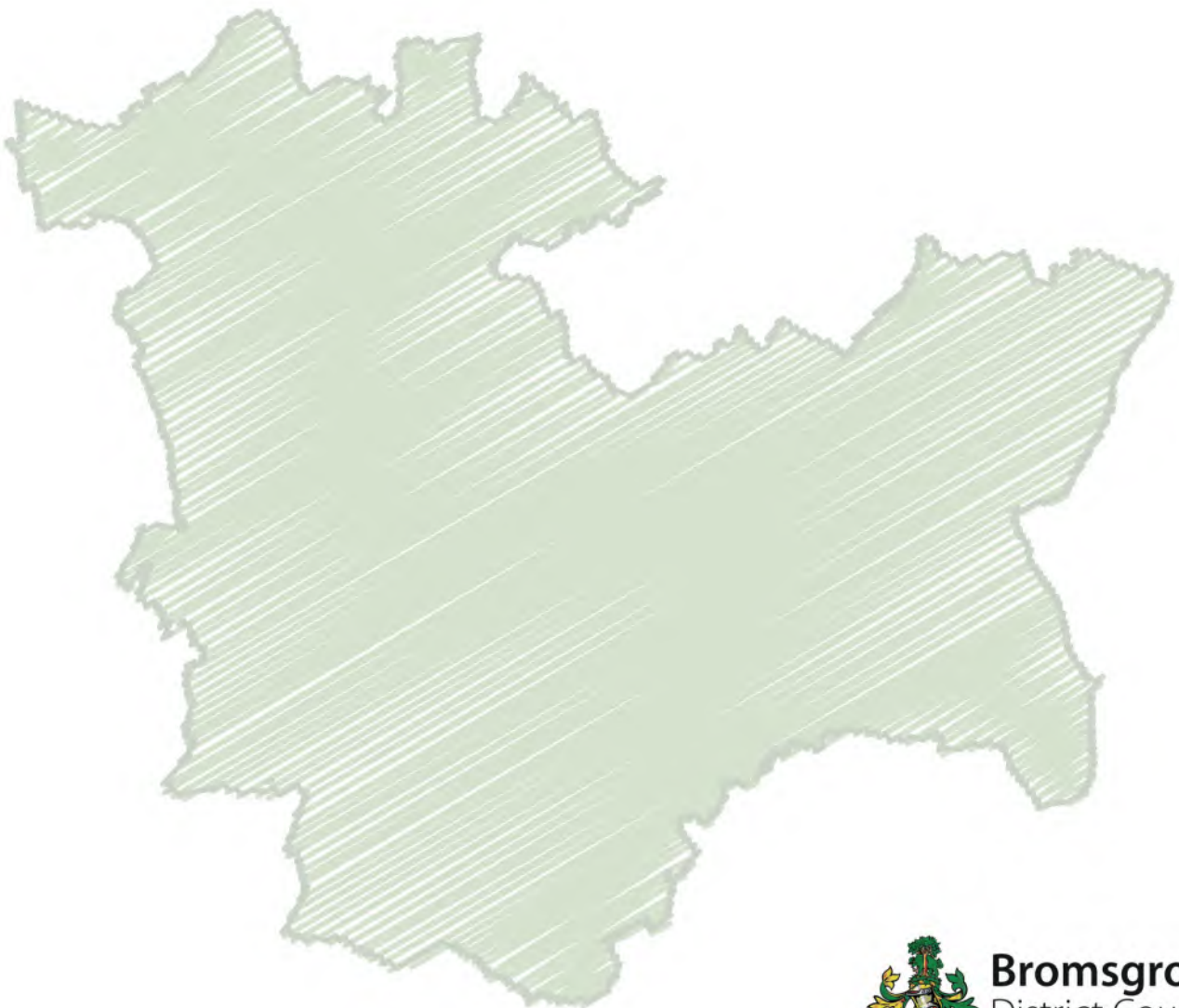


# Future Local Governance in Bromsgrove

Understanding how communities could be represented following Local Government Reorganisation



**Bromsgrove**  
District Council

[www.bromsgrove.gov.uk](http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk)

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# Introduction

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Local Government Reorganisation is expected to bring significant change to the structure of local government across Worcestershire. As part of these changes, the existing county and district council structure is expected to be replaced by a new unitary authority arrangement from 2028.

