Shaping Worcestershire - Council changes survey 2025
County wide headline results

The initial Shaping Worcestershire public engagement campaign and survey was carried out for a month from 1st June to 29th June 2025. All borough, city and districts were involved, but not the county council.

The following report sets out the headline results for the whole of the county. It does not currently include any free text analysis and has only one table of results by individual council area. A thematic analysis of free text comments and summary reports for each borough/city/district council and will be available by Friday 11th July 2025. Individual files of raw data will be provided to each borough/city/district after this date for continued / further analysis locally.

4,249 responses in total were received from across the county. The majority (94%) were from residents. Small numbers of businesses, parish and town councils, and voluntary and community sector organisations also responded. The 'other' category of responses included police, church groups, housing associations, colleges, GPs, and some council employees and councillors.

In what capacity are you responding? (If you would like to respond in more than one capacity, please complete a separate survey for each.)			
Answer Choices		**Response Percent**	**Response Total**
1	Resident	94.4%	4009
2	Business	1.5%	65
3	Parish/Town council	1.2%	52
4	Voluntary or community sector organisation	1.5%	63
5	Other, for example, school, health provider, police, housing association etc (please specify):	1.4%	60
		answered	4249

The total number of responses for each borough/city/district (all types of respondents combined) were as follows:

Number of respondents:						
	Bromsgrove DC	**Malvern Hills DC**	**Redditch BC**	**Worcester CC**	**Wychavon DC**	**Wyre Forest DC**
Responses	560	633	759	502	1,073	722

AWARENESS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION PLANS:

How aware are you of plans for reorganising local councils in Worcestershire?			
Answer Choices		**Response Percent**	**Response Total**
1	Very aware	40.2%	1697
2	Somewhat aware	47.9%	2023
3	Not aware	11.8%	500
		answered	4220
		skipped	29

How well do you understand each of the two proposed options for Worcestershire? (For more details on the proposed options, see the main Shape Worcestershire website (opens in a new window))				
Answer Choices	**Very well**	**Somewhat**	**Not well**	**Response Total**
One unitary council covering all of Worcestershire	47.6% 1984	40.8% 1700	11.7% 486	4170
Two unitary councils - one for North Worcestershire and one for South Worcestershire	46.0% 1930	41.8% 1751	12.2% 511	4192
			answered	4238
			skipped	11

RESPONDENTS' PREFERENCES FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION:

	Based on the information provided, which option do you currently prefer?			
Answer Choices			**Response Percent**	**Response Total**
1	One unitary council covering all of Worcestershire		28.7%	1215
2	Two unitary councils - one for North Worcestershire and one for South Worcestershire		47.8%	2026
3	I don't have a preference		4.2%	176
4	I don't support reorganisation of local councils in Worcestershire		18.9%	799
5	I'm not interested		0.5%	20
			answered	4236
			skipped	13
Please tell us the main reason/s for your choice: (3179)				

3,179 respondents shared the main reason/s for their preference. These responses are currently being analysed and a headline thematic analysis will be provided by 11th July 2025.

Despite the overall pattern of views across the county showing two unitary authorities as the most popular preference, there is some variation in responses by borough/city/districts. This is shown in the table below.

By local area - Based on the information provided, which option do you currently prefer?						
	Bromsgrove DC	**Malvern Hills DC**	**Redditch BC**	**Worcester CC**	**Wychavon DC**	**Wyre Forest DC**
One unitary authority	34%	24%	15%	46%	22%	40%
Two unitary authorities	46%	58%	41%	42%	57%	39%
I don't have a preference	2%	4%	6%	4%	3%	6%
I don't support reorganisation	18%	14%	37%	8%	17%	15%
I'm not interested	<0.2%	<0.5%	<1%	0	<1%	<0.5%

Respondents were asked to identify which restructure arrangement would best deliver a range of outcomes, with the responses shown in the table below.

In summary, the one unitary authority option was rated as best for 'saving money and delivering value', and 'making local government simpler', and the two unitary authority option was thought to be better for 'improving local services', 'supporting local identity', and 'stronger community engagement'.

