



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

STRUCTURAL CHANGE ORDERS

TRANCHE 3



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No decisions on any proposal or how it might be implemented have yet been taken. The detail for inclusion in the Structural Change Order (SCO) will be a decision for ministers and will reflect the proposal, with or without modifications, that they decide to implement (if any).

Key dates:

February 2026:
Consultation opens

March 2026:
Consultation closed

16 Jun 2026:
Seeking views on matters for SCO

C. July 2026:
Decision announced

Winter 2026:
SCO laid in Parliament

C. March 2027:
SCO will come into force.

May 2027:
Elections for new authorities. Mop-up Order follows

April 2028:
New authorities go live

Councils' role in implementation:

Voluntary arrangement across the whole area encouraged

- Voluntary arrangements continue so all councils involved can balance the need to maintain service delivery with decisions that affect new unitary councils
- We will share draft SCO in the autumn for any factual comments, with a quick turnaround
- Encourage establishment of Joint Committees/Implementation Executive that reflect those decisions in the SCO
- We will seek representations on Section 24 directions.

- Joint committees/ Implementation Executive required in the SCO, which will be in place until the elections.

- Shadow Council/Preparing Council in place for transitional period with preparatory functions, duty on all councils to cooperate, and requirement for an Implementation Plan
- Applicable regulations are in force that provide a framework for implementation matters, including financial issues, staffing, disputes and continuity between existing and new councils
- S.24 in place

It is essential councils continue to deliver services and duties, which remain substantially unchanged until reorganisation is complete and new councils go live. We will continue to work closely with you throughout this process.



Implementation Orders and Directions

There are three types of implementation products

1 Structural Changes Order

- Establishes new councils – providing for their elections, councillor numbers and warding
- Abolishes existing councils
- Provides for the transitional arrangements to get from predecessor councils to successor councils. Such as implementation teams and committees.
- Provides preparatory functions for the new authorities before they are vested:
 - Prepare, review and revise an implementation plan
 - Code of conduct, scheme of allowances and appointment of officers
 - Duty to consult and cooperate placed on all councils
 - Other functions as necessary

Affirmative secondary legislation

Policy intention shared with councils on announcement in July 2026

SCO Draft shared in Autumn and subject to Parliament will come into force by March 2027

2 Section 24 Direction

Covers the control of disposals, contracts and reserves, instructing predecessor councils to get consent from the new councils before entering into such arrangements.

This aims to ensure that agreements being entered into by existing councils are also in the best interests of the new councils. Issues may still arise, we expect that these are put in place.

Representations may be sought on the relevant date this comes into effect from to enable smooth decision making. This is likely to be ahead of elections to the shadow/preparing councils.

Example: [Cumbria, Somerset and North Yorkshire councils: direction - GOV.UK](#)

Issued by senior civil servant

3 Mop up order

If needed covers:

- Ceremonial matters
- Housing Revenue Account
- Local Government Pensions
- Other local matters - such as membership of local boards

Likely to be combined to cover multiple LGR areas

Affirmative secondary legislation

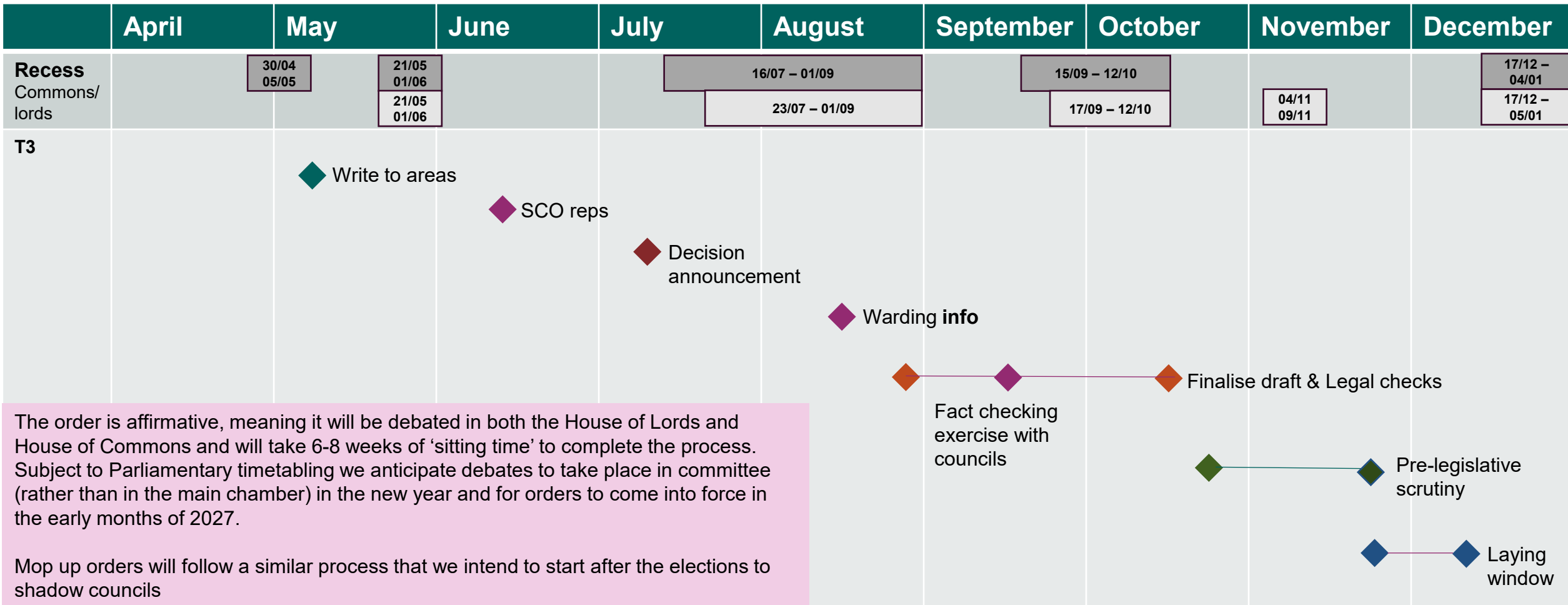
Completed in transition year



Indicative timetable

The SCO usually takes six to nine months to prepare and take through Parliament, depending on the complexity.

