Local Government Association

Knowledge Bites – LGR Update

18 June 2026

www.local.gov.uk

Local Government Association

Where are we now?

- Decisions now made on 5 of 21 areas. Reduces 56 councils to 18
- Final decisions by 16 July 2026
- Final total number of councils in England will be 155 -181 (down from 317)
- In 4 of the areas, preference for smaller unitaries. Surrey is the only area so far where the option with larger unitaries was chosen. Govt clear this should not be considered a precedent!
- Government has announced that each area will be awarded £900,000 per new unitary to support LGR work
- Legal action underway from 4 councils so far.

The 7 programme stages as set out on Gov.uk - All dates in this slide pack should be considered indicative.

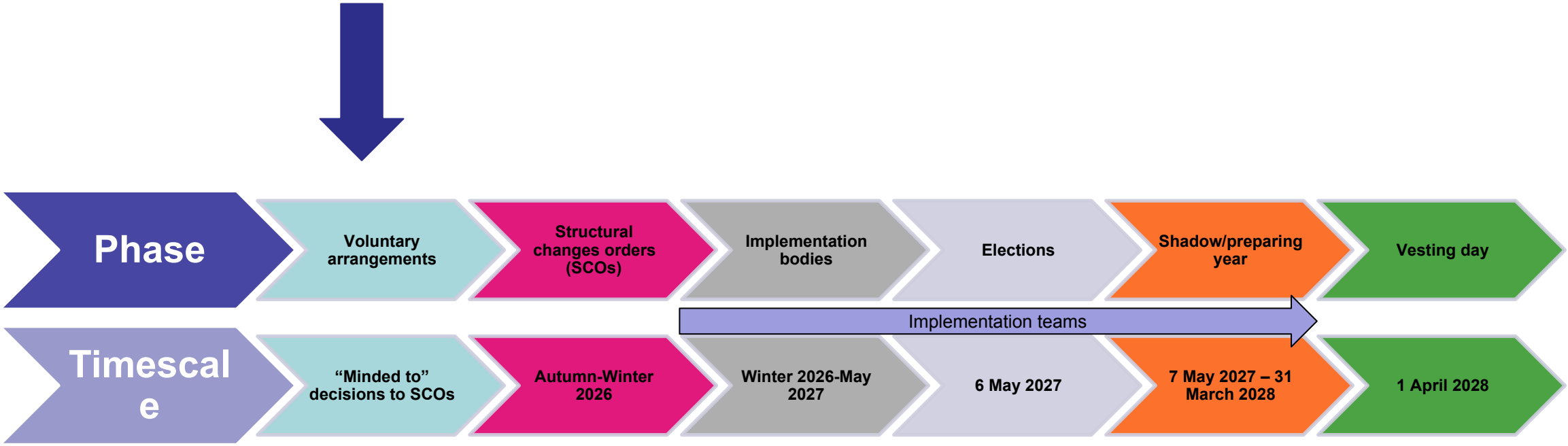
LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION: TIMELINES AND PROGRESS

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07
	Inviting unitary proposals All (21) two tier areas and their neighbouring small unitary authorities invited to submit proposals	**Submission of formal unitary proposals** Council proposals received by Government	**Statutory consultation** Government must consult with every authority affected that did not submit the proposal, and such other persons as are considered appropriate	**Decision to implement a proposal** Subject to collective agreement **with other government department**	**Making secondary legislation** Structural Changes Order for each area to dissolve the predecessor councils and establish the new unitary authority	**Transition period** A critical time for success of new authority: Can include new authority elections and making consequential orders	**New unitary authority goes live** Go live date
Tranche 1 Surrey	Complete (Feb 2025)	Complete (May 2025)	Complete (Aug 2025)	Complete (28 October 2025)	Approved 4 March 2026	March 2026 - March 2027	1st April 2027
Tranche 2 areas	Complete (Feb 2025)	Complete (26 September)	Complete (Jan 2026)	Complete (25 March 2026)	Parli passage: Autumn 2026	Autumn 2026 - March 2028	1st April 2028
Tranche 3 **areas**	Complete (Feb 2025)	Complete (28 November)	Complete (26 March 2026)	Summer 2026	Parli passage: Winter 2027	Spring 2027 - March 2028	1st April 2028

Tranche 2 areas:
- **East Sussex and Brighton and Hove***
- **Essex, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock**
- **Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and the Isle of Wight**
- **Norfolk**
- **Suffolk**
- **West Sussex***

