting financial context for Government Criteria 2: Right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.

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 adult social care and children's services, 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 councils' 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 county levels. While the borough, city and district councils 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 their resources to fund the cost of reorganisation, which is likely to be through a mixture of using 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[70]	Net revenue budget (£m)[71]
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
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.

70 Individual council statement of accounts
71 Medium Term Financial Plans 2025/26

Figure 6.3.2 Key data comparison of the unitary model options regarding financials and demand

		North and South model	
		North	South
Financial Demand[72]	Net revenue expenditure (£m) * (2025/26)[73]	279.3	298.1
	Council tax base (number of band D equivalent properties) (2024)[74]	100,154	120,896
	General fund balance (£m) (2025/26)[75]	33.1	36.1
	% 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%

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.

72 Provided by authority
73 Provided by S151s / published budget reports
74 MHCLG Council Tax Requirement Stats
75 Individual councils' statement of accounts

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 Officer 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 £2m of '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 S151 Officers, 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 Officer 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 3.9-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 unitary 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 result, 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 – 3.9 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	1.4 years	3.9 years
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 council. 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 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 LGR, primarily arising from removing duplication between district and county council 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 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 councils	16.23

Categories of saving

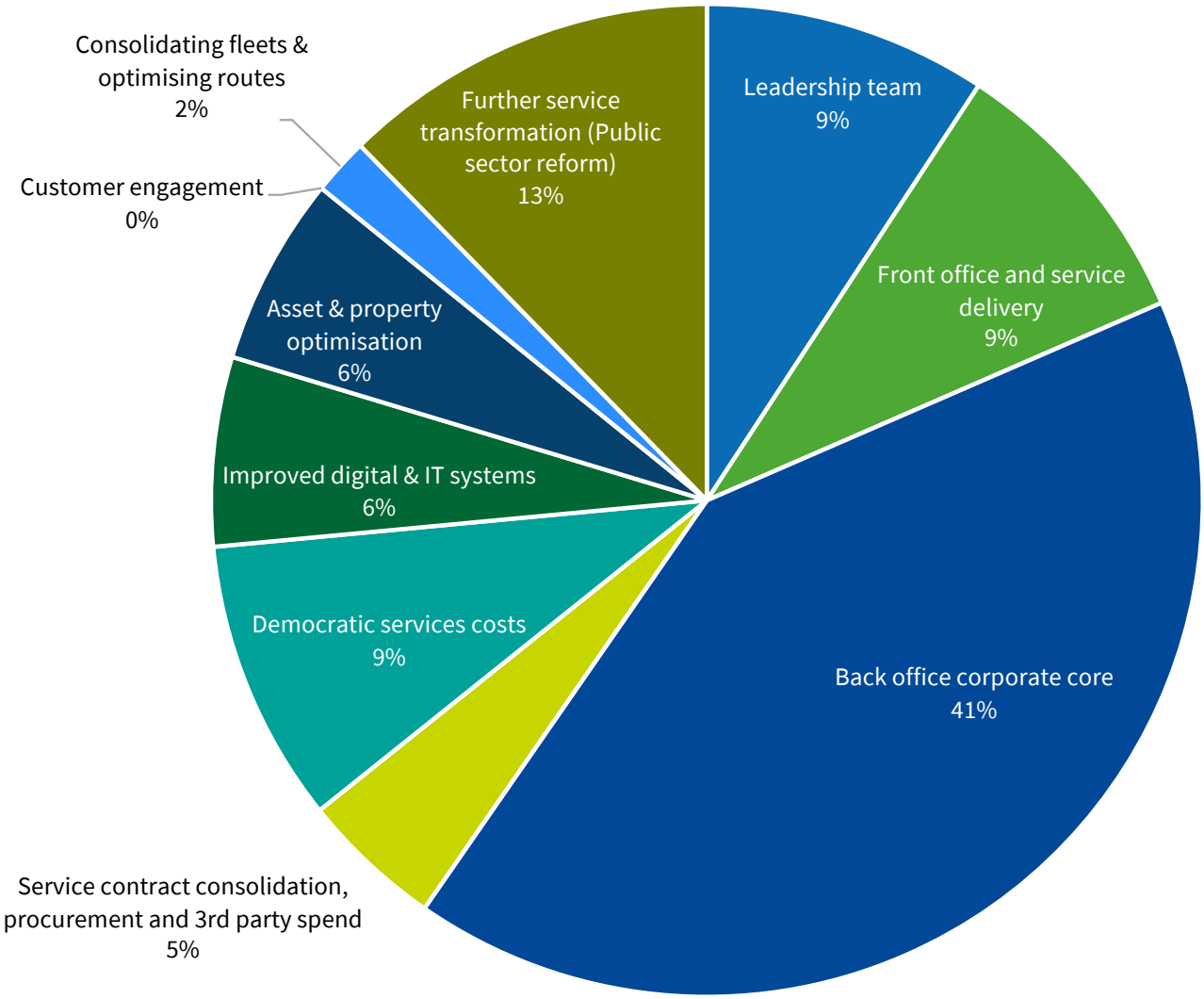
As part of benchmarking LGR revenue savings, categories of savings have been identified to provide an indication of the expected breakdown of savings.

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 and third 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 and 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 administrative overheads.
Asset and property optimisation	Reviewing property portfolios to ensure alignment with the councils' overall objectives and community needs.
Consolidating fleets and 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 residents in the areas covered by the new councils 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 council, 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 councils. 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 and 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 one of the new councils. 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 and 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 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 one 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 councils	19.83

