



One Worcestershire

A single unitary council

Proposal Document – November 2025

One Worcestershire

Final Draft

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Introduction

Welcome to

One Worcestershire

Our proposal for a single unitary council in Worcestershire. Our approach is built on careful preparation, beginning change now, and taking prudent financial decisions from the outset, to deliver a stable and sustainable future.



This document sets out a **strategic case** for the new authority. This illustrates how residents, businesses, partners and our workforce will identify and connect with the new council, and the benefits of delivering services across a growing and prosperous population of over 620,000 residents. This section also outlines our aspirations for future devolution and the potential for the Heart of England to be an economic and cultural force on the national stage.



It outlines **how the new council will operate** and the steps we have taken to test these potential new ways of working with local stakeholders and the support for our approach from partners. This section also shares our emerging plans for implementation of the new council, and the transformation which is key to delivering the benefits of One Worcestershire.



Finally, it details a **financial case** for a single unitary authority, on the basis that it provides the most robust foundations for future stability and sustainability and the scale to deliver genuine transformation. This is particularly important in the context of the existing county council's Exceptional Financial Support arrangements.



Cllr Jo Monk
Leader
Worcestershire County Council



Cllr Marcus Hart
Leader
Wyre Forest District Council



01

One Worcestershire: Executive Summary

A summary of our proposal

The One Worcestershire proposal delivers...

A single unitary authority retaining the footprint of the current and long-established ceremonial county boundary, and supports the continuation of cooperation with statutory, private sector and voluntary partners. The proposal is focused on providing **the best possible outcomes** and **value for money** for residents and business, by creating simpler and more efficient access to services, a community-focused delivery model, and strategic leadership that has a local focus along with a regional and national voice.

Retaining key **social care, education and public health** services together will avoid costly and complex disaggregation of these services which will duplicate overheads, impacting on quality and outcomes. However, new links with **housing and homelessness services** will create opportunities for earlier support. The proposal also preserves current successful partnership arrangements for **waste disposal**, proposing that the new authority manages the whole process from kerbside collection to sustainable energy generation.

A **single elected council and leadership team** can provide a simpler decision-making approach with direct representation of residents by a single tier of councillors, with the size of the council increased to ensure the public can access the support of members. This **strengthens the centrality and importance of the ward councillor role** in representing their area and understanding residents needs, linking with a proposed **new approach for working with Town and Parish councils**.



The geography

Based on current **Worcestershire** administrative boundary and incorporating the districts of **Bromsgrove, Wyre Forest, Wychavon, Malvern Hills, Redditch Borough** and the **City of Worcester**.



The right size to deliver for the future

A resident population of over **621,000** with **26,900** businesses, generating **£14.9bn** in gross value added.



No requirement for disaggregation of services

The proposal builds a new council through consolidation and simplification. It will provide the best possible outcomes, the most economical process and will be the least disruptive option for residents, partners, providers and most employees.



Support for future devolution

A **single unitary council provides Worcestershire with the scale and influence to be a key player in negotiating a new regional partnership**. The unitary authority will share common challenges and issues with neighbouring former two-tier county areas.

Our approach to local government reorganisation

We recognise that local government reorganisation (LGR) is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for Worcestershire, and as such is an emotive and challenging decision for local people. Reflecting on this, our approach to developing this proposal has been:



Impartial

Our proposals have been developed by council officers with the support of PriceWaterhouse Coopers (PwC) without direct political involvement, with a focus on what is best for residents and businesses, and how we can deliver a financially sustainable future for Worcestershire.



Collaborative

We have committed to sharing our research and evidence with colleagues in all local district councils, recognising that though we differ on our view of the best model for future governance, we have a common interest in representing the challenges and opportunities Worcestershire faces. We have worked directly with **Wyre Forest District Council** since July 2025 to develop this proposal.



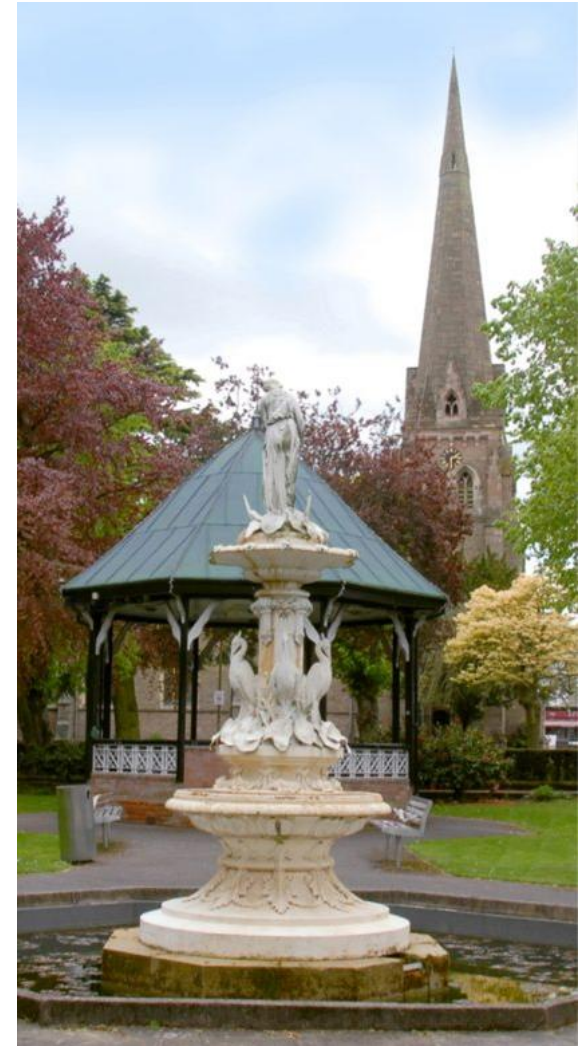
Evidence-based

We have engaged with experts within and outside the council to develop our plans, relying on a range of publicly available sources of information, in-depth analysis and experience gleaned from previous experiences of LGR and implementation of new unitary councils.



Open and accessible

We have delivered regular updates to the public through our website, via a dedicated LGR page available since March 2025. We also focused our annual series of summer 'road shows' at local events on the topic. As we approach the public consultation process, we have embarked on a public information campaign to ensure residents understand the process, the implications and the importance of LGR to the future of Worcestershire.



How does this proposal meet MHCLG priorities?

Our proposed single unitary council for Worcestershire would be a digitally driven and technology enabled organisation, which engages with the community and uses data to focus delivery where it is most needed.

The new council would be financially sustainable, driven by strong partnerships, commercial awareness, evidence-based decisions about how we deliver services, and through an empowered and flexible workforce. Throughout this document, we have referenced the Ministry of Housing,

Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) headline criteria shown here to make direct links between our proposal and the criteria set out in the invitation to two-tier areas, developed further by the feedback received by local areas and through the LGA-hosted 'frequently asked questions'.



The financial case for implementing One Worcestershire

The One Worcestershire proposal delivers benefits through...

- **No costs of disaggregation**, by retaining established and successful education, health and social care services;
- **Reduced costs of annual audit**; and
- **The impact of scale** in purchasing and providing services.

Implementation Programme costs will be offset swiftly by:

- the efficiencies realised from delivering a single tier of local government, including **reducing duplication and delivering efficiencies through economies of scale**; and
- **a comparatively rapid return on the initial implementation costs**, which are expected to be fully recovered within three years.

This enables action to build financial sustainability to deliver benefits more reliably, and sooner.

Implementation Benefits	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Scale: Reduction in third party spend	(£3,441,597)	(£5,162,396)	(£6,883,194)
Scale: Reductions in property costs	(£2,573,819)	(£4,221,063)	(£5,628,084)
Scale: Reductions in staffing costs	(£11,227,337)	(£16,841,005)	(£22,454,673)
Reductions in democracy and member costs	(£1,328,433)	(£1,328,433)	(£1,328,433)
Reductions in annual audit fees	(£600,000)	(£600,000)	(£600,000)
Implementation Benefits Total	(£18,571,185)	(£27,552,896)	(£36,294,384)

Implementation Costs	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
External comms, rebranding & engagement	£366,000		
External transition design & implementation	£3,202,500	£1,067,500	
Internal programme management	£1,427,250	£475,750	
Organisation closedown costs	£915,000		
ICT costs	£2,625,000	£875,000	
Costs of Pay Equalisation (recurring)	£4,212,515	£4,212,515	£4,212,515
Cost of redundancies	£6,375,640	£2,125,213	
Cost of actuarial strain	£11,802,656	£3,934,219	
Contingency	£9,277,968	£2,538,039	
Implementation Costs Total	£40,204,529	£15,228,237	£4,212,515

Impact of LGR Implementation	£21,633,344 cost	£12,324,659 benefit	£32,081,868 benefit
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Achieving financial sustainability

Sustainability is built into One Worcestershire from the beginning

Our proposal is based on a clear and deliverable financial plan which uses the support provided by Government and the opportunities presented by LGR to drive sustainability as a priority:

- **By using EFS to support our journey to sustainability** alongside the benefits of LGR and achievable levels of additional savings, One Worcestershire is expected to be delivering financial sustainability by 2030/31.
- This involves **a moderate use of reserves in the first year** to support the costs of delivering LGR. This totals **6.5%** of current combined usable reserves held by all councils in Worcestershire. With prudent financial management, the council could be making contributions to restore reserves by 2032.
- **A modest sale of assets in the first year of operation** also supports the delivery of LGR and delivers a balanced budget. This represents only **3.4%** of the total land and property assets of the single unitary council and does not compromise the investment and income which the new authority will derive from these critical parts of the area's physical and social infrastructure.

Opening Position – 2028/29	
Unfunded growth	£12,700,000
Shortfall from EFS	£43,600,000
Cost of LGR implementation	£40,204,529
Total additional pressures	£96,504,529
Council Tax Harmonisation	(£16,836,480)
Sale of Assets	(£23,891,897)
LGR Benefits	(£18,571,185)
Total increased income	(£59,299,562)

Balance	£37,204,967
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Funded by	
Use of Reserves or EFS	(£24,504,967)
Additional Savings Required	(£12,700,000)

Medium Term Projection - 2031/32	
Unfunded growth	£12,700,000
Shortfall from EFS	£43,600,000
Pay/hrs harmonisation	£4,212,515
Total additional pressures	£60,512,515
Council Tax Harmonisation	(£16,836,480)
Sale of Assets	£0
LGR Benefits	(£36,294,384)
Total increased income	(£53,130,864)

Balance	£7,381,652
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Funded by	
Use of Reserves or EFS	£0
Additional Savings Required	(£7,381,652)



Detailed financial plans can be found in Section 10 of this document.

The financial challenge in a two-unitary model

Dividing Worcestershire into two new councils would exacerbate existing inequalities and compound financial challenges

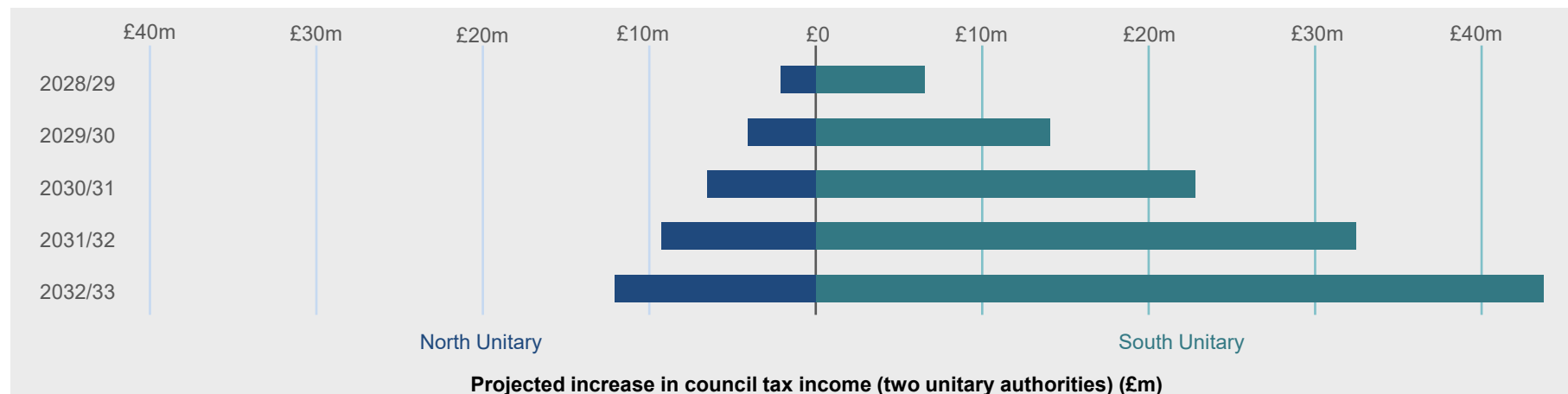
A new North Worcestershire unitary council would face the significant challenge of balancing greater levels of need for adult services in particular with a smaller share of the taxbase, while South Worcestershire would show very significant increases in income over the same period. This increasing inequity would soon result in dramatic differences in council tax rates, service sufficiency and delivery quality, and in the experiences of residents and businesses – creating a genuine postcode lottery.

Are shared services the answer?

Worcestershire has significant experience of delivering services through outsourcing or wholly-owned companies, including **Worcestershire Children First**. This was a success because:

- It was owned and funded by a single entity, Worcestershire County Council.
- Governance was provided by one director of children's service and one responsible lead cabinet member steering a clear, single vision for change.
- It was monitored against the performance of a single, clear set of indicators and outcomes.
- It was focused solely on improving services and outcomes rather than achieving efficiencies or cost reductions.

Given that none of the above conditions will be the case, the challenge of increasing need in the north and the imbalance in funding, it would be extremely unlikely that one organisation could meet the differing requirements of two unitary authorities, and a clear strategic steer for the organisation would be very difficult to align.



The strategic risks of disaggregation

Aside from the service-specific benefits of a single unitary authority which our proposal details in Sections 3 & 5 below, there are significant risks in dividing the current county footprint into two smaller unitary authorities.

The population of approximately 620,000 provides the scale, opportunity and links with key regional and local partners required to deliver sustainability and change. The risks at a strategic level of not bringing all seven councils together include:



Services planned at a population level, such as health prevention, transport and skills will be fragmented in two unitaries. This risks a variable service for residents living in relative proximity and isolates partners and providers such as Further Education Colleges or Primary Care Networks from wider populations which may naturally gravitate to their local town or village hub, regardless of local authority boundaries.



One Worcestershire is founded on a plan to consolidate enabling and support services including finance, HR, business support, governance and strategic planning. Early work in Worcestershire County Council has demonstrated the potential extent of this approach in improving services, reducing complexity and deliver ongoing cost reductions. This approach would not provide the same scale of benefits across two new unitary councils.



Disaggregation of critical services such as Children's Services and Adult Social Care could compromise the safety of service users, increase the cost of services, and will set back the considerable progress which has been made in bringing these functions to their current high standards. Any diversion from delivering services and putting in place the national reforms required will reduce the capacity of teams to meet local needs.



The funding position of two unitary authorities would be fundamentally unbalanced from the outset. The concentration of need for high-cost adult social care services, and schools facing financial challenge lie in the north of the area, while the greater portion of the taxbase is in the south. Currently, there is a degree of balance, and all residents pay relatively low rates of council tax. In a two unitary model, this would not be the case, with the burden of higher council tax rates falling disproportionately on the northern part of the county.



Partnerships are hard-won and built on trust. Fragmenting the network of partnerships in Worcestershire would complicate funding arrangements, commissioning plans, service eligibility across user groups and the ability to plan and act together in an emergency. Preserving and building on these partnerships, with closer relationships possible via a single Housing and Homelessness or public safety function for example, is a key benefit of a single unitary council.



The financial challenges faced by all councils requires them to delivering services more efficiently by reducing the duplication of functions. Two unitary councils will be challenged to deliver the efficiencies and benefits of LGR and will also find it more challenging to deliver the transformational opportunities which will provide the year-on-year efficiencies which support sustainability.

Transformation of the County Council begins now...

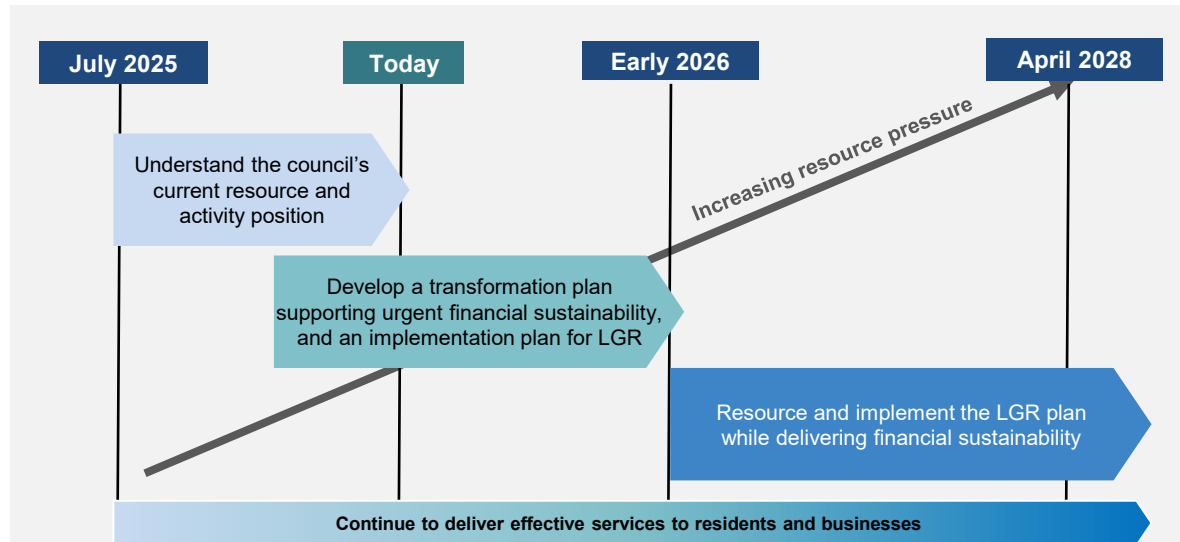
Implementing LGR to provide a 'safe and legal' local authority is only part of the story. The most significant benefits of reorganisation are unlocked by the transformative redesign of councils, services and partnerships which will be a fundamental part of the One Worcestershire plan.

However, there are significant challenges along the road to vesting day – and not least in the financial situation faced by councils, the growing deficit in the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant, and the increasing need for Adults and Children's Services, and to address homelessness.

We have determined that investing in transformation now is both critical to a sustainable future council, and to the successful implementation of LGR.

Delivering a single transformation plan for Worcestershire County Council, which can be extended to other predecessor councils once a clear decision on the future is made by government allows us to provide a clear roadmap to the public, to businesses and to our partners.

One Worcestershire



- 1 Design and implementation of a **new operating model** which embeds collaboration across directorates and teams in the new council
- 2 A **review of all council spending** to identify areas of high-cost or duplication for review and action to deliver efficiencies
- 3 Analysis of **how staff time is used across the county council**, to realign resources to meet residents needs, design new processes
- 4 Identified opportunities and a clear strategic roadmap for **using technology** to simplify customer interactions, deliver the benefits of AI and support staff to work smarter

Conclusion - the best option for Worcestershire's future

Only One Worcestershire:

Provides a pathway to financial sustainability which local government needs, and which the government's 'Plan for Change' is founded on.

Delivers the scale and regional impact which can drive economic growth and ensure everyone in Worcestershire benefits from future devolution.

Brings services together to meet changing local needs more efficiently, while making it easier for residents to deal with one council.

Will deliver long term transformation which will provide improved services, stable finances and effective governance.

Keeps critical services like social care, housing, education and public health in a single organisation to provide continuity and the best access to care and support.

Has a plan for local government reorganisation which delivers efficiencies rapidly and pays back investment swiftly.



The background of the slide is a photograph of a church tower, likely Worcester Cathedral, set against a backdrop of a forested hillside and a river. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The number '02' is prominently displayed in the upper right corner in a large, white, sans-serif font.

02

One **Worcestershire**: Context and background

National Context | Local Government Policy

The English Devolution White paper, launched by the government in late 2024 marked a distinct shift in the approach to re-organising local government in England.

The paper signalled a move from the 'devolution deal' required by previous administrations, towards a new approach founded on an assumption that significant change is needed across the country to improve local services and to fundamentally change how they are funded to ensure sustainability.

The white paper outlined three specific ambitions:

- 1 for increased powers and autonomy to be vested in local and regional government.
- 2 for these new entities to cover **larger geographies** and which resonate with local identity, but which retain logical boundaries and avoid 'islands' between reorganised areas.
- 3 for this radical change to **happen at pace**, hastening the delivery of benefits to everyone, and restoring local government's financial stability.

The white paper effectively provided two distinct but related routes to the consolidation of governance:

Reorganisation – through the creation of new unitary authorities which will ultimately remove the 'two tier' model of delivery from the map. This may involve the creation of a new unitary council which amalgamates the current county and districts into a single council, or creation of multiple unitary authorities to replace counties by bringing together groups of districts with disaggregated or shared county services.

Devolution – through the creation of Strategic Authorities with or without a Mayor, which coordinate and commission services at a regional level. This could include the collaboration of multiple unitary authorities to provide a strategic regional authority in a similar form to that currently in place in the West Midlands or West of England. The white paper includes specific ambitions and incentives for these authorities to drive economic growth, received devolved funding and responsibilities, and lead intra- and inter-regional transport initiatives.

These routes to devolution can be considered on a continuum, with reorganised and unitarised authorities providing a necessary building block for the creation of future strategic authorities.

Reorganise

Consolidate

Delegate

National policy drivers

Local government reorganisation involves restructuring sometimes long-established arrangements to improve governance, service delivery and financial sustainability.

Improved service delivery and local accountability

A single tier of local government is an opportunity to better coordinate service provision, improve efficiency and to deliver consistency in how funding is provided and policy implemented. Clearer accountability of elected members and officers to residents and businesses with strengthened scrutiny of service quality and value.

Building capacity and organisational expertise

LGR provides a unique opportunity for councils to bring together expertise to develop and strengthen capacity in commissioning, procurement and technology which will drive modern governance and improve value for money in councils of the future.

Restoring financial sustainability

Growing funding pressures and increasing demand for services challenge councils to deliver services differently, to prioritise prevention, and to identify efficiencies which create the capacity for investment in service quality and reduced costs to the taxpayer at a local and national level.

Delivering devolution

Devolution has proven its ability to provide the capacity for local exercise of strategic powers, and to leverage resources to enable wider public service reform. Strategic authorities have demonstrated the power of regional partnerships in delivering policing, transport and health services based on local need.

Empowering communities

The power of communities to organise and support each other was evident during the Covid-19 pandemic, where councils provided enabling infrastructure for community-led action. Further improving the relationships between a single unitary council and local residents and businesses will empower communities to ensure policies reflect what is important to them, through participation in ongoing conversations in neighbourhoods.

Local government reorganisation sits at the interface of national and local policy:



Sustainable public finances



Skills for innovation in an advanced tech economy



Education which provides the best start for all



Health services which work for everyone, without long waits



Barriers to delivering housing and infrastructure removed



Empowered communities which strengthen public safety

The complex challenges faced by councils

Since the implementation of austerity policies by the coalition government in 2010, local authorities at all tiers have faced exceptionally challenging times.

Councils have faced a need to find year-on-year savings despite pressure to deliver statutory services at increasing cost and volume. This has particularly impacted upper-tier councils which are responsible for the bulk of demand-led care and support services.



Financial pressures

Local government in the UK is facing significant financial challenge. The LGA estimates a funding gap of **£4 billion** over the next two years. Despite additional funding from the government, many councils still need to make significant cost savings following a long period of austerity and increases in council tax to balance budgets are inevitable. This financial strain affects the delivery of local services and the ability of councils to plan for the future and impacts the standards of living of Worcestershire's residents.



Demand for services

Population growth, an ageing demographic, and increasingly complex needs being met in the community are driving increased demand for higher-cost services. This is particularly the case in special educational needs and disabilities, with deficits in the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) now impacting general funding, and likely to become a critical balance sheet item for local authorities in future.



Rising costs of service provision

The rising costs of commissioning and delivering social care for adults and children are a major cost pressure. Over the past five years, **adult social care costs have increased by 9%** in real terms, while **children's social care costs have risen by 18%**. These services are heavily regulated by central government, and there are few avenues available to local authorities to reduce costs and demands whilst still delivering statutory requirements and meeting the expected standards.



Benefits for residents and businesses

There are three primary areas where residents and local businesses will see benefits from Local Government Reorganisation:



Efficiency

Many local authorities, following the challenges of austerity and Covid-19, are facing critical financial challenges. The delivery of services at scale is critical to finding the efficiencies needed to stabilise finances, and to shape a sustainable future based on new ways of funding local services.



Transparency

The complexity and variation in local government structures around the country challenges citizens to understand how their council taxes and business rates are spent, how effectively services are performing, and most importantly how to secure the support they need at the right time. A simplified structure for local government offers an opportunity to reconnect communities with their councils and elected representatives.



Growth and prosperity

Continued and accelerated growth which reaches all parts of Worcestershire requires a strategy which reflects local expertise and harnesses regional priorities, aspirations and opportunities. The conditions for future prosperity will be influenced by new infrastructure and investment which rely on a broader focus across a wider geography than that offered by planning across two tiers of governance.

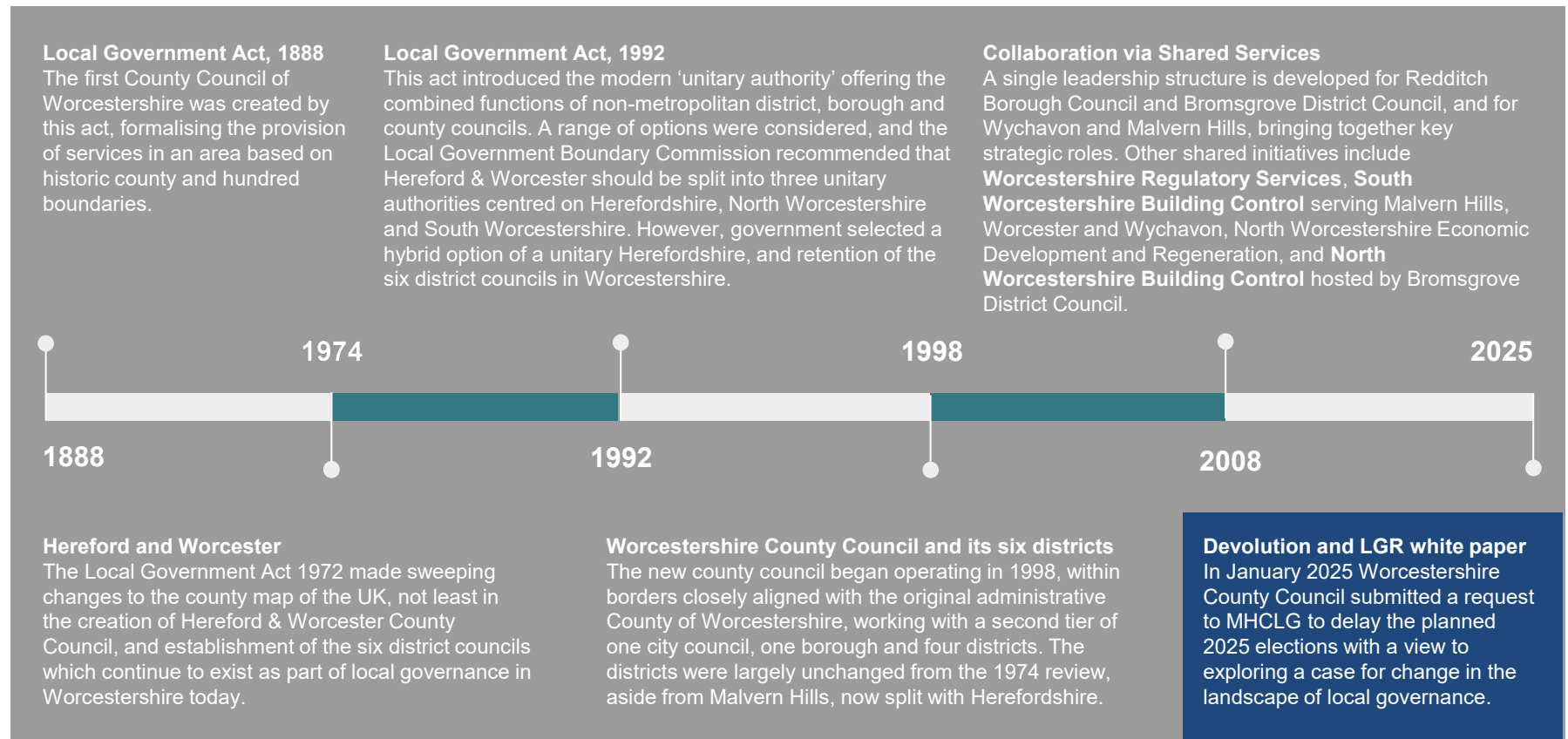
The national relationship with local government is changing. As a result, councils are facing a challenge to align to a new environment based on a single tier of governance, increased regional collaboration, and incentives to act regionally. The Government is actively pursuing LGR to create simpler and more efficient local structures which will form a pathway to greater devolution. Although local authorities have adapted to local challenges, finding ways to collaborate across the two tiers, the pace required to respond means that reform is essential.



Local government in Worcestershire

The history of local government in Worcestershire is complex, with shifting boundaries and responsibilities, often on account of changes outside the county, in the wider West Midlands.