Tranche 3 areas:
- **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough**
- **Devon, Plymouth, and Torbay**
- **Derbyshire and Derby**
- **Gloucestershire**
- **Hertfordshire**
- **Kent and Medway**
- **Lancashire, Blackburn, and Blackpool**
- **Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland**
- **Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire, and North-East Lincolnshire**
- **Nottinghamshire and Nottingham**
- **Oxfordshire**
- **Staffordshire**
- **Warwickshire**
- **Worcestershire**

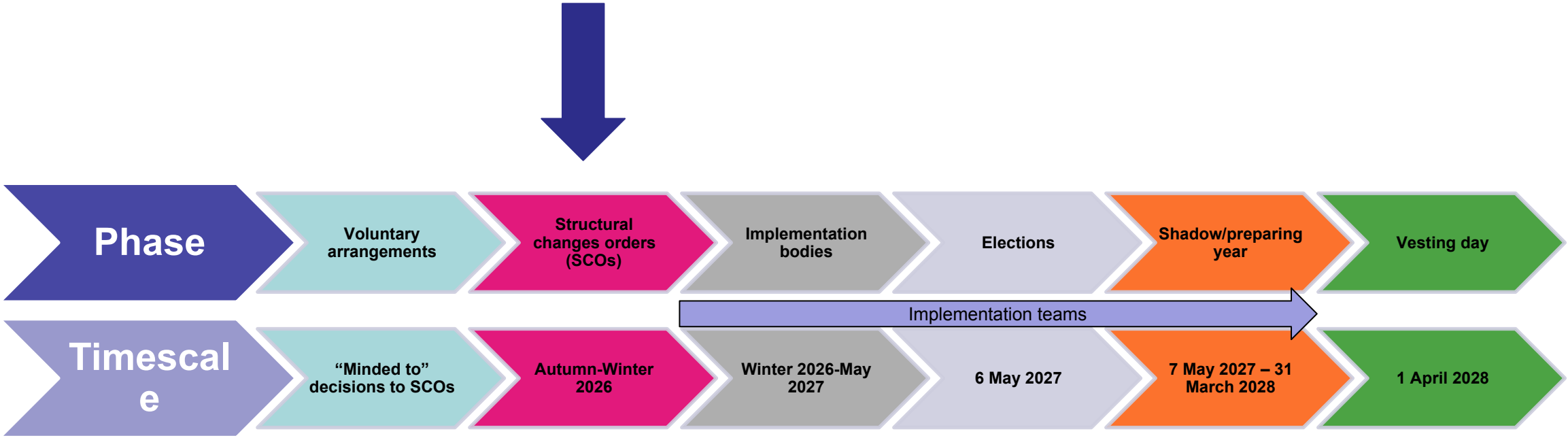
*** No decision was made on East and West Sussex and Brighton in March 2026; they have now moved onto the same timeline as Tranche 3**


Phase
Voluntary arrangements
Structural changes orders (SCOs)
Implementation bodies
Elections
Shadow/preparing year
Vesting day
Implementation teams
Timescale
"Minded to" decisions to SCOs
Autumn-Winter 2026
Winter 2026-May 2027
6 May 2027
7 May 2027 – 31 March 2028
1 April 2028

Local Government Association

Voluntary collaboration

- Councils establish voluntary arrangements (e.g. a voluntary joint committee) to progress LGR implementation
- Good practice for these to reflect the implementation arrangements specified by draft SCO (good for continuity) – but they don’t have to
- Work can include designing the draft implementation plan and supporting LGR readiness activities



*** Aide-memoire – there will be lots here!**

4. Structural Changes Order (SCO)

An SCO is a statutory instrument made by the Secretary of State which will abolish existing councils in an area and transfer these councils' functions to one or more unitary authorities. It must be approved by Parliament to enable the change to take place.

An SCO will include:

- Details of the new council(s) to be established, including their names
- Details of the councils to be abolished
- Details of implementation bodies, their functions and membership
- Electoral matters including electoral divisions and cancellation of district/county/parish elections as required
- Ceremonial matters as appropriate

Local Government Association

Shadow vs preparing council model

All areas will have either a shadow council model or a preparing council model.