Categories of implementation cost

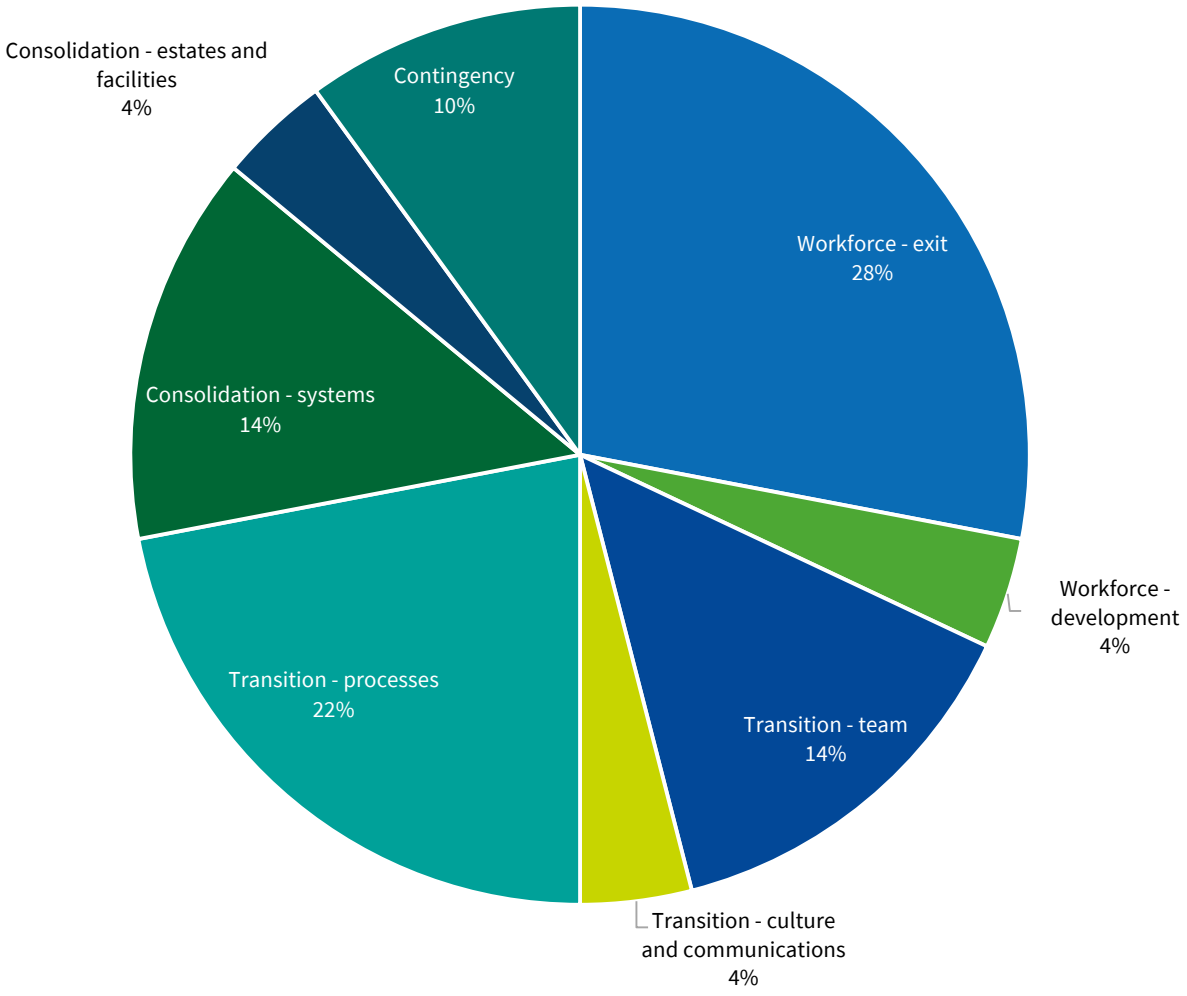
Categories of implementation costs are:

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 councils. 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.

Five-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.

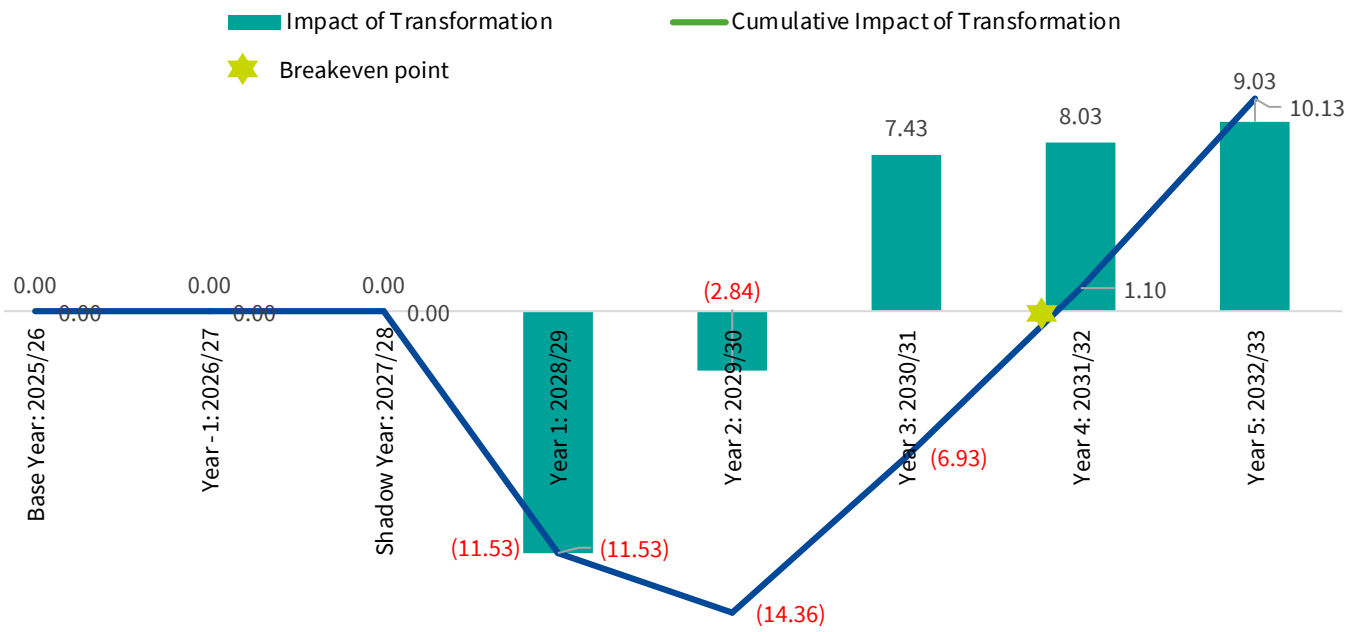
Savings are introduced on a phased basis, with partial realisation in year one and full recurring savings achieved by year five, consistent with the time needed to embed organisational redesign and transformation.

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 North and South Worcestershire model, full payback is achieved within approximately 3.9 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 3.9 years when benefits outweigh expenditure.

Figure 6.3.13. Cumulative financial benefit and payback period by LGR option

		One unitary		North and south model	
Modelling year	**Financial year**	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 Four:
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)[76]	293,445	327,915	621,360
Geographic area (sq km) (2023)[77]	466	1,254	1,741
Population density (people per sq km) (2023)	629	261	357
65+ population (2023)[78]	66,139	76,957	143,096
Population 2032 estimate[79]	300,113	345,053	645,166
Population 2047 estimate	314,356	373,506	687,862

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)[80]	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)[81]	101,006	124,123	225,129
Council Tax band D (average) (£) (2023)[82]	2,307	2,239	2,273
Retained business rates (£million) (2024–25)[83]	245	293	538
Estimated budget gap	41.4	57.3	98.7
Short-term borrowing[84]	50.6	55.9	106.5
Long-term borrowing	346.5	250.1	596.6
Total borrowing	397.1	305.9	703.0

76 Estimates of the population for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland – Office for National Statistics
77 Standard Area Measurements for Administrative Areas (December 2023) in the UK
78 Population aged 65 and over – ONS
79 Subnational population projections for England – Office for National Statistics
80 Subregional productivity in the UK – Office for National Statistics
81 Council Tax Requirement (CTR) data for Billing Authorities in England, 2024–25 and 2025–26, MHCLG
82 Sourced on individual council websites
83 National non-domestic rates collected by councils in England: forecast 2024 to 2025 – GOV.UK
84 Data provided by councils