Whilst these changes relate primarily to how principal local government services are delivered, they also provide an opportunity to consider how local communities within Bromsgrove are represented at a neighbourhood level in the future.

Bromsgrove District Council is therefore seeking the views of residents, businesses, community groups and other stakeholders on future local governance arrangements within the district, particularly within the current unparished areas of Bromsgrove.

This document provides background information on Local Government Reorganisation, neighbourhood governance and the different forms of local representation that may operate within future unitary authority structures.

No decisions have been made regarding future governance arrangements within Bromsgrove District and the purpose of this engagement exercise is to gather views and inform future consideration of these matters.

Further information on wider Local Government Reorganisation affecting Worcestershire can be found on the Council's dedicated webpage: [\*\*Bromsgrove District Council - Local government Reorganisation.\*\*](#)

# Purpose of the Engagement Exercise

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The purpose of this engagement exercise is to better understand local views on future community governance arrangements within Bromsgrove District in light of Local Government Reorganisation.

In particular, Bromsgrove District Council is seeking views on:

- How local communities should be represented in the future
- The role of neighbourhood-level governance within future unitary authority structures
- Different forms of local governance, including parish and town councils and neighbourhood area committees
- The priorities and characteristics residents feel are important for effective local governance and community representation
- Whether further work, including a formal Community Governance Review, should be considered

This engagement exercise is intended to:

- Raise awareness of Local Government Reorganisation and neighbourhood governance
- Provide information on different forms of local representation
- Understand how residents currently feel represented at a local level
- Gather views on possible future governance arrangements within Bromsgrove

This engagement exercise is not a formal Community Governance Review.

# Background

## Local Government Reorganisation

The Government is currently progressing proposals for Local Government Reorganisation across a number of areas in England, including Worcestershire.

Local Government Reorganisation involves replacing the current two-tier system of local government, made up of district councils and county councils, with new unitary authorities responsible for delivering all principal local government services within a single organisation.

At the present time, no final decision has been made by Government regarding the future unitary authority structure for Worcestershire. Proposals are currently being considered, and further information is expected from Government in due course.

Whilst the final structure has not yet been determined, it is expected that the existing county and district council arrangements within Worcestershire, including Bromsgrove District Council and Worcestershire County Council, would be replaced by a new unitary authority structure from 2028.

Although Local Government Reorganisation will change the structure of principal local authorities, it does not automatically determine arrangements for governance at community or neighbourhood level. Existing parish councils would continue unless changed through a separate legal process. Bromsgrove District Council considers that wider reorganisation also provides an opportunity to consider whether different forms of local governance or representation may be appropriate in the future.

## Local Governance and Community Representation

Local governance, also referred to as neighbourhood or community governance, describes how local communities are represented and how decisions affecting local areas are made at community level.

Different areas across England operate different forms of local governance arrangements. In some areas, local representation is delivered solely through the principal authority, whilst in others there may also be parish or town councils, neighbourhood area committees, community forums or other local arrangements.

Local Government Reorganisation is expected to result in larger unitary authority structures covering wider geographic areas and populations than the current district council arrangements.

Whilst unitary authorities may provide opportunities for simplified service delivery and strategic decision making, there has also been increasing national focus on how local communities continue to maintain a strong local voice, identity and neighbourhood-level representation within these larger governance structures.

This is one of the reasons why neighbourhood governance and community representation have become an increasingly important consideration within Local Government Reorganisation nationally.

Bromsgrove District currently contains a mixture of parished and unparished areas. Whilst much of the district is currently represented by parish councils, with councillors elected specifically to represent those local communities, the main urban area of Bromsgrove and the Rubery area are currently unparished and do not have parish or town council arrangements.

### **What does “parished” mean?**

A parished area is one that is represented by a parish or town council. These councils form the most local level of government and can represent community views, provide local services and support local projects and activities.

An unparished area does not currently have a parish or town council. In these areas, local representation is provided through the principal local authority and its elected councillors.

Outside of existing parish council arrangements, Bromsgrove District Council does not currently operate neighbourhood area committees or similar neighbourhood governance arrangements within its unparished areas.