Shadow authority or shadow council:

- A new legal entity which will become the unitary council on vesting day.
- Councillors are elected to the shadow authority to oversee the structural change to a unitary authority throughout the transition phase.
- Used in e.g. Surrey, Cumbria, Northamptonshire

Preparing council or 'continuing authority':

- An existing council which is designated to become the unitary council on vesting day and is granted the transitional functions to oversee this process.
- Councillors who are elected to this council in the transition oversee the structural change to a new unitary council, alongside their duties in relation to the business as usual.
- Usually applies where a new unitary is on the same footprint as a predecessor council (generally the county)
- Used in e.g. North Yorkshire, Somerset

All predecessor councils retain their statutory duties and continue to deliver services up to vesting day

Local Government Association

‘Mop up’ legislation

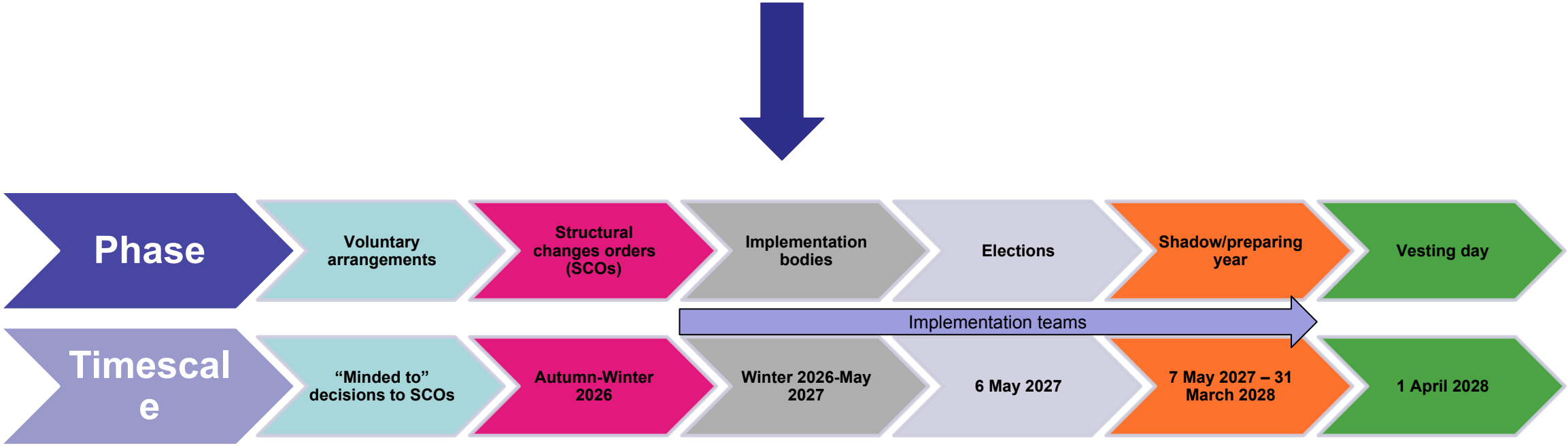
Additional secondary legislation will likely be necessary between the SCO and vesting day, known as ‘mop up’ legislation.

This makes any area specific amendments in legislation that are identified in the implementation due diligence process as areas prepare for vesting day. This could include amending board memberships, pensions legislation, setting a new Housing Revenue Account and ceremonial arrangements.

Local Government Association

Section 24 Notice

- This requires predecessor councils to obtain consent from the new council before entering into certain contracts or for certain asset disposals, to avoid undermining the benefits or savings anticipated as part of the reorganisation



*** Aide-memoire – there will be lots here!**

5.Implementation bodies - councillors

Joint Committee (shadow model) or Implementation Executive (preparing council model) – broadly the same functions. These do not take decisions on behalf of the new council, but they will prepare the ground

SCO will set out membership and functions of these. Likely to include:

- Formulating proposals for code of conduct for new unitary
- Preparing implementation plan for new unitary
- Preparing groundwork for shadow/preparing council to take decisions on e.g. budgets, official appointments
- Membership in the past has generally been half county, half districts. Chair and deputy are decided by the body itself.