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) (April-June 2024)[85]	1.83	1.69	1.76
Unemployment rates (%) (October 23-September 24)[86]	2.89	2.97	2.93
Employment rate (18–64)[87]	81.9%	76.7%	79.4%
Economic activity (16–64)[88]	83.8%	78.2%	81.2%
Housing delivery test 2023 Measurement %[89]	1.73	1.33	1.53
5-year housing land supply (years)[90]	4.7	1.71	3.3
Rough sleeper count (Autumn 2023)[91]	13	44	57
Number of Households in TA per 1,000 pop. Apr-Jun 2024[92]	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 temporary accommodation in another local authority district Apr-Jun 2024	16	26	42

85 Tables on homelessness – GOV.UK
86 Unemployment – Office for National Statistics
87 Employment and employee types – Office for National Statistics
88 Economic activity status, England and Wales – Office for National Statistics
89 Housing Delivery Test: 2023 measurement – GOV.UK
90 Sourced from each council's website
91 Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2023 – GOV.UK
92 Tables on homelessness – GOV.UK

Figure 6.4.4. Children's Services and Education[93]

Metric	Two unitary councils		One unitary council
	North Worcestershire	South Worcestershire	Worcestershire
% of students receiving SEND 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**

Figure 6.4.5. Adult Services[94]

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.

93 Provided by councils
94 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: Page 84 options appraisal analysis (areas are ranked with 1 being the most deprived, 10 the least deprived)

Figure 6.4.7 Children looked after[95]

Number of children looked after at 31 March by LA for for Worcestershire & All English county local authorities

Area	No. of children looked after at 31 March					
	2018/19 Children	2019/20 Children	2020/21 Children	2021/22 Children	2022/23 Children	2023/24 Children
Cambridgeshire	773	717	640	593	635	649
Derbyshire	801	862	899	912	996	1,057
Devon	750	749	812	820	894	873
East Sussex	589	580	610	627	654	657
Essex	1,060	1,073	1,081	1,118	1,162	1,149
Gloucestershire	716	730	784	836	865	842
Hampshire	1,664	1,601	1,661	1,726	1,858	1,917
Hertfordshire	929	948	991	1,022	964	971
Kent	1,588	1,806	1,662	1,777	1,938	1,960
Lancashire	2,115	2,095	1,995	1,934	1,870	1,754
Leicestershire	583	654	706	696	681	726
Lincolnshire	611	622	680	736	728	754
Mean for All English county local authorities	965	987	1,008	1,026	1,064	1,054
Norfolk	1,186	1,105	1,083	1,089	1,215	1,152
Nottinghamshire	862	909	993	958	956	957
Oxfordshire	779	767	782	855	882	770
Staffordshire	1,173	1,218	1,242	1,303	1,385	1,307
Suffolk	865	936	946	915	981	930
Surrey	970	983	995	1,048	1,019	963
Warwickshire	722	755	861	821	778	805
West Sussex	705	806	891	861	886	906
Worcestershire	833	819	859	891	998	1,044

Source:
Metric ID: 6012, Number of children looked after at 31 March by LA

95 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

Rate of children looked after by local area for Worcestershire & All English county local authorities

	Children looked after rate, per 10,000 children aged under 18					
	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Area	Ratio per 10,000	Ratio per 10,000	Ratio per 10,000	Ratio per 10,000	Ratio per 10,000	Ratio per 10,000
Cambridgeshire	58	54	48	44	46	47
Derbyshire	53	57	59	60	65	68
Devon	52	52	56	57	61	59
East Sussex	57	56	60	61	64	63
Essex	34	35	35	36	37	36
Gloucestershire	56	57	62	66	67	65
Hampshire	59	57	59	61	66	67
Hertfordshire	35	35	37	38	36	36
Kent	48	54	50	53	57	56
Lancashire	85	84	80	77	74	68
Leicestershire	42	47	50	49	48	50
Lincolnshire	42	43	47	51	50	51
Mean for All English county local authorities	54	55	57	58	59	58
Norfolk	71	66	65	65	72	68
Nottinghamshire	53	56	61	59	58	57
Oxfordshire	54	53	54	58	59	50
Staffordshire	70	73	74	77	81	76
Suffolk	58	63	64	62	66	62
Surrey	38	38	38	40	39	36
Warwickshire	62	65	73	69	64	64
West Sussex	41	46	51	49	50	51
Worcestershire	71	70	73	76	84	87

Source:
Metric ID: 891, Children looked after rate, per 10,000 children aged under 18

Number of children looked after at 31 March by LA for for Worcestershire & All English county local authorities

	No. of children looked after at 31 March					
	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Area	Children	Children	Children	Children	Children	Children
Cambridgeshire	773	717	640	593	635	649
Derbyshire	801	862	899	912	996	1,057
Devon	750	749	812	820	894	873
East Sussex	589	580	610	627	654	657
Essex	1,060	1,073	1,081	1,118	1,162	1,149
Gloucestershire	716	730	784	836	865	842
Hampshire	1,664	1,601	1,661	1,726	1,858	1,917
Hertfordshire	929	948	991	1,022	964	971
Kent	1,588	1,806	1,662	1,777	1,938	1,960
Lancashire	2,115	2,095	1,995	1,934	1,870	1,754
Leicestershire	583	654	706	696	681	726
Lincolnshire	611	622	680	736	728	754
Mean for All English county local authorities	965	987	1,008	1,026	1,064	1,054
Norfolk	1,186	1,105	1,083	1,089	1,215	1,152
Nottinghamshire	862	909	993	958	956	957
Oxfordshire	779	767	782	855	882	770
Staffordshire	1,173	1,218	1,242	1,303	1,385	1,307
Suffolk	865	936	946	915	981	930
Surrey	970	983	995	1,048	1,019	963
Warwickshire	722	755	861	821	778	805
West Sussex	705	806	891	861	886	906
Worcestershire	833	819	859	891	998	1,044

Source:
Metric ID: 6012, Number of children looked after at 31 March by LA

Appendix Five:
High quality and sustainable public services

Further detail on how the two unitary councils will provide high quality and sustainable public services.