In light of Local Government Reorganisation, the Council wishes to better understand how residents, community groups and stakeholders feel local communities within Bromsgrove should be represented in the future, how local priorities and community identity should be reflected within future governance arrangements, and whether any alternative governance arrangements should be explored further.

## **Factors That May Influence Future Governance Arrangements**

Different governance arrangements may involve different approaches to:

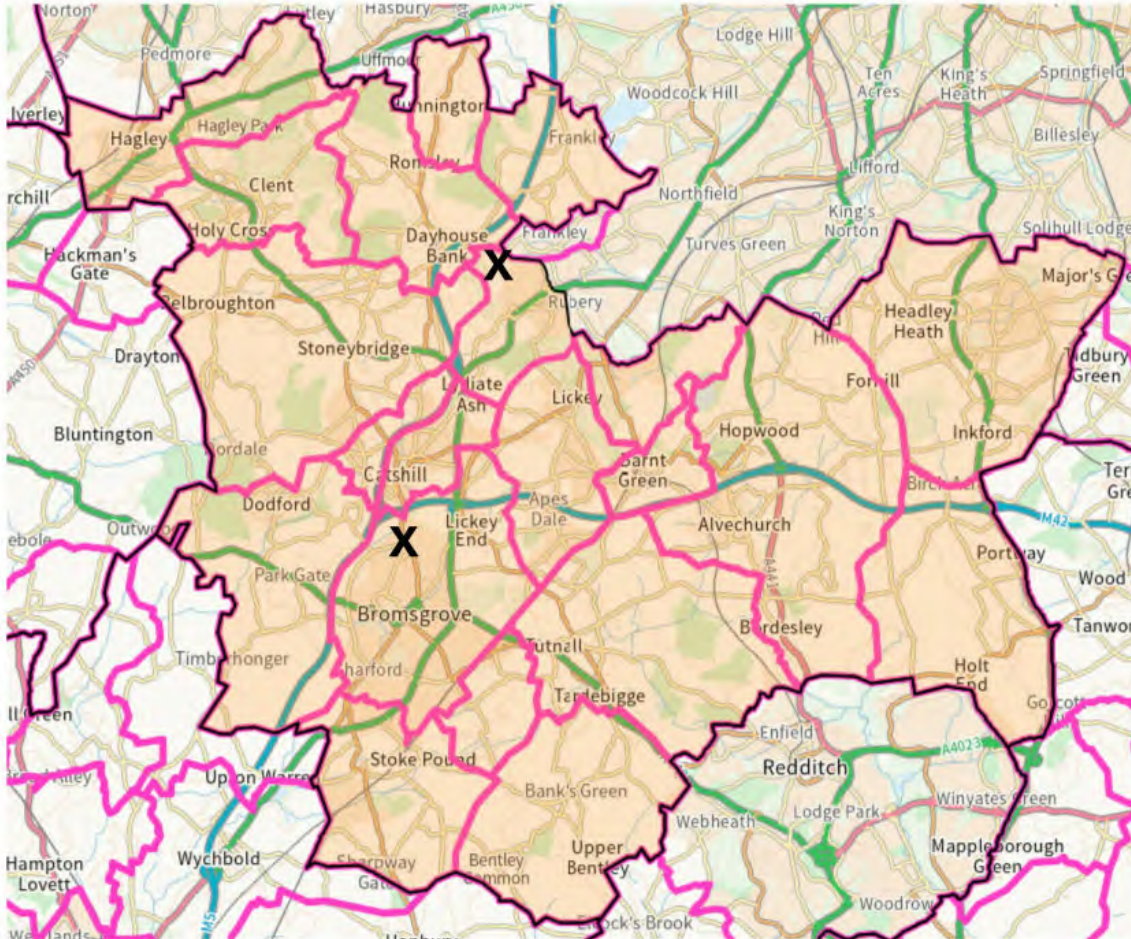
- Local representation and accountability
- Reflecting community identity and neighbourhoods
- Local decision making
- Funding and local precepts
- The delivery of local services or projects
- Coordination across larger geographic areas

Views on these matters may differ between communities and residents and form part of this engagement exercise.