Reorganisation is not new to Worcestershire or its constituent districts, and there has historically been support for a range of positions. However, there is a longstanding continuity in the boundaries, identity and culture of Worcestershire which persists today.



Geography and governance

Local governance in Worcestershire is complex

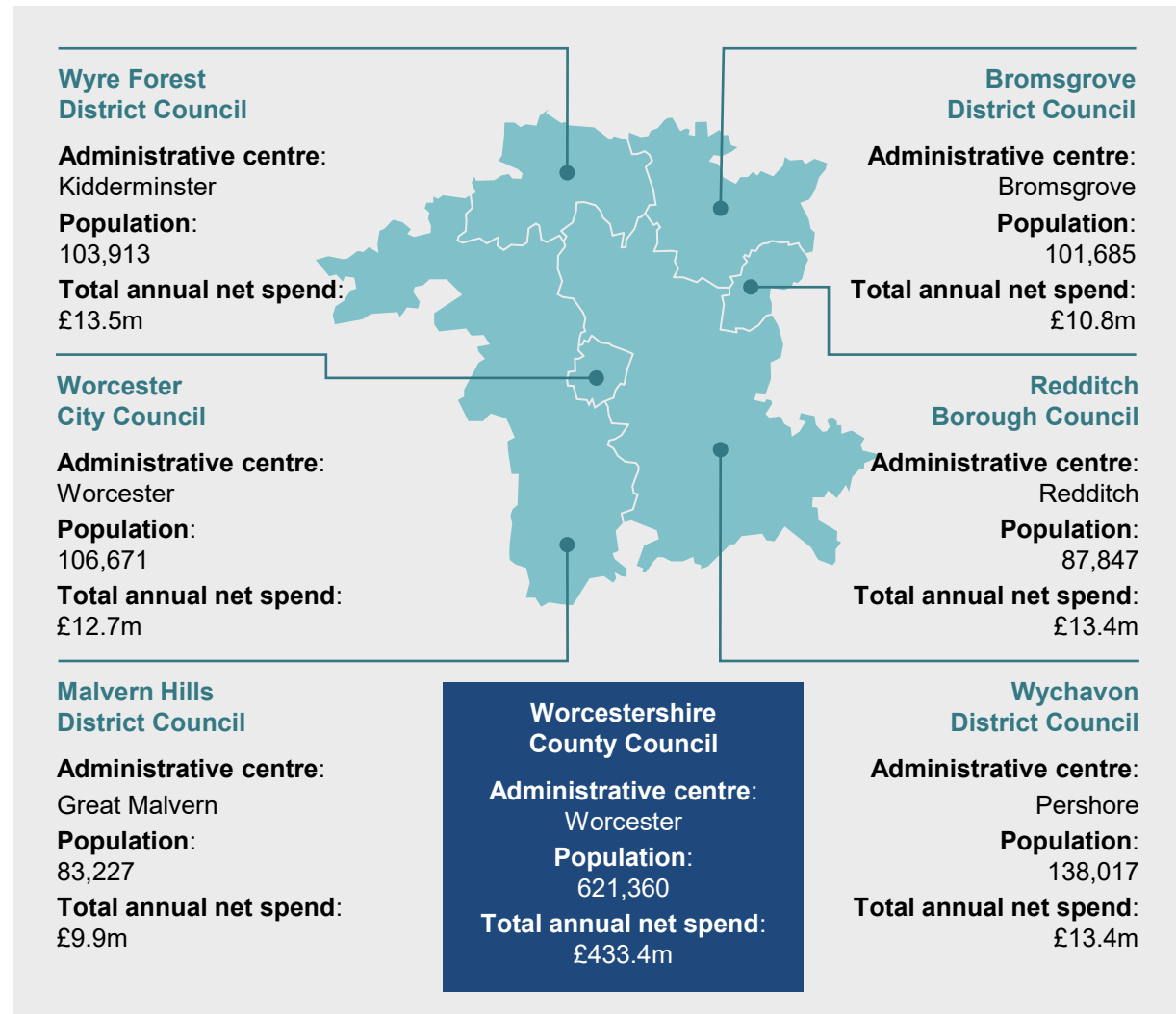
The **County Council** provides education, social care, waste disposal and highways services while **six second-tier councils** provide housing, waste collection and other local services. Most district councils are also subdivided into numerous Towns and Parishes.

Six parliamentary constituencies, largely coterminous with district boundaries, serve Worcestershire. The county area is regarded as part of the **West Midlands Region** in terms of statistical reporting.

Worcestershire shares a boundary with the **West Midlands Combined Authority** to the north, and Redditch Borough Council has joined the authority as a non-constituent member.

The county also borders **Gloucestershire**, **Warwickshire** and **Staffordshire** (which also remain two-tier areas) and **Shropshire** and **Herefordshire** (unitary authorities).

Sources: Mid-year Population Estimates, 2024 (ONS)
Local Government Revenue Expenditure & Financing, 2023-24 (gov.uk)





03

One **Worcestershire**:

The benefits of a single unitary
council for Worcestershire

How does One Worcestershire deliver benefits?

This part of our proposal details the challenges faced across our area, and how bringing all councils in Worcestershire together as a new single unitary authority supports a sustainable and secure future for essential services.

The priorities outlined here are based on three key approaches which only One Worcestershire can deliver:

- **Continuity:** using established partnerships, delivery mechanisms and relationships to ensure that the services delivered by the new council continue to meet local needs.
- **Innovation:** using the scale of the new council, along with our plans to deliver transformation, to bring the benefits of new ways of working, new technology and AI, and aligned and integrated services.
- **Sustainability:** ensuring that resources are focused on delivering services which residents value, and that our people, processes and systems are designed to deliver the best possible outcomes.



This section focuses on how One Worcestershire can deliver effective services which bring together the best of the predecessor councils, work with partners and continue to drive local economic growth.

Criteria 1 & 4

New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements

Prioritises the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to residents

1

Must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks

How councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views

A single tier of local government for the whole area

Should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment

4



Local Benefits | People and places

Population

621,360



Area

1,741 km²



Population Density

346.8/km²



Communities and public services

Worcestershire has genuine ambition for its communities and voluntary sector, and all tiers of local government actively encourage everyone to have a voice in how our area functions. However, these ambitions are often challenged by the disconnected planning and policy-making which arise from two layers of local government. **A simplified system that reduces complexity** and makes decision-making clear and transparent across the area is critical to delivering on Worcestershire's collective ambition. **This also means developing a more co-productive relationship with town and parish councils**, which will remain the most local, community-focused level of representation.

Key statutory and VCSE partners are structured to collaborate at a county or regional level. For example, **a unitary council aligns the local NHS commissioning infrastructure with a single body** which is responsible for services supporting the wider determinants of health and wellbeing throughout the life course. **NHS Hereford and Worcestershire ICB has provided clear and unequivocal support for One Worcestershire** (as seen in Appendix 12.d, p155). By focusing efforts as one council but delivering on a hyper-local footprint through cooperation and partnership, programmes which successfully address community needs and foster greater independence can be tested, adapted and rolled out to meet the needs of communities through our proposed locality arrangements.

Similarly, discussions with the **County Association of Local Councils (CALC)** and their national counterpart, the **National Association of Local Councils (NALC)**, have revealed strong support for a model where CALC acts as a liaison between a single unitary authority and parish/town councils. By centralising communication and collaboration, while distributing decision-making, this fosters stronger connections and more efficient governance across the region.

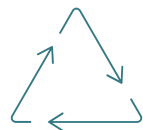
For detailed sources of statistics, see Appendix 12.a, p143

Local Benefits | Infrastructure and environment

**Net Book
Value of Assets**
£2.089 billion



**Household
Waste collected**
206,183 tonnes



**Planning
Applications
Received**
3415



Planning and investing in the future

Worcestershire benefits from strong transport links, improving high-speed broadband connectivity and **ambitious plans for new housing and commercial development**. Our spatial plans and economic strategies are mainly developed on a North & South Worcestershire basis, recognising the challenge of planning strategically at a more localised single district level. One Worcestershire allows this process to consider a wider geography, a broader range of local industries, and the opportunity to become more resilient to shocks and challenges. Aligning a whole-Worcestershire skills strategy and working with the three major further education providers in the county supports businesses to train and equip a future workforce which delivers success in Worcestershire. Coupled with increased flexibility in the planning regime, a single unitary council can drive this development at scale and pace.

The county council already supports state-of-the-art local infrastructure, such as the **EnviRecover waste-to-energy facility** which provides services to all districts and neighbouring counties. Aligning waste collection and waste disposal services for the first time in generations will give residents clearer expectations and confidence in the service regardless of their address and will provide the scale to modernise and optimise the recycling journey. A single unitary council provides a wide and varied portfolio of assets which enables the new council to consider innovative new or shared uses which support local ambitions and opportunities and enhance service delivery. This portfolio also provides a unique opportunity to rationalise duplicated assets releasing funding to support the cost of reorganisation and transformation. While this document does not examine the detailed opportunities arising from community assets, the combined portfolio of **a unitary council provides increased scope for improved use and transformational income and partnership opportunities from assets across a wider geography**.

For detailed sources of statistics, see Appendix 12.a, p143

Local Benefits | Growing up and learning

Pass rate
in English and
Maths GCSE
63.3%



Rate of
children
looked after
87.0 per 10K



Schools
rated 'good' or
'outstanding'
88.9%



Rate of
pupils receiving
SEN Support
167.5 per 1000



Rate of Pupils with
an EHCP
72.7 per 1000



Children, young people and education

Worcestershire is demographically varied and complex – experiencing change across the age range. It has a **growing population of children and young people**, supported by a range of high-performing services - from the universal offer in schools, to the highly specialised services delivered by children's social care.

Worcestershire's Children's Services have taken an inspiring trajectory to national recognition for quality and effectiveness, coming back into the council from a wholly-owned company following successful completion of an improvement programme. Children's Services have established **excellent working relationships with local schools and academies** and are supporting improvement from early years through to Key Stage 4 and beyond. Local SEND services have begun an ambitious improvement journey, reflecting many of the issues and concerns faced across the country at present.

Some localities in Worcestershire are grappling with escalating challenges of **inequality and social need**, with 18 neighbourhoods identified as among the most deprived in England according to the 2020 Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). The challenges faced by families, particularly where a child has special needs or a disability are reflected in the proportion of school pupils with Education Health & Care Plans, at 4.9% compared to the regional rate of 4.5%. This link between children living in poverty during early life, increased parental challenges, and a **higher need for family support** is well-established.

The partnerships across education, SEND and youth justice services provide opportunities to tackle these inequalities through local community approaches alongside county-wide strategy. Continuing and building on this unified approach will enhance coordination, streamline and simplify joint working with key partners, and ensures resources reach areas where they are needed most.

For detailed sources of statistics, see Appendix 12.a, p143

Local Benefits | Economy and employment

Job Density

0.86 jobs per
working-age person



Claimant Count

2.6%



Developed Land Use

9.3% of total area



Green Belt Land

23.6%



Growth and prosperity for everyone

The Worcestershire economy is diverse and has proven resilient, with opportunities across a broad range of developing sectors building on the reliability of cornerstone industries which continue to perform strongly. Currently, economic growth, skills development, and workforce strategies are developed across the tiers of local government via bodies such as the Local Economic Partnership and Growth Hub which work primarily at the county level. One Worcestershire will build on this collaboration between neighbouring districts, creating consistent strategies and priorities across Worcestershire.

Continued prosperity can only be supported effectively by a local authority with the **ability to work at scale with both local and global businesses, strategic partners and the UK Government**. Many of the key levers for developing a workforce fit for the future are delivered at the county level, including supporting **access and quality of education, adult learning and responsibility for critical strategic infrastructure**. A single council is thus well-positioned as an enabler for economic growth, able to invest in the future by supporting young people to develop into the next generation of innovators.

In a future devolved regional context, a single authority can ensure a fair deal for Worcestershire and will benefit from the links with neighbouring counties in delivering a growth strategy which leverages local skills and specialisms in the context of regional partnerships, and a new deal for local investment.

Everyone living and working in Worcestershire will benefit from a system that promotes coherence, simplicity and clarity in strategic leadership. A unified approach is essential to sustain and build on current economic growth.

For detailed sources of statistics, see Appendix 12.a, p143

Local Benefits | Wellbeing and lifelong health

**Adult
Social Care
users aged 18-64**
74 per 10,000



**Spend on
Temporary
Accommodation**
£2.52m



**Adult
Social Care users
aged 65+**
295 per 10,000



**Hospital
admissions due
to falls – people
aged 65+**
2,455



Health, wellbeing and independence

Worcestershire is experiencing complex demographic shifts, with an aging population exceeding the national average: 22% of the population is aged 66-84 and 3% are 85+. This is occurring alongside an increasing younger population of over 117,900 children. **These changes significantly impact access to essential services like nurseries, schools, GPs, hospitals, and social care.**

Key 'people' services such as housing, family support, revenues and benefits, and social care are currently delivered across two tiers of local government with policy drivers and customer-facing functions which do not necessarily provide easy and clear access to help. This leads to complexities in accessing services, inefficiencies in providing support and disparities in outcomes. **Establishing a single unitary council will streamline coordination and resource allocation**, fostering integrated strategies to meet the needs of both aging and young residents effectively.

A unified approach will support improved access to healthcare, housing and education across the county, address the structural economic challenges posed by the ratio of full-time workers to retirees, and ensure the availability of quality social care services.

By simplifying governance, a single council can create a community-focused framework for promoting health, wellbeing and independence across all age groups, accommodating the evolving demographic landscape and enhancing service delivery for the entire population. Evidence from county-wide initiatives like Priority Neighbourhood Development (PND), Healthy Worcestershire, and the Family Hubs Network indicates these services – supported at scale but delivered locally, can drive a decrease in health and social care demand, alongside greater local empowerment and self-determination.

For detailed sources of statistics, see Appendix 12.a, p143

Local Benefits | Using resources prudently

**Local authorities
by funding level**
147th out of 152



**Core Spending
Power (CSP)**
increased by
3.2% in 2025/26



**Net recurrent
pressures of**
£15.3m in 2025/26



Providing value for taxpayer's money

The two-tier district and county model results in significant duplication of effort, bureaucracy, and ultimately, costs. While there is a commonly stated case that smaller, district councils bring decision-making closer to the citizen, the system also creates confusion for residents around representation and the responsibility for service delivery. Residents repeatedly tell councils that they want quality services, reasonable rates of Council Tax and simpler access to support when they need it most. One Worcestershire is the only solution which can provides all these outcomes while also delivering financial sustainability.

All tiers of government are challenged by increasing demand and funding pressures. **Re-thinking delivery is essential to maintain and improve outcomes and to provide cost-effective services.** Recent research detailed in Section 5.3 indicates how important scale is in managing the cost of social care and education services – a single unitary authority would provide scale and avoids the increasing cost impact of competition which multiple local unitary councils would create. Several innovative shared service agreements are already in place across District councils in Worcestershire, recognising the benefits of scale and coordination by sharing **senior leadership, regulatory functions and back-office processes**. This indicates that **both upper- and lower-tier service delivery benefits from scale**, the ability to influence markets and a geographical footprint which secures collaboration with other public service providers. Further consolidation is a logical next step to improve these services while offering residents and local businesses value for money.

The plans we detail for **transforming current delivery models and deploying technology across a single unitary council** will drive value for money in the future and will ensure there is a continued effort to provide the best quality services within a sustainable budget position.

For detailed sources of statistics, see Appendix 12.a, p143

The background of the slide is a photograph of a modern, curved glass building. The building's facade is covered in large glass panels that reflect the sky and surrounding environment. On the upper part of the building, the word 'Kingfisher' is written in a bold, sans-serif font, and below it, 'Redditch' is written in a stylized, cursive script. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. In the top right corner, the number '04' is displayed in a large, white, sans-serif font.

04

One **Worcestershire**:

The vision for One Worcestershire

In this section...

This part of our proposal details how One Worcestershire meets local needs, supports existing and future partnerships, and delivers a sound foundation for future devolution.

This section of the proposal:

- 4.1 Defines our vision for One Worcestershire, developed through the process of engaging with the local partnership to develop this proposal.
- 4.2 Examines the existing partnership landscape across the public, private and voluntary sectors, and how they contribute to our future as a single unitary council.
- 4.3 Explains the potential for a range of devolution options based on Worcestershire's position in the Heart of England, and close relationships with other two-tier areas approaching LGR.



This section focuses on how One Worcestershire can deliver effective services which bring together the best of the predecessor councils, work with partners and continue to drive local economic growth.

Criteria 2, 4 & 6

New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.

6

Prioritises the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to residents.

Must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.

How councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.

2

A single tier of local government for the whole area.

4

Should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.





4.1

One Worcestershire: Our vision

A vision for One Worcestershire

In the process of developing this proposal we have spoken with the public, with partners in the voluntary sector, with our statutory colleagues who commission and deliver health, policing and fire and rescue services, and with representatives of the district and parish councils across Worcestershire. In doing so, we have identified a vision for the new council which is outlined in the six statements below. These will be echoed throughout this document:

Worcestershire's new single unitary council would:

- 1 Be **financially sustainable** by design;
- 2 Be built on **strong partnerships** across public, voluntary and private sectors, harnessing the expertise of this wider partnership to solve local problems;
- 3 **Engage with the community** through co-designed local networks which operate with the commitment and support of both councillors and officers;
- 4 **Use evidence and insights to focus delivery** where it is most needed, making decisions about how, where and when we deliver services to support the best outcomes;
- 5 **Be empowered by technology**, which simplifies access to services for customers, and enables our people to be more productive, creative and to solve problems for our service users; and
- 6 **Recruit, reward and retain an empowered and flexible workforce** which has the commercial, technical and specialist professional skills to create the council of the future.





4.2

One Worcestershire: Maintaining and strengthening partnerships

Statutory and Economic partnership in Worcestershire

Worcestershire is founded on strong partnerships – both within the county, across its districts and with surrounding communities.

Though no longer an administrative area, the shared footprint of **Herefordshire and Worcestershire** remains a focus for statutory provision, used by the Fire and Rescue service and the NHS Integrated Care Board. Meanwhile, the promotion of continued economic growth and a vibrant voluntary sector are represented primarily at a county level.



Statutory Partners

The NHS, Police and Fire Services are active over a wider territory, in common with other areas of a similar size and composition, and which could sit in a potential future devolution footprint. Some smaller units of delivery (e.g. Primary Care Networks) span current District and County boundaries. **NHS Hereford and Worcestershire, Herefordshire & Worcestershire Fire and Rescue and West Mercia Police have indicated support for One Worcestershire**, on the basis that this will prevent additional complexity in delivering emergency services and responding to critical incidents. **Letters of support will be added to Appendix 12.d (p154).**



Economic Partnerships

The local economy is represented strategically by a forward-looking, innovation focused **Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)**. Practical support to businesses is delivered via the **Worcestershire Growth Hub**. The LEP has developed and secured funding for **BetaDen**, a tech-accelerator which provides co-location, financial support and assistance with business development to a cohort of local advanced tech businesses. **The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)** distributed by District Councils is part of the government's Levelling Up agenda, with £2.6 billion allocated for local investment by March 2025. In Worcestershire, it supports initiatives to boost local businesses, communities, and skills.



The voluntary sector in Worcestershire



Voluntary & Community Sector Partnerships



Worcestershire benefits from a strong relationship with the strategic **VCSE Alliance**, working to develop partnerships and opportunities within the sector and across the system.

This relationship enables facilitation, development and delivery around challenging areas for the council alongside core VCSE support, working to ensure equality of access to services which support people within their communities across the county.



Worcestershire CALC (County Association of Local Councils) supports town and parish councils on statutory and organisational matters, but increasingly works alongside the county and district councils on the health, wellbeing and preventative support agenda. We have also worked extensively with CALC (and NALC, their national counterpart) during the preparation of this proposal in developing our Locality Approach (detailed in Section 7 of this proposal).



WeCAN provides infrastructural support to the VCSE sector. Other groups are also county-wide, for example **Families In Partnership**, the Parent/Carer Forum (recognised by the Dept. for Education as advocating for parents of local children with SEND). Worcestershire benefits from a Social Value partnership with **Worcestershire County Cricket Club** which provides support to communities across the county.

How might LGR impact these partnerships?

Some organisations within the VCS are currently required to bid or tender for funding from several councils. A single unitary authority has the potential to streamline funding allocations and release capacity in the VCSE to focus on delivery and not applying for funding. Should the area be divided into two new councils, with statutory services disaggregated, there is a concern that these organisations would struggle to raise funding to provide support in all areas, would face challenging issues with onward referrals, and would ultimately provide a less effective service to their communities.

4.3

One Worcestershire: Future devolution

Looking forward to future devolution

The English Devolution White paper marked a distinct shift in the approach to reorganising local government in England, providing two distinct but related routes to the consolidation of governance: reorganisation and devolution.

Devolution focuses on the creation of Strategic Authorities, with or without a mayor, to coordinate and commission services at a regional level. The white paper includes specific ambitions and incentives for these authorities to drive economic growth, received devolved funding and responsibilities, and lead intra and inter-regional transport initiatives.

All councils across Worcestershire support the need for devolution to happen as quickly as possible. The county is missing out compared to areas that are - or soon will be - part of a mayoral strategic authority (MSA). A single unitary authority for the whole of Worcestershire would play an effective part in an MSA and the shared aspiration is for a mayor and MSA that have the full range of powers, functions and funding, ideally from the outset.

Worcestershire councils have undertaken an analysis of potential strategic, economic and public sector delivery links across the wider region, and a range of options are being considered that would best deliver growth. Discussions with nearby areas have not reached a point where there is a clear consensus about the way ahead, with many neighbouring councils also currently managing the complexities of LGR concurrently.



This section describes our approach to the various potential devolution scenarios which may follow LGR, and how One Worcestershire could fit into these structures

Criteria 4 & 6

New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements

6

Prioritises the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to residents

Must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks

How councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views

A single tier of local government for the whole area

4

Should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment

Work will continue with neighbouring areas after submission of LGR proposals to reach agreement enabling the government to commence the formal processes to establish a mayor and MSA under the revised statutory framework set out in the English Devolution Bill. We recognise that this will take place alongside, but , separately from the structural change order required to implement LGR.

A devolved Worcestershire

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 MSA should benefit from the mix and range of powers that deliver the greatest benefit to local communities. If this is the case, then powers should include the ability for the mayor to take over **Police and Crime Commissioner** and **Fire and Rescue Authority** functions, and to play an active role in the work of integrated care boards. A unitary structure for Worcestershire would support the earliest possible devolution pathway for the area. All options for an early decision on the future devolution of the area should remain available, with local councils committing to implement them quickly.

Worcestershire and Herefordshire

The consideration of Worcestershire's path toward devolution involves thorough attention to how public services are currently structured across the county and neighbouring regions.

The government has emphasised the importance of avoiding '*devolution islands*' which would result in isolated areas without comprehensive regional integration. Consequently, any plans for a Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) involving Worcestershire must consider the interconnected nature of services and governance that go beyond the county borders. Given this context, Herefordshire should be included in any future combined authority framework along with Worcestershire. This is because:



It shares a large common border with Worcestershire.

Linking with any other area would result in an unworkable footprint for devolution. This view is broadly shared by Herefordshire Council's officers and members;



There is broad commonality in industrial structure

although Herefordshire is much more dominated by agriculture. The areas share the tourism benefits of the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB);



The two counties are served by a shared fire and rescue service and NHS Health and Care Trust.

Even though the footprint of West Mercia Police is wider, it has recently instituted a command structure under a Chief Superintendent covering Herefordshire and Worcestershire.



Herefordshire



Worcestershire

By forming a strategic authority for a wider area that encompasses both Worcestershire and Herefordshire, there can be greater alignment on priorities, resource sharing, and strategic planning, benefiting both counties significantly.

This collaboration allows for enhanced efficiency in service delivery, stronger economic ties, and a unified approach to tackling issues such as infrastructure development, healthcare integration, and community planning. It harmonises with the government devolution agenda by ensuring that both counties work together rather than operating in isolated silos, creating a robust regional network that can effectively meet the needs of its residents and businesses.



Building on established industrial structures

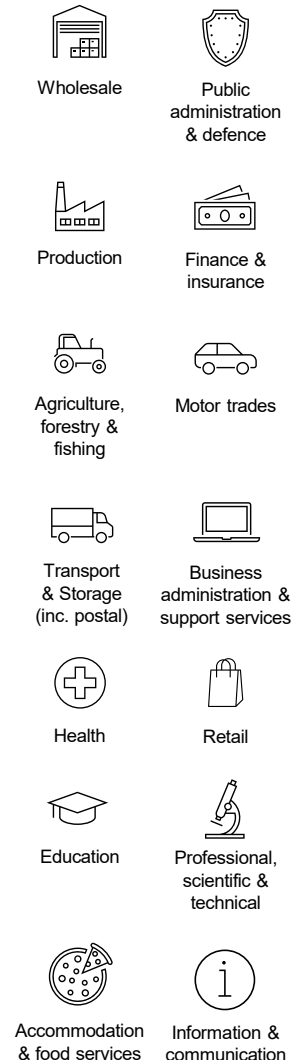
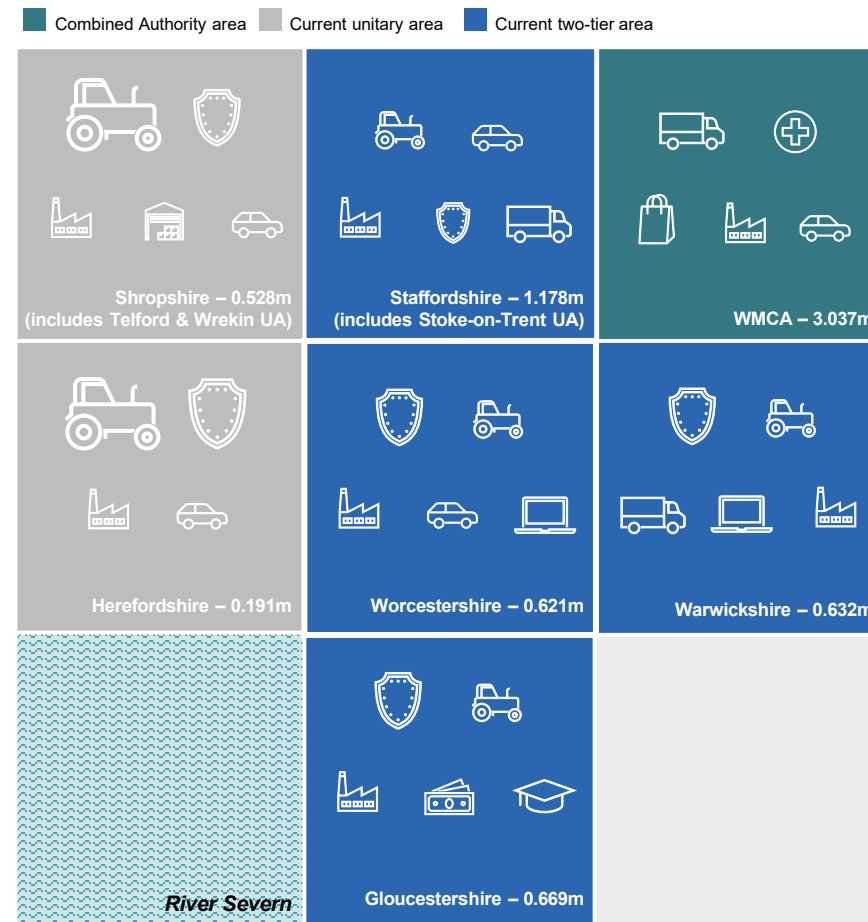
Mapping analysis of the industrial structure of areas around Worcestershire provides a clear alignment in terms of the type and scale of activity as calculated as a Business Base figure.

A base greater than 1 implies a greater than number of VAT and/or PAYE registered enterprises in that industry relative to the national norm. The Business Base ranges from 1.00 to 5.42, the highest rating being for agriculture, forestry & fishing in Herefordshire.

This analysis demonstrates a strong commonality between Worcestershire and Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin, in addition to significant overlaps with Warwickshire and Gloucestershire.

Worcestershire has fewer commonalities with Birmingham and the wider WMCA. This insight can support consideration of potential industrial synergies which could be leveraged to enhance the overall economic resilience and competitiveness of new devolved regions. Appendix 12.c (p152) shows the breakdown of the Business Base calculation for each area.

Table 1 – Population & Business Base



Population: ONS 2024 mid-year estimates

Viable options for a Devolution Footprint (1-2)

The tables represent the potential options for the footprint of an MSA focussed on growth. It is recognised that other areas may have differing preferred solutions for their areas and further discussions will take place following submissions of LGR proposals:

1

Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire

This proposed devolution footprint offers a viable population of little under 1.5 million, which would soon be exceeded with projected housing growth. This configuration presents commonalities in industrial structure, paving the way for enhanced economic collaboration. The potential for growth is significant along the M5, M42 and A46 corridors.

This arrangement would allow the mayor to take over the two fire and rescue services. Consideration would need to be given to the merger of Police forces if there is a desire for a mayor to become Police & Crime Commissioner and govern just one police force. In this option, based on current boundaries it would not enable a mayor to take on PCC powers without splitting West Mercia Police. Worcestershire ICB clusters with Coventry and Warwickshire which means there is partial overlap with the WMCA area.

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, particularly around the M42 growth corridor.