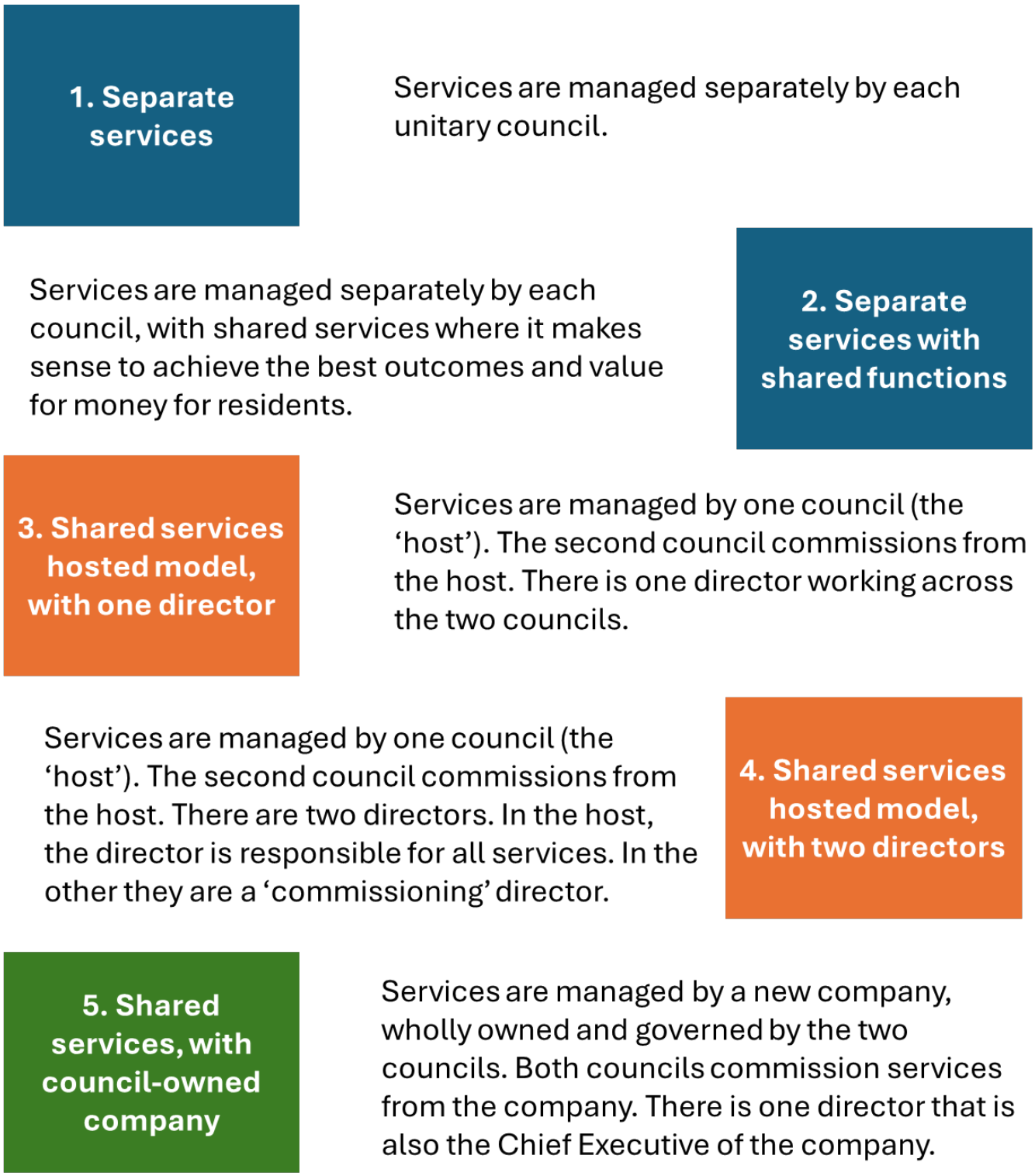
The proposed north and south model for Worcestershire aims to transform public services by enhancing local responsiveness, promoting prevention, and integrating with local partners, while ensuring robust governance and accountability for critical services like children's, adult, and public health.

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.

Service area	Description	Accountability arrangements
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 that public health is predominantly a commissioning function managed within a small team with existing processes and relationships.	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.
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 build strong links with the arrangements that are created to replace 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 will build strong links with the arrangements that are created to replace 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.

Service area	Description	Accountability arrangements
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. Maintenance and improvements will be locally led, ensuring responsiveness to community needs and more tailored transport investment.	Shared services will be overseen by a joint committee including the two council Directors and with equal member involvement from the two councils. 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 away 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 Six: Feedback from other organisations

Summary of feedback received from other organisations that has shaped our proposal.

Organisation	Feedback
Worcestershire VCSE Alliance	Ready to act as a system partner for both authorities, offering a unified VCSE voice while preserving local nuance. Highlights ability to co-design strategies, provide community insight, and support service integration and commissioning under the north and south model.
Heart of Worcestershire College	The north and south model for Worcestershire will enable tailored skills strategies, stronger local partnerships, and more responsive governance aligned to the distinct needs of North and South Worcestershire.
Hereford and Worcestershire ICB	Welcomes intention for two unitary authorities to work together at scale to deliver services that are provided at county level, believing this commitment to be of significant importance.
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 and Redditch	Supports north and south model for providing services that are responsive to their local communities. Highlights risks of a single authority being too large.
Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN)	VSCE members of BARN advocate for stronger role in north and south model. Warn against remoteness and one-size-fits-all approaches. Support co-creation and local representation.
Droitwich, Ombersley & the Rurals PCN	The north and south model enables more localised decision-making, and better reflects health and wellbeing needs of different communities. It could facilitate innovation and partnership at a neighbourhood level.
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.

Letter from Herefordshire and Worcestershire ICB

Kirkham House
John Comyn Drive
WORCESTER
WR3 7NS
simon.trickett@nhs.net

The leaders of the five Worcestershire District Councils
Sent via email to Rebecca.harrison@wychavon.gov.uk

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

Letter from Citizens Advice Bromsgrove & Redditch

50 – 52 Birmingham Road
Bromsgrove
Worcestershire
B61 0DD

Tel: 0808 278 7890
www.cabr.org.uk/contact

Alison McGovern MP
Minister for Local Government and Homelessness
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Our Ref: 11/25/CR

Date: 21/11/25

Dear Minister,

REF: Local Government reorganisation in Worcestershire

I am writing in support of the proposal that Worcestershire be reorganised into two unitary authorities, not a single Countywide entity.

Whilst the scale of our operations is markedly different, Citizens Advice services and local government do face the same challenge when looking at the best organisational size to operate at. The larger the geographical area covered, then the more economies of scale that can be gained, however, both organisations also need to provide a service that is responsive to all of their local communities. This latter task becoming considerably more difficult to do meaningfully as the area covered grows larger.

It is our firm belief that whilst a single county authority would initially look attractive in cash terms, it would be unable to effectively hear the views of its constituencies, leading to decisions that are far more heavily influenced by political or bureaucratic voices. In the long term, as these decisions are likely to be less effective and sometimes damaging, this will ultimately cost more.

In the particular case of Worcestershire there is also a very definite distinction between the culture within the northern three Districts, which are a mix of urban and rural with half a face towards Birmingham; and the southern Three Districts that are far more rural and feel more part of "The Marches". This would almost inevitably mean that even good decisions would almost certainly be seen as biased, creating political tensions and once again, poor local government outcomes.