# Existing Local Governance Arrangements in Bromsgrove

Local governance arrangements within Bromsgrove District currently consist of a mixture of parished and unparished areas.

The map below shows the current parish boundaries across Bromsgrove District and highlights the areas which are currently unparished.



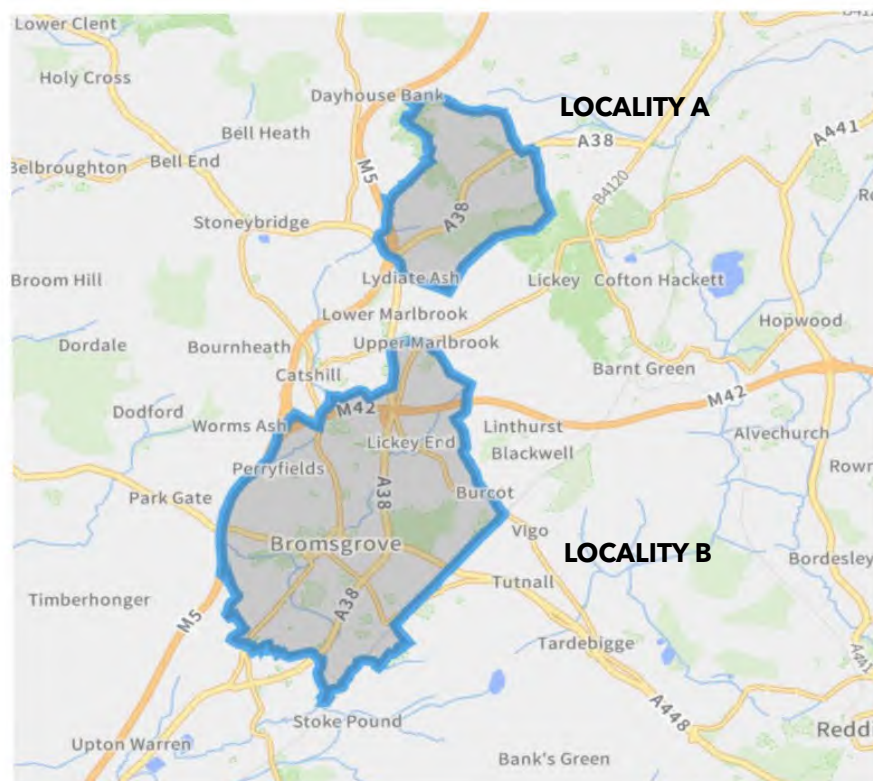
Bromsgrove District currently contains 19 parish councils representing communities across much of the district. Parish councils form the most local level of government and are independent public bodies representing their local communities.

The role and activities of parish councils can vary between areas depending on local needs and resources, but they commonly support local representation, community projects, local facilities and civic activities.

The areas marked with an **X** on the map are currently unparished areas. This means these areas do not currently have a parish or town park arrangement.

The district currently contains two main unparished localities, shown on the map below.

These areas do not currently have parish or town council arrangements and are the primary focus of this engagement exercise in relation to future neighbourhood governance considerations.



## **Locality A**

Locality A is situated in the north of Bromsgrove District and is currently comprised of 5,899 electors. The locality includes the unparished district wards of Rubery North, Rubery South and Lydiate Ash within the Marlbrook ward.

The locality currently falls within the Rubery North, Rubery South and Marlbrook district wards and the Beacon and Woodvale county divisions.

## **Locality B**

Locality B covers the main unparished urban area of Bromsgrove and is currently comprised of 26,039 electors. The locality includes a large number of polling districts across the town and surrounding neighbourhoods and represents the largest unparished area within Bromsgrove District.

The locality currently includes polling districts within the Aston Fields, Bromsgrove Central, Charford, Hill Top, Lowes Hill, Norton, Perryfields, Rock Hill, Sanders Park, Sidemoor, Slideslow and Tardebigge wards, alongside the Bromsgrove Central, Bromsgrove East, Bromsgrove South and Bromsgrove West County divisions.

# Possible Future Governance Arrangements

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As part of wider Local Government Reorganisation and devolution proposals across England, there has been increasing national discussion around the importance of neighbourhood governance and ensuring local communities continue to have a strong voice within larger unitary authority structures.