This footprint offers strategic promise with good population alignment and growth potential along key transport corridors. However, geographical dispersal, and the complexities in police and healthcare alignment, pose considerable challenges.

2

Herefordshire, Worcestershire and 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. And 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 fire and rescue services. Consideration would need to be given to Police forces if there is a desire for a mayor to take on Police Crime Commissioner powers. Whilst it is possible for MSAs to take on PCC powers for more than one policing area where boundaries are coterminous, based on current police force area this option would not enable a mayor to take on PCC powers without the splitting of West Mercia Police.

There is poor alignment with existing ICBs in their current clusters, which would require adjustment if they are to match the MSA 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.

The Herefordshire, Worcestershire, and Gloucestershire devolution option offers a holistic approach to aligning economic growth priorities and cultural heritage, with strategic advantages along the M5 corridor. However, the complexities involved in police and healthcare service realignment, pose considerable challenges.



Viable options for a Devolution Footprint (3-5)

The tables represent the potential options for the footprint of an MSA focussed on growth. It is recognised that other areas may have differing preferred solutions for their areas and further discussions will take place following submissions of LGR proposals:

3 Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Warwickshire This would serve a population of c. 2m. In addition to the features of other options, this offers strategic opportunities through its focus on the M5, M42 and A46 growth corridors. These are vital for economic expansion and connectivity, positioning the region advantageously for development and investment. It would permit mayoral control of three fire and rescue services. Consideration would be needed around Police forces as several will serve the area. Whilst it is possible for MSAs to take on PCC powers for more than one area where boundaries are coterminous, this would not be the case in this geography. Wider re-clustering of ICBs may also be necessary – while aligning with most of the Herefordshire & Worcestershire and Coventry & Warwickshire ICB cluster, Gloucestershire is 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. This model offers significant economic opportunities along major growth corridors and could deliver integrated management of emergency services. However, the complexities involved in police and healthcare service realignment, pose considerable challenges.	4 West Mercia & Warwickshire Serving a population of 1.9 million, this option aligns well with public service boundaries. It would permit the mayor to become the police and crime commissioner for West Mercia and Warwickshire police and to assume responsibility for three fire and rescue authorities (Hereford & Worcester, Shropshire and Warwickshire). There is strong industrial alignment across this footprint, providing opportunities for cohesive economic strategy and growth. There is alignment with most of the Herefordshire & Worcestershire and Coventry & Warwickshire ICB cluster, but challenges outside these areas, where Shropshire & Telford are currently aligned with Staffordshire & Stoke. The quality and availability of travel links across the area vary, with key north-south routes requiring travel via the busy networks around Birmingham, but the area enjoys a reasonable degree of self-containment as a functioning economic geography. 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.	5 West Mercia A devolved arrangement based on the West Mercia footprint would enable strong alignment with key public service boundaries and permit the mayor to assume responsibility for West Mercia Police, Hereford & Worcester and Shropshire fire and rescue authorities. Industrial structures across West Mercia demonstrates reasonable alignment, which could benefit economic planning and collaboration across sectors. The population at 1.3 million falls short of the suggested figure, but it encompasses a large geography with significant rural areas. Another challenge is the misalignment with existing NHS integrated care boards. The quality and availability of travel links across the area vary but the area enjoys a reasonable degree of self-containment as a functioning economic geography. This option lacks the motorway growth corridors that are the feature of other options. 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.
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Conclusion: Future Devolution for Worcestershire

Worcestershire sits at the heart of several other counties which are approaching local government reorganisation or have already transitioned to become unitary authorities. This 'Heart of England' zone provides a range of potential future devolution footprints, which need detailed exploration to establish an agreed way forward. However, the key factors below offer potential ways ahead:



Whichever footprint is determined for the area in future, it is likely that this would link Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

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 with police, fire and NHS organisations.



Industrial profiles 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 vary across Worcestershire.

In the north of the county where commuter routes and business linkages are well established there is a strong link. However, there is a lack of alignment with the rest of Worcestershire, where the metropolitan economy is seen as distant and physical connections with the West Midlands Combined Authority's area are challenging.





One Worcestershire: Delivering better outcomes

In this section...

This part of our proposal details how One Worcestershire will integrate existing services to improve how local needs are met, while delivering significant financial benefits and avoiding strategic risks.

This section of the proposal:

- 5.1 Examines how services across the current two-tier system can be integrated to deliver more than the sum of their parts and provides case studies for key areas where LGR offers genuine opportunities to innovate
- 5.2 Details the strategic and operational risks inherent in disaggregating services, which would occur should a two-unitary authority model be implemented. Avoiding these risks is critical to the quality of service and the financial outcomes the council is working towards
- 5.3 Details research undertaken by the County Councils Network to understand the impact of scale on people-focused services, and the risk disaggregation poses for costs, quality and other factors
- 5.4 Explains how the proposal supports the delivery of economic growth and prosperity for everyone in Worcestershire via a single Economic Development function



This section focuses on how One Worcestershire can deliver effective services which bring together the best of the predecessor councils, work with partners and continue to drive local economic growth

Criteria 1, 4 & 5

New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements

Prioritises the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to residents

1

Must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks

How councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views

5

A single tier of local government for the whole area

Should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment

4





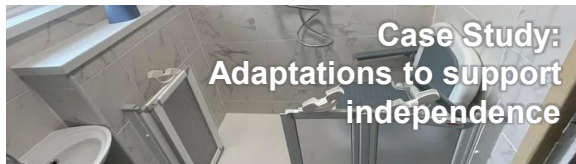
5.1

One Worcestershire: Improving services through integration

One Worcestershire is key to Improving services

A single council for Worcestershire will simplify services, improve efficiency, and create a more equitable experience for residents.

One Worcestershire provides the opportunity to deliver shared customer and back-office support functions and to ensure that links between critical services are established. The key benefits for residents, businesses and partners are detailed in this section.



Disabled facilities grants (DFG) enable people to remain in their own home despite experiencing disability or ill-health which may otherwise have required them to live in residential care. The six districts are responsible for DFGs but have long operated through a single home improvement agency for the county which is being brought into a shared service hosted by Wyre Forest District Council in April 2026. The county council will operate a separate minor adaptations service from that date. Bringing the DFG process into a single unitary authority would simplify the interface with social care and ensure there was a single set of rules on financial support beyond the statutory maximum.



Simplified Service Access: A single customer function, driven by a clear digital presence would eliminate the confusion that residents currently face when trying to navigate tiers of local government. This is especially beneficial for residents who are eligible for several services, as complex customer journeys involving multiple teams and services can be streamlined, simplifying and automating complex processes and making it easier to access support.



Maintain Consistency and Quality: A single council would remove the risk of a 'postcode lottery' across the former county area, where access, cost, sufficiency and quality of services may vary depending on where a resident lives. This is particularly key for areas like education and social care, where quality and impact of services are under the scrutiny of external regulatory bodies like Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC).



Integrated Services with a focus on outcomes: A single unitary council can combine services that have inherent synergies, delivering better outcomes for the community. For example, a single authority can integrate public health priorities with services like housing and leisure. This '*health-in-all-policies*' approach is more effective at preventing additional service needs than a fragmented system, and the line of sight from need to outcome is more evident.



Operational and Financial Efficiency: A single unitary council presents the opportunity to eliminate significant duplication in customer and enabling services. One Worcestershire offers the opportunity to centralise and professionalise these functions in a strong corporate core. This would also allow for a more cohesive digital strategy that is *digital-first* but not *digital-only* ensuring continued accessibility for all community members.



Empowered Workforce: A single council would provide better career pathways and new opportunities for staff by bringing together the workforce of predecessor councils. This provides a basis for improved recruitment and retention in skill areas where there is increasing need such as contract management and commissioning, and in social care and education psychology where national shortages are a major concern, and where two councils would create additional local pressures and competition for postholders.

Service focus: Children's Services



Children's Social Care

Worcestershire's services for children in care were inspected by Ofsted in December 2024 and were praised for their management of complex change – including the reintegration of services into the council following a period as part of Worcestershire Children's First – a wholly-owned company specifically intended to focus on service improvement. This success is based on collaboration across the local public service landscape – with the police and health services working to support a one-stop **Family Front Door** providing access to all support, with effective locality working models. A single unitary authority founded on a strong, whole-council community-led model offers the opportunity to collaborate both within the council and across new and existing partnerships, to support families with a wider range of preventive services which avoid children needing to come into the care of the council.



Education & Early Years

Education in Worcestershire benefits from strong and effective partnerships with schools – these have been rebuilt following a period where support for schools was outsourced and are now delivering innovation and change.

The **Education Improvement** and **Special Educational Needs and Disability** functions provided by the county council work closely with schools, academies, and with the three major Further Education providers across the county. Working at this scale allows delivery of a range of specialist education support which is only possible where schools and colleges are collaborating with a single strategic lead and a single commissioner of school placements and alternative provision. The development and extension of schools to meet the needs of new communities relies on a collaboration with planning authorities which is hugely simplified where a unitary authority is in place.



Case Study: Leaving Care

Young people leaving the care system face many challenges, not least in finding a home and accessing benefits to support their independence while they complete studies or seek careers. This is complex and sometime very challenging to navigate at present, with a small county-wide team supporting care leavers needing to work with five different Housing teams and three Revenues and Benefits services to support young people into independence.

A single unitary authority offers the opportunity for coordinated joint working in place of the current need to work across multiple policy contexts. Young people will have a clearer idea of their options and opportunities and will be empowered to find a home and work within the areas where they have connections and community. This supports One Worcestershire in its statutory responsibility to offer an equitable and transparent local offer for some of its most vulnerable young adults.

Service focus: Adult Social Care & Housing



Adult Social Care

Adult Social Care services are focused on implementing national reforms across the county, working with partners in the NHS, care providers and local community organisations to ensure that the benefits of these changes reach all service users. Working across the whole range of council services enables the **make every contact count** approach – where everyone who interacts with residents can report any concerning incidents or evidence of changing needs to prevent, reduce or delay the need for adult social care and enable individuals to live independently.

Key to delivering effective services to adults are the links between service delivery and the functions which secure services for individuals: commissioning, contract management and brokerage. One Worcestershire preserves this model intact and provides potential further benefits to the council and its partners in digitising the care journey.



Housing, Revenues & Benefits

The six district councils are responsible for housing and homelessness support. Wychavon and Malvern Hills operate a shared housing service, and arrangements in Redditch also differ from the rest of the county because the Borough Council owns and operates its own stock of council housing. Registered providers (housing associations) and the private rented sector play an important part in providing housing in all districts.

The six districts operate housing registers for people seeking housing. There are some minor differences between policies although Wyre Forest and Bromsgrove, for example, have the same policy. The three South Worcestershire districts share an allocations policy. Priority for allocation of housing is based on a combination of national rules, which all housing authorities have to follow, and local rules. An individual's local connection with an area is usually a key factor – while people can apply to any or all of the districts to join the register, the priority will be affected by their local district connection in most cases.

There are three revenues and benefits teams – shared services in the South Worcestershire Partnership and in Redditch & Bromsgrove, while the third team operates in Wyre Forest. Each council operates a council tax reduction scheme to assist low-income working age households, alongside the common national scheme for pensioners. There are differences between the six districts' schemes.

A single housing function for the area would deliver efficiencies, changes in service to residents (such as a single waiting list for the whole county) and a platform to negotiate at scale with housing providers in securing affordable housing as part of major planning decisions. A single housing allocation policy would mean applicants could more easily move to different areas within the county, and a unified revenues and benefits service would also offer simplification and consistency of approach.

Service focus: Highways, planning and environment



Highways, Planning and Transport

Planning and highways functions are areas where the county and district council work most closely together at present and as such, the opportunity to bring these areas of service together in a single unitary authority presents potentially transformational opportunities. One Worcestershire sits at a strategic nexus on the M5 corridor and the gateway to South Wales. The management of a strategic network of major roads, the ability to plan infrastructure delivery at scale, and to speak with a single voice in wider conversations with newly devolved mayoral authorities, the Department of Transport, and other agencies provide genuine benefits to residents and businesses.

Coordinating these strategic functions with stewardship of critical local transport networks particularly in rural areas, management of high streets and travel infrastructure will ensure local residents have access to the wider economic and employment benefits too.



Economy and environment

Local councils in Worcestershire already collaborate in delivering services to support the growing economy and the local environment. Combining these services in a single unitary authority would strengthen this approach, align currently disparate funding, and create a powerful engine for economic growth. Planning the skills, infrastructure and workforce needed to maintain growth involves collaboration across a range of areas: education, planning, adult skills and regulatory services. The ability to align these in a single organisation would be more efficient and more effective in delivering an economy which works for Worcestershire.

Currently District waste collection functions work with a county-wide Waste-to-Energy and disposal function. Bringing the whole journey from kerbside to energy generation into a single authority would deliver economies and improvements.



Planning functions in Worcestershire are currently distributed across district and county councils, and more broadly across public services. One Worcestershire and future devolution offer the opportunity to deliver planning at the community level – considering how new residents will live, learn, work and prosper within a single context. With a new town at Worcestershire Parkway already planned, this is a genuine priority for the area.

Currently the process of planning the sufficiency of nursery and school places is undertaken within the Education function, remotely from residential planning. While close collaboration takes place with district planning and development teams, the new council creates an opportunity to align this in a single plan alongside the population-wide responsibilities in the Public Health function, to connect planning with neighbourhoods – building not just homes and schools, but new communities.

Public health & Wider Public Service Reform



Public Health

Public Health currently advocates for health and wellbeing with one voice in Worcestershire.

Bringing together key functions currently fragmented across councils including emergency planning, regulatory services and community safety allows a coordinated, consistent approach which aligns with the public health function.

This also provides a single interface between the Public Health function for the area and Public Health England and the NHS. From the perspective of a focus on population level health and wider determinants of well-being, public health functions are best **coordinated** at a strategic level and **delivered** in collaboration with communities to meet their specific needs.

The One Worcestershire approach to working with communities builds on this public health focused approach.



Wider Public Service Reform

All public services are undergoing rapid change at present, as they manage challenging increases in need, reductions in resources and the need to embrace fast-changing technology.

By providing one strategic interface for all public service organisations, a single unitary council for Worcestershire will preserve a single **Youth Justice Board, Health & Wellbeing Board, and Adults and Children's Safeguarding Boards** for the current county area. The connections and collaborations in these functions are not easily won, and the trust and shared strategic focus which has been built overtime are essential in building the future public sector Worcestershire needs. In many cases, the council jointly commissions services with the NHS, West Mercia Police and the court system.

These organisations have been unequivocal in stating their support for the strategic focus and simplicity of dealing with a single unitary council.



**Case Study:
Making Healthy
places**

Public health functions focus on a whole-community based approach to wellbeing, considering social connections, trust and the confidence to participate in the public sphere as key determinants of healthy communities. This approach aims to reduce inequalities in well-being by reducing stress, discrimination and social isolation alongside more traditional indicators of wellbeing. A single unitary council provides the best possible opportunities to deliver community-based Public Health functions – with the same organisation providing essential social care services, community safety functions, placemaking and environmental functions. This alignment allows community-based approaches which identify and build on local assets as the focus of supporting residents, and bringing together the wider public estate allows innovative solutions in delivering health checks, immunisation programmes, and support for substance misuse.

5.2

One Worcestershire: Operational risks of disaggregation

Operational risks of disaggregation | Adult Services

Disaggregating critical services is not as simple as realigning resources and teams to serve different areas.

The funding, partnership and commissioning activities involved in delivering Adult Social Care for instance, are complex - and will result in challenges throughout the system.



Disaggregation will increase the risks of residents not receiving seamless continuity of care, as determining their Ordinary Residence will increase in complexity across two councils. In turn this will increase funding disputes and demands on partners who will also have to determine in which council area the person is ordinarily resident to determine who is responsible for commissioning and provision of services.



These issues **increase risks in service delivery, delay assessment and can impact residents' experiences** in situations where a timely response is often critical. Creating two unitary authorities will also dilute the ability to work flexibly on large scale safeguarding and crisis work, as we currently flex our workforce to meet this business need.



The two proposed council areas result in considerably different demographic profiles and a disparity in council tax income, creating a gap between need and resources. There is also a risk in recruiting and retaining workforce to support the most vulnerable areas and residents.



The majority of Adult Social Care funding is used to purchase care from the external market, often using shared or pooled budgets with the NHS. Disaggregating the existing county-wide service will create further complexity of apportioning responsibility for funding, negotiating fee uplift with providers who may be delivering in both new areas, and introducing competition between the two councils which will drive cost increases for both.

Operational risks of disaggregation | Children's Services

Disaggregating children's social care would require significant effort in rewriting local policies and procedures, which have been negotiated and agreed with partner agencies.

Significant burdens and overheads would result, along with the specific factors below which will further complicate the issues:



Work with families is based on relational practice – with consistent workers building trust over time. A boundary across the current county area will impair the quality and consistency of practice as families move around the area.



Children's Social Care is rigorously regulated by Ofsted, and the teams have worked hard to deliver significant improvements. The disaggregation of services, and the additional scrutiny on new authorities would likely be seen as a backward step for children in Worcestershire.



Case recording systems are critical to social care practice. Establishing and maintaining two systems would be costly and would take time to implement. Historical records are extremely important in child protection investigations, and splitting these records would risk missing critical evidence.



Allocating support to children and families would become inconsistent, with a different local service offer in each area. Where these services are commissioned from providers, there may be impacts around cost, alignment, and potential withdrawal from provision in some area.



A differential offer in social care in the north and south may create an incentive for families to gravitate to areas where there is a perception of a better service. The existing demographic differences between the north and south would be further compounded by this.



5.3

One Worcestershire: The impact of scale on services

Evidencing the impact of scale on services

An October 2025 report, commissioned by the County Councils Network (CCN) presents evidence on how local government reorganisation (LGR) will impact people-based services including adult social care, children's services, and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision.

This work explored the impact of the geographical footprint and population sizes of new unitary councils on the costs and risks associated with the disaggregation of county-wide services. The evidence strongly suggests larger-scale councils are essential to preserve service quality, prevent rising costs and ensure financial sustainability of people-based services:

1 New unitary councils with populations substantially below 500,000 people will increase the price councils pay for care, putting further financial costs on these under-pressure services. Modelling suggests that if all new unitary councils had a population below this figure, this would result in additional unit costs of between £180m and £270m annually solely from reductions in purchasing power.

2 Splitting county councils into smaller local authorities will require hundreds of new senior roles as councils already grapple with a shortfall in care staff. Modelling shows that if all new unitary councils had a population of below 500,000, this would result in a requirement of between 500 - 1,100 additional management and senior roles in care services. The lack of a need to disaggregate these services in One Worcestershire would require no additional senior management recruitment.

3 Breaking up high-performing county councils into substantially smaller councils could lead to worse services. The report reveals that larger authorities are more likely to receive 'Outstanding' or 'Good' ratings from Ofsted for children's services. Currently, 16 of the 21 county councils are already good or outstanding for these services. Consequently, directors of care and special needs services warn in the report that smaller services could struggle to attract staff and invest in improving services.

4 Splitting county councils into smaller unitaries covering populations as small as 300,000 or lower could see some of these new authorities overwhelmed with demand. The report finds that the smaller the council, the more they could experience extreme concentrations of care users: effectively meaning care costs are highly variable between new authorities and may exceed planned budgets. This could leave some councils exposed to unaffordable costs and the use of expensive out of area placements. This could challenge their financial sustainability from inception.

Source: *Local Government Reorganisation: analysing the impact on people services*, CCN/Newton Europe, 10 October 2025

Evidencing the impact of scale on services

These findings indicate that decisions about unitary authority size and configuration will have profound, long-lasting impacts on the most vulnerable members of society who depend on people-based services.

However, with appropriate planning and scale considerations, LGR offers the potential for transformational improvements in how local government serves its communities.

Unit cost increase	The analysis identifies a clear correlation between authority size and commissioning costs. For every 200,000 reduction in population, unit costs for commissioned care across all services (adult social care, children's services, SEND) increase by approximately 1%, driven by reduced purchasing power. With existing county councils commissioning care worth many hundreds of millions of pounds per year, reductions in population scale will result in a very significant, material and absolute cost increase where disaggregation takes place.
Workforce and leadership challenges	Creating additional authorities necessitates substantial increases in senior management posts. Each new unitary requires additional Directors of Adult Social Care, Directors of Children's Services, and supporting leadership teams. This includes the provision of sufficient supervision for front-line social care professionals at Team Manager and Service Manager level. Critically, the sector could face severe challenges in recruiting sufficient qualified professionals to fill these roles, particularly given existing vacancy rates of 8.3% nationally in adult social care. The analysis suggests that reorganisation could result in £1-3 million additional total senior staffing costs per authority created. This analysis only includes senior leadership and service management roles required for the people services in the scope of this analysis; there would be further additional staffing required in support functions, including business intelligence, IT and digital, HR and finance to support these newly formed services.
Service quality risks	Analysis undertaken for this engagement indicates that people-based services delivered by larger local authorities are typically more highly rated by regulators. Therefore, disaggregation posed a risk that service quality would be negatively impacted by disaggregation. Analysis for this programme revealed that larger authorities are more likely to receive 'Good' or 'Outstanding' ratings from Ofsted for children's services. Service directors engaged in this work argued that the relationship appears linked to larger authorities' capacity for practice development, quality assurance, and attracting experienced leadership.
High Needs Block deficits	High Needs Block (HNB) deficits held by local authorities due to overspends and the statutory DSG override, are arguably the single biggest financial risk facing county councils. How these deficits may be distributed as a result of LGR is a fundamental question for the financial sustainability of the newly formed authorities, particularly where disaggregation takes place. Analysis for this programme shows a greater level of variation in the level of risk as the number of smaller unitary authorities increases. This suggests significant inequality in financial risk could be created, which may demand disproportionate and unevenly distributed savings to be delivered in the future.

Source: *Local Government Reorganisation: analysing the impact on people services*, CCN/Newton Europe, 10 October 2025

Evidencing the impact of scale on services

While LGR presents significant opportunities for improved service delivery and democratic accountability, this analysis reveals substantial risks if reorganisation results in excessive fragmentation of people-based services through disaggregation

The evidence analysed strongly suggests that maintaining larger-scale unitary authorities is essential to preserve service quality, control costs, and ensure financial sustainability. Disaggregation should be avoided or minimised where possible, but where it cannot, the analysis suggests unitary authorities with populations greater than 500,000 are those most likely to be able to reduce the risks of extreme demand variation, increased unit costs, and deterioration in service quality.

Distorted care demand and supply

Many sector stakeholders engaged through this programme expressed a concern about the impact of ordinary residence, whereby demand originates from parts of a county which may not be where the supply of support is most readily available. This research shows that disaggregation and the formation of smaller unitary authorities will present a challenge to balance the uneven distribution of supply of care and the demand for care within these authorities, which is currently smoothed across larger geographic footprints. The greatest potential impact of this distortion can be seen in the working age adult residential cohorts. For these cohorts, demand, cost, and growth can be highly varied across a large county area.

Other Services

Whilst this analysis has examined the social care sector in detail, there are additional statutory upper-tier services which will also incur significant costs on disaggregation. These include Education support functions including school improvement, school admissions and educational psychology staff, associated data functions to deliver statutory returns to the department for education, and staffing to support school finances. Additionally, other services such as libraries will incur additional staffing costs in a disaggregated model, those these will be less significant than those across 'people' services.

Source: *Local Government Reorganisation: analysing the impact on people services*, CCN/Newton Europe, 10 October 2025

5.4

One **Worcestershire**: Shared prosperity for everyone in Worcestershire

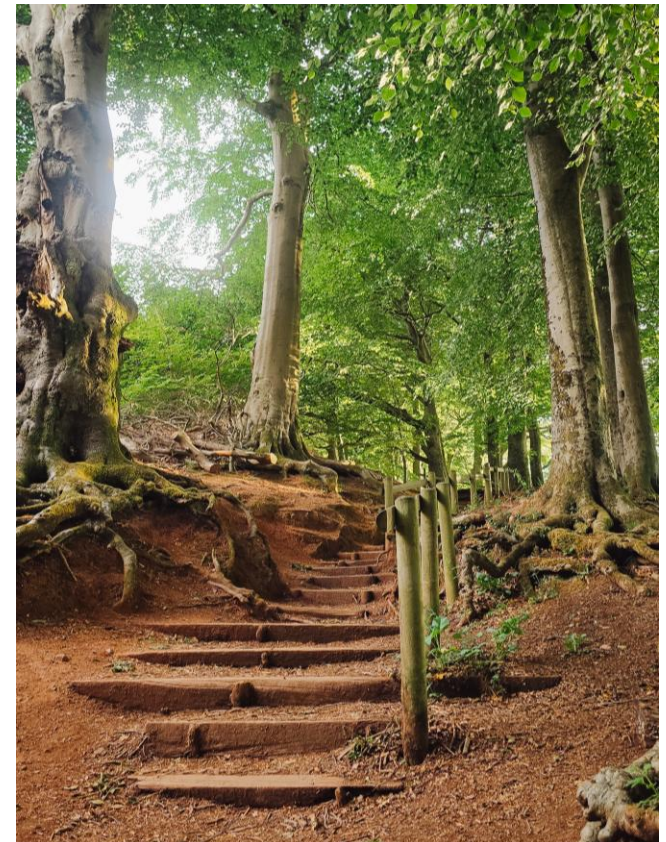
Maintaining economic growth

Unitary councils bring together important local government functions that foster economic growth and support businesses to thrive - planning, regeneration, transport planning, support for local businesses and engagement, skills development, innovation, infrastructure and inward investment.

A single unitary council for Worcestershire will have a generational impact in boosting competitiveness, productivity, job creation and local economic resilience because:

It will operate on the same footprint as existing county-wide activities, avoiding either the cost and inefficiency of disaggregation or shared approaches to maintain existing arrangements;

- 1 It would allow a unified approach to local and strategic planning, aiming for the eventual adoption of a single local plan that would guide investment in infrastructure, housing and employment sites. This would be then be reflected in a spatial development strategy prepared by a future mayoral strategic authority in which Worcestershire would have a strong voice as one of its largest constituent members;
- 2 The county is already recognised by the Government as being the appropriate scale and geography for numerous functions and their associated funding streams, such as national funding for growth hubs, a strategic Get Worcestershire Working plan, and contracts for Connect to Work, Adult Education and the Careers and Enterprise Company.
- 3 Greater impact and voice promote the county as an excellent location to grow businesses. Economies rely on diversity for the resilience – and marketing Worcestershire as a single destination for business allows the promotion of a wider range or urban, rural, traditional and high-tech industries.



Maintaining economic growth

Considerable economic development activity already takes place across the Worcestershire County footprint, and a single unitary authority on the same scale provides opportunities to continue, and to expand this work.

Over time, it is proposed that this would enable the area to benefit a single Local Plan, replacing those currently in place at district and multi-district level with a strategic plan for the wider area, supporting Worcestershire as it approaches the challenges and benefits of devolution.



Operating at the scale of One Worcestershire will secure other benefits and preserve existing partnerships, including:



Reducing the number of cross-border issues and negotiations required in **developing and delivering on local plans** and particularly in **developing and generating funding for large strategic infrastructure projects**;



Maintaining the **county's strong voice** in dealing with national and regional bodies such as Highways England, GB Railways, train operators, the Environment Agency and Central Government departments;



Aligning with the important role that the **University of Worcester** plays in the county's economy as the only university in Worcestershire.

County-wide activity is already delivering for residents and businesses in Worcestershire:

- Single plans for **waste facilities and minerals extraction**
- **A Local transport plan** – current plan is LTP4, with LTP5 in development
- **Worcestershire Growth Hub** – providing advice and mentoring, access to finance, help with innovation and exports
- **Get Worcestershire Working Plan** – adopted during Autumn 2025
- **Worcestershire Local Skills Improvement Plan** – led by the Chamber of Commerce
- **Worcestershire One Public Estate** working group
- **BetaDen Technology Accelerator and Incubator**, acknowledged in national awards

The scope of a single economic development function

A single unitary authority brings together all of the local authority functions which support economic development and maintained growth.

Across a footprint which can deliver significant opportunity for new businesses through a skilled workforce, partnerships with academia and links with regional and national infrastructure providers:

Local Plans and Development Management	Currently, district councils lead the local place-based strategic approach for land allocation and use classification, including housing, employment and retail, industrial and commercial and environmental protection. There is a pressing need for coordination on housing supply, major economic development, transport infrastructure, environmental protection and climate-change measures to ensure sustainable growth across a wider functional area. Currently, separate Local Plans are produced in South Worcestershire, Wyre Forest, and by Bromsgrove and Redditch jointly.
Transport Planning	Transport planning outlines a long-term vision, policies and investment priorities to achieve the sustainable movement of people and goods. It covers integration across road, rail, public and active modes, using quantitative data and predictive modelling to tackle congestion, improve connectivity and support regional economic growth and productivity. Worcestershire County Council current policy is Local Transport Plan 4 , with Plan 5 in development.
Business Engagement	Business engagement involves proactive collaboration between local authorities and the private sector to understand business needs, co-design local economic policies through partnership approaches, and to foster an ecosystem of support. The Worcestershire Growth Hub , brings together business engagement, supported by all partners to remove barriers to individual business growth plans. Partners include local authority economic development teams, membership organisations including the Chamber of Commerce and National Farmers Union, along with Business Improvement Districts (BIDs).
Support to Business	Business support offers tailored services and interventions to help businesses start, grow and adapt to changing economic conditions. This includes advice and mentoring, access to finance through grants, loans and equity, help with innovation and exports, networking opportunities, and links to business hubs or incubators. All support is designed to boost competitiveness, job creation and local economic resilience. Funding is jointly provided via central government sources, local councils and other partner organisations.

