

Committee: Scrutiny Committee

Date: Monday, 13
July 2026

Title: Local Government Reorganisation: Update on
the work of the Scrutiny Committee Task and
Finish Group

**Report
Author:** Peter Holt, Chief Executive

**Lead
Member:** Cllr Petrina Lees, Leader

Summary

1. In February 2026, Scrutiny Committee took a decision to form a Task and Finish Working Group to provide oversight to planning and delivery of the organisation's Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) readiness programme. The Scoping Report which set the Terms of Reference for the Task and Finish Group were approved at the same meeting.
2. Since its formation, the Task and Finish Group has met three times and confirmed the areas of the LGR readiness programme on which they wish to focus.

Recommendations

3. To note this report
4. To note that the LGR Task and Finish Group will bring a further interim report on their work to Scrutiny Committee in Autumn 2026, with the final report expected in March 2027.

Financial Implications

5. None specific to this report.

Background Papers

6. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.
 - a. Scoping Report for Local Government Reorganisation Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group (February 2026)
 - b. Published Decision confirming Uttlesford District Council's response to Government on the Structural Change Order (May 2026)

Situation

7. In March 2026, the Government set out its minded to decision to implement the five unitary model. Under the five unitary model, the area of Uttlesford

District Council will come together with the areas of Harlow District Council and Epping Forest District Council to form a West Essex Council, which will also undertake delivery of services and responsibilities disaggregated from Essex County Council.

8. Alongside the selection of the five unitary council proposal, the government confirmed:
 - a) the structure of the implementation team - the implementation team will be led by the Chief Executive of Essex County Council. Each new unitary area has subsequently selected a chief executive to serve as deputy team leader.
 - b) the establishment and representation for joint committees
 - c) that Theresa Grant will continue to act as the sector advisor to the Greater Essex area
 - d) allocation of £900,000 funding per new unitary authority to assist with transition costs
9. The government is also working with councils in Essex to develop:
 - a. Draft legislation for Structural Change Order (SCO)
 - b. Draft content for a direction under Section 24 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act ("Section 24 Notice")
 - c. Further legislation that is expected to be needed to cover matters such as local government pensions, housing revenue accounts, ceremonial matters that need specific provision, and matters relating to where a council is a member of a body or organisation that needs to be updated.
10. The Structural Change Order will establish the new councils and abolish the existing councils. Existing councils will remain responsible for services in your areas until they are abolished on 1 April 2028 and will be under a duty to co-operate with each other and with the new councils. The Structural Changes Order sets out:
 - a. dates for transition,
 - b. how the new unitary councils will be established (and current councils abolished),
 - c. how the new unitary councils will be initially established in 'shadow' form in 2027 and until they formally go-live in 2028,
 - d. arrangements for elections
 - e. other transitional arrangements
11. The government asked councils in Essex to submit further information on three areas by 29 May 2026 (this deadline was subsequently extended to June 2026):
 - a. Confirmation of Returning Officers for inaugural elections in each new council area

- b. Suggested warding arrangements for each of the new councils (for inclusion in the SCO)
 - c. Current electoral cycles for parish councils in the area of each new council and preferences for how these should be aligned with the new unitary council elections.
12. The first meeting of the LGR Task and Finish Group (April 2026) focused on a briefing for Members on the government's Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) programme, an overview of the Greater Essex LGR Programme and how Uttlesford is preparing for the transition, and a focus on the proposed electoral ward boundaries for the Uttlesford area of the new West Essex Council. As part of this inaugural meeting, members of the group identified the following items for their work programme:
- a. The impact on and role of Town and Parish Councils
 - b. The impact and role of the Community and Voluntary Sector
 - c. How the Council is supporting its staff
 - d. How the transition to West Essex Council could maximise collaboration across the wider system to benefit residents and communities
13. In response to the timetable set by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for information to inform the SCO, an additional meeting of the Task and Finish Group was arranged in May 2026 with a focus on proposed warding arrangements for the Uttlesford area of the future West Essex Council. In advance of the meeting, Party Group Leaders were asked to contribute to naming conventions for the West Essex Council wards.
14. At the additional meeting, the LGR Task and Finish Group members reviewed the proposed warding arrangements in detail and endorsed the ward names and structure for submission to MHCLG. Full details can be found in the published [Decision - Response to the Government on the Structural Changes Order for Local Government Reorganisation \(May 2026\)](#)
15. The third meeting of the LGR Task and Finish Group took place in June 2026. Following a detailed update and discussion on the current position, progress and aims of LGR, the group focused on the support the Council is providing to its staff. Members of the group explored how the learning and development provision will provide opportunities for all staff to develop skills, how tailored curriculum will be made available to specific cohorts, and how a package of support will be provided for individuals throughout the LGR process.
16. Members of the Task and Finish Group were also provided with resources that will support elected Councillors through the LGR process, including resources setting out the role of a unitary councillor intended to help members prepare for potential future roles.
17. The next meeting of the Task and Finish Group will take place in September 2026.