Two of the three districts in both the north and south of the County already share many back office functions, and having done that journey once will have learnt many of the key lessons needed to bring the third district into the fold relatively easily and with less disruption.

In summary we believe that the two unitary option for the County offers the best choice in terms of finding economies of scale whilst maintaining Local Government effectiveness, and will ultimately cost less in the long term as a result.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Chris Roberts
Chief Executive - Citizens Advice Bromsgrove & Redditch

Letter from Bromsgrove and Redditch Network

Bromsgrove and Redditch Network

c/o The REDI Centre, 54 South Street
Redditch, B98 7DQ
United Kingdom
E-mail: office@barn.org.uk
Telephone: 01527 60282

John Leach,
Chief Executive,
Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Councils
Walter Stranz Square,
Redditch
B98 8AH

21st November 2025

Dear John,

Re: Transforming Worcestershire

As you know, Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN) is the local **Council for Voluntary Service** – the infrastructure organisation supporting the amazingly diverse and active Voluntary and Community Sector across Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough.

Over the years we have worked closely with our members, and representatives of both Bromsgrove and Redditch Councils, to support local communities together. The relationship between us, the local VCS, and the District and Borough Councils is strong and valued, and over the years that partnership has made a real difference to our communities.

Local Government Reorganisation has the potential to significantly impact communities and the Voluntary and Community Sector. We have had ongoing dialogue with the VCS members of our Network regarding the proposals, both at our Network Meetings and one-to-one sessions. There is, of course, a diversity of opinion within the VCS, but there have been specific themes and issues that have emerged during consultations:

- Most of the VCS organisations we work with recognise the distinct characteristics of North and South Worcestershire that exist already – different demographics, different attitudes, different infrastructure. They were predominantly of the opinion that North Worcestershire and South Worcestershire authorities would better represent local identity.

- There was a feeling that a North/South Worcestershire split would be more likely to protect local assets that already exist because the authorities would be closer to communities, more familiar the assets, and would value them, whereas a whole countywide body may not appreciate the importance of those assets to specific local communities - there could be a risk of losing those assets vital to local residents.

BARN is a Registered Charity number 1122980 and a Company Limited by Guarantee
Company Registration Number 5814032 (England & Wales) Registered Office address as above

- VCS members that had been commissioned by Worcestershire County Council in the past often felt there was a "one-size-fits-all" mentality, where more generic services were provided that often did not reflect local need (although there was a recognition that this seemed to be improving more recently). Although that worked in some cases, working with Borough and Districts typically led to services and support that were much more responsive to communities. Although neither model will be replicated in the future arrangements, members expressed the view that the two-authority model would be more likely to commission according to local need than a county-wide authority.

- There was a general acceptance that a Worcestershire-wide model would likely save more money, and so potentially free up more money to be spent on services. However, there were repeated concerns that a Worcestershire-wide model would be too distant from communities, too large, and so money would most likely not be spent in a way that reflected community need or identity as well as the North/South model would. BARN members felt any benefits of the cost savings of the county model would potentially be offset by less appropriate services being provided.

- There have been several discussions about whether a two-authority model would amplify the North/South divide that most organisations recognise exists and create a greater "post code lottery" situation. Views were mixed, but most did not believe this would be a significant issue.

- Although this can be a dry subject for residents to engage with, BARN members who had discussed it with their volunteers or clients said they mostly preferred the two authority model because there is a belief it is the safest option (closest to the District model) and would ensure most of the money goes to the right areas.

As the local infrastructure body, BARN is committed to remaining a strong, independent voice for the VCS whatever the model chosen. As a sector-wide infrastructure body, BARN must be mindful of its role to represent all members and maintain a neutral position. We will work closely with council officers from the new authority however it is configured, alongside the VCS and local residents, for the benefit of local communities.

Although BARN itself will not advocate for one model over the other, in our discussions with our members they have predominantly expressed the view that a North Worcestershire authority will best reflect the local identities of Bromsgrove and Redditch, provide services better targeted at local need, and offer better value for money as services would be more tailored to local communities.

Gary Roskell
Chief Executive

www.barn.org.uk

Letter from Rooftop Housing Group

Rooftop Housing Group
70 High Street
Evesham
Worcestershire
WR11 4YD
Tel: 01386 420800
enquiries@rooftopgroup.org
www.rooftopgroup.org

Our reference: BW/LGR

25 November 2025

Letter sent via email to:
Vic Allison – Joint Chief Executive
Malvern Hills and Wychavon District Councils

Dear Sirs

LGR

I am writing to support proposals to reorganise Worcestershire into two unitary authorities.

Rooftop has worked across South Worcestershire for 30 years and knows and understands the towns, villages, communities and neighbourhoods which make up this unique and vibrant rural area.

While we fully understand the financial opportunities which scale provides, we remain proud and committed to our place-based model and have seen how some larger housing associations have grown and lost a level of connection to their local customers and communities. This has at times been reflected in lower levels of customer satisfaction and declining trust and reputation.

We also see first-hand how much local delivery matters to our customers. We know they value having named Neighbourhood Officers allocated to their patch, and senior managers who are knowledgeable and committed to the local area. This matters to people.

In Worcestershire, we also see a clear distinction between the people, culture, and economic and social landscape of the northern districts which orbit 'Greater Birmingham' and the three rural districts in which we work. This difference is very real – and is a key reason why we have never focused on expansion of our operations into the north of the county. Our own vision and values recognise this in our stated commitment to 'South Worcestershire' as we see it, where we already have a leading example of local government excellence in Wychavon and Malvern aligning management and service provision.

Furthermore, our experience of county-wide provision highlights the potentially problematic issues of scale – our district councils are responsive and effective to us and to local need. The county has never been able to replicate these levels of delivery at that much more extensive county level. Any move to a single entity will require extensive and expensive mitigation measures to deliver a 'locality model' which already exists very effectively in two of the three southern district councils.

No system is perfect of course and financial pressures demand change. Of the two options proposed, it is clear to me that creating two unitary authorities best balances the needs of local people and the requirements to deliver Value for Money.

Yours faithfully

[redacted]

Boris Worrall
Group Chief Executive
For and on behalf of Rooftop Housing Group Limited

Letter from Worcester Warriors

Mr Vic Allison
Wychavon District Council
Queen Elizabeth Drive
Pershore
WR10 1PT

Friday 21 November 2025

Dear Mr Allison,

I'm writing to offer my firm support for the two-unitary-council proposal put forward by Wychavon District Council, Malvern Hills District Council, Redditch Borough Council, Worcester City Council and Bromsgrove District Council.

Since becoming Owner and Executive Chairman of Worcester Warriors Rugby Club in 2023, and through many years in the private sector, I've seen first-hand how critical local councils are in creating the conditions for growth, investment and long-term stability. The councils that make the biggest difference are those that stay close to their communities, understand the pressures and ambitions of local businesses, and can move quickly when opportunities appear.