The scope of a single economic development function

Skills Support Property Innovation Infrastructure	Skills support describes initiatives and partnerships aimed at developing the local workforce capabilities to meet current and future employer demand. It embraces apprenticeships, vocational training, reskilling and upskilling programmes, delivered through the Employment and Skills Board. This Board oversees development of the Worcestershire Local Skills report (2022), the Get Worcestershire Working Plan adopted in September 2025, and has a lead role in supporting the Local Skills Improvement Plan , which is led by the Chamber of Commerce. The aim is to drive productivity by ensuring the whole workforce - from young people entering to working age individuals currently in work - is ready for the future. Support is delivered through programmes such as Worcestershire Apprenticeships , Early Careers Education through the Careers and Enterprise Company and increased employability through the Get Worcestershire Working Strategy and initiatives such as DfE Bootcamps, Careers Worcestershire working with DWP Youth Hubs and Connect to Work.
Skills Support Property Innovation Infrastructure	The property function in economic development manages the acquisition, development, disposal and ongoing stewardship of land and buildings to meet local needs for housing, commercial premises, industrial estates and mixed-use schemes. It balances market demand , planning policy and sustainability requirements to unlock sites, attract investment and shape places to support business growth and community wellbeing. Through the Worcestershire One Public Estate working group efficiency has been achieved through partnership between local authority, Police, Fire, and Health partners.
Skills Support Property Innovation Infrastructure	Innovation functions champion the creation and diffusion of new products, services, processes and business models by supporting research and development, facilitating collaboration between academia and industry, and delivering targeted grants and equity funding. Worcestershire is host to the national award winning BetaDen Technology Accelerator and Incubator delivering a growth platform, mentoring and support to advanced technology-based businesses.
Skills Support Property Innovation Infrastructure	Delivery of the essential physical networks and facilities—such as transport, energy, water, digital connectivity and social assets – underpins and enables both economic activity and quality of life. Worcestershire has demonstrated positive policy and delivery impacts, including Superfast Worcestershire which is now moving to facilitate gigabit connectivity across the county. Flooding response and alleviation , is supporting business resilience through partnership work between local government and the Environment Agency . The WLEP Energy Strategy is focused on energy production through renewable sources, energy efficiency through an invest-to-save model and overcoming business constraints in the National Grid.

6

One Worcestershire: The new council

In this section...

One Worcestershire is about the industrious, vibrant places across the county and its established communities working together to create a brand-new future for our area.

This part of our proposal outlines how a new unitary council for Worcestershire will align with both the history and future of the area, how the new council will engage with people who live here and work for us. The final section will consider some of the approaches we are taking to delivering the future, which have already begun:

- 6.1 A new operating model which prepares the ground for leading, delivering and transforming the single unitary council.
- 6.2 How the new council will deliver an inclusive culture, distinct from its predecessor, but building on local connections.
- 6.3 How services will be enabled and enhanced by technology from the outset of the new council's work.



This section outlines our proposed community and locality approach in One Worcestershire

Criteria 1, 4 & 5

New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements

Must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks

A single tier of local government for the whole area

Prioritises the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to residents

How councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views

Should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment

1

5

4



The opportunity to design for the future

Local government reorganisation is a key moment, offering the unprecedented opportunity to redefine how councils work, and to revisit their relationships with wider public services which face their own processes of change.

Whether this relates to the provision of services to residents, our preventive work with partner organisations in the public and voluntary sectors, or to our commercial relationships with suppliers, this offers a chance to deliver a genuinely transformational programme.



What can One Worcestershire provide to harness these opportunities?



A leadership team which can enable continued delivery of high-quality services, while focusing on the potential for transformation which technology, data and shared enabling services can offer;



A structure which enables genuinely strategic approaches to using resources, preventing future need, connecting services and working with partners to support locality level responses to changing needs;



A service offer which is not just the combined duties of predecessor councils, but builds on the synergies and dependencies within the system to provide leadership of place and community;



The ability to collectively challenge and support strategy and policy within the leadership team and beyond, to drive forward our critically important work to become financially sustainable; and



A chief executive role which is supported by the corporate leadership team to work with government in securing the best future devolution option for One Worcestershire, while championing the council's role in wider public sector reform.

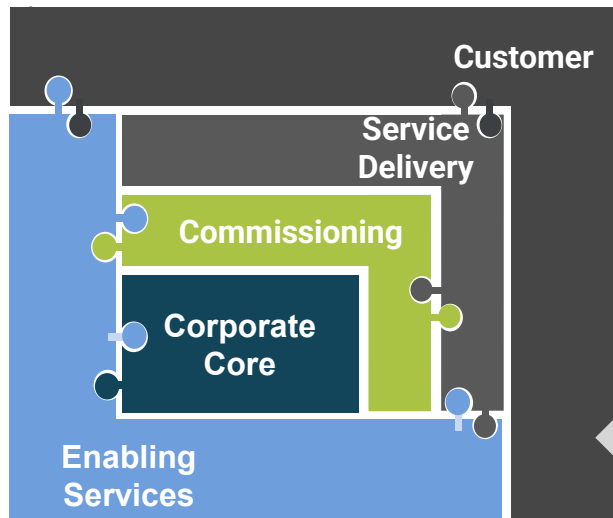
6.1

One **Worcestershire:** Future operating model

How did we determine the future model?

Early in the process of developing the One Worcestershire proposal, it was proposed that the new council should deliver a shift from current ways of working together.

This is a unique chance to consider the opportunities offered by a significant change in how the council operates, and to develop a vision for a future unitary council which maximises the benefits of delivering all services in the area via a single organisation.



Design Principles

A range of design principles were identified to govern work in this area, to ensure that the operating model delivered genuine transformation, and to link the operating model directly to work to deliver a financially sustainable council.

- 1 Prioritise the customer experience – simpler processes, clearer outcomes, digital first.
- 2 Embed corporate accountability through clear governance, effective controls and transparent decision making.
- 3 Communicate with clarity, purpose and transparency, reflecting the positive impact the council delivers and building trust with staff, residents and partners.
- 4 Use evidence to drive strategy, develop policy and to improve delivery.
- 5 Be 'Digital by Default' and develop technology strategy corporately to maximise the impact and value it delivers.
- 6 Define the current and future capabilities required in the workforce, and link these to the strategies and plans developed by the new council.
- 7 Consciously build a new culture and identity for a new council, which signals that this is not a merger or a takeover, and signifies a new start.
- 8 Use the new council's assets and property to support locality working and create value.

Design work to date has focused on the **functions** needed, and the **connections** between them

Delivering differently: Statements of intent

Based on these principles, the following statements of intent were developed: these capture the fundamental ways in which a new unitary council could operate, determined through intentional design and focused on delivering high quality services while becoming financially sustainable:



Digital

Digital solutions will be the default option for interaction with the new council, using a single set of AI and technology tools to gradually reduce demand and continuously shifting towards more efficient digital engagement.



Localities

Community engagement will focus work on smaller geographic areas, seldom-engaged communities, and under-represented groups, using proactive and targeted messaging and appropriate communication methods. This aims to foster collaboration across shared local services to improve partnerships and streamline referrals



Enabling Services

Support and enabling services will be consolidated, creating a corporate core which may extend beyond the traditional realms of IT, HR, Finance and Business Support, providing comprehensive and consistent assistance to all service areas.



Delivery Model

The new council will take a pragmatic and evidence-based approach to how each service is best delivered, including when to commission and when to directly provide.



Data and Insights

Data and insights will drive decisions around service delivery and transformation and will influence relationships with providers and partners.



Leadership

The council's leadership will act, and be accountable, corporately - acting as a team, but recognising both the synergies and specialisms across directorates in the new council.

The Operating Model must be structured to realise these ambitions while embedding accountability and efficiency

What the Operating Model Delivers

The operating model delivers a framework which uses evidence and performance to provide flexibility for staff, improve access to support for residents and communities, and fosters strategic partnerships and collaborative commissioning practice. What could this mean for how the new council works with residents, employees, partners and suppliers?

Commissioners & Suppliers



Creates clarity and consistency in working with the council to deliver services.

- Aligns authority-wide goals to ensure services meet organisational objectives and deliver improvement recognised by regulatory bodies.
- Promotes collaboration by leveraging shared resources and balancing risk and reward between the council and providers to improve service delivery.
- Efficiency is enhanced and costs are managed despite rising demand, with a focus on sustainability and stable financial performance.
- Facilitates efficient joint commissioning initiatives with partners like the NHS to enhance service delivery, reduce duplication and build preventive capacity.
- Focuses on improving relationships with suppliers to ensure effective management and collaboration.

Our Workforce



Clarifies expectations, increases trust and offers support.

- A 'new deal' where staff are offered flexible working arrangements and a high trust environment, contingent upon meeting performance targets.
- The model provides more opportunities for training and development, particularly via apprenticeships and graduate entry schemes.
- It fosters a supportive workplace culture where employees feel valued and proud to be a part of the new organisation.
- Emphasises effective performance management to align staff objectives with organisational goals, and to provide progression into professional roles.
- Staff will benefit from technology which links systems together, reduces duplication and works 'out of the box'.

Residents & Communities



Improves access and responsiveness while managing demand.

- A primarily digital front-door enhances access to information and advice for residents and communities via a self-service first approach.
- All engagement with residents will seek identify needs as early as possible.
- The focus will then be on directing residents efficiently to the right support at the right time, which may not be a council-delivered service in many instances.
- Smarter prevention strategies, such as more assessments being delivered at the initial contact, will ensure quicker resolution of issues and concerns - reducing overall demand and helping decrease waiting times for more complex support.

Leadership & Elected Members



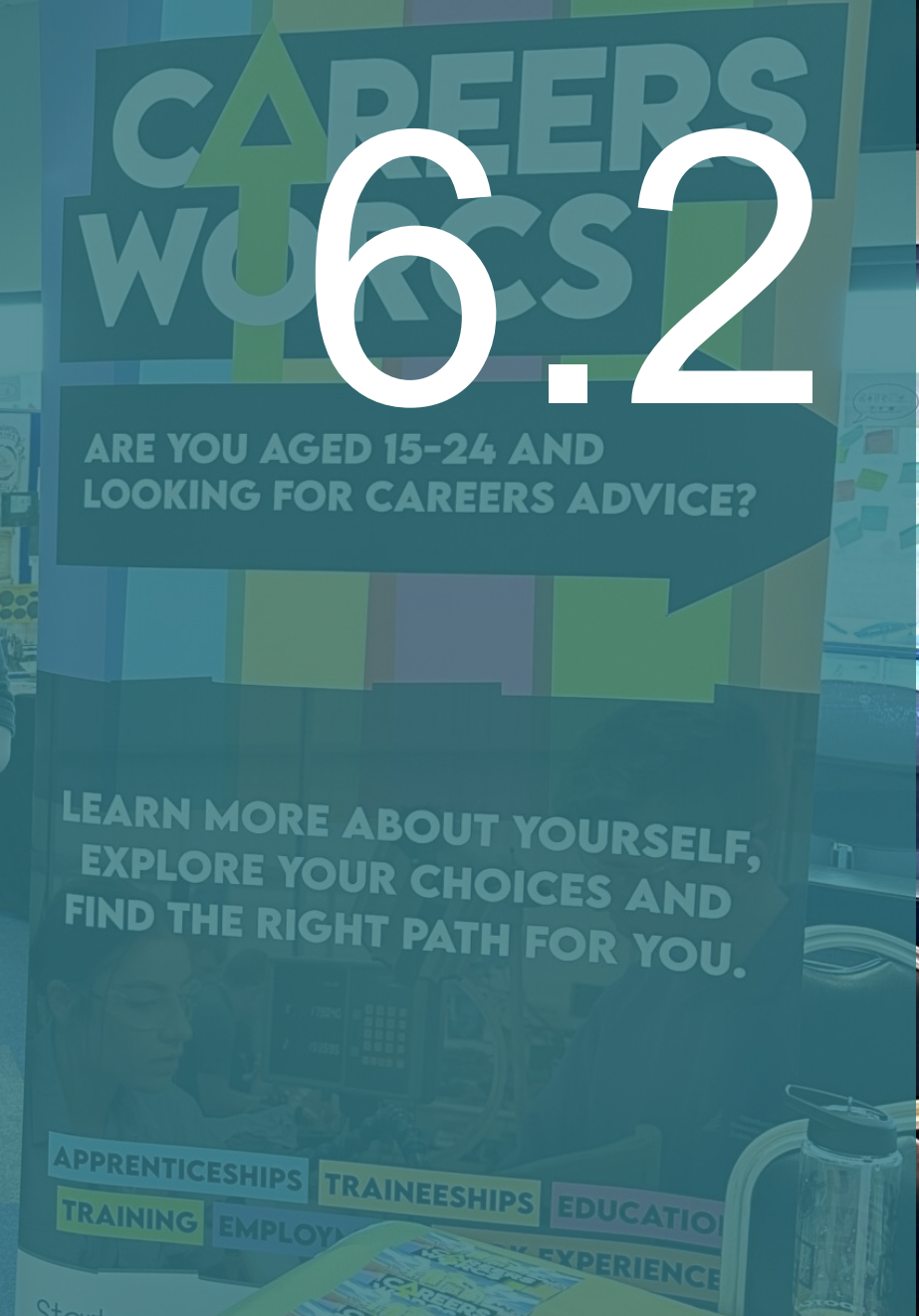
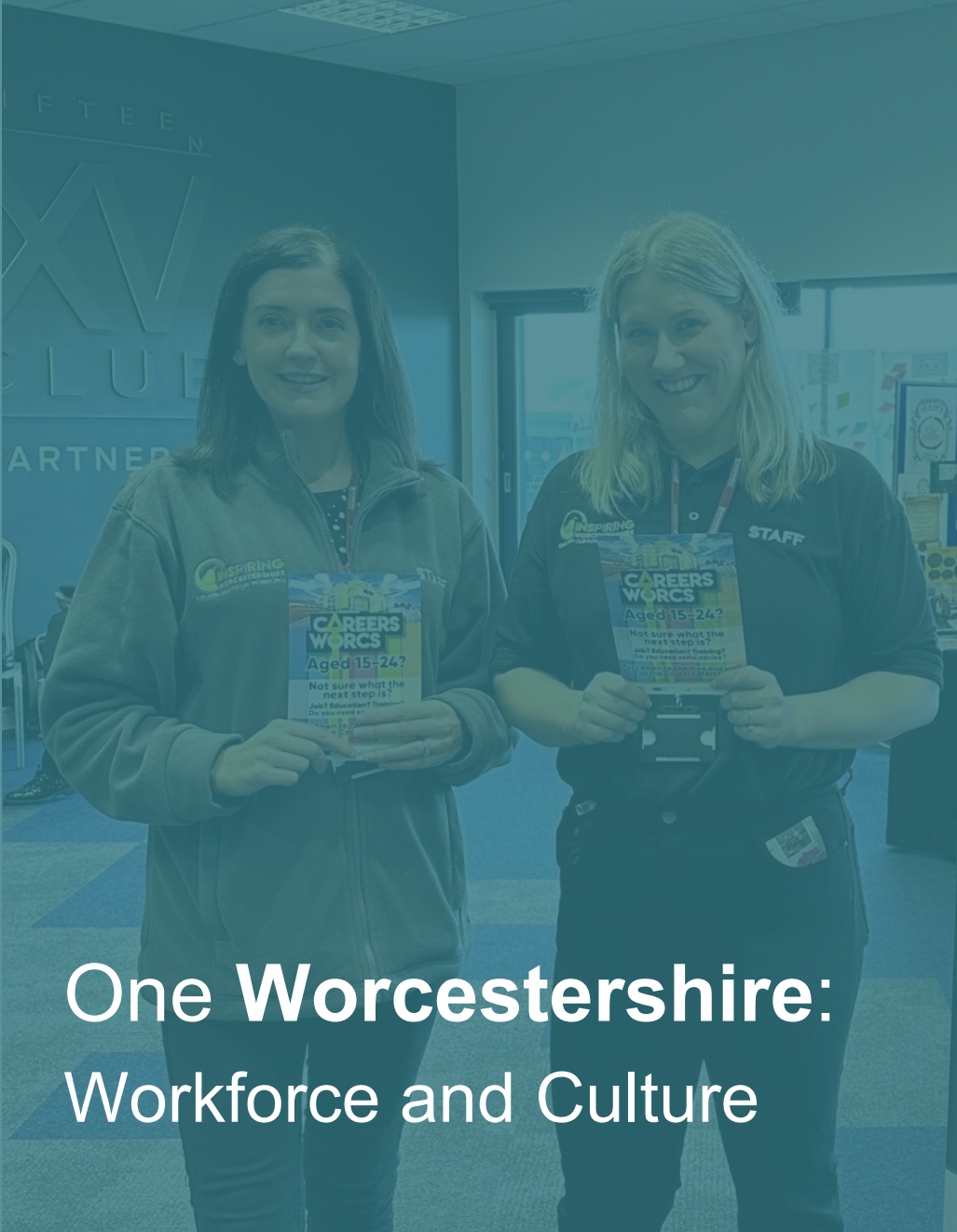
Creates accountability and consistency for working together.

- Senior leaders will act at a strategic level, offering challenge and support to service delivery teams, and creating the conditions for success.
- The Leadership team will work corporately, and be accountable both within the team, and to external regulatory functions.
- A performance culture will recognise individual, team and service contributions to outcomes and will equally value frontline and support roles
- Leaders and members will develop strategy and scrutinise outcomes based on evidence and data analysis.

How our proposed operating model aligns with LGR

There are directly links between the proposed operating model for the single unitary council, and MHCLG aspirations for future single-tier governance. By harnessing the benefits of scale, simplifying local service delivery, and delivering devolution-ready governance:





One Worcestershire: Workforce and Culture

One Worcestershire | Continuity and change

LGR represents a generational shift in governance for Worcestershire, and the opportunities to develop new approaches to delivering services and meeting needs are a critical driver for our plans.

However, it is important to understand what has built the county and the local identity, to ensure we preserve what is important to our residents and to our workforce.

Worcestershire in History

Worcestershire has a long-standing historical significance, first constituted in 927 CE. The modern era of governance began in 1889 under the Local Government Act of 1888, which introduced elected county councils across England and Wales, with Urban and Rural districts following soon after – providing a structure recognisable today. The county underwent significant changes during the local government reorganisation of 1974, when it was merged into the county of Hereford and Worcester, altering its administrative boundaries and creating its six district councils. However, in 1998, Worcestershire County Council was re-established as a separate entity, delivering critical services alongside the Borough of Redditch, City of Worcester and districts of Malvern Hills, Wychavon, Wyre Forest and Bromsgrove, reaffirming its administrative independence and restoring a focus on localized governance.



Our local Identity

Worcestershire is a region characterised by a rich tapestry of history, culture and natural beauty. The county's identity is deeply rooted in its agricultural heritage, which has played a significant role in shaping its landscape and cultural practices. The industrial era brought Worcestershire's market towns to prominence, with Redditch, Kidderminster, and Worcester becoming known for manufacturing needles, carpets, and gloves, respectively.

This industrial heritage is still evident in local museums and community events that celebrate the craftsmanship and innovation of past generations. However, new technology is part of the fabric too, evident in Malvern Hills Science Park and BetaDen.

Community life in Worcestershire is vibrant and diverse, with a blend of urban and rural influences creating a unique local culture. Festivals, markets, and community events reflect the county's welcoming atmosphere and the importance placed on local traditions and community cohesion. The City of Worcester stands proudly at the centre of this tradition – blending heritage and progress with its cathedral, university and growing prominence as a tourist destination.

Worcestershire has an enduring identity, rooted in a rich history, cultural heritage, and natural beauty. A new council for Worcestershire will celebrate these unchanged, while delivering a prosperous future.

Culture in One Worcestershire

The culture of the new council will reflect the wider community – and will focus on continuity of the historic and important functions of the county and district councils, while building a wholly new organisation from the ground up.

Culture is a critical aspect in the formation of any new organisation, directly influencing how effectively people work together, adapt to change, and deliver services when multiple organisations become a new organisation.

Culture is the invisible element that shapes how people think, behave, and perform within an organisation. A strong, intentional culture establishes alignment, trust, and resilience. It enables teams to thrive even in times of change. By prioritising and actively working towards a new, shared culture and remaining flexible in how we embed it, we create the conditions for sustained high performance, deeper engagement, and a shared sense of purpose.

We will consciously build our culture around three pillars:



Trust – that our people know best how they deliver quality services, listening to their views and respecting their approach



Productivity – finding ways of working, tools and processes which enable individuals and teams to collaborate in delivering outcomes efficiently



Wellbeing – supporting each other, formally and informally, to ensure we are safe, well and able to speak out about challenges we face.

This represents a new start for a new council, building on the legacy and commitment of predecessor councils.

An embedded performance culture which supports teams to grow and develop as the council changes.



A flexible workforce that is responsive to the people of Worcestershire both now and in the future as demand and complexities increase.



Visible, accessible and consistent leadership at all levels from leaders who have the freedom to act, improving performance.



One Worcestershire



The right people, with the right skills, in the right roles – empowered and supported to exceed expectations.



A workforce that has personal and collective resilience with wellbeing centred in everything we do.



A culture where employees understand the vision and values and want to contribute to the new council's success.

Intentional design | Cohesion and collaboration

Employees of all predecessor councils have told us that it is important to them that moving to a single unitary authority is not a takeover or a merger, but a chance to consciously design a new organisation with a distinct vision, values and culture.

The transition period to the new council is crucial as it involves bringing together employees from seven organisations into a single, new, cohesive entity. This phase is essential for shaping behaviours and decision-making, fostering trust, enhancing performance and service quality.

The transition to the new unitary authority facilitates integration and establishes a unified identity while supporting leadership and navigating change effectively. The county and district councils will work together before vesting day to minimise the impact on staff of ALL predecessor councils, particularly around managing roles which become vacant and avoiding potential redundancies.

To bring together all employees from across the seven individual organisations to create one new aligned organisation we will:

Support our workforce through the change and transformation:



- Implement wellbeing options and practical support for all staff
- Support staff to develop the skills needed in One Worcestershire including use of AI and technology
- Collaborate with staff, partners and trade unions to deliver a One Worcestershire Workforce Strategy

Recruit, reward and retain talent:



- Develop a plan to attract and retain talent to the new council
- Establish career pathways which enable our workforce to progress their careers and achieve their ambitions
- Ensure we build ways to 'grow our own' talent from apprenticeships upwards

Establish service excellence and measurable achievements:



- Develop future Managers and Leaders who support a growth mindset and a coaching culture
- Celebrate and recognise achievements
- Ensure that 'good news stories' about great quality, efficient services and local achievements reach the public, creating a council to be proud of

Our deal | Equity, performance and flexibility

The new organisation will bring together a range of cultures and expectations from across seven predecessor councils.

To provide the best experience for all employees from the outset, and to ensure fairness and equity, a new 'deal' with employees is proposed. This will be subject to further design and engagement – but will be subject to the key principles, and core outputs below:

Key Principles

- 1 Principle One** – to ensure that all employees are treated fairly in transition to the new organisation, and that opportunities are open to all in approaching how our new teams are built.
- 2 Principle Two** – to use the opportunity of building a new organisation to resolve any historical challenges or inequities, for example the 35- and 37-hour working week disparity in Worcestershire County Council.
- 3 Principle Three** – to provide clear pay and grading structures which support the council to attract and retain talent, and which support career development along clear pathways open to all.
- 4 Principle Four** – to build a performance culture from the outset, with clear shared and individual responsibility to improve services, and to coach and support colleagues to contribute to improvement.
- 5 Principle Five** – to build collective trust, where employees can work with flexibility and autonomy, in return for a commitment to the performance culture and the needs of the organisation.

Core Outputs



A transparent pay policy which includes a job evaluation scheme that encompasses the diverse roles within the new, unitary organisation.



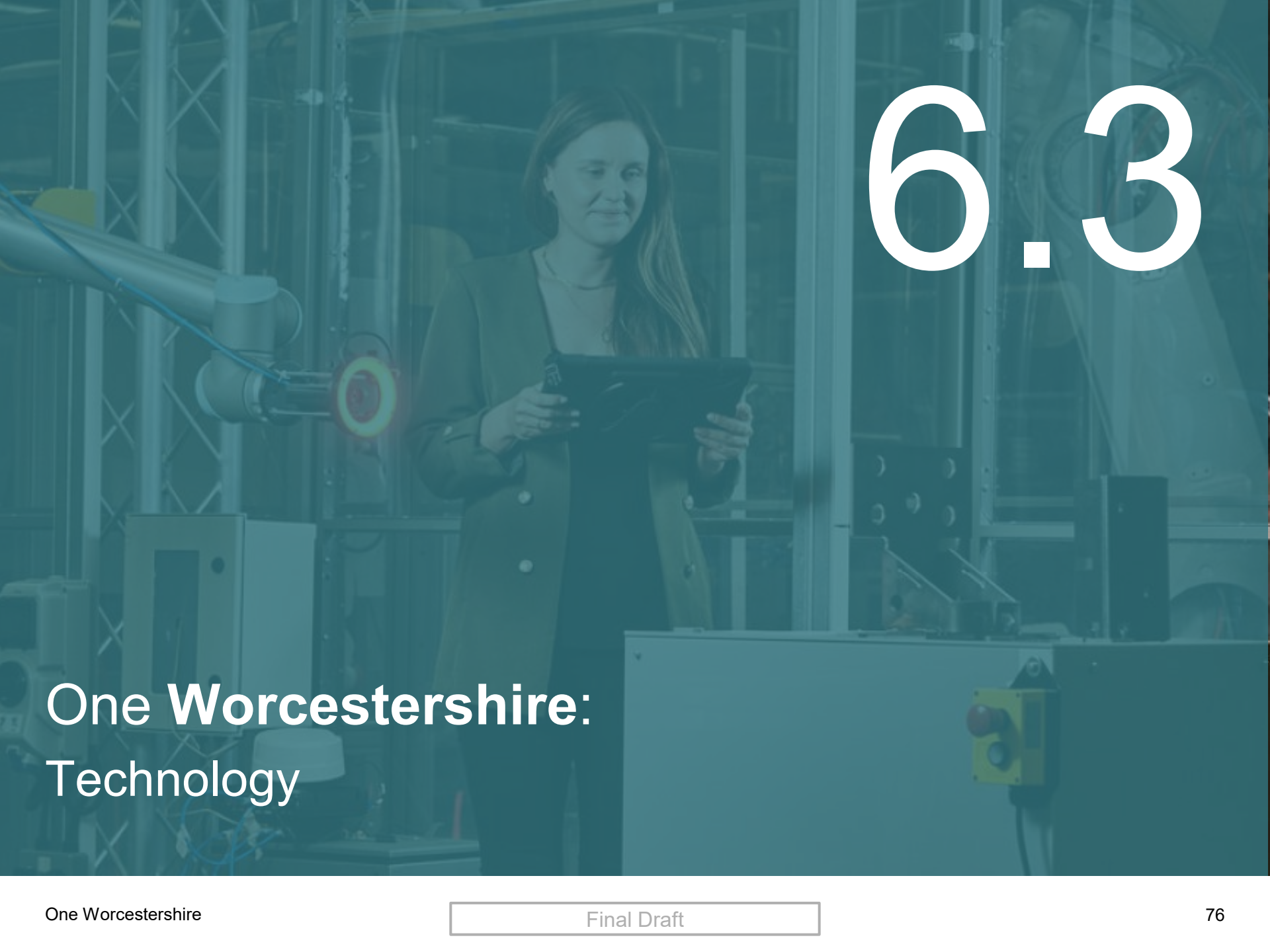
Career pathways and development programmes that upskill staff for new roles where digital transformation and customer experience are vital.



Workforce plans to support talent acquisition, development and succession planning for key roles.



A productivity-first approach to maximise synergies, efficiencies and effectiveness to improve services and reduce costs.

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a dark lab coat over a black top, is holding a black tablet computer. She is standing in a factory or industrial setting. In the background, there is a large industrial robotic arm with a yellow and red light on its end. The entire image has a blue tint.

6.3

One Worcestershire: Technology

Technology built in - from the ground up

The opportunity to design and implement a brand-new council is timely, given the fundamental shift in technology which society is currently experiencing. The new council proposes to be:

Connected

Council services should always be accessible to all residents and businesses. A single digital presence will allow us to connect people to services, sharing the benefits of a single-tier of local government.

Agile

The organisation will be designed to adapt to changing circumstances, using a range of standard tools and systems to build solutions rather than adopting highly customised tools.

Secure

A connected council which uses digital tools to deliver key services needs robust protection of its systems, communications and data. A ground-up council design allows these protections to be built in as defaults.

Collaborative

Council services should always be accessible to all residents and businesses. A single digital presence will allow us to connect people to services, sharing the benefits of a single-tier of local government.

Intelligent

The new organisation should build AI into its core operating model, with key repetitive tasks undertaken by common tools, freeing time to spend on core roles and face-to-face delivery.

A single digital strategy

Bringing together the experience, skills and capabilities of seven organisations using a range of technology solutions offers a huge opportunity for the new council - but also brings complexity. To ensure continuity of service delivery on day one of the proposed new council, it is necessary for the IT teams to begin work on a plan.