We expect to draft the SCO over the summer, with a version shared in the autumn, for fact checking, before sending the Order for pre-legislative scrutiny and laying in Parliament around the end of the year. **The visual below is indicative.**





Key principles expected to be applied to the SCO

1 Representations to be sought from all councils

- On transitional arrangements, from all councils in the affected area, before final decisions on legislative content are made.
- We are inviting representations for all proposals for your area. We encourage you to discuss your responses and encourage you to seek as much common ground as possible.
- We will write seeking representations on any S.24 directions ahead of elections to shadow councils. Ahead of this we expect all councils **to commit to voluntary best practice ahead of time.**

2 Structures and preparatory functions should reflect local circumstances, and how best to ensure success

This is described on the next slide.

3 Entirely new vs preparing councils

- **Entirely new unitary councils:** this is possible everywhere but should be used when a new council(s) are significantly different in scale to all the predecessors, so as to enable democratic representation and service delivery new councils are established. Joint Committees will precede elections to new unitary councils.
- **Preparing council:** This is an alternative model that is possible where the area of a new council matches that of a predecessor council (i.e. single county unitary). An Implementation Executive will precede elections.

4 We will announce the policy intention for the SCO alongside any decision.

This is to provide clarity as soon as possible and allow voluntary arrangements to mirror the legal ones.

We will set out decisions in a letter and intend to draft the Order based on what is set out.

Once we receive your proposed warding there will be a fact checking process but we do not intend to seek further representations

We will write to request representations on transitional arrangements **by 16 June** and warding by **17 August**. Please let us know if these dates are an issue. Information earlier will be appreciated.



Starting principles to consider

Joint committee membership

- **Joint committees should be 8-16 members** to provide sufficient capacity and representation. Decisions should be by a simple majority, with a casting vote for the chair where needed.
- **All councils should be appropriately represented**, including taking account of unitary expertise, which councils developed the proposal, and where the complexity of service aggregation and disaggregation lies.
- In general, joint committee members should represent a ward/division within the area of the new council. This will mean, in most cases, members can only sit on one joint committee that covers the ward/division they represent.
- Political balance should not be required – These bodies are the equivalent of the executive of the new council. However, each council should be free to nominate their representatives.

Other principles

- **A single implementation team of officers**, with deputy leaders designated within that team for each new council area, allows information flow and engagement between joint committees, councils, teams and the government on progress, particularly for services being disaggregated, and should strengthen engagement and communication throughout.
- **Wider membership of the implementation team(s) is for each of the councils to determine** beyond any limits/requirements set in the structural changes order. Precedent is that the leader and the deputy leader(s) may be specified in the structural changes order.
- Parish elections are not automatically affected. However, provision can be made to align parish elections to the new unitary elections where this is desired locally, in order to minimise the costs of these elections being held separately. If this is agreed, final information on aligning elections would be required by 17 August.



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SCO representations

**It is a decision for Ministers on what to include in the legislation to ensure councils are well placed for go live in order to implement the proposal that has been chosen.
We are seeking representations on the following issues.**

Representations for the SCO for 16 June (or before):

- Whether you prefer a preparing council and implementation executive model (where geographies align) or a new council model with a joint committee?
- How many members from each relevant council would you prefer to sit on each Joint Committee or on the Implementation Executive, including the balance of members from different councils?
- Would you prefer for any individuals to be specified for the Chair/Deputy Chair roles, and if so, who?
- What are your views on any requirement for political balance in the joint committee(s)/ implementation executive?
- Who should be the returning officer for the first election to each of the new unitary councils, that proposals would see established.
- What are your preferences for the membership of the Implementation Team and whether roles should be specified?
- Would you prefer for any parish council elections to be aligned with elections to the new councils?
- What are the current legal names of the councils and what are your preferred names for new councils?
- If different to proposals, has there been any further modelling of your preferred councillors for each new councils that you would like the Secretary of State to consider, alongside any information on the rationale for the numbers?

Representations for the SCO for 17 August (or before):

- What are your suggested wards, that reflect the proposal and councillor numbers decided, and that best meet the LGBCE guidance, for inclusion in the SCO?

Preparatory Functions:

- Preparing for and facilitating the economic, effective, efficient and timely transfer of the functions, property, rights and liabilities as relate to the new council and its inhabitants.
- Prepare, review and revise an implementation plan, including necessary plans, timetables and budgets.
- Code of conduct, scheme of allowances and appointment of officers.
- Duty to consult and cooperate placed on all councils.

Structural Change Order (SCO) examples:

Cumbria: [The Cumbria \(Structural Changes\) Order 2022](#)

North Yorkshire: [The North Yorkshire \(Structural Changes\) Order 2022](#)

Surrey: [The Surrey \(Structural Changes\) Order 2026](#)



Transitional Governance Roles & Responsibilities

[See: Local government reorganisation: implementation guidance - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/local-government-reorganisation-implementation-guidance)