A single unitary authority covering more than 600,000 people is, in my view, simply too large to provide that focus. That kind of structure would act as a deterrent to investment which can only have an adverse impact on the Worcestershire economy

A two-unitary model, by contrast, allows strategies to be shaped around the real economic differences between north and south Worcestershire. That clarity and relevance will be a major advantage in attracting both new investors and supporting those already committed to the county.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Christopher Holland
Executive Chairman

Sixways Stadium, Warriors Way, Worcester, WR3 8ZE | 01905 972700

Letter from Chris Bloore MP, Redditch and the Villages

CHRIS BLOORE MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

John Leach
Chief Executive Officer
Redditch Borough Council
Kingfisher Shopping Centre
5 George Walk
Redditch
B97 4HB

November 2025

Dear John,

I am writing to express my strong support for Redditch becoming part of a new Northern Unitary Authority as part of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposed in the Government's English Devolution White Paper.

Last year's White Paper made clear that, after fourteen years of austerity and sustained reductions in local government funding, the existing two-tier system is no longer capable of meeting the needs of our communities. Across the country, councils have struggled, and many have had to seek rescue from central government. Worcestershire is no exception. With the County Council now receiving Exceptional Financial Support and ongoing concerns about service quality—particularly in SEND provision following critical Ofsted and CQC findings—it is evident that the current structure is no longer fit for purpose.

Against this backdrop, five Worcestershire councils—Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills, Redditch, Worcester City, and Wychavon—have come together to develop a positive, forward-looking case for change. Through collaboration, shared evidence, and collective ambition, they have concluded that a more efficient, financially sustainable, and responsive system of local governance is essential.

A key element of the proposal is the creation of two new unitary councils that reflect the distinct cultures, histories, and identities of North and South Worcestershire. Under this model, North Worcestershire would comprise Redditch, Bromsgrove, and Wyre Forest, while South Worcestershire would include Malvern Hills, Worcester City, and Wychavon. It is important to be clear that this is not about breaking up Worcestershire. Our county will remain whole. What is changing is simply how local government is organised, so that we have structures that properly reflect the different needs, priorities, and identities within Worcestershire.

Member of Parliament for Redditch and the Villages

chris.bloore.mp@parliament.uk 01527 362815 www.chrisbloore.co.uk

Chris4Redditch @chrisbloore

Public support for this model is strong. In the summer consultation, 62.5% of residents expressed a preference for the North–South two-unitary structure, making it the only option shaped and endorsed by local people and stakeholders.

For many in Redditch, Worcestershire County Council has not been able to drive the economic development the town urgently needs, nor has it been able to deliver the standard of public services that my constituents rely on. A new Northern Unitary Authority offers the opportunity to address these longstanding challenges by creating governance that genuinely understands and prioritises Redditch's needs, while still keeping us firmly within the wider Worcestershire family.

For Redditch, joining a Northern Unitary Authority would mean more preventative public services, more empowered and connected communities, and more responsive decision-making rooted in local priorities. It would allow for better housing that supports healthier lives, stronger and more tailored local economies, and infrastructure planning that reflects the specific demographic and economic needs of North Worcestershire. It would also enable neighbourhood-based service delivery that strengthens long-term financial sustainability and provides better value for residents.

Above all, this is the option supported by the people. The two-unitary arrangement represents not a break from Worcestershire, but a modernisation of how Worcestershire is governed. It strengthens our county by ensuring that local government reflects the real differences in communities, economies, and priorities across the area. For Redditch, becoming part of a Northern Unitary Authority is the logical, locally supported, and forward-looking choice.

I therefore fully endorse Redditch's inclusion in the proposed North Worcestershire unitary council and encourage decision-makers to act on the clear evidence and strong public mandate for this change.

Chris Bloore MP
Redditch and the Villages

Letter from Nigel Huddleston MP, Droitwich, Evesham and the villages

Nigel Huddleston MP
Member of Parliament for Droitwich, Evesham and the villages

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Mr Vic Allison
Wychavon District Council
The Civic Centre
Queen Elizabeth Dr
Pershore
WR10 1PT

12 November 2025

Dear Vic,

Wychavon District Council has asked local stakeholders and partners to submit their views about proposals on local government reorganisation (LGR). Please see a copy of my submission below.

Question 1 – How can we shape our proposal to support your organisation to deliver services, strengthen local partnerships, and achieve its goals?

The two-council option gives us the best chance on continuing to deliver on the local needs which residents care about and that Wychavon has successfully been doing for many years. This focus on local delivery in the current Wychavon area must be retained in any reorganisation.

However, there may be a legacy from the existing two-tier council structure that could impact larger-scale services (some of them a statutory responsibility) currently delivered by Worcestershire County Council (WCC). Where possible, we should explore whether collaboration between the two new Worcestershire unitary authorities on certain issues would help to deliver better outcomes for all residents. Areas for co-operation may include health and social care as well as support for business and enterprise, such as through the current Local Enterprise Partnership, where a county-wide approach could give the area greater economic pull. This could be practically and financially sensible.

Question 2 – Please let us know any other feedback and comments that you have regarding a two unitary model for Worcestershire, including your thoughts on risks, challenges and opportunities, and your views on ways to tackle these?

The two-unitary option mitigates against some of the concerns I had about planning (whereby Wychavon's green spaces and fields may be used to make up for shortfalls in areas such as Worcester and Redditch).

Telephone: 020 7219 5814 Email: nigel.huddleston.mp@parliament.uk

However, the current South Worcestershire Councils – which are proposed to form the South Worcestershire Unitary Council – already face a significant increase in housing requirements through the Government's changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The new authority will need to have a clear and coherent local plan in place to mitigate against "speculative development" and to ensure that we are able to build the right number of homes in appropriate places – with accommodating infrastructure. The new authority will also need to be continue the development of long-term infrastructure projects which are currently being handled by various authorities, such as the Worcestershire Parkway Garden Town. We need to make sure infrastructure needs and sustainability are properly considered.

The current South Worcestershire Allocations Policy (SWAP) already covers the three local authorities, so in many respects I hope there is some continuity. However, whilst demand continues to outstrip supply I would also encourage a new authority to review the allocations policy so we can ensure that it is as up to date and fair as possible.

If the current statutory responsibilities carried out by upper-tier authorities are directly transferred across to the new two-unitary structure, the ever-increasing cost demands which we already face could mean that services currently carried out by district councils, such as parks and leisure and sense of place, become underfunded and in the longer-term non-existent. Whilst at a parliamentary level we can try to address some of these pressures, I would welcome a commitment that the new authority would continue to carry out the services currently being provided by Wychavon – and that Wychavon residents receive their fair share of spending and attention, not just tax!

ENDS

I hope my response to the consultation is of interest, and please be assured I will continue to follow any further developments closely.