This will form the basis of a comprehensive plan for how data is used and safeguarded, how systems interoperate to ensure customers can access support and how staff members can communicate:

- **A seamless transition to the new organisation** - Ensuring services remain accessible and effective throughout the process of moving to a single unitary council
- **An effective plan for integration** - Bringing systems, data and support services together swiftly and effectively.
- **A plan for future transformation** - Looking beyond the immediate requirements for vesting day, a single IT strategy will be an early milestone in our proposed implementation plan.
- **A 'digital first' approach to working with customers**, and to developing a council-wide view of the customer to facilitate early intervention, and prevention from first contact.

Delivering technology for the new council

We recognise that integrating digital services will be a critical part of the implementation of a single unitary authority. We have begun to work together as a group of district and county council technology functions to explore the challenges and changes required to provide a seamless digital experience for staff and customers.

Our plans for day one...

We are working together on a plan which will provide the public with a single way of reaching the new council from day one, and to ensure staff can communicate and reach key systems immediately. This plan will be a key workstream in implementing LGR and will be further developed prior to a decision being taken on the future council.

...and beyond day one

A single technology function will provide the scale and scope to deliver real change, using AI tools to deliver automation, and deploying technology which simplifies regularly undertaken routine tasks. This will also present a simpler, clearer route to access information, advice and services for our customers.

The principles which will underpin the future technology function are:

Key Service Operating Principles



Data-Driven Decision Making: The service will embed analytics and performance dashboards across operations to enable evidence-based decision-making. Real-time data insights will support service planning, resource allocation, and policy development. By leveraging data from multiple sources—including operational systems, customer feedback, and external datasets—the authority can proactively identify trends, measure impact, and continuously improve service delivery.



Security by Design: Cybersecurity will be integrated into every layer of the service architecture, from infrastructure to applications and user access. This includes adopting secure coding practices, implementing robust identity and access management, and ensuring compliance with national standards such as Cyber Essentials and ISO27001. Regular risk assessments, penetration testing, and staff awareness training will underpin a culture of security and resilience.



Agile Delivery: The service will adopt agile methodologies to deliver technology solutions iteratively and responsively. This approach enables rapid prototyping, continuous feedback, and adaptive planning, ensuring that solutions evolve in line with user needs and organisational priorities. Agile delivery also supports cross-functional collaboration and accelerates time-to-value for digital initiatives.



Collaboration & Integration: Cross-departmental working and shared platforms will be central to the service's operating model. By breaking down silos and fostering collaboration between IT, service teams, and external partners, the authority can deliver more cohesive and efficient services. Integration of systems and data will reduce duplication, improve interoperability, and enable a single view of the customer, enhancing both operational efficiency and service quality.



Citizen-Centric Design: Services will be designed around the needs, preferences, and behaviours of residents, ensuring accessibility, inclusivity, and ease of use. This principle prioritises user experience across all digital touchpoints, from websites and mobile apps to customer service channels. It involves engaging with users through co-design, feedback loops, and usability testing to ensure services are intuitive, responsive, and equitable for all demographics.

Worcestershire County Council

7

What do your local councils do?

District Councils

- Six councils
- 200 councillors
- £73m total spend after income



- Planning
- Housing
- Environment
- Waste Collection
- Council Tax and Benefits
- Licensing
- Elections and Voting
- Economic Development
- Parks, Amenities and Public Facilities

One Worcestershire Council

would provide all services for the whole county with a single group of councillors, chief executive and leadership team.



Find more website

County Council

- One council
- 57 councillors
- £433m total spend after income



- Education and Schools
- Children's Social Care
- Adult Social Care
- Libraries and Culture
- Transport
- Strategic Planning
- Public Health
- Waste Management
- Trading Standards

One Worcestershire: Connecting with communities

Engaging and empowering local communities

Throughout and beyond the process of Local Government Reorganisation we will build on the reputation that Worcestershire has for ensuring County-wide programmes engage and empower local communities.

A single unitary authority will enable us to work effectively with the 'natural neighbourhoods' – those defined by where people identify and where they seek opportunities, support and leisure. A One Worcestershire approach means fewer communities being divided by abstract council boundaries which affect the services or communications people receive.

A single Worcestershire authority will allow us to work seamlessly with families. Families with adult children and older relatives who live in different areas of Worcestershire will not be impacted by a north vs. south divide. Neither will nursery, school or college communities find themselves split across separate local authorities.

The following proposals set out how we can enable stronger community engagement and empowerment as a single unitary authority, and how these can positively impact residents' wellbeing and the ability to live independent, healthy lives.



This section outlines our proposed community and locality approach in One Worcestershire

Criteria 2 & 3

New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements

Prioritises the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to residents

Must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks

How councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views

2

A single tier of local government for the whole area

Should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment

3

These proposals emerged from engagement with a range of local agencies and sectors, leading to six key principles that will enable early positive results leading to evolution and maturity over time – including alignment with transformation in other sectors.

The proposals then consider how the single unitary authority can maintain its presence in local communities by using the network of available premises across the new unitary authority footprint, alongside improved digital services.

Building up from the roots of the community

The Government has emphasized the need for unitary structures to “*enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment*” while not replacing existing structures in new configurations.

The proposed approach to working with localities across Worcestershire focuses on three key principles:

- 1 Using existing community structures flexibly** and innovatively to build hyper-local approaches which may be very different from neighbourhood to neighbourhood.
- 2 Positioning the local authority as the single service delivery point**, where communities can interact with and co-produce services which meet local need.
- 3 Looking ahead to the development of a devolved, strategic tier of regional government** which positions our local area at the heart of a system developing infrastructure, economic growth and innovation.

This is not a proposal to recreate multiple tiers of local government – it is a response to the challenge to think and work locally while engaging in a regional conversation about the future of our area. **A single unitary council delivering services for Worcestershire’s residents and businesses is central to making the system work for everyone in the area.**



Developing the role of Town and Parish Councils

The English Devolution white paper (2024) does not directly address the form or function of town and parish councils. However, they are essential stakeholders in LGR, particularly as a voice for local communities.

The white paper acknowledges this, stating that “*We will also work with the town and parish council sector to improve engagement between them and Local Authorities.*” and “*We will also rewire the relationship between town and parish councils and principal Local Authorities, strengthening expectations on engagement and community voice.*” Ministers have also warned that the proposals should not seek to recreate current two-tier structures by setting up new bodies.

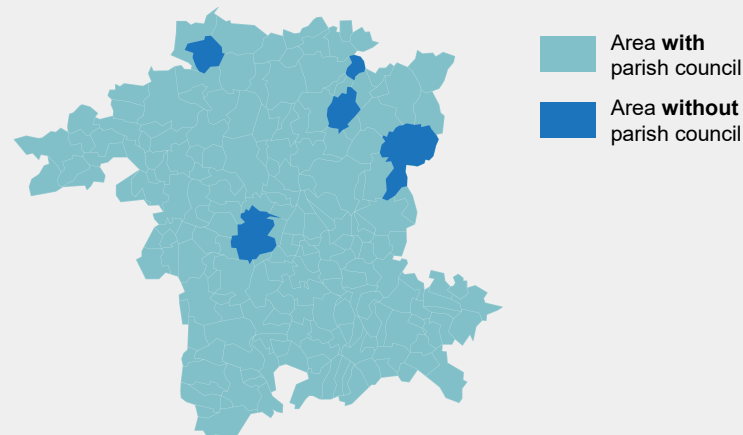
Based on this policy background, two key aims emerge for LGR in relation to town and parish councils:

- 1 Define the role of town and parish councils in a new system in a way that plays to their unique strengths.
- 2 Establish a framework for collaboration with the unitary authority utilising existing bodies, systems and governance including town and parish councils.

It is proposed that the structural change order which implements LGR for Worcestershire takes account of the status of the **Borough of Redditch**, and **City of Worcester** and approves the appointment of Charter Trustees to protect their historical mayoralties should parish authorities not be in place at the time the order is issued.



Town and Parish Councils in Worcestershire



- Town and parish councils are the first tier of local government – directly representing neighbourhoods at a hyper-local level.
- There are 151 such councils in Worcestershire.
- They represent communities at the most local level.
- They play an increasingly vital role in community life.

Five areas of the county are not currently represented by Town or Parish councils, They include the towns of Redditch and Bromsgrove, Rubery and the City of Worcester, and the Ribbesford area of Wyre Forest.

Ensuring community empowerment – Steps 1 & 2

1

Step 1: Establishing an infrastructure

The work to commission an independent organisation to provide an infrastructure for community engagement will begin well before vesting day. This will allow local empowerment to happen right from the start of the unitary authority's life and be baked into its policies and procedures as they develop.

The infrastructure organisation will work at pace, supporting the unitary authority to create place-based representation routes, including in any unparished areas.

As part of this, it will also begin supporting the new unitary authority to establish **local neighbourhood committees** (LNCs) in collaboration with parish and town councils and the voluntary sector (see Step 2).

It is important to note that the commissioned organisation will only be responsible for providing the infrastructure and administration of community engagement.

Overall responsibility for the depth and quality of that engagement, as well as its translation into action, will remain with the unitary authority, with officers seeing regular community empowerment as a core part of their work and skill set.

2

Step 2: Local Neighbourhood Committees

In their feedback on the original unitarisation proposals the Government said that they want to see “plans for neighbourhood-based governance and outline their thoughts about formal neighbourhood partnerships and area committees.”

In Worcestershire, we will establish a network of local neighbourhood committees (LNCs) made up of representatives of towns and parishes, the unitary authority, local voluntary sector groups and partners from healthcare and the Police.

These LNCs will be supported by the unitary authority and the infrastructure organisation (described in Step 1) and ensure that local communities are involved in the development of any strategies or policies that affect them.

LNCs may also take on the management of local services or assets; empowering local communities to take an active role in the future of Worcestershire.

The exact number and footprint of LNCs will be determined through community engagement. Options will include alignment with the footprints of the NHS Neighbourhood Health Programme.

Ensuring community empowerment – Step 3

3

Step 3: Utilising Inclusive Engagement Methods

Not everyone is equally able to engage in formal meeting settings. Therefore, LNCs will utilise engagement methods that enable everyone to have a voice, including a balanced combination of online and offline engagement techniques.

Participation will be facilitated in familiar settings like community centres, libraries, or farmers markets as well as via services that the unitary authority and its partners provide.

In ensuring wide community empowerment, the role of the Voluntary Sector is crucial. Their involvement will ensure that those that face the biggest barriers against community involvement will be included.

In its efforts to facilitate engagement, the unitary authority will also establish accessible locations across the county that will enable residents to conduct their business with the council. These will utilise our network of libraries, community centres and local council offices, as well as mobile solutions (see later slides).

In its efforts to facilitate engagement, the unitary authority will also operate from accessible locations across the County that will enable residents to conduct their business with the council. These will utilise our network of libraries, community centres and local council offices, as well as mobile solutions (see later slides).

The advantage going forward is that, as a single county-wide unitary authority, issues can be managed in a joined-up way rather than requiring residents to negotiate the split between District and County functions, or between different parts of the County that their family or lives may connect with.



Ensuring community empowerment – Steps 4 & 5

4

Step 4: Going beyond consultation

One of the most consistent findings from our stakeholder engagement was that there is support for genuinely empowering local communities rather than simply consulting them on pre-written plans.

Worcestershire already has a positive reputation for this type of work. For example, the county council's Priority Neighbourhood Development Programme, which co-designs and co-delivers health and wellbeing initiatives with local communities, led to measurable reductions in health and social care service demand. The Programme won the national LGC Public Health Award in 2025 and has been cited by the LGA as an example of best practice.

The new council will actively encourage LNCs, as well as town and parish Councils, to play an active role in the design and delivery of key services. As discussed in Step 3 – this will be achieved in way that ensures everyone has a chance to participate, including those facing barriers due to disability or digital exclusion.

5

Step 5: Align with NHS transformation

The current UK policy direction towards local community empowerment is not confined to local government. In particular, the emergence of Neighbourhood Health plans provides a once in a generation opportunity to better align the services that the NHS and local government provide.

In Worcestershire, we will encourage cooperation between local neighbourhood committees (LNCs) and the emergent Neighbourhood Health Providers, including coterminous geographies and collaboration on joint initiatives. If done well, this will achieve the more joined-up approach to public sector working that our communities want.

In working towards this ambition, the new council will not be starting from scratch. Local 'collaboratives' already operate across the county that bring together local authority, NHS and voluntary sector. This way of working will be built upon and expanded to facilitate both local government reorganisation and NHS reform agendas - enabling more cost-effective working and genuine empowerment of communities in the issues that matter most to them.

Ensuring community empowerment – Step 6

6

Step 6: Allowing evolution and building trust

Efforts to empowering local communities require trust to be established and maintained. This in turn requires that local authorities can adopt a flexible approach that enables change in response to the feedback provided by local people.

The idea that a perfect, one-size fits all solution to community empowerment can be delivered on vesting day and remain unchanged is naive and will detract from its key aim of enabling local determination. Equally, assuming the form of local engagement and empowerment in place at the beginning of a new authority will remain static over time does disservice to the flexibility and adaptability of our local communities.

For example, it may be that, over time, the initial group of LNCs adapt or merge to better achieve their aims, or to reflect the changing nature of the local community. In addition, methods of communication may develop as digital inclusion extends across the population. We will also continuously attend to a 'you said – we did' approach to communication.

Therefore, the new council will consistently check our systems for local empowerment against local perceptions and build in a culture of continuous improvement, adapting the model as required.

If we are to maximise trust and engagement, then we will need to demonstrate that local opinion and ideas are being acted on.

Towards this aim, we will establish regular feedback sessions into LNCs on key areas of collaboration and disseminate examples of where they have made a difference.



Where and how will residents engage with the council?



General Principles

- The council will need a physical presence in local communities at accessible venues to delivery its statutory duties effectively.
- The move to a single unitary authority provides extensive potential for the rationalisation of local authority premises and an opportunity to reconfigure the services that operate out of them.
- Rurality, disability and equity are key considerations as premises and services are designed.
- Co-location of services is key to both the efficiency of those services and the convenience of the people using them.
- The ongoing shift to digital channels must be a priority, This can be achieved in way that promotes digital inclusion while taking care not to leave anyone behind or excluded from communication.



Local Hubs

Significant economies and improvements in service experience will be achieved by amalgamating district and county property portfolios to create multi-service hubs. These hubs would act as one-stop shops for all council services, reducing duplication and improving accessibility.

Co-location with services such as libraries and housing, as well as with NHS and VCSE partner organisations, will deliver customer-facing services and reduce front-office costs.



Hybrid Service Formats

Best practice guidance from the Local Government Association stresses the importance of hybrid approaches to enabling people to do their business with their council.

Our hybrid approach will combine in-person and digital delivery methods. As with staffing, we have good data to guide us on how much in-person versus digital service provision is required.

- **Face-to-face:** Drop-in sessions, advice desks, and scheduled appointments at local hubs.
- **Digital:** Self-service kiosks in venues, video booths for virtual appointments, and mobile apps for booking and payments.



Digital Inclusion

An ambitious programme aimed at enhancing digital inclusion across the population in Worcestershire is already underway. The work is well progressed through our libraries and many other community venues and initiatives.

This will gradually allow greater channel shift to more convenient and economical digital service delivery without leaving anyone behind.

Making our presence in neighbourhoods inclusive



Smart Staffing

Maintaining an in-person staff presence at council premises needs to be done efficiently. This will be made possible through a data-led predictive modelling approach. Data on attendance at various venues and the services requested will be continually monitored and fed into a model which will help managers set appropriate staffing at different venues and times.

Together with service journey mapping, this will allow provision to be tailored accurately to our residents needs as well as avoid expensive overstaffing at quiet times.



Prioritise Rural Accessibility

With 86% of Worcestershire classified as rural, mobile outreach (e.g., pop-up council desks in village halls) is essential. This prevents rural residents from being disadvantaged by centralisation and supports equal access to services



Disability and Access

The new council will ensure that all services are accessible, with a focus on disabled users, by ensuring premises have features like widened doorways, ramps, tactile paving, and sensory lighting. Language barriers will also be addressed through Braille signage and multi-sensory navigation. In digital services, we will comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standards to overcome age, language, disability, and socio-economic barriers.

Engaging with residents and capturing demographic data helps us meet our Public Sector Equality Duty, ensuring inclusive services. Prioritizing co-production, feedback, and solutions enables effective service development and delivery.



Co-Design with Communities

Decisions on the locations and configuration of council premises and digital services will include users of those services at every stage.

Importantly, this will not just be done once. Co-design with local people will form an integral part of a process of continuous improvement. This will help us stay ahead of changing priorities, opportunities and technologies.



One Worcestershire: Democracy, leadership and governance

In this section...

A new single unitary council requires a modern approach to governance and leadership to ensure it achieves financial sustainability while continuing to deliver of high-quality services.

This section of the proposal:

- 8.1 Outlines how the council could be organised and led by an effective cabinet structure, and how the role of ward members will be critical to locality working
- 8.2 Describes the proposed officer leadership structure which seeks to provide strategic leadership from a collaborative and corporate team committed to service delivery and financial sustainability



This section focuses on how One Worcestershire can deliver effective services which bring together the best of the predecessor councils, work with partners and continue to drive local economic growth

Criteria 4 & 5

New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements

Prioritises the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to residents

Must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks

5

How councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views

A single tier of local government for the whole area

4

Should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment



8.1

One **Worcestershire**: Democratic arrangements

The structure of the council

Worcestershire currently has 257 elected county and district councillors representing 165 wards and divisions of varying geographic size.

24 of these councillors are ‘*twin hatters*’ representing similar communities within both county council divisions, district and borough wards. Collectively, these councillors serve on over 80 council committees and sub-committees many of which perform similar functions across different parts of the county.

One Worcestershire provides an opportunity to reduce duplication and to provide a simplified governance structure.

One Worcestershire will provide clearer democratic accountability and make it easier and simpler to engage and work with statutory partners like the Police and NHS.

If two unitary councils are created for Worcestershire there is increased possibility that these agencies would need to work with two divergent political administrations with competing strategic and political objectives in neighbouring areas.

Previously, councils in England were able to choose between 3 different governance models: Mayor and Cabinet, Leader and Cabinet, and the committee system.

Six of the seven councils in Worcestershire operate a leader and cabinet system. Worcester City Council operates a committee system. The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill proposes to abolish the committee system. It will be for the Leader of the new unitary council to appoint their cabinet

members and respective portfolios (legislation requires a cabinet to be between 3 and 10 members) There will need to be a clear and appropriate committee structure given the range of services the council will be responsible for, including social care, planning, licensing and housing. These will be coupled with robust scrutiny arrangements to hold decision makers to account.

The role of ward members will be directly linked to our proposals for working with local communities,

with a clearer role for members in providing the link between council services and the residents they represent. As these locality plans coalesce and our Local Neighbourhood Committees are developed, ward members will have a critical role to play in how their local neighbourhood committee develops, working alongside town and parish councillors and other community groups.

Devolving local decision-making to these groups wherever possible,

ensures that we make the most of the commitment, skills and local connections of our ward members – ensuring their role is purposeful and fulfilling and challenging the perception that decisions are taken by a cabinet remote from residents.



A new single unitary council will also require a new relationship with local town and parish councils – see Section 7 of this document

The size of the council

Worcestershire was subject to a Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBCE) review in 2023 which established the electoral divisions used in the 2025 election. It is proposed that these divisions are retained, and that **all divisions in the new unitary council area are represented by two members** (except in Redditch which would have divisions returning four members). This results in around 4,500 electors per councillor based on the 2025 electorate factoring in population growth. This is similar to the rate in recently created unitary county areas (average c. 3,900) and should support a balanced and manageable workload for members. While recognising that LGBCE regard a range of 30-100 councillors to be a practical size for a council, **this approach avoids areas experiencing a significant reduction in representation before any future review takes place.**

Current number of wards and members in County & District Councils	165 wards/divisions 257 members
Wards and members in Proposed One Worcestershire Council	53 wards/divisions 114 members
Proposed Electors per Councillor	c. 4,500

Table 2 - The size of the proposed council



?

Are residents represented equitably?

Currently, each Worcestershire County councillor represents **8,049** electors, while on average district councillors across the area represent **2,273** electors. Across the five existing unitary councils with an electorate greater than 400,000, each elected member represents an average of **3,956** electors.

The cost of the new unitary council

Councillor's Allowances

Estimated basic allowance rates are based on the levels set by the county council in May 2025, uprated by projected CPI as published by the Office for Budget Responsibility for 2026-28. The next review is scheduled for 2028.

Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs)

The new council will operate on a Leader & Cabinet basis, with a proposed number of roles detailed in Table 4. However, it will be a function of the new authority to determine the rate of allowance paid and the specific roles which receive remuneration.

To provide an estimated costing we have assumed an increase based on a larger number of committee chairs to reflect the wider responsibilities of the new council. This has been validated by testing against the changes experienced in other recently created unitary authorities of a similar size.

Projected Basic Allowance rate per member (2028)	£13,419
Projected Total Basic Allowances (2028)	£1,529,766
Projected cost of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) and discretionary allowances	£740,000
Projected annual total member allowances	£2,269,766

Table 3 – Projected Member Allowance costs

SRA and Discretionary Allowances - Proposed Roles	Count of Roles
Leader	1
Deputy Leader	1
Cabinet Member	8
Political Group Leaders	4 *
Overview & Scrutiny Performance Board Chair	1
Lead Scrutiny Members	8
Committee Chair	12
Chair of the Council **	1
Deputy Chair **	1

Table 4 – Proposed roles in receipt of Special Responsibility Allowances

* Subject to change depending on grouping arrangements. This proposed figure reflects the number of political parties with more than 5 seats after the 2025 County Council Election

** Discretionary allowances for Chair and Vice-chair under provisions of the Local Government Act, 1972

Election Costs

There are currently over 250 councillors representing the residents of Worcestershire at district and county level, with a significant number of individual councillors serving on both their district ward and county division.

A new unitary council spanning the whole county area provides an opportunity to:

- Reduce the number of councillors overall, while ensuring residents remain effectively and equitably represented.
- Deliver a modern council, better focused on supporting residents needs.
- Redefine the role of ward councillor as a link to our locality partnership arrangements.

A further area of efficiency will be the costs of delivering local democracy through a reduction in the number of elections which will take place in each democratic cycle.

In modelling these future costs, we have assumed that:

- The cost per vote is approximately equal to the total Maximum Recoverable Amount (MRA) for the whole area, divided by the total electorate and subject to projected inflation calculated by the OBR.
- The costs are based on an average turnout for prior elections, to avoid overstating the impact of these changes
- Future elections will take place on a four-yearly cycle, with costs annualised to support inclusion in the overall costs and benefits of delivering LGR.

Table 5 – Reduced costs of delivering elections

Cost of elections	
Election cycle and Frequency	Whole council every four years
Average turnout in recent local elections	39%
Estimated cost per vote (by 2028) *	£5.17 (based on MRA & inflation)
Projected cost per election at average turnout	£960,874
Annualised cost	£240,218
Annual Saving against costs in current two-tier system	£202,947

* Based on MRA published for each relevant constituency in [The Parliamentary Elections \(Returning Officers Charges\) Order 2024](#) and OBR inflation projections to 2028/29.



8.2

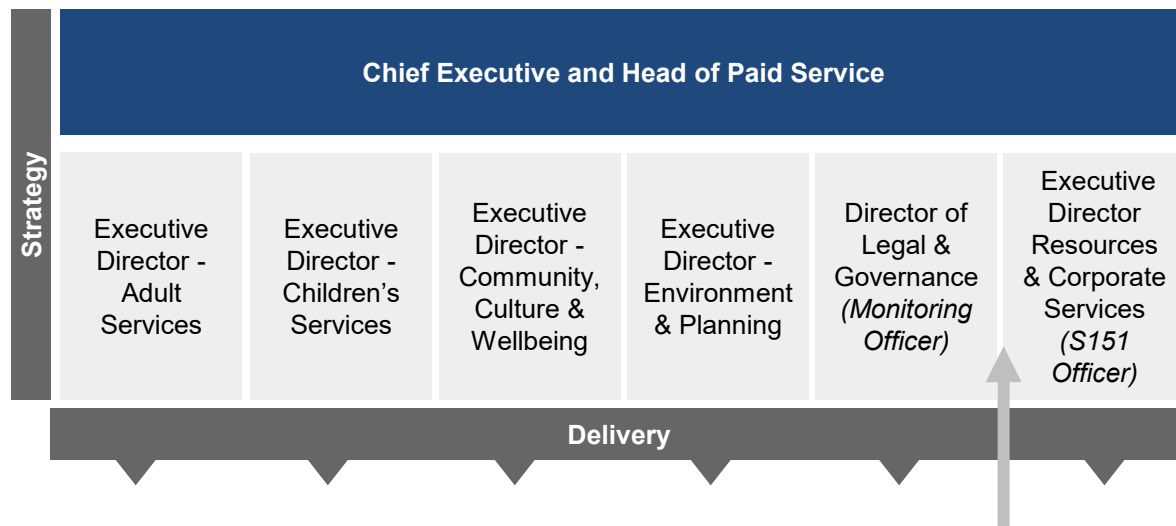
One **Worcestershire**: Leadership in the new council

Strategic Leadership

Our proposed operating model for a new council is focused on a need for trusted, collaborative leadership which provides a corporate strategic steer across the whole council.

This will be particularly important as the new organisation is likely to be larger than any of its predecessors, deliver a greater range of statutory services, and act as custodian of much greater public funding.

To deliver the cultural, operational and productivity changes we believe are required to create the conditions for success and financial sustainability, we are proposing a lean executive team which delivers strategic leadership to a layer of Operations Directors who drive service provision and ensure that our strategy is delivered effectively and efficiently.



Why is this part of our proposal for LGR?

The complexities of bringing seven organisations together while creating a wholly new council require a clear steer from a committed and collaborative executive team. We want this team to be transformative leaders who share a strategic commitment to delivering a brand-new council for Worcestershire.

The Director of Legal & Governance and Executive Director – Resources & Corporate Services will oversee the delivery of shared enabling services to the wider council including financial support, legal advice and support, governance, policy, HR, pension and information technology. This will replace the currently fragmented service offer distributed across a mix of central and directorate functions.

9

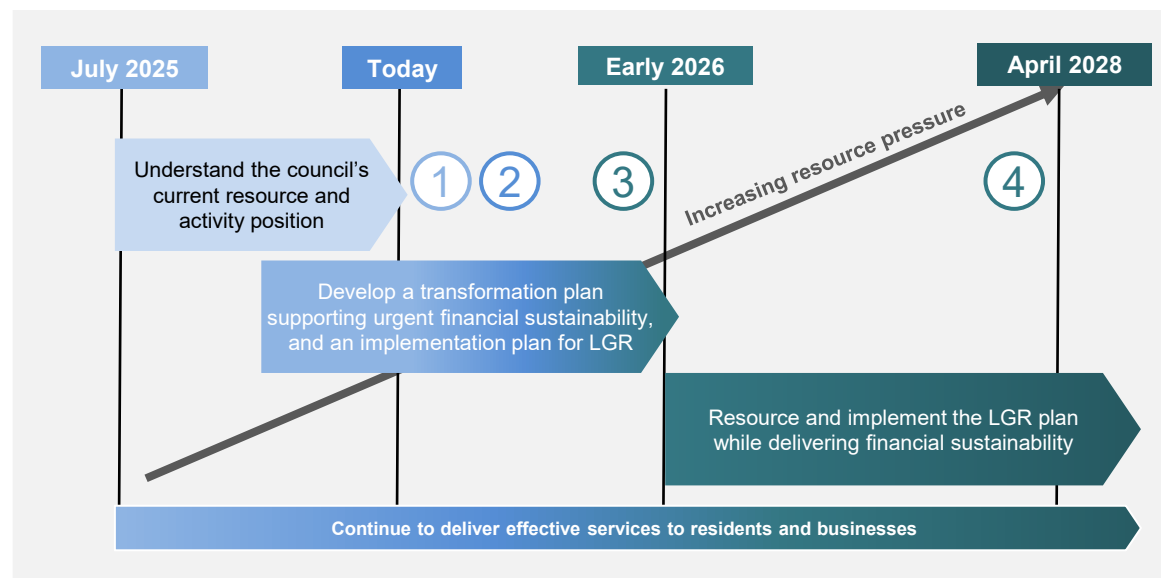
One **Worcestershire:** Transformation opportunities

A single transformation journey

Our financial case provides a compelling narrative around the need for a single unitary authority in Worcestershire – but this approach is not without financial challenges and risks in an uncertain economic situation. Worcestershire County Council has begun a process of transformation to become ‘**fit for the future**’.

The county council recognises the need to make decisions and take actions now which will both sustain the council’s financial security prior to 2028 and will build the foundations of a stable and sustainable new council beyond LGR implementation. **Work has already begun by starting the process of designing a new operating model.** It is also recognised that the coming years will not be without further challenges and increasing pressure on resources, and that delaying action until LGR implementation begins is not a feasible approach for Worcestershire County Council.

The county council is investing in transformation now to deliver these improvements and efficiencies alongside plans for implementing LGR. This will support us in achieving the benefits of reorganisation. The approach can be extended to other predecessor councils once a clear decision on the future is made by government.



- 1 Design and implementation of a **new operating model** which embeds collaboration across directorates and teams.
- 2 A **review of all county council spending** to identify areas of high-cost or duplication for review and action to deliver efficiencies
- 3 Analysis of **how staff time is used across the county council**, to realign resources to meet residents needs, design new processes
- 4 Identified opportunities and a clear strategic roadmap for **using technology** to simplify customer interactions, deliver the benefits of AI and support staff to work smarter.