Thinking of the outcomes the Government expects us to consider when deciding how we restructure councils in Worcestershire, which of the potential options do you think would best deliver each? Choose one option for each of the outcomes						
Answer Choices	One unitary authority	Two unitary authorities	Both options	Neither option	Don't know	Response Total
Improving local services	24.6%	44.8%	5.0%	20.9%	4.7%	4192
Saving money and delivering value	36.2%	30.8%	8.5%	18.5%	6.0%	4210
Making local government simpler	35.8%	32.5%	9.7%	17.9%	4.1%	4205
Supporting local identity	20.3%	45.7%	5.1%	25.3%	3.6%	4211
Stronger community engagement	18.7%	43.7%	5.2%	27.4%	4.9%	4206
					answered	4235

The three things delivered by local councils that mattered most to the respondents were 'infrastructure planning' (64%), 'maintaining or improving local services and council-owned facilities' (59%), and 'how much Council Tax I pay' (45%). 'Impact on the local community and local identity' was a very close fourth choice (44%).

Thinking about how your local councils are currently organised, which three things from the list below matter most to you? Choose up to three				
	Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Access to local representation/councillors to get my voice heard		35.1%	1485
2	Availability of business support		4.1%	172
3	Funding and other support for voluntary and community organisations		16.1%	681
4	How much Council Tax I pay		44.7%	1894
5	Impact on the local community and local identity		43.8%	1856
6	Infrastructure planning (e.g. roads, schools, health)		63.8%	2701

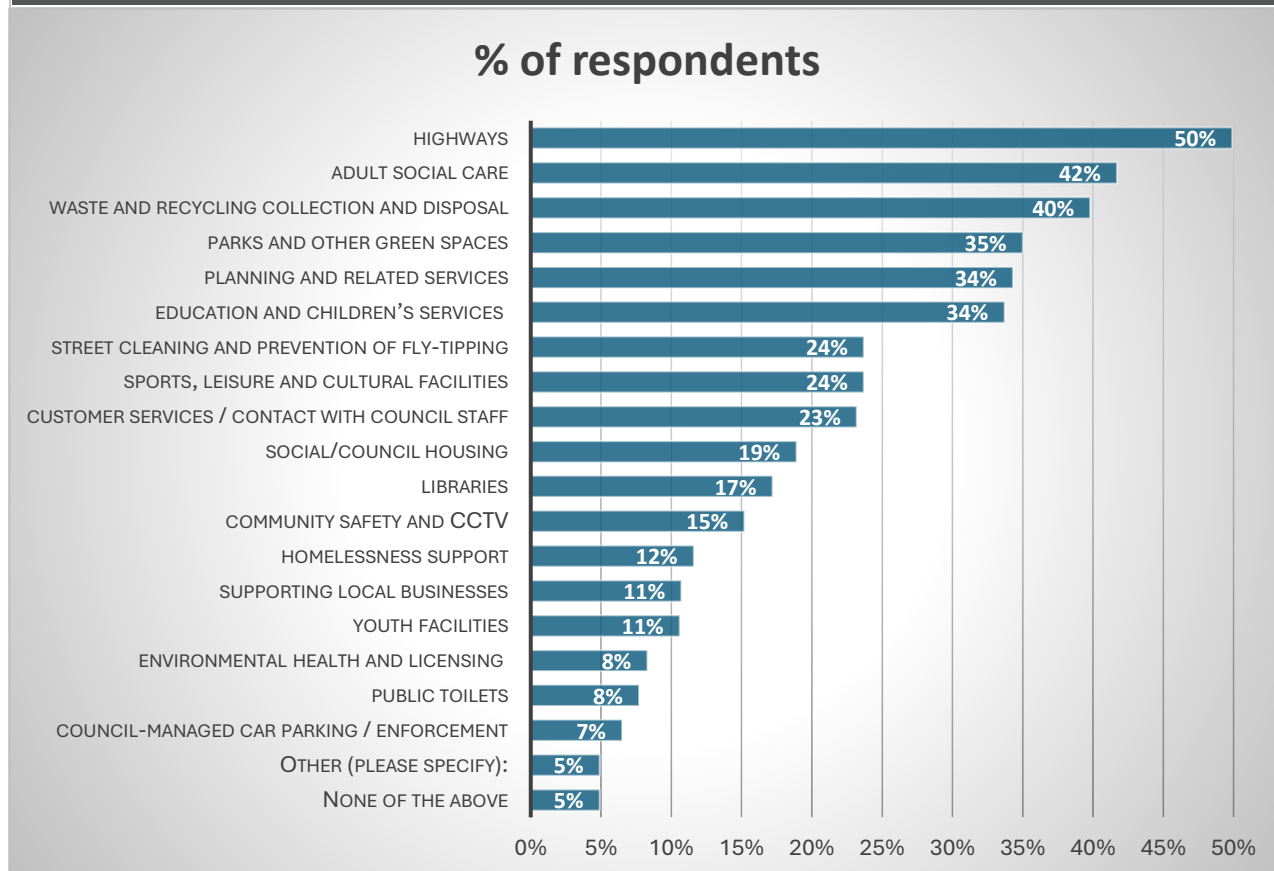|	Thinking about how your local councils are currently organised, which three things from the list below matter most to you? Choose up to three			
7	Knowing who to contact when I have a query or complaint		21.3%	903
8	Maintaining or improving local services and council-owned facilities, such as community centres, sports grounds, arts centres, museums etc-		59.0%	2498
9	Other (please specify):		6.0%	253
			answered	4236