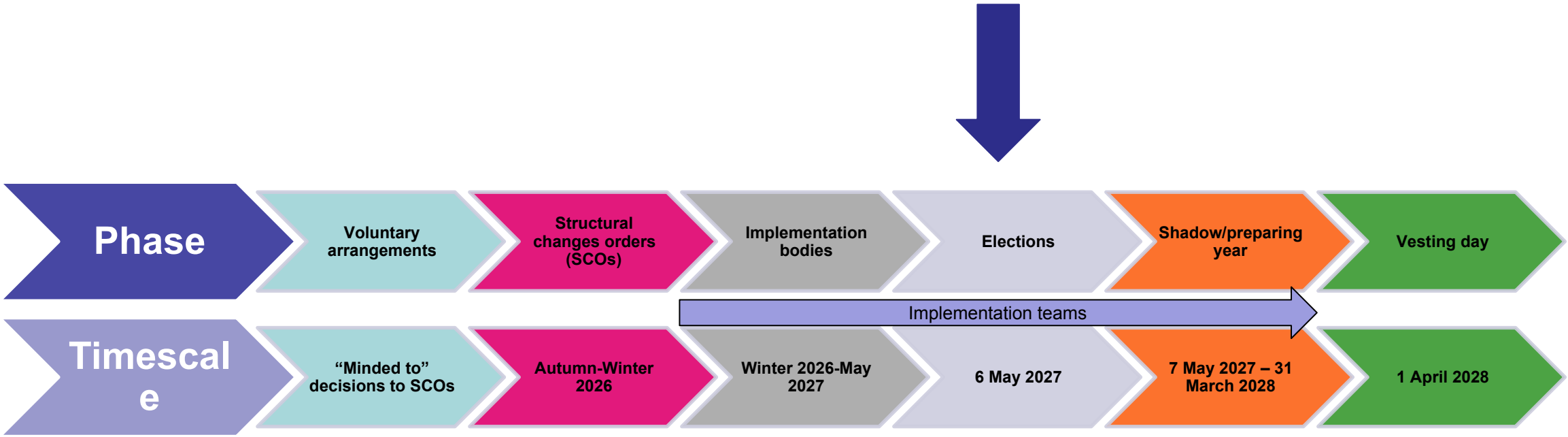
They run from SCO to just after the shadow/preparing council elections (so in practice, will only exist for 3-6 months)

One for each new council

Local Government Association

6. Implementation teams - officers

- Implementation teams are formally established by the SCO, appointed by the implementation bodies, and are made up of officers. The teams remain in place until vesting day
- The implementation team assists the joint committees/implementation executives, then the shadow/preparing council, to prepare for the new councils
- The SCO will specify who MUST be on the team but leave flexibility as to the totality of the membership. Councils must release officers from normal duties to support the implementation team.
- There is ONE for the whole area – not one per new authority. However there will be deputy team leaders who will be key links to each implementation body
- In Surrey and Northamptonshire (shadow model), the SCO specified that the Chief Executive of the county council was the leader of the team, with two deputies – an officer from a council in each new footprint
- In North Yorkshire (preparing council model), the SCO specified that the Chief Executive of the county council was the leader of the team, and a Chief Executive of one of the district councils was to be the deputy leader



*** Aide-memoire – there will be lots here!**

7. Elections – 6 May 2027

Shadow model:

*** where there are shadow councils, elections will take place to these, and shadow councillors will be in post for five years (one shadow year and four in the new unitary).**

*** All other elections in the area will be cancelled and current councillors will remain in post until 31 March 2028.**

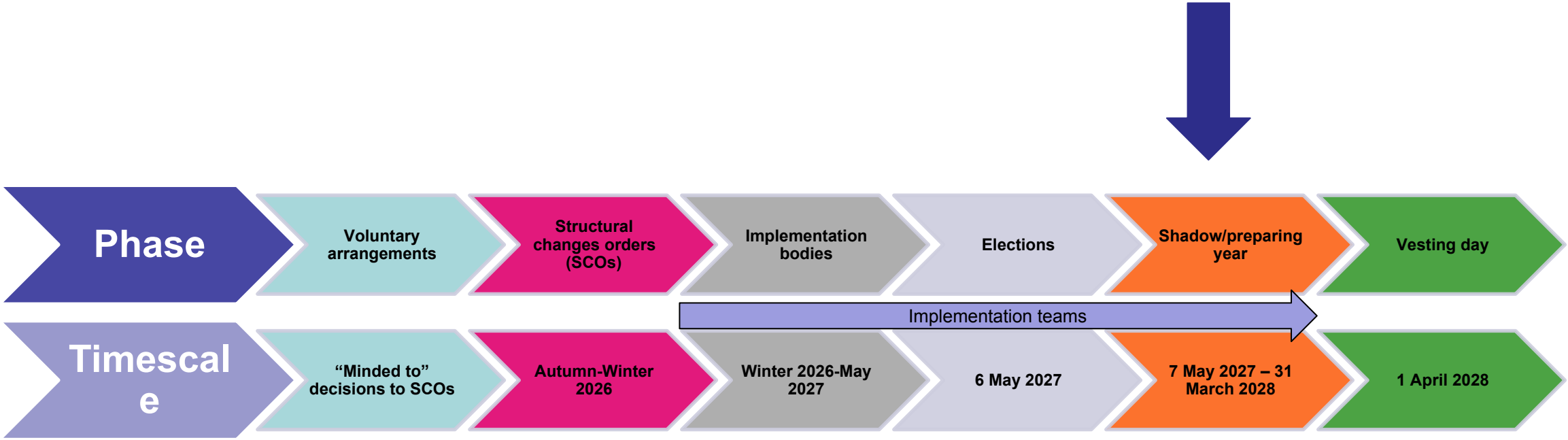
*** This means three sets of councillors for the area for shadow year – the district, county and shadow councillors.**