Detailed analysis of how the County Council spends its money

LGR provides a significant opportunity to review how services are best provided across a single unitary authority, determining where services may be best delivered in-house, and where bringing together existing contracts for similar services could release cost savings and economies of scale.

While this process can begin in earnest once a decision has been made on the shape of the new council and local authorities are committed to a duty to collaborate, there is considerable work to do within the county council prior to implementation of LGR.

This approach could be extended across all predecessor councils to provide a plan for financial health from Day One in a new authority, and supports the broader transformation needed to effectively bring all seven councils together.

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Why is this part of our proposal for LGR?

In order to support the county council's financial position prior to LGR and to enable delivery of the potential economies of scale offered by a single unitary authority, action is needed to identify cashable savings which control spending and deliver efficiencies. This approach identifies potential areas of cost reduction from the evidence available in spend data, rather than the traditional approach of seeking savings plans from already resource challenged and busy delivery teams in directorates.

Our transformation plans include:

Action 1:

Review customer facing functions, delivery channels and digital access to harness technology, reduce duplication and focus effort on supporting customers with highest needs

Action 2:

Analysis of potential duplication, poor value, low quality and other inefficiencies

Action 3:

Identification of areas for review – where a contract could be renegotiated or terminated, and where a decision to deliver directly or to outsource may be required?

Action 4:

Deliver a prioritised list of actions to deliver cashable savings ahead of LGR implementation

Action 5:

Design of the commissioning, procurement, brokerage and contract management functions for the new unitary council

1

2

3

4

▶

Developing efficient ways of working

The county council has begun to look at how staff spend their time, the tools they use and the processes they operate to support delivery of the savings required prior to – and after – LGR implementation.

This has focused our attention on three key areas of activity:

- **Customer Management functions** are duplicated across all directorates – bringing this together and using technology to support customers in getting the right service at the right time would provide efficiencies and service improvements.
- **Enabling and business support activities such as HR, IT, Legal Services and Finance** are dispersed widely across directorates, despite an extensive corporate centre. Bringing these services together, and providing a professional, high-performing corporate core for the council will simplify and strengthen all of the activity which relies on these critical services.
- **Delivering effective customer management and corporate services** will release staff time in our Children, Adults and Economy & Environment directorates to undertake more front-line service provision, reducing waiting times and increasing our capacity to provide preventive and early intervention support.



Why is this part of our proposal for LGR?

We have described elsewhere in this document the ambition to provide a 'new deal' for staff – recognising their professionalism and trusting them to deliver the best possible services, while providing clear expectations around productivity. These actions will support them with the tools, processes and support they need to deliver on this deal.

Our transformation plans include:

Action 1:

Review customer facing functions, delivery channels and digital access to harness technology, reduce duplication and focus effort on supporting customers with highest needs

Action 2:

Identify opportunities to automate common tasks and deploying standardised organisation-wide AI tools to support note-taking, records management and common task

Action 3:

Consolidate enabling functions, bringing together expertise and standardising the offer across directorates, providing a professionalised and career-oriented enabling and business support function



Beyond safe and legal

There are a range of areas where additional transformation undertaken alongside LGR implementation will support the effective delivery of the new single unitary council.

This will enhance and expedite the impact of work to reduce costs and will have marked improvements on how the new council interacts with customers from the beginning of its operations.



These include:

Improving the new council's digital footprint with a single, clear website, available immediately which signposts to the correct content, describes any interim arrangements, and provides a positive immediate engagement for those seeking information on the new council and regarding continuity of the services they currently use.

Reviewing physical premises. While key office locations will be a key consideration of the Implementation Plan, a range of satellite offices and surplus assets may be repurposed for locality delivery hubs, which could in time be entrusted to the emerging LNCs (see Section 7) to deliver their local priorities.

Considering customer journeys and the processes which requests for service take through the new organisation, to reduce repetitive activities, deploy AI to offer pre-assessment, screening and automation, freeing customer-facing staff to deliver face-to-face engagement and to support the development of new community networks.

Developing a plan to devolve funds and decision-making to the Local Network Committees as soon as possible after their creation, ensuring that residents can participate directly in shaping the new council and how it works to provide services at the most local level.



Why is this part of our proposal for LGR?

One Worcestershire aspires to build a new unitary council which moves beyond 'safe and legal' from its outset, improving the lives of residents, supporting them to access help independently, and ensuring they benefit from the economic opportunities which LGR and Devolution will offer.



10

One **Worcestershire:** The financial case for One Worcestershire

In this section...

One Worcestershire presents the only workable plan for delivering sustainable, responsible spending which does not create disadvantages for the public and local business

This section of the proposal:

- 10.1 Sets out the six principles for financial sustainability which support our design for a new organisation
- 10.2 Develops a high-level opening financial position for the new council, based on current data
- 10.3 Considers key financial indicators on vesting day: income, borrowing, assets, and reserves
- 10.4 Explains our approach to aligning pay and conditions for employees in the new council, and the costs of doing so
- 10.5 Provides an estimated cost for implementing a single unitary council and compares this to alternative proposals



This section focuses on how One Worcestershire can deliver effective services which bring together the best of the predecessor councils, work with partners and continue to drive local economic growth

Criteria 1 & 5

New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements

Prioritises the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to residents

1

Must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks

5

How councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views

A single tier of local government for the whole area

Should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment



10.1

One Worcestershire: The approach to a financially sustainable One Worcestershire

Approaching the financial challenges ahead

Why is a single unitary council the best option for future stability?

In common with all local authorities, a future Worcestershire council will inherit significant financial challenges and will need to plan an approach which delivers a stable financial position in the short-term, with a view to creating longer-term stability.

- The proposal for One Worcestershire provides the best opportunity to deliver this financial future:
- It has the potential to deliver significant economies of scale in terms of service delivery, and to manage economic shocks
- It has a stable and balanced council tax base which allows confident projection of future need and income
- It has a varied local economy based on a range of thriving rural and urban industries which support continued growth in business rate income

The new council would build sustainability into its new operating model from the outset via six supporting principles.

Where are the challenges coming from?



Future accounting for Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit. Expected to surpass £300m by vesting day



EFS Capitalisation
£33.6m in 2024/25 and up to £43.6m in 2026/27



Demand pressures in Adult Social Care
c. £11.4m per annum



Demand pressures in Children's Services and Home to School Transport (Mainstream & SEND)
c. £19.9m per annum



Demand pressures in Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation
c. £0.5m – 1.5m per annum



...against a backdrop of changing national funding and global economic uncertainty

Financial sustainability by design

Our proposal for a single unitary council for Worcestershire is based on a fundamentally new operating model, which embeds financial sustainability from the outset.

Developing a stable financial position and assuring the longer-term viability of the new council is only possible through creation of a single unitary authority which has the scale, skill mix and commercial influence to deliver better value for residents and local businesses.

However, this cannot be achieved through traditional approaches to savings or piecemeal reductions alone. With councils nationally challenged to deliver within current funding envelopes, and significant uncertainty about the future, fundamentally new approaches are required. The majority of the expenditure of the new council will continue to be on its workforce and on products and services which it purchases.

The **six financial sustainability principles** below indicate how the new council will embed the relationship between quality, cost and value in its new operating model.

1

Reducing the cost of leadership and governance

2

Becoming a prevention-focused council, which supports independence and innovation

3

Supporting a workforce which is affordable, accountable and high-performing

4

Acting as an intelligent commissioner and agile provider of services as appropriate

5

Delivering responsible, astute custodianship of assets

6

Using evidence of outcomes to make the right financial decisions

?

Why is this part of our proposal for LGR?

By developing an operating model founded on stability, digital governance and performance management, these six principles will enable staff in the new council at all levels to contribute to our journey to sustainability.

Our financial sustainability principles

1 A collegiate and corporate model of leadership

While a single leadership team will reduce overall costs, these are also contingent on a fundamental redesign. The operating model and leadership structure of the new council will be redesigned from the ground up to reflect the needs of a modern unitary authority. This includes manage spending sustainably, and to work across the structure to find innovative and effective ways of delivering differently. Services which have been amalgamated from predecessor districts will be critical parts of the structure with an equal role to play in delivering the best outcomes in Worcestershire.

Our proposal for One Worcestershire delivers principle one by:

- Reducing the total cost of leadership, and focusing on shared priorities and fiscal responsibility
- Enabling development of a financial strategy which supports cross-cutting efficiencies and opportunities
- Commitment to a single approach to Support Services, which deliver flexibility, productivity and efficiency
- A culture built on performance management – including financial performance

2 Supporting residents at the right time and place, with the right support

All councils have made efforts to deliver preventive services, particularly in adults and children's social care, and in housing. However, these have sometimes been short-term responses to grant funded programmes, or have been focused on small, specific populations of residents.

One Worcestershire provides an opportunity to embed a preventive, independence-focused approach in all services. From delivering accessible, clear and accurate information via digital platforms, reducing the number of direct contacts residents need to make to access services, and by delivering support which gets people back on their feet.

Our proposal for One Worcestershire delivers principle two by:

- Providing a single digital face to the world - which enables residents to understand their new council from the beginning
- Reducing the effort required to access early help and support
- Providing decision-making tools which support residents in accessing self-help and community-based support.

Our financial sustainability principles

3 Supporting a workforce which is affordable, accountable and high-performing

The new council will benefit from the coming together of skills and experience from seven predecessor authorities but cannot simply integrate the workforce without designing for effectiveness and financial sustainability.

There will naturally be some consolidation of roles across the joint workforce, and a strategic view has been developed of where effort is duplicated or inefficient prior to detailed organisational design by conducting Activity Analysis within the county council. A future compact with employees is also proposed, which sees flexibility and autonomy balanced with delivery of individual, team and council-wide targets.

Our proposal for One Worcestershire delivers principle three by:

- Designing a future workforce of the right size and skill base to deliver services across the council area
- Developing an understanding of where processes or activities are inefficient and building revised processes and technological solutions into the new council from the outset.
- Working with the workforce and trade unions to develop a future culture based on high performance, productivity and trust

4 Acting as an intelligent commissioner and agile provider of services as appropriate

A single council will provide unparalleled buying power and access to markets and will place the new authority in a position to influence local and regional commissioning across a wide range of products and services. Equally, the new council will be well-placed to invest strategically in delivering services directly where this presents better value.

Building an effective Corporate Core which can support finance, procurement and strategic commissioning activity, we will support our directorates to purchase services and manage contracts effectively, recognising that Contract & Client Management is a distinct skill, and may not be best provided by practitioners in the field who need to advocate for our customers as a first duty.

Our proposal for One Worcestershire delivers principle four by:

- Using the increased scale of a single unitary council to influence key markets, and
- Develop the capacity and commercial skills needed to manage relationships with suppliers to drive value and cost-effectiveness
- Delivering a strategic review of contracts in place on vesting day, delivering simpler, more efficient local services across the new council

Our financial sustainability principles

5 Delivering responsible, astute custodianship of assets

One Worcestershire will bring together a diverse portfolio of property and assets, ranging from historic city buildings in Worcester, to cutting-edge ecological housing developments in Bromsgrove. The stewardship of this asset base is critical to delivering a balanced budget, ensuring the continued delivery of truly local services, and in maintaining the cultural ties to the historic county and its ancient market towns. It is also key to future growth; with the supply of undeveloped land diminishing in the north of the county along with the complexities of the West Midlands Green Belt, newly consolidated council assets will offer significant redevelopment opportunities.

Our proposal for One Worcestershire delivers principle five by:

- Reviewing assets for sale or disposal across the newly integrated portfolio, focusing on addressing EFS requirements
- Strategically reviewing key council work bases - offices, depots and yards - to select those most suitable for the needs of a modern fleet and workforce
- Developing an approach to customer contact which balances local presence in key areas with the increased use of digital technology and AI

6 Using evidence of outcomes to make the right financial decisions

Modern councils are data-rich organisations, collecting significant bodies of information on local needs, services and community assets. Bringing together this data across the county and district councils will create a significant opportunity to develop a view of what works for Worcestershire, and how approaches to service delivery may need to vary to suit the needs of local communities. This also supports an evidence-based view of how efficient and effective spending on service delivery.

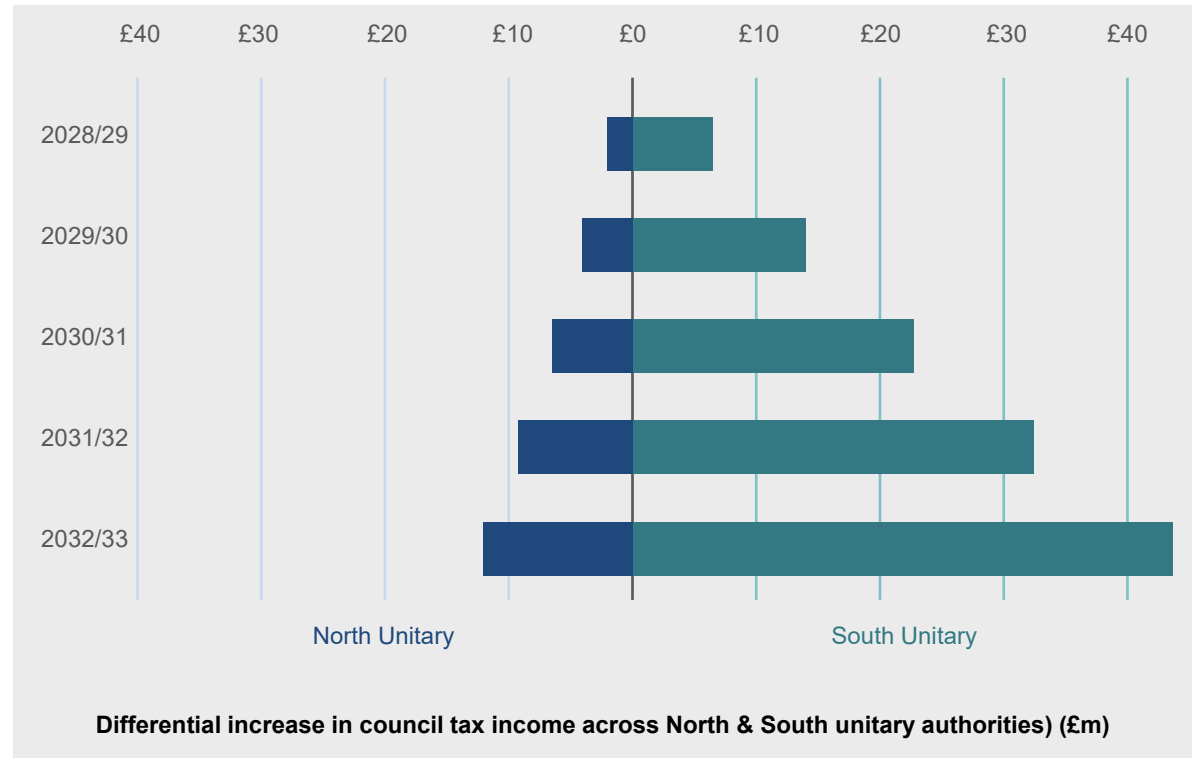
Our proposal for One Worcestershire delivers principle six by:

- Developing a single view of the customer, and ensuring they can discuss their needs and services wherever they meet the new council
- Supporting truly local delivery by developing our understanding of localities and how their needs are best met
- Developing a workforce which is skilled at using evidence to underpin decisions - from the delivery of individual services which are proven to be effective, to the strategic planning for the future of public services in Worcestershire.

The financial challenge in a two-unitary model

The imbalance in need for service delivery and income from council tax would be significant in a two unitary authority model for Worcestershire.

A new North Worcestershire unitary council would face the significant challenge of balancing greater levels of need in some areas with a smaller share of the taxbase, increasing deprivation and a less advantageous economic outlook. South Worcestershire would show very significant increases in council tax over the same period.



10.2

One Worcestershire: The future council's financial position

Planning for stability, by delivering financial sustainability

While LGR alone will not resolve the financial challenges faced by councils, we recognise that there is a significant opportunity to set the proposed new unitary authority on the right track for short-term stability which could support a sustainable financial future.

Our approach to planning the immediate financial situation of the new council is based on:

- **Exceptional Financial Support** which MHCLG has permitted the county council to use providing a stable platform on which to build a plan for sustainability;
- **Using reserves prudently**, and recognising the need to fund the one-off costs of LGR from the collective funds of predecessor councils;
- **Recognising the potential for an increased asset base** to provide initial funding for the new council, but using this carefully and targeting this funding on crucial programmes in the early years of the new council;
- **Harnessing the benefits of scale which LGR brings to a single unitary authority** but recognising that this also comes with ongoing costs – particularly as we approach harmonisation of pay scales and staff working hours.

Worcestershire County Council proposes to use EFS capitalisation as a bridge to LGR, providing the space to undertake extensive transformation work ahead of vesting day to be *Fit for the Future*. In this way EFS represents an investment in the future of the new council, in addition to providing a short-term solution to balance budgets.



Why is this part of our proposal for LGR?

While all councils facing reorganisation will need to tackle the harmonisation of their various approaches to pay, grading and retention, in Worcestershire County Council an initial challenge arises from varying approaches to full-time equivalence – with some colleagues on a maximum 35hrs per week contract and some on 37hrs contracts. While this is complex to unravel, doing so ahead of LGR provides a fair and clear opening position for all employees of the new council.



Opening financial position and medium-term strategy

Financial modelling indicates that the proposed new council will begin operations in the following financial position, with a medium-term financial strategy which **achieves stability by the end of 2031/32**, and which provides a foundation for the new council to **increase reserves from 2032 onwards** alongside a prudent level of annual savings. This model includes currently unfunded growth recognized in the financial plans for both the predecessor county and district councils, recognizes the need to manage Worcestershire's current EFS capitalisation, and assumes an

approach to maximizing Council Tax income via rapid but equitable harmonisation.

The strategy includes a modest proposed sale of assets in Year 1 totalling around 3.4% of the combined saleable land and property assets of the new council which become surplus due to duplication of facilities. This excludes libraries, schools, crematoria and other critical assets. The strategy also proposed use of 6.5% of current usable reserves to fund approximately half of the cost of initial LGR implementation.

Table 6 - One Worcestershire: 2028/29 Opening financial position and MTFP

2028/29		2029/30		2030/31		2031/32	
Unfunded growth	£12,700,000	Unfunded growth	£12,700,000	Unfunded growth	£12,700,000	Unfunded growth	£12,700,000
Shortfall from EFS	£43,600,000	Shortfall from EFS	£43,600,000	Shortfall from EFS	£43,600,000	Shortfall from EFS	£43,600,000
Cost of LGR implementation	£40,204,529	Cost of LGR implementation	£15,228,237	Pay/hrs harmonisation	£4,212,515	Pay/hrs harmonisation	£4,212,515
Total additional pressures	£96,504,529	Total additional pressures	£71,528,237	Total additional pressures	£60,512,515	Total additional pressures	£60,512,515
Council Tax Harmonisation	(£16,836,480)	Council Tax Harmonisation	(£16,836,480)	Council Tax Harmonisation	(£16,836,480)	Council Tax Harmonisation	(£16,836,480)
Sale of Assets	(£23,891,897)	Sale of Assets	£0	Sale of Assets	£0	Sale of Assets	£0
LGR Benefits	(£18,571,185)	LGR Benefits	(£27,552,896)	LGR Benefits	(£36,294,384)	LGR Benefits	(£36,294,384)
Total increased income	(£59,299,562)	Total increased income	(£44,389,376)	Total increased income	(£53,130,864)	Total increased income	(£53,130,864)
Balance	£37,204,967	Balance	£27,138,861	Balance	£7,381,652	Balance	£7,381,652
Funded by		Funded by		Funded by		Funded by	
Use of Reserves or EFS	(£24,504,967)	Use of Reserves or EFS	(£14,438,861)	Use of Reserves or EFS	£0	Use of Reserves or EFS	£0
Additional Savings Required	(£12,700,000)	Additional Savings Required	(£12,700,000)	Additional Savings Required	(£7,381,652)	Additional Savings Required	(£7,381,652)

Annual view of budgeted increased pressures

The council will begin operations with a portfolio of planned growth in response to increasing costs, investment in facilities or services, and demand pressures which are built into the assumptions around initial financial plans. These have been summarised from published Medium Term Financial Plans (MTFPs) for each council, and are detailed below for the years before and immediately after vesting day:

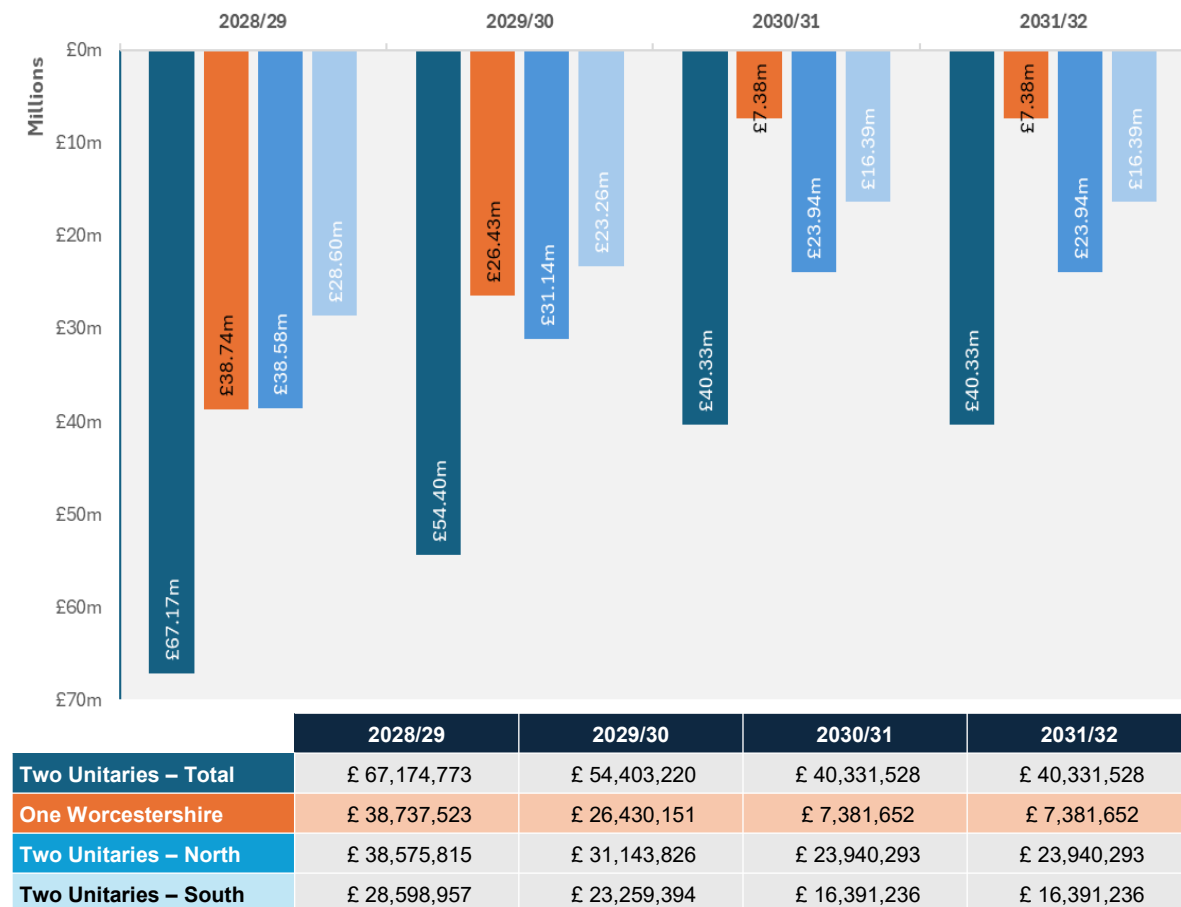
Table 7 – Annual increased pressures in council budgets 2026-2031

Worcestershire County Council	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Additional Contract Inflation - Adults	£5,900,000	£5,900,000	£5,900,000	£5,900,000	£5,900,000
Additional Contract Inflation - Children	£6,600,000	£6,600,000	£6,600,000	£6,600,000	£6,600,000
Additional Contract Inflation - HTST	£2,500,000	£2,500,000	£2,500,000	£2,500,000	£2,500,000
Demand - Adults	£5,500,000	£5,500,000	£5,500,000	£5,500,000	£5,500,000
Demand - Children	£4,000,000	£4,000,000	£4,000,000	£4,000,000	£4,000,000
Demand HTST	£6,800,000	£6,800,000	£6,800,000	£6,800,000	£6,800,000
Demand - Waste	£800,000	£800,000	£800,000	£800,000	£800,000
Contract Inflation - Other	£1,787,000	£3,805,000	£3,805,000	£3,805,000	£3,805,000
Pay Inflation	£4,698,000	£4,856,000	£4,856,000	£4,856,000	£4,856,000
Investment Capital Programme	£5,700,000	£4,000,000	£4,000,000	£4,000,000	£4,000,000
Worcester City Council	£1,012,000	£972,000	£391,000	£440,000	£440,000
Wychavon District Council	£3,097,000	£1,106,000	£241,000	£829,000	£829,000
Malvern Hills District Council	-	£354,890	£304,890	£354,890	£354,890
Redditch Borough Council	£1,920,000	£1,977,600	£2,036,928	£2,098,036	£2,160,977
Bromsgrove District Council	£1,440,000	£1,483,200	£1,527,696	£1,573,527	£1,620,733
Wyre Forest District Council	£313,310	£364,630	£364,630	£364,630	£364,630
All Districts: Demand - Homelessness	£775,000	£940,000	£1,135,000	£1,375,000	£1,660,000
MTFP Pressures Total	£52,842,310	£51,959,320	£50,762,144	£51,796,083	£52,191,230

Stability and sustainability

By applying the six sustainability principles detailed above in combination with the benefits of scale which a single unitary authority deliver, One Worcestershire presents a foundation for a journey towards stability and future financial sustainability. Dividing the area into two unitary authorities would not enable this to happen at the same pace, or with confidence around the outcome:

Table 8 – Projected additional unfunded spend, including LGR impacts 2028-2032



The chart provides an overview of additional spending pressures across the one- and two-unitary authority models, including the implementation and benefits of LGR. The remaining pressures in 2031/32 will be recurrent without further identified savings or other actions.

There is a significant financial advantage in the scale of a single unitary authority, and a particular disparity between the pressures in the North and South unitary authorities in a two-unitary model.

10.3

One Worcestershire: Key financial indicators

Asset Base

A key benefit of LGR is the coming together of county and district owned asset bases, which can then be actively managed as means of generating either one-off capital gains, or delivering rental or investment incomes. The borrowing to asset base ratio also provide an indicator of the scale of the affordability of the council's strategy for financing loans and other borrowing.

Benefits of asset base consolidation

- A single asset base allow the opportunity to reduce the number of depots, office bases etc
- Identification of duplicate offices and depots, allows the selection of the asset in best repair to be retained when planning how and where services will best be delivered in future
- There are potential reductions in terms of the teams and external providers which support buildings

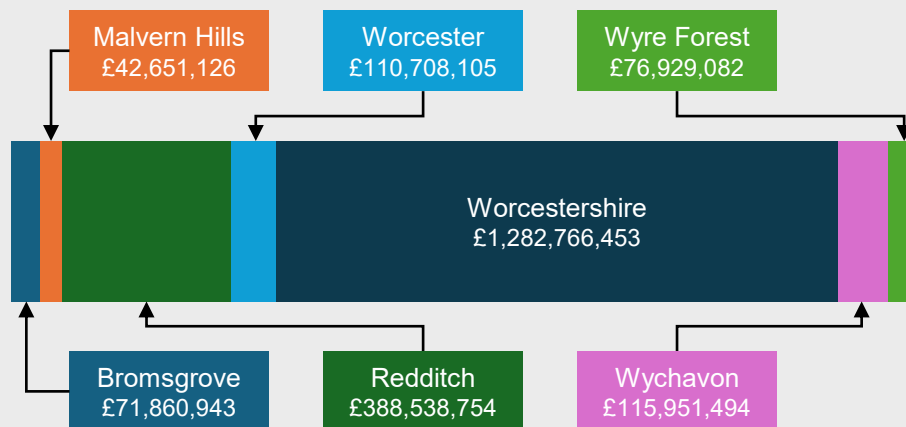
Benefits of asset disposal

- A larger asset base will provide a greater range of opportunities in approach, working with Town & Parish councils to redesign locality working and service provision
- A focus on **surplus and duplicated** assets for disposal will avoid disproportionate impact on any service or locality
- The relative scale of disposals as part of financial planning is very modest.

Council	Total Net Book Value (NBV)
Bromsgrove District Council	£71,860,943
Malvern Hills District Council	£42,651,126
Redditch Borough Council *	£388,538,754
Worcester City Council	£110,708,105
Wychavon District Council	£115,951,494
Wyre Forest District Council	£76,929,082
Worcestershire County Council	£1,282,766,453
Total	£2,089,405,957

* Includes council housing stock valued at £330m

Table 9 – Distribution of assets in predecessor councils – 2025/26 baseline



Total value of One Worcestershire asset base: £2,089m

Reserves

Building up a prudent level of reserves is critical to delivering a sustainable future council. All upper-tier councils have faced challenges in sustaining levels of usable reserves in recent years due to growing demand and cost pressures relating to adults and children's services, SEND and home to school travel.