Of the services currently delivered by the county and borough/city/district councils, the top five that respondents were most concerned about being affected by local government reorganisation were:

1. Highways (potholes, footpaths, drainage, street lighting etc) **– 49.9%**
2. Adult social care, such as support for people with disabilities, or care for the elderly **– 41.7%**
3. Waste and recycling collection and disposal **– 39.8%**
4. Parks and other green spaces **– 35.0%**
5. Planning and related services **– 34.3%**

Education and children's services such as looked-after children, those with special educational needs or disability (SEND), fostering and adoption was a very close sixth choice, with 33.7% of respondents selecting it in their top five.

The full ranking is shown in the table on the next page.

County and district/borough/city councils are responsible for a number of services. Which, if any, local services are you concerned about being affected by reorganisation? Choose up to a maximum of five services.

% of respondents

Service	%
HIGHWAYS	50%
ADULT SOCIAL CARE	42%
WASTE AND RECYCLING COLLECTION AND DISPOSAL	40%
PARKS AND OTHER GREEN SPACES	35%
PLANNING AND RELATED SERVICES	34%
EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES	34%
STREET CLEANING AND PREVENTION OF FLY-TIPPING	24%
SPORTS, LEISURE AND CULTURAL FACILITIES	24%
CUSTOMER SERVICES / CONTACT WITH COUNCIL STAFF	23%
SOCIAL/COUNCIL HOUSING	19%
LIBRARIES	17%
COMMUNITY SAFETY AND CCTV	15%
HOMELESSNESS SUPPORT	12%
SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES	11%
YOUTH FACILITIES	11%
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND LICENSING	8%
PUBLIC TOILETS	8%
COUNCIL-MANAGED CAR PARKING / ENFORCEMENT	7%
OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY):	5%
NONE OF THE ABOVE	5%

The final question in the survey asked if respondents had any other comments, suggestions or concerns about the proposed reorganisation. 1,563 respondents shared a view, and these text responses are currently being analysed.

Shape Worcestershire - Council changes survey 2025

Executive summary of the thematic analysis

The Shape Worcestershire – Council Changes Survey 2025 included two free text questions. These elicited a total of 4,742 responses, providing insight into respondents' views and concerns about the future of local councils in Worcestershire.

This executive summary provides an overview of the main themes and key points covered in the free text responses. A more detailed analysis can be found in the 'County wide headline results thematic analysis' report.

Survey respondents were invited to choose their **preferred option for reorganising local councils in Worcestershire**. A total of 4,236 respondents gave a preference and 3,179 of them shared the main reason/s for their preference

Of the 1,215 respondents (29%) who selected **'one unitary council'**, 924 gave a reason for their choice.

The prevailing argument for one council is respondents believe this option would deliver greater efficiency and cost savings, reduce duplication, streamline services, cut costs, provide fairness for all irrespective of where they live and maintain a coherent, historic county identity.

Respondents also felt this option would provide strategic coherence, including negating the need to split strategic services currently delivered on a county wide-basis if a two unitary model were chosen.

These respondents broadly reject the idea of splitting the county into two smaller units, which is seen as inefficient, unsustainable, unnecessary and inconsistent with both local needs and national policy direction.

Of the 2,026 respondents (48%) who selected '**two unitary councils',** 1,570 gave a reason for their choice.

Supporters believe the two-council model provides a balanced approach enabling shared efficiencies where appropriate, while still maintaining local focus, democratic accountability and community connection.

The existing cooperation between councils, suitable infrastructure and natural boundaries are also cited as logical reasons for the north/south option. Many feel this is the least disruptive and most effective solution, which is more reflective of local needs, identities

and priorities. Respondents believe that two councils could cooperate successfully on county-wide services, while tailoring delivery more effectively at a local level.

Generally, these respondents strongly oppose the creation of a single county-wide unitary council, which is seen as too large, remote and unrepresentative. Concerns centre on losing local identity, reduced democratic accountability and worsened service delivery, particularly for rural areas.