Preparing council model:

*** elections will take place to the preparing council. Terms of existing councillors in that council will end, and new councillors elected will take over, for a five-year term.**

*** District council elections will be cancelled and those councillors will remain in post until 31 March 2028.**

*** There will be two sets of councillors for the area from 6 May 2027 – 31 March 2028 – district councillors and those in the preparing authority, who will carry out their preparing authority duties alongside their county councillor duties.**



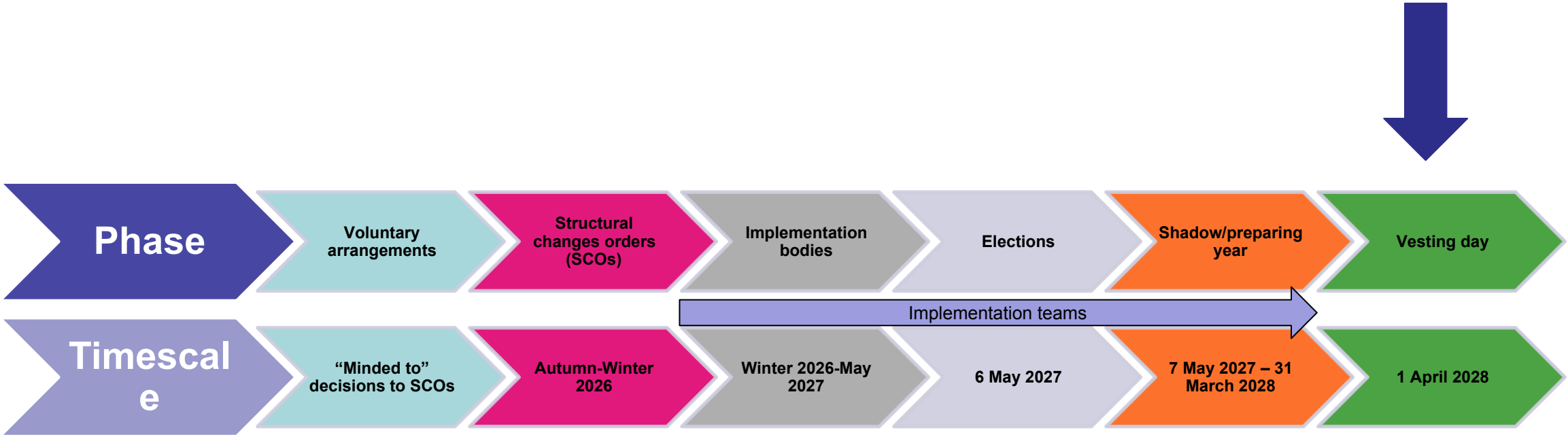
*** Aide-memoire – there will be lots here!**

The shadow/preparing council must make all necessary preparations in advance of vesting day. This includes:

- **Adopting governance arrangements, a code of conduct and scheme of members' allowances**
- **Appointing statutory officers**
- **Keeping the implementation plan under review**
- **Setting the budget and council tax for the new council**
- **Decisions around estate, branding and identity.**

Predecessor councils retain all of their statutory responsibilities and carry out day-to-day work.

Likely to see increasing amount of "dual hatting" between officers as appointments to new councils are made and plans are developed



*** Aide-memoire – there will be lots here!**

Local Government Association

9. Vesting day

- 1 April 2028
- All predecessor councils cease to exist
- All services to be provided by new authorities
- Work really starts now!!

Local Government Association

What are councils saying?

- Varying levels of enthusiasm!
- Significant concerns re: deliverability:
  - Timescales
  - Level of reform across local government
  - Capacity & workforce
- Pressure on relationships
- Need for support – practical, "how to", capacity

Local Government Association

Our support offer

- Knowledge sharing – webinars, networks, LGR Toolkit
- Regional teams
- Councillor development – leadership, finance, induction materials
- Peer support – councillors and officers
- Workforce – planning, industrial relations, culture, pay & grading, employment law
- Governance – including model constitution
- Digital, data & technology support offer