Yours s[redacted]

Nigel Huddleston MP

Letter from Tom Collins MP, Worcester

Tom Collins MP
Member of Parliament for Worcester

20 November 2025

LGR Responsible
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

To whom it may concern,

Local Government Reorganisation in Worcestershire

I am writing to offer my firm endorsement of the ***Transforming Worcestershire*** proposal for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Worcestershire.

There are five key reasons for my endorsement of this proposal in favour of the alternative *One Worcestershire* proposal:

1. Local Identity and Leadership
The North and South regions of the county have distinct identities – these have been emphasised and reenforced by the existing structures of local government, for example South Worcestershire district councils currently share strategic planning activities through the successful South Worcestershire Development Plan (SWDP).
In essence, the south of the county looks to Worcester as its representative centre, whereas the north of the county looks further northward to Birmingham and the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) area, which it borders.

2. Economic Sympathy
Just as the collective identities of the two county areas are different, so are their economies. The north of the county is home to various industrial businesses supporting the West Midlands automotive industry. Rail and road infrastructure serving the north Worcestershire towns create strong connections to the West Midlands conurbation whereas these links are indirect, bottle-necked or indeed missing to Worcester.
In the south of the county, Worcester and Malvern have been homes to academia and long-standing high-value innovation, and both Evesham and Pershore look to Worcester, channelling the rural economy to Worcester as the county town.
Local government administration will be most effective in delivering good economic strategy and effective delivery of well- designed and tailored services if boundaries map sympathetically to the economic realities.

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07543 467626
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3. Optionality for Devolution
The economic differentiators between North and South Worcestershire should also influence considerations around devolution and the development of a new Strategic Authority to the south-west of the WMCA. Strategic Authorities will have clear responsibilities for economic planning and infrastructure, and their boundaries should therefore reflect economic geography.
Creating separate Unitary Authorities for North and South Worcestershire would provide a degree of optionality for the final arrangement of Strategic Authorities (SAs). It is currently unclear (at least to me) how Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Gloucestershire and Herefordshire will be distributed into SAs, but I can see merit in any, or indeed all, of the three former of these counties potentially having feet in multiple SAs.
The *Transforming Worcestershire* proposal would facilitate either outcome for Worcestershire; the two resultant UAs could easily be in the same SA, but could also finally be allocated to different SAs without producing incoherent boundaries.

4. Successful Delivery
The South Worcestershire district authorities have a strong track record of delivery. Worcester City Council has faced very real financial pressures, serving an urban district that includes large areas of deprivation. However, it has consistently provided effective delivery of services, and has been able to adapt and respond to opportunities such as the Levelling Up (Culture) project to regenerate a key area of the city centre with the Scala performing arts centre. The success of the South Worcestershire collaboration of districts is also reflected in the South Worcestershire Development Plan which has exceeded expectations in housing supply and is bringing about one of the Government's flagship new towns at Worcestershire Parkway; Wychavon Town.
The *Transforming Worcestershire* proposal would implicitly and practically create much stronger opportunities for the existing community of talent and leadership in the districts to shape the cultures and development of the new UAs. This is a significant factor in my view.

5. A Fresh Start
It is my firm view that a disruptive impetus would be extremely healthy for the Worcestershire County Council organisation. Until recently, it has enjoyed a very long period of stability with a single party winning multiple terms with a strong controlling majority. In my view, this has eventually resulted in an inert environment for cultural development or challenge. We cannot face the challenges of the near future with further attempts at efficiency savings, but rather a transformational response is needed that emphasises prevention and real localised community engagement. It is a clear priority of our national Government to introduce a much more agile, responsive and partnership-focussed approach to governing. The *Transforming Worcestershire* proposal creates by far the best opportunity to see this transition embodied in local government in Worcestershire.

As a result of these considerations, I strongly support the ***Transforming Worcestershire*** proposal, and I urge the Department to select this as its preferred option. I would be very happy to discuss this further.

Thank you for all your work, yours sincerely,

[redacted]

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA
07543 467626
tom.collins.mp@parliament.uk

Appendix Seven: 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's Public Health Director and 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 borough, city and 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 the 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

- Staff surveys were undertaken
- Facilitated 14 focus groups involving residents, housing tenants, town and parish councils, and VCSE representatives
- Structured feedback was given by VCSE organisations, parish and town councils, public sector partners such as the Fire and Rescue Service, 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 Eight:
Implementation planning*