The Government's English Devolution White Paper<sup>1</sup> highlights the importance of ensuring that decisions are made "with communities, not done to them" and identifies a role for stronger community arrangements at neighbourhood and area level within future local government structures.

This has since been reinforced through the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act, which places increased emphasis on effective neighbourhood governance within local authority areas. The Act states "Local authorities in England must make appropriate arrangements to secure the effective governance of any area of a specified description that falls within the authority's area (a 'neighbourhood area')."

"In making appropriate arrangements in relation to a neighbourhood area in which there are one or more parish councils, the local authority must engage with the parish council or councils about parish representation under those arrangements."<sup>2</sup>

This demonstrates that future principal authorities will be required to secure effective neighbourhood governance within their areas, whilst also engaging with existing parish and town councils where these arrangements already exist.

## Neighbourhood Area Committees

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The main approach used by principal authorities to support neighbourhood-level governance is through neighbourhood area committees focused on specific localities or communities.

These committees are typically established by the principal authority and are usually made up of elected councillors of that authority representing the area in which they cover. Depending on local arrangements, they may help coordinate local priorities, distribute ring-fenced funding for local projects, consider community issues, support local engagement or oversee delegated local decision making.

Neighbourhood area committees are one example of how principal authorities may seek to fulfil this requirement in practice, although the detailed arrangements, powers and responsibilities adopted can vary significantly between authorities.

Unlike parish or town councils, neighbourhood area committees are not normally separate legal authorities and do not raise a separate council tax precept. Their responsibilities, delegated powers, budgets and geographic areas are determined by the principal authority.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth/english-devolution-white-paper>

<sup>2</sup> English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act, Schedule 29, Section 62: Local authorities: effective neighbourhood governance.

In response, some areas are exploring or piloting neighbourhood area committee models<sup>3</sup> as part of their wider vision for local governance and community involvement within new unitary authority arrangements. Neighbourhood area committees are established and governed by the principal authority. Their responsibilities, decision-making powers, budgets and geographic areas can therefore differ depending on the arrangements adopted by each authority.

## Parish and Town Councils

Parish and town councils are elected local councils representing a defined community area. They are independent public bodies and form the most local tier of government in England. Parish and town councils are made up of councillors elected by residents and normally hold regular public meetings to consider issues affecting their communities. A town council is a parish council that has formally resolved to style itself as a town council. Town councils operate under the same legislative framework and powers as parish councils but may also appoint a Town Mayor instead of a chairman to act as a civic representative for the area.

Parish and town councils:

- Represent the views of local communities
- Support local initiatives and community activity
- Provide or support certain local services and facilities
- Work with other organisations on local priorities
- Raise funding through a local council tax charge known as a precept

Parish and town councils operate within powers set out in legislation and do not replace the role of the principal authority. Responsibility for many major local government services, such as social care, education, highways, housing and waste collection, would remain with the principal authority.

The role and activities of parish and town councils can therefore vary significantly between areas depending on local priorities, available resources and the functions they choose to deliver or support.

<b>Services or Activities Often Supported by Parish and Town Councils</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community events and local initiatives</li> <li>• Parks and open spaces</li> <li>• Community centres and buildings</li> <li>• Local grants to community organisations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allotments</li> <li>• Bus shelters, benches and noticeboards</li> <li>• Christmas lights and civic activities</li> <li>• Markets and community events</li> </ul>

The services and activities provided by parish and town councils differ between areas and councils are not required to provide all of these functions.

You can find more information on parish and town councils by [reading this booklet](#) produced by The Electoral Commission and the National Association of Local Councils.

<sup>3</sup> [Surrey Neighbourhood Area Committee Pilots](#)

## Comparison of Different Local Governance Arrangements

Type of governance	How Local Communities are represented	How Decisions are made	Funding Arrangements	Typical Area Covered
Principal Authority	Through elected unitary councillors	Decisions are made through the principal authority	Funded through principal authority budgets and council tax	Whole authority area
Parish or Town Council	Through a separate elected local council	Decisions are made by the parish/town council within its legal powers	Raises a local precept through council tax	Parish or Town area
Neighbourhood Area Committee	Through unitary councillors elected within the relevant area	Decisions or recommendations made through delegated powers to area committees	Funding allocated by the principal authority	Locality or neighbourhood

Parish and town councils are separate legal authorities established through legislation and a formal Community Governance Review process. Neighbourhood area committees are governance arrangements established and operated by the principal authority.