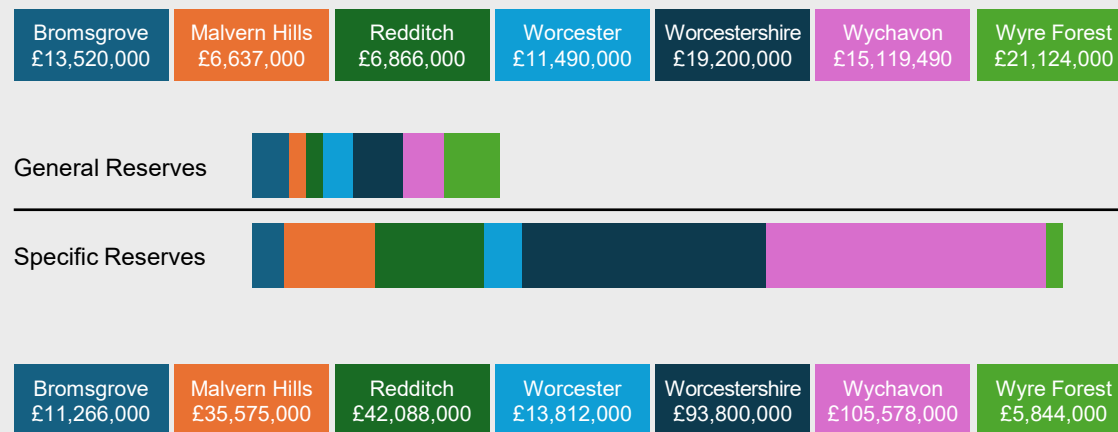
Use of Reserves

Bringing together district and county council reserves will provide a modest but secure baseline level of funds which will provide the new council with assurance against key financial risks which may occur early in its existence. However, while district councils have proportionately larger reserves, it is important that these are not seen as a means of managing upper-tier service pressures alone.

The proposals for sustainability in this case focus on a one-off use of reserves to support delivery of LGR. As the benefits of aggregation reach their full effect, this will support the council in becoming sustainable. It is estimated that contributions to reserves could be made from 2031 onwards.

2025/26 Opening Reserve Balance	Specific Reserves	General Reserves
Bromsgrove District Council	£11,266,000	£13,520,000
Malvern Hills District Council	£35,575,000	£6,637,000
Redditch Borough Council	£42,088,000	£6,866,000
Worcester City Council	£13,812,000	£11,490,000
Worcestershire County Council	£93,800,000	£19,200,000
Wychavon District Council	£105,578,000	£15,119,490
Wyre Forest District Council	£5,844,000	£21,124,000
Total	£310,003,000	£93,955,000

Table 10 – Distribution of specific and general reserves – 2025/26 baseline



Total value of One Worcestershire reserves: £404m

Borrowing

Borrowing by councils is not necessarily a sign of a challenging financial position and supports the delivery of complex capital programmes which deliver infrastructure, schools and housing across the area. The position of most councils in Worcestershire represents modest borrowing overall, and very low rates of short-term borrowing. The combined impact of the total borrowing on the finances of a single unitary council is not expected to be significant.

Table 11 – Borrowing by term and predecessor council, Q3 2024/25

Council	Short Term Borrowing		Longer Term Borrowing				Total (£'000)
	Household Sector	Local Authorities	Public Works Loan Board	Banks	Public Corporations	Other	
Bromsgrove District Council	-	-	-	-	-	-	£0
Malvern Hills District Council	-	-	-	-	-	-	£0
Redditch Borough Council	-	-	£98,929,000	£5,000,000	-	-	£103,929,000
Worcester City Council	-	-	£10,091,000	-	£5,000,000	-	£15,091,000
Worcestershire County Council	£186,000	£106,000	£406,530,000	-	-	£40,000,000	£552,716,000
Wychavon District Council	-	-	-	-	-	-	£0
Wyre Forest District Council	-	£281,000	£31,000,000	-	-	-	£31,281,000

Data: Live Tables on LA Borrowing & Investment, Q3 2024-25, MHCLG

The ratio of borrowing to assets is approximately 34% and represents 1.74 x current reserves.

Council Tax Harmonisation

In approaching Council Tax Harmonisation, this proposal seeks to deliver:

- A harmonised rate of council tax payment across the whole area within the first year of the new council's operation
- Harmonisation to the highest current combined district and county rate in payment, by 2027/28, for implementation in vesting year
- An increase of £16.3m in income from council tax.

We have provided the outcomes of low, medium and high harmonisation, and for the two unitary council option for comparison:

Table 12– Impact of harmonisation on Council Tax

Impact on Council Tax (projected loss or gain)		2028/29 (£m)
One Worcestershire	Low	- £19.89
	Mid	+ £5.8
	High	+ £16.3
Two Unitaries Combined costs/(benefits) for North & South	Low	- £6.5
	Mid	+ £2.1
	High	+ £8.5

Our modelling is based on the following assumptions:

- All predecessor councils have sought to increase rates according to the maximum allowable without triggering a referendum in each year from 2025/26 to 2028/29.
- There will not be material increases in the tax base over the period.
- No account is taken of the potential creation of Town or Parish councils in the remaining few unparished areas of the county.
- The flexibilities available in terms of meeting referendum principles will remain unchanged and can be applied.

?

How will this impact the rates payable by residents?

Harmonisation at the pace required may result in some higher-than-normal increases in rates, though it is proposed that these could be accommodated without referenda by applying an Alternative Notional Amount calculated as a weighted average across the whole unitary authority area. It is likely that the impact of these initial increases will be balanced for some people by adoption of a single council tax reduction scheme and the simplified approach of the same council tax rate across Worcestershire.

Table 13 – Calculation of Estimated Alternative Notional Amount 2028/29

Estimated Alternative Notional Amount (ANA) 2028/29		
One Worcestershire		£2,100
Two Unitaries	North	£2,154
	South	£2,055

Table 14 – Projected final Band D rates at harmonisation

Final Band D Rate in 2028/29		Low	Median	High
One Worcestershire		£2,011	£2,126	£2,174
Two Unitaries	North	£2,143	£2,151	£2,174
	South	£2,011	£2,076	£2,110

Key: Rate within ANA + 4.99% Rate exceeds ANA + 4.99%

Exceptional Financial Support (EFS)

Over the coming five years, councils are likely to experience even greater financial pressures. Local government funding reform will impact many councils across England, leaving both winners and losers.

In 2028, the Dedicated Schools Grant statutory override is expected to expire, meaning the full cost of SEND support (Children's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) will impact council's balance sheets. These changes, along with continued increased demand and a volatile economic landscape, mean financial pressures will continue to be a concern. Since 2024/25, the demand for financial support has risen. Almost 10% of all councils are now in receipt of EFS, although the total amount of EFS allocated was slightly less than the previous financial year.

Table 15 – Councils receiving EFS and total support provided

Councils in receipt of EFS	30 out of 317
Total allocation of EFS to date	c. £1.3bn

The combined value of support provided to Birmingham, Bradford and Croydon represents slightly over one-third of this figure. Apart from four councils (Plymouth, West Northamptonshire, North Northamptonshire and Middlesbrough) all the councils that received support in the 2024/25 financial year also received support for the current financial year (2025/26). Worcestershire County Council was also one of the authorities in receipt of EFS.

Worcestershire County Council's budget is essentially fixed in cash terms and its ability to raise income is limited. There are national limits in place around Council Tax and Business Rates and the ability to generate income from trading is minimal in overall budgetary terms. The council has worked with similar councils through the County Councils Network (CCN) and input into national policy papers to highlight to Government these concerns about demand and cost pressures, particularly relating to Children's Social Care placements, Home to School Transport and Adult Social Care, and we continue to make this case.

At the final budget stage in February 2025, our 2025/26 remaining budget gap was £48.6m. This was after accounting for savings of £12.5m and the indicative increases in grants and other funding as set out in the final settlement. This gap was able to be reduced on a one-off basis by the use of a further £15m of reserves, leaving an unmitigated gap of £33.6m which was funded by EFS.

Following conversations with Central Government, an indicative request was submitted for a capitalisation direction of up to £33.6m for 2025/26, and up to £43.6m for 2026/27.

Part of our strategic approach which is outlined in this proposal is that a single unitary authority will provide a council of the right size to achieve ongoing efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.

One Worcestershire demonstrates that local government in Worcestershire potentially has a viable and sustainable future. The scale which one unitary council delivers will enable us to use EFS capitalisation as an additional lever for change and to support the journey to future sustainability.

10.4

One **Worcestershire**: Costs and benefits of a single workforce in One Worcestershire

Pay and hours harmonisation

Bringing together seven complex organisations will require significant coordination and harmonisation of employee's terms and conditions of employment, remuneration and benefits.

It is imperative that this is delivered equitably and swiftly to:

- Ensure fairness and equity in employee benefits;
- Reduce the potential for costly equal pay claims in future; and to
- Begin the process of building a new culture on a firm and fair footing for all staff.

In preparation for this the likely cost impact of harmonisation has been modelled based on the following assumptions:

- Pay is harmonised to the current Worcestershire County Council pay scale on the basis that this is the closest comparator to nearby unitary councils
- That comparable grades below the mid-point of an existing Worcestershire County Council grade are lifted to that mid-point, or the bottom of the next highest existing grade
- That the duplication of roles across the seven councils coming together will provide an overall reduction in pay costs, primarily by rigorously managing vacancies and natural attrition between 2025/26 and 2028/29
- That this applies to all staff paid on the NJC pay spine.
- That all senior leadership roles (Tier 3 and above) will not be harmonised but will be subject to new specifications and pay evaluations as part of implementing the new council.

35 & 37 hours: The additional challenge in Worcestershire

Employees of the county council are subject to two sets of terms and conditions, one based around a standard 37-hour week constituting full-time employment, and another where 35 hours (0.95FTE) is considered full-time. While this is broadly focused on customer-facing vs. back-office roles, there has been considerable drift away from this principle over the years.

In proposing a new single unitary council, with pay scales and job families harmonised from the outset, it is critical that the issue of inconsistent full-time hours is resolved fairly at the same time.

The cost of undertaking this exercise is estimated below. This will be a recurring budget pressure and has been factored into the business case above.

Table 16 – Costs of pay and hours harmonisation

Cost of pay harmonisation	£2,161,587
Cost of moving all 35hr staff to 37hrs/week	£2,050,928
Total additional recurring cost of Harmonisation	£4,212,515

It is assumed for purposes of modelling that this cost will recur each year, though in practice some roles may be subject to change through the process of transformation in future years.

A separate exercise to harmonise job descriptions and to address any disparities identified will be undertaken as part of the implementation process.

Redundancy payments & actuarial strain

It is proposed that every effort is made to avoid redundancies among the County and District workforce as the existing councils come together as One Worcestershire.

However, it is inevitable that some duplicated roles across functions will not be required, and that there is a potential risk of these roles being made redundant.

To deliver a prudent and realistic cost of this process, this proposal estimates the factor by which roles will be duplicated and assumes that the immediate pay impact of redundancy will incur costs of around 30% of the total salary of those made redundant.

Additionally, it is recognised that the workforce of all councils are skewed towards older employees who have remained with their employers for longer. This implies a potential actuarial strain on the local government pension scheme (LGPS) reflecting the additional cost of paying pension benefits between the actual date of leaving service, and the date when benefits would have been ordinarily due.



Table 17 – Reduction in costs due to duplicated roles

Duplication factor in NJC Grades	(£24,416,581)
Duplication factor in leadership teams	(£3,919,596)
Adjusted for estimated future pay inflation	£5,881,504
Total reduction in costs	(£22,454,673)

The figures above represent a potential saving based on our assumptions around duplication: `

- delivering a single leadership team for the new unitary authority; and
- a duplication factor representing 32% of the total cost of NJC grade roles across all councils which deliver services in common (including business support, enabling services, and duplicated functions in predecessor district councils)
- This is broadly comparable with reductions seen in other recent LGR implementations, e.g. North Yorkshire, Cumbria and Dorset/BCP.

Table 18 – Impact of redundancy pay and pension strain

Redundancy pay (one-off cost)	£8,500,853
Actuarial strain (one-off cost)	£15,736,874
Total cost of potential redundancies	£24,237,727

A worst-case scenario, based on all duplicated posts requiring redundancy payments, along with associated actuarial strain on pension costs where it is likely staff members would be eligible, has been built into costings.



10.5

One **Worcestershire:** Costs of implementing the new council

The costing model

The scenarios modelled to produce this case were undertaken by officers of Worcestershire County Council, with support from PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC) LLP and are based on the model developed to support CCN which has been recognised by MHCLG in the white paper.

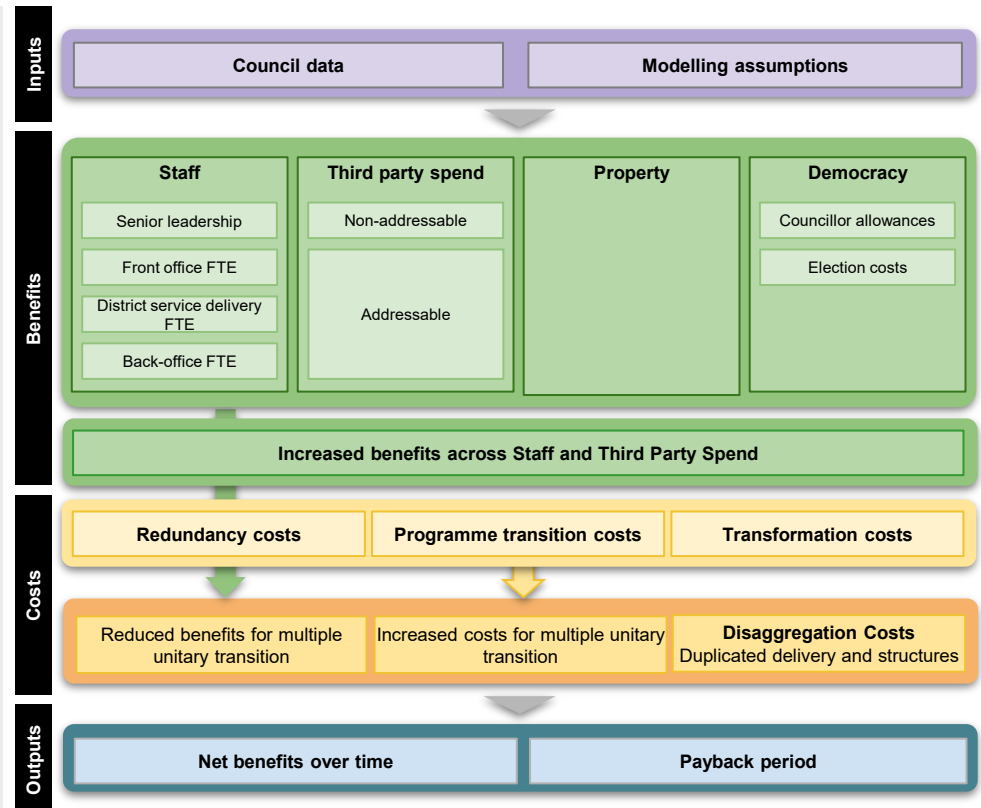
Following the initial options appraisal, shared with MHCLG in March 2025, this model has been refined using specific local costings wherever possible to **model the benefits of reorganisation, including:**

- benefits of scale relating to staffing, commissioned services (third party spend),
- reductions in duplication of district services,
- reductions in duplication of enabling services across all councils,
- reduced costs of councillors' allowances and elections

and to model the reduced benefits and increased costs of forming multiple new authorities:

- costs of additional leadership, service delivery staffing, systems and support for all statutory upper-tier services
- Reduced benefits of scale based on smaller new unitary authorities
- Reduced benefits from councillors and elections due to duplicated administrations
- Reduced capacity to transform the future organisations

The model also takes account of differential costs of implementation including redundancy, transition and IT costs.



Where has the model been refined for One Worcestershire?

The model includes more detailed assumptions around the costs of harmonising pay and conditions of service, potential redundancies, actuarial costs of early retirement, and to take account of additional 'market forces' costs of employment in hard-to-recruit professions.

Implementing One Worcestershire

The costs of implementing this proposal have been evaluated in detail, based on initial work conducted for the options appraisal.

The One Worcestershire proposal benefits from:

- No costs of disaggregation for upper-tier services
- Reduced costs of annual audit

Implementation Programme costs will be offset swiftly by:

- the efficiencies possible from delivering a single tier of local government, including reducing duplication and delivering efficiencies through economies of scale;
- a comparatively swift return on the initial implementation costs, which are **expected to be fully recovered within three years**.

Detailed comparative tables of costs for implementing one vs. two unitary authorities can be found in Appendix 12.b (p149)

Table 19 – Costs and benefits of LGR implementation

Implementation Benefits	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Scale: Reduction in third party spend	(£3,441,597)	(£5,162,396)	(£6,883,194)
Scale: Reductions in property costs	(£2,573,819)	(£4,221,063)	(£5,628,084)
Scale: Reductions in staffing costs	(£11,227,337)	(£16,841,005)	(£22,454,673)
Reductions in democracy and member costs	(£1,328,433)	(£1,328,433)	(£1,328,433)
Reductions in annual audit fees	(£600,000)	(£600,000)	(£600,000)
Implementation Benefits Total	(£18,571,185)	(£27,552,896)	(£36,294,384)

Implementation Costs	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
External comms, rebranding & engagement	£366,000		
External transition design & implementation	£3,202,500	£1,067,500	
Internal programme management	£1,427,250	£475,750	
Organisation closedown costs	£915,000		
ICT costs	£2,625,000	£875,000	
Costs of Pay Equalisation (recurring)	£4,212,515	£4,212,515	£4,212,515
Cost of redundancies	£6,375,640	£2,125,213	
Cost of actuarial strain	£11,802,656	£3,934,219	
Contingency	£9,277,968	£2,538,039	
Implementation Costs Total	£40,204,529	£15,228,237	£4,212,515
Impact of LGR Implementation Cost/(Benefit)	£21,633,344	(£12,324,659)	(£32,081,868)

Implementation costs of one vs. two new councils

While this proposal focuses on the benefits of implementing a single unitary council in Worcestershire, comparative modelling has been conducted to consider the costs and benefits of a two-unitary model.

Based on a common set of assumptions, the One Worcestershire case both **increases benefits** and **offsets implementation costs rapidly**. The corresponding two authority model **incurs higher initial implementation costs** and additional, **recurring disaggregation costs**. These are not offset by the benefits delivered across the two new councils.

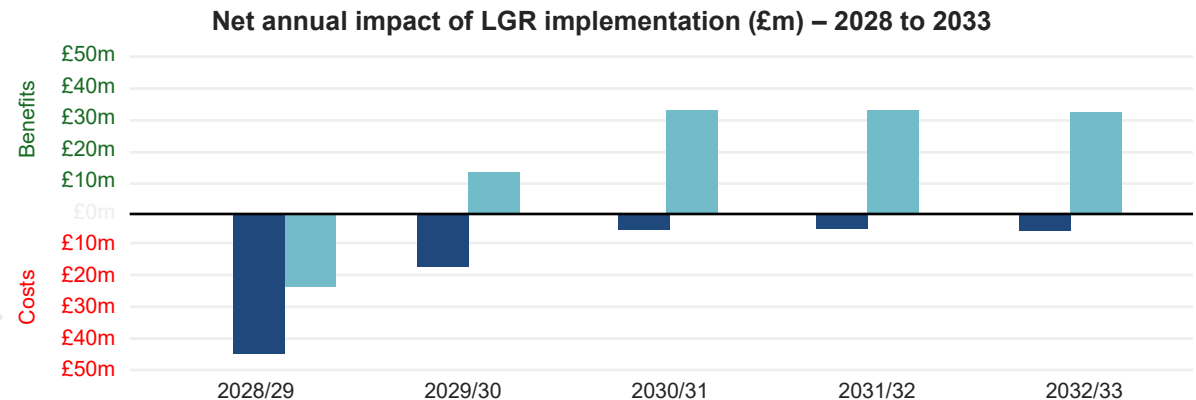
The ongoing net benefits of a single unitary council are estimated to be **£32.1m per year** from 2030/31 onwards.

Details of the assumptions underlying disaggregation costs can be found in Section 5.3 (p54-57)

Table 20 – Summary of Costs and Benefits of LGR for One Worcestershire vs. Two Unitaries

Implementation Costs	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
One Worcestershire	£40,204,529	£15,228,237	£4,212,515 *
Two unitary authorities	£38,693,477	£13,921,388	£4,212,515 *
Implementation Benefits	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
One Worcestershire	£18,571,185	£27,552,896	£36,294,384
Two unitary authorities	£6,173,918	£8,803,022	£11,646,676
Disaggregation Costs	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
One Worcestershire	£0	£0	£0
Two unitary authorities	£9,992,098	£9,992,098	£9,992,098
Net impact of LGR	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
One Worcestershire	£21,633,344 cost	£12,324,569 benefit	£32,081,869 benefit
Two unitary authorities	£42,511,657 cost	£15,110,464 cost	£2,557,937 cost

* Recurring costs of pay harmonisation





11

One Worcestershire: Implementation

In this section...

Bringing it all together – communicating our intent, and making it happen

The final section of our proposal outlines the approach we have taken to planning implementation of a single unitary council. While a complete implementation plan will be prepared as part of the planned transformation work, this section provides an overview of how local residents will be engaged with before and after a decision is made, and how work with partners begins now to start the process of delivering the new council:

- 11.1 Describes engagement work to date, the approach to informing the public, and plans for a campaign which focuses on the facts and figures
- 11.2 Describes the three stages of implementation we have identified – beginning with **mobilising** resources and skills for the huge task of delivering the new council through **transition** where new arrangements are built, tested and put in place, and to **transformation** which alongside transition, will ensure that One Worcestershire delivers on its plans and efficiencies



11.1

One **Worcestershire**: Engagement with residents and stakeholders

Our approach to engagement

The council has engaged with a wide range of stakeholders to inform the proposal in a meaningful and constructive way.

Whilst conducting the engagement, consideration has been given to the formal consultation will be conducted by Government, as required by statute, following submission of the proposal.

Engagement on the proposal continues until submission and beyond. To date, there has been a range of engagement including, but not limited to:

- County council staff (including Leadership Teams),
- Colleagues from Wyre Forest District Council who have contributed to this proposal
- Elected leaders and Chief Executives from Worcestershire County Council and the six district councils
- S151 Officers of all councils (through an existing consultative group)
- ICT leads of all councils (through an existing strategy group)
- Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils (CALC)
- National Association of Local Councils (NALC)
- Voluntary Sector / Worcestershire VCSE Alliance,
- NHS Hereford & Worcestershire ICB members.



This section details the approach to engaging Local residents, businesses and other stakeholders in planning for LGR

Criteria 2 & 3

New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements

Prioritises the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to residents

Must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks

How councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views

2

A single tier of local government for the whole area

Should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment

3



Keeping the public informed

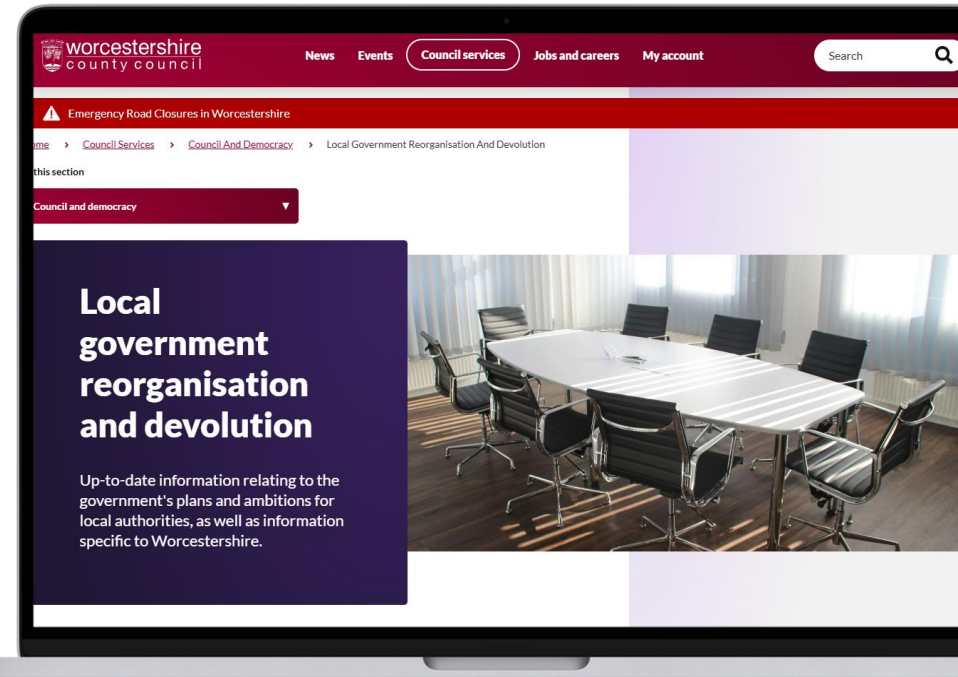
Since March 2025, a Local Government Reorganisation page on the Worcestershire County Council website has been updated with progress, information about the options considered and the process being undertaken by government and by local councils in the area. This has linked to key documents provided by MHCLG view of the process being undertaken.

The One Worcestershire proposal has not been subject to a public consultation or questionnaire to date on the basis that:

- Doing so would be asking residents to come to a judgement with insufficient detail on local proposals
- Awareness of LGR has been low until recently, and an informed position was not available to most residents
- We do not wish to detract from the formal consultation which will be issued by MHCLG.

Next steps

It is important that residents can meaningfully contribute to the LGR conversation, and to ensure that along with the views on belonging and community, they have opportunities to consider other aspects such as value for money and the quality of services delivered.

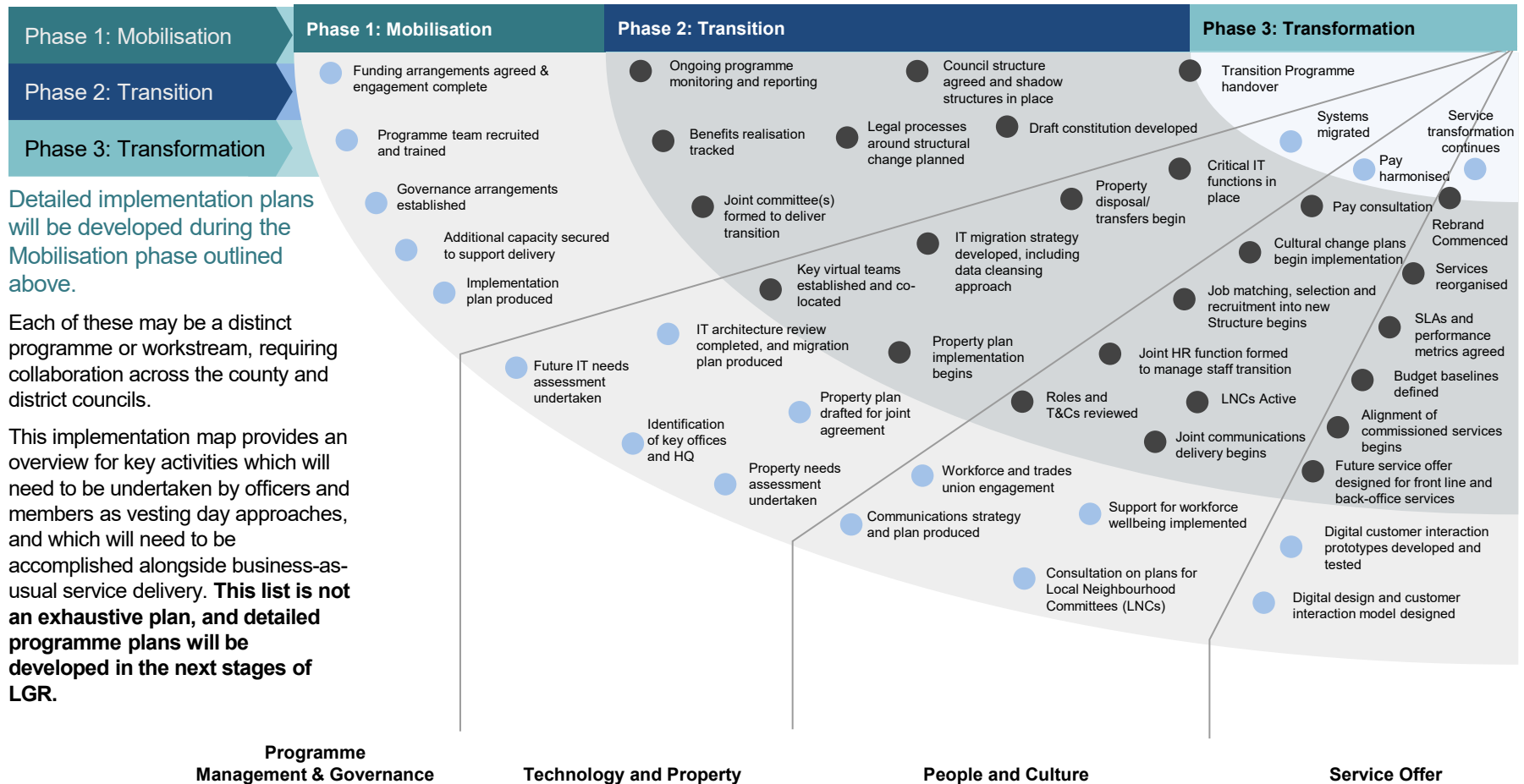


Our engagement campaign for residents began in October 2025 with the focus and objective being to **raise awareness, support understanding** and **build trust**, by transparently communicating the scope and opportunity which LGR and Devolution offers in Worcestershire, and the principles which underpin this proposal. The campaign will do this by explaining national government direction, including the MHCLG criteria, and matching these with key elements of the One Worcestershire proposal.