***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.**

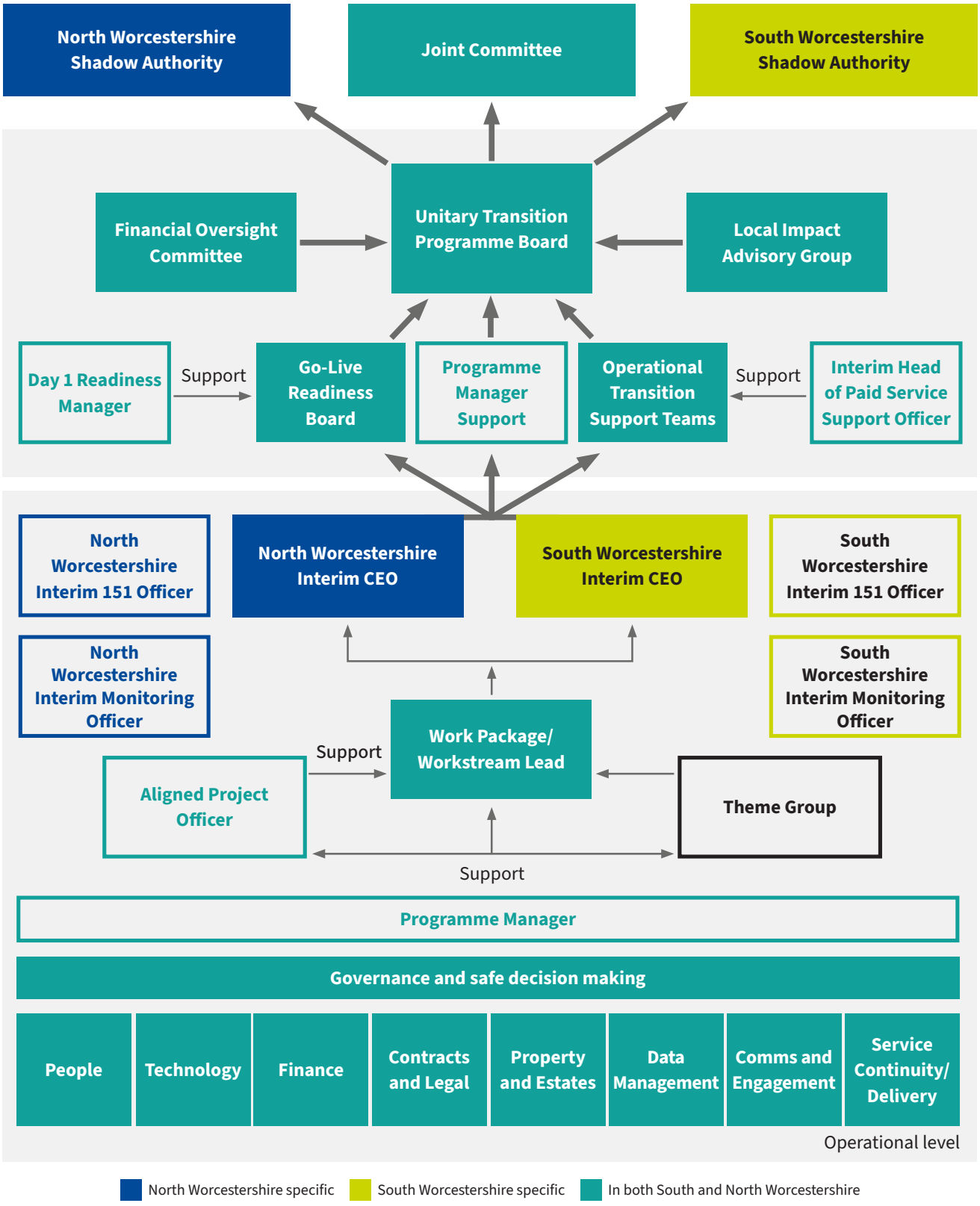
Governance and workstreams

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 in each of the two new unitary authorities to ensure all elements of the transition are effectively managed and supported. The proposed governance structure includes:

- **Joint committees:** 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. The joint committees for each of the new authorities will comprise of key/lead Members from the constituent outgoing local authorities. Where required, the joint committees for the two authorities will collaborate with each other regarding shared service arrangements.
- **Unitary transition programme boards:** Reporting to the joint committees of each respective proposed new local authority, these boards (one in each local authority) will be led initially by senior officers from each authority (and then the permanent chief executives, when in post) alongside a programme director. They will be responsible for overseeing strategic matters and managing key risks.
- **Financial oversight committees:** These committees will meet regularly to ensure sound financial management across councils.
- **Operational transition teams:** Operating as sub-groups under the programme boards, these teams will focus on specific areas covering frontline and back-office service delivery such as elections, waste and 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 groups:** Representatives from the newly clustered councils will provide local insights and ensure that the unique needs of each area are considered throughout the transition to two unitary authorities.
- **Go-live readiness boards:** These boards will oversee preparations for the official launch, including monitoring progress against the programme plan, tracking milestones, and ensuring completion of all day one 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, definitely 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
Communicating with staff about timelines and plans, gathering comprehensive data on all personnel, and assessing their skills and capabilities

Technology
Forming a technology working group, reviewing the existing infrastructure (including security), and gathering a single view of all systems and core system contracts

Finance
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

Contracts and legal
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

Property and estates
Data gathering and scenario planning concerning property and estates

Data management
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

Comms and engagement
Stakeholder mapping and strategy, identifying of setting up partner and provider forums, identifying communication channels, and identifying branding requirements.

Service continuity and delivery
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 consistent communication and allowing 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. Fortunately, Worcestershire councils have strong working relationships already which mitigates some risks seen in other areas, however there are still areas of concern.

Risk – Operational		Impact	Likelihood	Mitigation
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 are already a number of county services delivered at a local level that 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 lead to service disruption and resistance from staff.	Medium	Medium	High levels of collaborative working reduce 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 enabling them to be caught 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 with all colleagues early in the process. This will ensure there is documentation of the knowledge they hold / it is passed to colleagues who wish to remain and support the new unitary authorities.

Risk – Operational		Impact	Likelihood	Mitigation
Existing council relationships pre-LGR	The new unitary authorities will require a different type of working relationship, which may highlight culture clashes, and 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 compromises 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 there is not proper communication and support, leading to decreased morale and higher staff turnover.	Medium	Medium	Engaging staff who are moving into the new unitary councils in the design, so that they are helping to develop the change and it does not feel like the change is happening to them. Increasing communication between the change team 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.

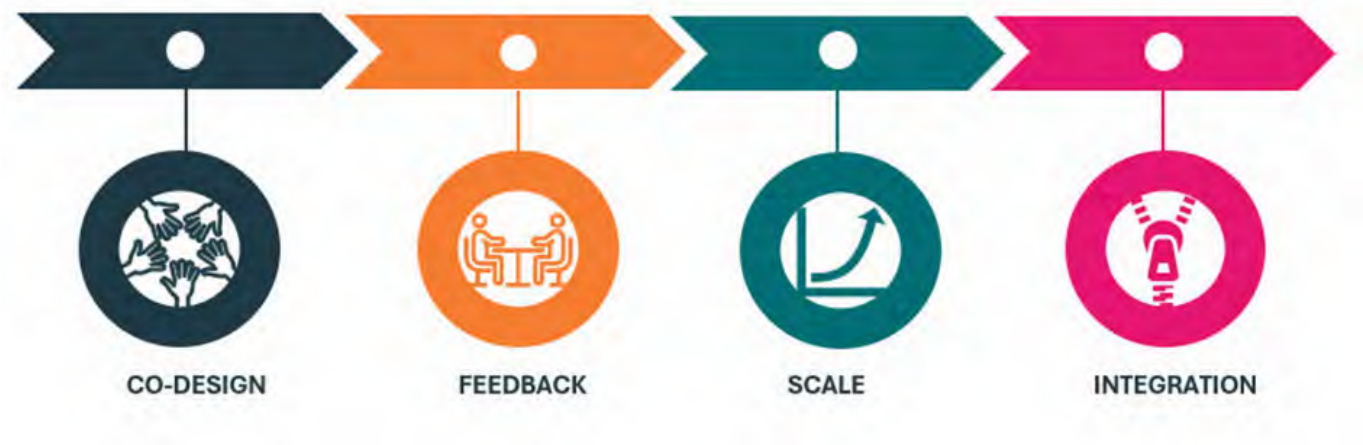
Risk – Operational		Impact	Likelihood	Mitigation
Capacity constraints	Staff will need to maintain current services while preparing for transformation creating capacity constraints. The dual burden can lead to burnout, reducing quality of existing services and compromising the transformation effort.	High	Medium	Review roles, and share capacity where possible, bringing in external support where required. Hire a team to carry out current roles, to allow staff who are moving to the new unitary councils to focus on the change and designing the new system.

Risk – Financial		Impact	Likelihood	Mitigation
Disaggregation of accounting services	There are technical challenges of integrating the different accounting software used in the different councils, alongside the risk of data transfers leading to potential errors in reporting, delays in payments and 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 to which risks can be escalated 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 make detailed plans for decision-making.	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. Set up flexible planning teams that allow plans to be tailored as information becomes available.

Risk – Reputational		Impact	Likelihood	Mitigation
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 unitary councils 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 and 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 unitary councils 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 and continuous improvement

- Further integrate 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 learn