The governance arrangements used by local communities can differ significantly depending on local priorities, geography, population and the role communities wish to play in local representation and decision making.

# Future Community Governance Considerations

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As part of Local Government Reorganisation, consideration may need to be given to how local communities within Bromsgrove are represented in the future. In particular, the engagement exercise seeks views from communities currently located within the unparished areas of the district.

The district currently contains a mixture of parished and unparished areas and does not currently operate neighbourhood area committees or similar local governance arrangements within its unparished localities. In light of the expected move to a new unitary authority structure, the Council wishes to better understand local views regarding future community-level representation and governance.

There are a number of possible approaches that could be considered in the future. These may include:

- Retaining existing arrangements initially
- Exploring neighbourhood or area committee arrangements within the future unitary authority
- Undertaking a Community Governance Review to consider the creation of parish or town councils within unparished areas
- Considering future governance arrangements at a later stage once the new unitary authority is established

## Community Governance Reviews

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A Community Governance Review (CGR) is a formal legal process used to review local governance arrangements within a principal authority area.

A CGR can consider a range of matters relating to community governance, including:

- The creation of new parish or town councils
- Changes to existing parish boundaries
- Electoral arrangements for parish councils

If a parish or town council were created in the future, it would operate independently from the principal authority and would raise a local council tax charge, known as a precept, to support local activities, services and community initiatives within its area.

# Future Considerations for Bromsgrove

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Much of Bromsgrove District is already represented by parish councils. However, the district also contains a number of unparished areas, including the main urban area of Bromsgrove.

As part of this engagement exercise, the Council is seeking views on how communities within these unparished areas may wish to be represented in the future following Local Government Reorganisation.

Some future neighbourhood governance arrangements, such as neighbourhood area committees, could potentially be established directly by the future unitary authority as part of its wider governance structure.

These arrangements would not necessarily replace parish or town councils. In many areas, neighbourhood area committees and parish or town councils operate alongside one another as part of wider neighbourhood governance arrangements.

In contrast, the creation of parish or town councils would require a formal Community Governance Review (CGR) as described on the previous page.

If a future CGR were undertaken, there are a number of different approaches that could potentially be considered. These could include:

- A single parish or town council covering a larger urban area
- A number of smaller parish councils representing different communities or localities
- Alternative parish boundary arrangements
- Retaining existing unparished arrangements

## Timing and Future Considerations

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Local Government Reorganisation across Worcestershire is still developing and the final structure and governance arrangements for any future unitary authority have not yet been fully determined.

As part of this engagement exercise, the Council is therefore seeking views on whether:

- Future governance arrangements should be explored further now
- A Community Governance Review should be undertaken by Bromsgrove District Council
- Neighbourhood area committee arrangements may be appropriate
- Consideration of future governance arrangements should take place at a later stage once the new unitary authority, and any neighbourhood governance arrangements within that authority are established.

At this stage, no decisions have been made regarding the future governance arrangements for Bromsgrove District. The purpose of this engagement exercise is to gather views and help inform any future consideration of these matters.

# Have Your Say

Bromsgrove District Council is seeking the views of residents, businesses, community groups and other interested parties on future governance arrangements within the district.

The feedback received through this engagement exercise will help the Council better understand local views regarding:

- Community representation
- Neighbourhood governance
- Parish and town councils
- Neighbourhood area committees
- Future governance arrangements within the current unparished areas of the district
- Whether any formal work, including a community governance review, should be considered

Residents and stakeholders can provide feedback by completing the online questionnaire available at:

<http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/local-futures>

The questionnaire will remain open until 23:59 on August 9.

Alternatively, you can send in any general comments you have on this engagement exercise using the details below.

Alternative formats, including paper copies can be requested by contacting:

Electoral Shared Services  
Town Hall  
Walter Stranz Square  
Redditch  
B98 8AH

Email: [elections@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk](mailto:elections@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk)

Tel: **01527 881 421**