Of the 176 respondents (4%) who selected '**I don't have a preference'**, 89 gave a reason for their choice.

Most felt ill-equipped to make an informed choice due to the lack of concrete information about the proposed council reorganisation. They expressed frustration, confusion and a strong desire for more transparency and detailed explanations.

While many can see theoretical benefits to reorganisation, such as cost savings or simplified governance, they also express concern about losing local representation, increasing bureaucracy or creating geographical inequality.

There is a prevailing sense of scepticism and distrust toward government processes throughout the responses, with many doubting that any change, regardless of the structure, will result in tangible improvements for residents.

Whilst the survey made it clear that not reorganising is not an option, 799 respondents (19%) chose '**I don't support reorganisation of local councils in Worcestershire'.** 573 gave a reason for their choice.

These responses reveal strong opposition to proposals for merging local councils into one or two larger unitary authorities. They see the existing councils as effective, locally responsive and better equipped than unitary authorities to serve diverse communities across the county.

Among these respondents there is significant concern that larger, more centralised bodies would diminish local democracy and local representation, fearing that the distinct needs and identities of individual towns will be overshadowed by broader, less responsive administrations.

There is anxiety that service quality will decline due to stretched budgets, staff shortages and increased bureaucracy, alongside a belief that financial resources may be unfairly redistributed to more indebted or affluent areas at the expense of others, particularly in rural areas.

Critically, many feel the engagement process has been rushed and lacks transparency, leading to distrust in the motives behind the changes, which are viewed largely as political cost-cutting moves rather than efforts to improve governance.

Overall, these respondents value the current local council structure for its accessibility and local knowledge and worry that merging councils will diminish democratic engagement, weaken community identity and worsen public services. The dominant feeling among

those who selected this preference is that reorganisation is unnecessary, risky and not supported by evidence.

Just 20 respondents (0.5%) selected '**I am not interested'**. 13 gave a reason for their choice.

The issue most often raised by this small number of respondents was a lack of trust that structural reorganisation will lead to any real improvement in services or governance. There is scepticism that changing structures will not solve the current underlying problems of perceived inefficiency, poor decision-making and wasting public money.

At the end of the survey respondents were given the opportunity to add '**any other comments, suggestions, or concerns about the proposed reorganisation'**. Of the 4,249 survey respondents, 1,563 (37%) provided some further views indicating the strength of feeling about local government reorganisation in Worcestershire.

A summary of the key themes and points made is provided below, many are similar to those already expressed.

Urban vs rural differences
- Some support a single unitary council for efficiency, but many prefer two to reflect the diverse needs of urban and rural areas.
- Concerns include potential marginalisation of rural areas, unequal resource allocation and fears that rural needs (e.g. isolation, transport) will be overlooked.

Loss of localism and representation
- Worries about losing local identity and access to decision-makers, especially in smaller communities.
- Many believe smaller councils, or two unitary councils, would be more responsive and maintain local connections.
- Concerns about diminished community involvement, loss of local facilities and remote decision-making.

Accountability and governance
- Desire for clear, transparent governance with councillors who live in the areas they represent.
- Calls for better understanding of new structures and accountability.

Parish and town councils
- Concerns about overburdening parish councils with new responsibilities and losing their influence.
- Suggestions to empower rather than expand parish councils.

Service quality
- Fear of service decline, particularly for vulnerable populations (e.g. elderly, disabled, rural residents).
- Worries about the loss of non-statutory services (e.g. parks, libraries) and reliance on digital-only systems.

Financial concerns and cost-saving scepticism

- Many express doubts that reorganisation will save money, citing previous failed reorganisations.
- Concerns about higher council tax, service cuts and potential hidden costs.

Alternative proposals and reorganisation legitimacy

- Calls for strengthening existing councils or investing in back-office efficiencies rather than restructuring.
- Scepticism that the reorganisation is politically motivated or driven by cost-cutting, rather than improving services.
- Some suggest splitting into two unitary authorities that align with natural boundaries to better reflect local identities.
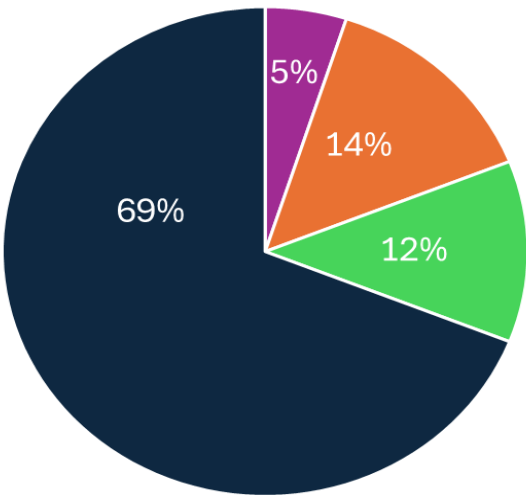
Planning, housing and environmental protections

- Concerns about overdevelopment, loss of green belt and strain on infrastructure.
- Emphasis on protecting the environment, nature reserves, and heritage sites.
- Calls for integrating climate adaptation and sustainability into planning decisions.