11.2

One Worcestershire: The roadmap to vesting day

Implementation overview



Detailed implementation plans will be developed during the Mobilisation phase outlined above.

Each of these may be a distinct programme or workstream, requiring collaboration across the county and district councils.

This implementation map provides an overview for key activities which will need to be undertaken by officers and members as vesting day approaches, and which will need to be accomplished alongside business-as-usual service delivery. **This list is not an exhaustive plan, and detailed programme plans will be developed in the next stages of LGR.**

Phase 1 | Mobilisation (pre-shadow council)

Phase 1: Mobilisation

This stage of the implementation process includes activity to prepare governance, budgets and engagement functions in preparation for the detailed activity to implement the new council

Phase 2: Transition

Phase 3: Transformation

Governance & Portfolio Management

- Bring together all council leaders and chief executives for an **LGR summit** post submission of the case.
- **S151 Officers group to reconvene** to determine spending envelope and mechanisms for monitoring expenditure.
- **Agreement of resources to be committed** – which should include staff time, backfill arrangements and agreement on any external support required.
- **Agreement on use of reserves** to fund LGR
- The overall **Implementation Plan will be drafted** and agreed with the Implementation Executive and shared with current district and county councils.
- **Core programme team agreed and in place**, including county, district and external resources required.

Delivery of key activities to progress the proposal

- Appointment of a responsible lead officer and cabinet member in each existing council.
- Define the roles of interim Chief Executive, S151 Officer and Monitoring Officer, in preparation for recruitment.
- Agree and undertake a joint plan for informing and engaging with the public following the ministerial decision on LGR.
- Agree and begin a joint plan for engaging all staff in the future culture and ways of working across the new council, building this in from the ground up. This includes formal consultations with staff across all councils and their Trades Unions.
- Determine and agree funding of the costs and legal support required in winding-up existing authorities and creating a new statutory entity.
- Engage with currently unparished areas to determine the impact of LGR for them and planning what support might be needed for the appointment of Charter Trustees, or to develop plans to form parish councils.

Phase 2 | Transition (shadow council in place)

Phase 1: Mobilisation

Phase 2: Transition

This stage involves the Implementation Executive guiding a range of workstreams to deliver the key activities required to begin operating as a single unitary council

Phase 3: Transformation

Governance & Portfolio Management

- **Portfolio and Programme Management** will begin operating, driving the day-to-day delivery of the overall programme, and managing risks and exceptions which arise.
- Workstreams will begin delivering on **implementation plans** through a series of iterative sprints.
- The **Implementation Executive** will oversee the bringing together of these outputs and monitor overall risks and progress toward delivery.
- **Key decisions** which need to be taken by the new authority will be logged ready for action when there is a competent authority to do so.
- **Risks and exceptions will be logged and carefully managed** by the Core Programme Team and regularly reported to the Implementation Executive to ensure progress is not stalled and issues find timely resolution.

Delivery of key activities to progress the proposal

- Resume the initial workstreams established prior to submission of the proposal, including representation from all predecessor councils. Additional workstreams will be created to progress Commercial functions.
- Establish regular governance, reporting to the Implementation Executive and seeking critical decisions from that group until a shadow or continuing council is in place.
- Refine shared data: particularly relating to assets, borrowing and contracts, to support the process of aggregation.
- Deliver key enabling activities: recruitment, consultation with staff and trades unions, organisation closedown.
- Deliver key transformation activity: implement contract and spend review outcomes.

Phase 3 | Transformation (new authority fully operating)

Phase 1: Mobilisation

Phase 2: Transition

Phase 3: Transformation

Transformation will take the new unitary council beyond 'safe and legal' and drive improvements which make a real difference to residents and businesses

Governance & Portfolio Management

A single portfolio of transformation activity will be drawn together from remaining LGR activity and future-focused plans for change:

- **Portfolio and Programme Management** will support the delivery of key transformation workstreams which work alongside those implementing the new council.
- Workstreams will focus on key activities defined on the basis of being **fit for the future**.
- The **Implementation Executive** be informed of the outcomes of the transformational activity as it will impact the financial and strategic decisions taken for the new council.
- **Transformation will not be complete by vesting day** and longer-term plans around the culture, workforce, use of assets and development of community functions will need to continue to be programme managed beyond April 2028.

Delivery of key activities to progress the proposal

- Completing the process of harmonising pay and grading, reviewing existing job families and descriptions to create parity across roles drawn from predecessor organisations.
- Delivery of programmes which provide efficiencies prior to vesting day, as detailed in Section 9 of this proposal.
- Delivery of ongoing transformational activities to improve the customer- and employee-facing technology offer and to exploit the opportunities of AI.
- Building, testing and iterating the community approaches outlined in Section 7 of this proposal.
- Ongoing identification of the residual savings needed to drive financial sustainability.
- Integration of key national programmes – particularly in Adults and Children's Social Care – to drive standards, reduce demand and engage with local markets.

12

One Worcestershire: Appendices

12.a

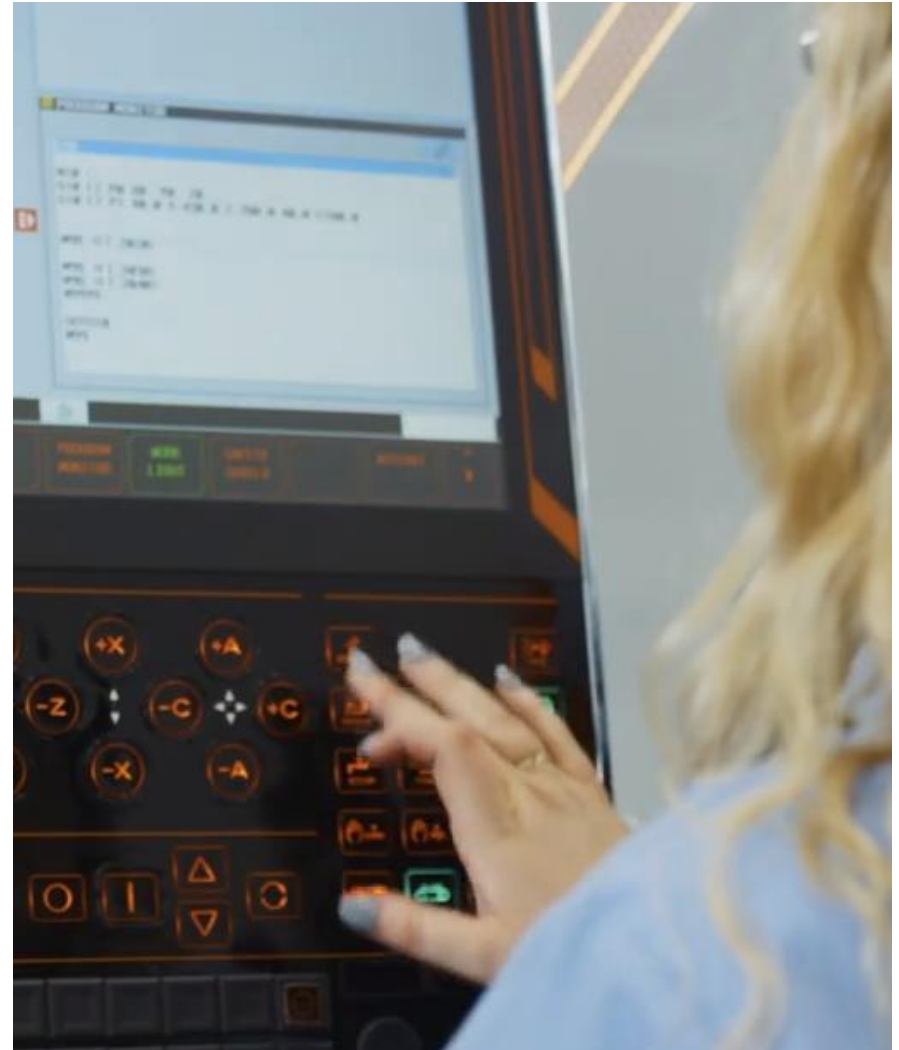
One **Worcestershire**: Comparative analysis

How we have used comparative analysis

During the preparation of the initial options appraisal and the further work to develop this proposal for One Worcestershire, we have been clear that the case needs to be broader than the base financial case, despite the compelling support this provides for a single unitary council.

We have thus used a range of indicators of need or supply to differentiate between the relative requirements of the North and South Worcestershire unitaries which were initially considered in our Options Appraisal. This has enabled us to balance the current and potential future service delivery requirements of these councils with our projections around the financial position they would inherit.

In the tables below, data used are from the most recent year where comparable financial and performance information were available from public sources at the time analysis took place. In the majority of cases this results in data for the 2023/24 financial year being used.



Economy and employment

While the county is broadly prosperous, there are marked disparities in the experience of working-age adults in the North and South of the area. This is illustrated by the number out-of-work benefit claimants, jobs available and business growth - which indicates poorer productivity in the North of Worcestershire.

Economic growth is limited - by business confidence and investment, but also by factors such as land supply for housing in the south, and by a wide margin of West Midlands Green Belt land to the north and north-east of the county. While Worcestershire as a whole has the potential to continue to deliver local economic growth, it is difficult to see how two smaller LAs could do so.

Table 21 - Local Economy and Employment

Option	Area	Job density	Gross Value Added (GVA) per hour worked	Business Growth	Claimant Count	Housing land supply	Developed Land Use	Green Belt Land as % of local area
Units and period:		Jobs per resident aged 16-64, 2023	£ per hour worked, 2022	%, 2023 New businesses vs. closed businesses in year	% of residents aged 16-64, by parliamentary constituency	Years of remaining supply, 2024	% of total area 'developed', 2023/24	% of land area in protected green belt, 2023/24
One Worcestershire		0.83	£34.30	-3.3%	3.3%	4.8	9.3%	23.6%
2UA	North	0.78	£33.30	-4.4%	3.5%	7.8	13.6%	68.7%
	South	0.87	£35.30	-2.2%	3.0%	1.8	7.8%	7.1%
England		0.87	£37.70	0.2%	4.3%	-	8.7%	20.4%
W. Mids.		0.82	£34.50	-1.0%	5.6%	-	10.1%	12.6%
Sources:		ONS	ONS	ONS	ONS	District Housing Strategies	MHCLG, 2022	MHCLG, 2024

Children and education

Worcestershire maintains a greater number of local authority schools than many counties, supporting learners across both rural and urban areas in schools ranging from village primary schools to large modern high schools. More pupils across the local education system are supported with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities than national and local comparators, and significant numbers have an Education Health and Care Plan which commits the council to financially supporting their provision.

While the South sees better educational outcomes by most measures, it has a greater population of both children needing SEND support, and those looked after - effectively 'in the care' of the local authority. The impact of growing need, the Designated School Grant deficit returning to the council budget from 2028, and maintained schools running at a deficit results in different, but marked challenges in a disaggregated North and South.

Table 22 - Service demand and quality: Children

Option	Area	KS2 Attainment: % Meeting Standards in Reading, Writing & Maths over 4 Years	Percentage of pupils receiving grade 4 or above in English and Maths GCSEs	Schools rated 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted	Maintained schools with budgets in deficit	Rate of pupils receiving SEN Support	Rate of Pupils with an EHCP	Children Looked After
Units and period:		%, 2018 - 2024	%, 2024	%, 2024	% of schools in each authority area	Rate per 1K	Rate per 1K	Rate per 10K
One Worcestershire		58.4	63.3	88.9%	37.0%	167.5	72.7	80.6
2UA	North	58.9	60.1	86.6%	46.5%	174.1	70.7	78.2
	South	57.9	66.4	91.1%	29.8%	160.4	74.8	82.9
England		61.3	65.4	90.3%	-	136.3	63.4	70.0
W. Mids.		59.3	61.3	88.9%	-	142.6	59.2	90.0
Sources:		DfE 2024	DfE, 2024	Ofsted, 2024	WCC annual accounts/S251 return	WCC School Census Return - Autumn 2024 and DfE	WCC School Census Return - Autumn 2024 and DfE	DfE LAIT

Working age adults and older people

All adults in Worcestershire enjoy a longer life expectancy than other areas in England, and fewer are full-time carers or claim housing benefit. However, the experience of adults in the North is again, significantly different to that in the South - with adults in the North more likely to have no qualifications, to be carers for other adults, or to be users of social care themselves. There are parallels with increasing spend on Temporary Accommodation (see Table 8 below).

Providing Adult Social Care is the single biggest area of spend for the county council currently, and the ever-growing demand pressures will place onerous burdens on councils in one or two unitary scenarios. Given the expected growth in the older population in the coming years, the likely static Council Tax base projected, and greater numbers of young people with mental health needs entering the adult system following Covid-19, economies of scale in provision are only attainable in the One Worcestershire model.

Table 23 - Service demand and quality: Adults

Option	Area	Life expectancy	Carers in receipt of Carers Allowance	Housing Benefit Claim Rate	Disability Living Allowance Claim Rate	Adult Social Care users - 18–64-year-olds	Adult Social Care users - 65+ year olds	Adults with no qualifications
Units and period:		Years, 2021/23	Rate per 1000 adults, 2023/24	Rate per 1000, 2023/24	Rate per 1000, 2023/24	Service users per 10,000, 2023/24	Service users per 10,000, 2023/24	Rate per 1000 adults, 2021
One Worcestershire		81.4	19.5	23.3	17.5	74	295	187.2
2UA	North	81.1	21.2	24.3	18.9	76	305	192.5
	South	81.7	18.0	22.3	16.1	73	285	182.0
England		81.0	20.6	29.0	21.0	77	365	181.0
W. Mids.		80.8	24.5	31.1	20.4	67	377	211.46
Sources:		ONS	DWP & ONS	Department for Work & Pensions	Department for Work & Pensions	WCC caseloads report and DHSC	WCC caseloads report and DHSC	House of Commons Library/ONS

District council services

It is important to acknowledge that the services provided by districts are often the most visible to working-age people in the UK, and that the upkeep of the local streets and environment, the collection of waste and the proper processing of planning applications are critical in supporting good health, good outcomes and good growth. The new unitary council will provide an opportunity to build connections between services, e.g. housing and homelessness provide public health and social care, which provide opportunities to deliver earlier support, and to reduce future costs.

The table below focuses on nationally reported aspects of district delivery, including demand measures for planning applications, waste collections and temporary accommodation costs, with performance data on allowed planning appeals, collection rates for council tax and NNDR, and homelessness duties. A more mixed pattern can be seen in comparison to county services, with a north unitary council likely to face greater challenges in securing accommodation for homeless households, while the south is spending considerably more on temporary accommodation.

Table 24 - Service demand and quality: Planning, Collection of Council Tax/NNDR, Waste Collection & Homelessness

Option	Area	Planning Applications Received	Planning Appeals Allowed	Collection Rate – Council Tax & NNDR	Household Waste collected	Homelessness Prevention Duty	Homelessness Relief Duty	Expenditure on Temporary Accommodation
Units and period:		Applications, 2024	% appeals (no.) 2024/25	% of Collectable Debt 2023/24	Tonnes, 2023/24	% of households accommodation secured, 2023/24	% of households accommodation secured, 2023/24	Outturn, 2023/24
One Worcestershire		3415	46% (97)	96.7%	206,183	42%	44%	£2.52m
2UA	North	1336	45% (20)	97.2%	99,392	32%	38%	£0.98m
	South	2079	47% (77)	96.2%	106,971	53%	48%	£1.54m
England		-	29% (2,921)	96.4%	-	51%	32%	-
W. Mids.		-	38% (318)	-	-	51%	37%	-
Sources:		MHCLG live data on planning applications, table P134	Planning Inspectorate Casework Database	Collection Rates for Council Tax and NNDR, MHCLG	Local Authority Collected Waste Management, MHCLG	Detailed LA tables on Homelessness		Local Authority Revenue Expenditure & Financing, MHCLG

Projected Council Tax income

The differential levels of need, inequalities in outcomes and challenges in service delivery detail in the tables above need to be set against the potential to deliver these services. The increase in council tax receipts in the two proposed unitaries will be distinctly different, with greater income in the south, and less in the north where service growth will be most critically required.

The table below shows the annual change in council tax income based on three harmonisation scenarios, within each of the proposed new unitary areas. Only harmonising to the highest rate produces modest additional income in the North, while both the mid- and high rates produce significant additional income in the South. Note that it is unlikely to be possible to set these mid and high rate increases as they would exceed referendum thresholds (see p121)

Table 25 – Potential harmonised Council Tax income in two unitary authority scenario

North Unitary Authority

Annual change in income (£000s)	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34	2034/35
Low	(1,115)	(2,331)	(3,653)	(5,094)	(6,670)	(8,373)	(10,233)
Mid	(324)	(680)	(1,067)	(1,491)	(1,963)	(2,468)	(3,029)
High	1,936	4,071	6,426	9,021	11,872	15,007	18,445

South Unitary Authority

Annual change in income (£000s)	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34	2034/35
Low	(5,429)	(11,139)	(17,156)	(23,442)	(30,095)	(37,142)	(44,485)
Mid	2,498	5,402	8,750	12,627	17,041	22,085	27,824
High	6,599	14,164	22,806	32,669	43,861	56,593	70,962

Current council sizes and allowances

This table summarises the current electoral arrangements across all councils in Worcestershire, and the cost of allowances paid to councillors.

Allowances are based on 2023/24, the most recent year for which all councils have published the amounts claimed.

Table 26 – Council size, wards, committees and allowances

Current Council	Members	Wards	Committees *	SRA **	Total Basic Allowances
Bromsgrove District Council	31	30	8	£54,573.02	£171,058
Redditch Borough Council	27	9	12	£73,065.00	£127,764
Wyre Forest District Council	33	12	10	£70,094.00	£168,234
Malvern Hills District Council	31	18	12	£48,523.55	£157,511
Worcester City Council	35	16	21	£101,095.00	£167,685
Wychavon District Council	43	27	11	£60,971.00	£237,274
Worcestershire County Council	57	53	10	£720,081.00	£590,878
Total	257		84	£1,128,402	£1,620,404

* Refers to standing committees and sub-committees which have clearly defined terms of reference in the current constitution of each council

** Based on amounts claimed in 2023/24, including Discretionary Allowances

12.b

One **Worcestershire**: Costs of implementing One Worcestershire vs. a disaggregated two-unitary model

Implementation & Disaggregation Costs – One Worcestershire

Financial benefits

The One Worcestershire proposal benefits from:

- **No costs of disaggregation**, by retaining established and successful education, health and social care services;
- **Reduced costs of annual audit**; and
- **No requirements to disaggregate services** such as Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education.

Implementation Programme costs will be offset swiftly by:

- the efficiencies realised from delivering a single tier of local government, including **reducing duplication and delivering efficiencies through economies of scale**; and
- **a comparatively rapid return on the initial implementation costs**, which are expected to be fully recovered within three years.

This enables action to build financial sustainability to deliver benefits more reliably, and sooner.

Table 27 – Implementation Costs for One Worcestershire

Implementation Benefits	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Scale: Reduction in third party spend	(£3,441,597)	(£5,162,396)	(£6,883,194)
Scale: Reductions in property costs	(£2,573,819)	(£4,221,063)	(£5,628,084)
Scale: Reductions in staffing costs	(£11,227,337)	(£16,841,005)	(£22,454,673)
Reductions in democracy and member costs	(£1,328,433)	(£1,328,433)	(£1,328,433)
Reductions in annual audit fees	(£600,000)	(£600,000)	(£600,000)
Implementation Benefits Total	(£18,571,185)	(£27,552,896)	(£36,294,384)

Implementation Costs	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
External comms, rebranding & engagement	£366,000		
External transition design & implementation	£3,202,500	£1,067,500	
Internal programme management	£1,427,250	£475,750	
Organisation closedown costs	£915,000		
ICT costs	£2,625,000	£875,000	
Costs of Pay Equalisation (recurring)	£4,212,515	£4,212,515	£4,212,515
Cost of redundancies	£6,375,640	£2,125,213	
Cost of actuarial strain	£11,802,656	£3,934,219	
Contingency	£9,277,968	£2,538,039	
Implementation Costs Total	£40,204,529	£15,228,237	£4,212,515

Impact of LGR Implementation Cost/(Benefit)	£21,633,344	(£12,324,659)	(£32,081,868)
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Implementation & Disaggregation Costs – Two unitary authorities

This table provides a comparative costs in implementation a two unitary authority structure in North and South Worcestershire.

The reduced benefits of scale and greater costs of building new structures results in a longer payback period in terms of implementation costs (6 years, 7 months) and there is an ongoing annual cost of disaggregation.

Details of the assumptions underlying disaggregation costs can be found in Section 5.3 (p54-57)

* Costs of pay equalisation assume the same harmonisation takes place in each of the two new councils, including the adjustment for 35-37hrs for disaggregated county council employees transferring with differing contractual terms.

Table 28 – Implementation Costs for Two Unitary Authorities

Implementation Benefits	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33
Scale: Reduction in third party spend	(£1,474,970)	(£2,212,455)	(£2,949,940)	(£2,949,940)	(£2,949,940)
Scale: Reductions in property costs	(£2,144,849)	(£3,217,274)	(£4,289,698)	(£4,289,698)	(£4,289,698)
Scale: Reductions in staffing costs	(£1,638,389)	(£2,457,584)	(£3,276,778)	(£3,276,778)	(£3,276,778)
Reductions in democracy and member costs	(£915,710)	(£915,710)	(£915,710)	(£915,710)	(£915,710)
Reductions in annual audit fees	(£214,550)	(£214,550)	(£214,550)	(£214,550)	(£214,550)
Implementation Benefits Total	(£6,173,918)	(£8,803,022)	(£11,646,676)	(£11,646,676)	(£11,646,676)
Implementation Costs	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33
External comms, rebranding & engagement	£549,000				
External transition design & implementation	£4,803,750	£1,601,250			
Internal programme management	£2,140,875	£713,625			
Organisation closedown costs	£915,000				
ICT costs	£2,953,125	£984,375			
Costs of Pay Equalisation *	£4,212,515	£4,212,515	£4,212,515	£4,212,515	£4,212,515
Cost of redundancies	£3,825,384	£1,275,128			
Cost of actuarial strain	£9,442,124	£2,360,531			
Contingency	£9,851,703	£2,773,964			
Disaggregation Costs (recurring)	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33
Additional senior leadership of UTLA services	£4,622,348	£4,622,348	£4,622,348	£4,622,348	£4,622,348
Disaggregation of UTLA service delivery	£5,369,750	£5,369,750	£5,369,750	£5,369,750	£5,369,750
Disaggregation Costs Total	£9,992,098	£9,992,098	£9,992,098	£9,992,098	£9,992,098
Implementation Costs Total	£38,693,477	£13,921,388	£4,212,515	£4,212,515	£4,212,515
Impact of LGR Implementation	£42,511,657 cost	£15,110,464 cost	£2,557,937 cost	£2,557,937 cost	£2,557,937 cost

12.c

One Worcestershire: Detailed business base analysis of devolution options

Devolution | Analysis of the Business Base

Industry prevalence across specific geographic areas using Business Base, calculated using the *UK Business, activity, size and location, Table 1* (ONS, 2024) to determine the proportionate number of VAT and/or PAYE based enterprises in certain industries within each area.

Table 29 – Business Base: detailed scoring by top five business sectors

Top 5 sectors by number of VAT and/or PAYE based enterprises (2024)

BB rank	Shropshire (includes Telford & Wrekin UA)	Herefordshire	Worcestershire	Warwickshire	Gloucestershire	Staffordshire (includes Stoke- on-Trent UA)	WMCA	Oxfordshire	Somerset	WECA	Wiltshire (includes Swindon UA)
1	Agriculture, forestry & fishing (3.95)	Agriculture, forestry & fishing (5.42)	Public administration & defence (1.84)	Public administration & defence (1.54)	Public administration & defence (2.12)	Agriculture, forestry & fishing (1.74)	Transport & Storage (Inc.. postal) (1.83)	Public administration & defence (2.29)	Agriculture, forestry & fishing (3.70)	Information & communication (1.22)	Public administration & defence (2.02)
2	Public administration & defence (2.14)	Public administration & defence (3.23)	Agriculture, forestry & fishing (1.62)	Agriculture, forestry & fishing (1.35)	Agriculture, forestry & fishing (1.82)	Motor trades (1.43)	Health (1.42)	Education (1.32)	Public administration & defence (2.93)	Finance & insurance (1.13)	Agriculture, forestry & fishing (1.89)
3	Motor trades (1.27)	Production (1.22)	Production (1.29)	Transport & Storage (Inc.. postal) (1.34)	Production (1.17)	Production (1.38)	Retail (1.38)	Agriculture, forestry & fishing (1.25)	Motor trades (1.22)	Professional, scientific & technical (1.12)	Motor trades (1.15)
4	Production (1.24)	Motor trades (1.01)	Motor trades (1.23)	Business administration & support services (1.16)	Finance & insurance (1.07)	Public administration & defence (1.35)	Production (1.33)	Professional, scientific & technical (1.24)	Production (1.16)	Health (1.07)	Transport & Storage (Inc.. postal) (1.09)
5	Wholesale (1.04)	Education (0.99)	Business administration & support services (1.16)	Production (1.14)	Education (1.07)	Transport & Storage (Inc.. postal) (1.34)	Motor trades (1.31)	Information & communication (1.16)	Accommodation & food services (1.06)	Accommodation & food services (1.05)	Education (1.06)

12.d

One Worcestershire: Letters of support

NHS Herefordshire & Worcestershire ICB



NHS
Herefordshire and
Worcestershire

Kirkham House
John Cornyn Drive
WORCESTER
WR3 7NS

simon.trickett@nhs.net

Paul Robinson
Chief Executive
Worcestershire County Council
Sent via email to probinson@worcestershire.gov.uk

1st October 2025

Dear Paul,

Re: Local Government reorganisation in Worcestershire

I recognise that Worcestershire County Council is nearing a decision point in respect of its future plans for Local Government reorganisation and appreciate 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.

It has been apparent over the last 12 months that there is actually a unanimous view from health organisations and from social care and patient engagement leaders that a single Unitary Council for Worcestershire would be our preferred option. This is based on practicality and a desire to continue the journey of further integrating services locally by removing barriers and delays for patients within our system. It is the Council services that interface the most with the health system that are of most concern, and splitting up the current countywide adult social care offer and Better Care Fund arrangements, developing different discharge pathways and processes and not taking the opportunity to streamline and simplify the housing support offer would add significant complexity and potentially further inefficiency to a system that is already under huge strain. Two Unitary Authorities would in essence double the work and complexity for many of our team members who are charged with managing all of this on a day-to-day basis, and it would undoubtedly have a detrimental impact on patients and local residents when they need these services.

We also clearly have a significant stake and role within the Children's Services improvement work, and I am concerned that there is a risk that some of that also becomes much more complex and resource intensive, mainly because again with two Unitary Authorities we would in essence be doubling the management ask. At a time when we will be reducing the Integrated Care Board management costs and capacity by 50%, it would not be feasible for us to make the same contribution that we have been making to the existing improvement work if the ask is in essence doubled.

1

[Title]

[Publish Date]

I do think there is a lot of agreement amongst local partners about a longer-term vision where we empower local communities to a much greater extent, and we work much more on a neighbourhood basis. This is a key part of the Government's 10 Year Plan for the NHS, and there will be synergies across wider public service policy as well in this respect. To do that effectively we need less centralised models and the ability to devolve more decision making about their public services to local communities. Worcestershire is a collection of different communities, but there is already a strong community infrastructure in most parts of the county, I do think that the Parish and Town Councils in particular play an important part in this, as do our emerging neighbourhood models of care.

Our role in the future as public service leaders will be to set outcomes, allocate resources and then to empower these communities. It is clear to me that will be best achieved by developing much stronger neighbourhood models of care and service delivery. We will need to build community capacity and resilience and to reduce the reliance on the local public service offer. We will need to develop innovative ways to use data, technology and artificial intelligence and we will need to spend much less on management costs. That in itself will deliver greater integration and more freedom and autonomy at local levels. The potential development of a two Unitary model would be a significant negative development in that respect.

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, 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.

I hope that these views are helpful and can inform the Council's 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

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12.e

One **Worcestershire**: Abbreviations used in this document

List of abbreviations

ANA	Alternative Notional Amount
CALC	Worcestershire Association of Local Councils
CCN	The County Councils Network
CQC	Care Quality Commission
DfE	Department for Education
DFG	Disabled Facilities Grant
DSG	Dedicated Schools Grant
HWFR	Herefordshire & Worcestershire Fire and Rescue
ICB	Integrated Care Board
IMD	Indices of Multiple Deprivation
KS2	Key Stage 2 (primary school years 3-6)
LEP/WLEP	Worcestershire Local Economic Partnership

LGPS	Local Government Pension Scheme
LGR	Local Government Reorganisation
LNC	Local Neighbourhood Committee
MSA	Mayoral Strategic Authority
NALC	National Association of Local Councils
NJC	National Joint Council for Local Government Services
NNDR	National Non-Domestic Rating (Business Rates)
PCC	Police & Crime Commissioner
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
UKSPF	UK Shared Prosperity Fund
VCS/VCSE	Voluntary & Community Sector (Enterprises)
WMCA	West Midlands Combined Authority



One Worcestershire

Final Draft