Staff surveys - headlines

Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council
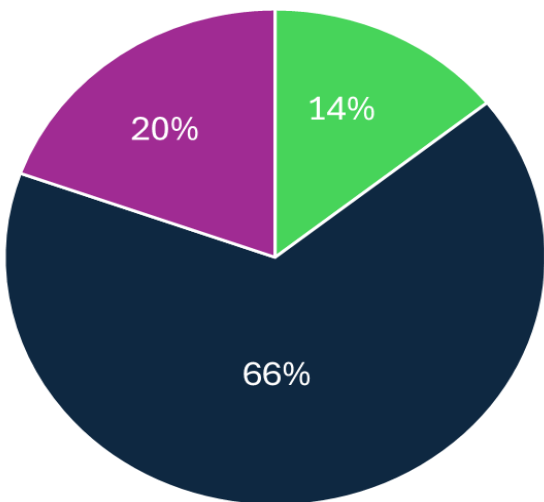### Which reorganisation option do you prefer?

Number of responses: 251

- ■ I don't have preference
- ■ I don't have enough information / feel informed enough to make a decision
- ■ One unitary authority covering all of Worcestershire
- ■ Two unitary authorities - one for North Worcestershire and one for South Worcestershire

Malvern Hills District Council and Wychavon District Council
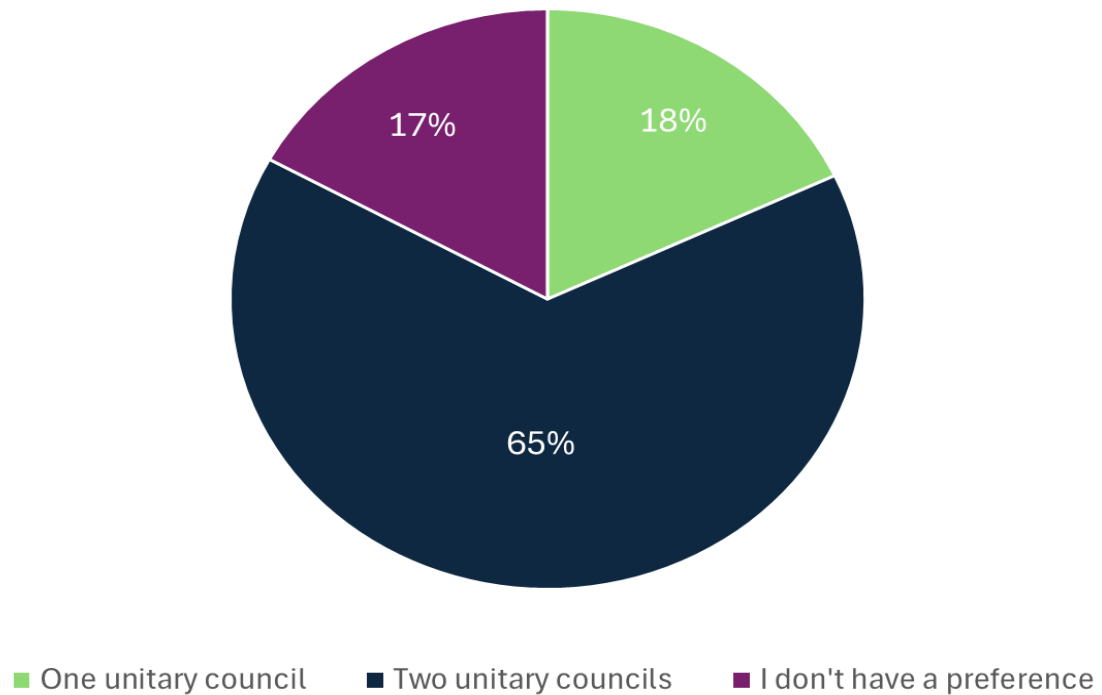### As a Malvern Hills or Wychavon council employee, which reorganisation option do you prefer?

Number of responses: 364

- ■ One unitary council covering all of Worcestershire
- ■ Two unitary councils – one for North Worcestershire and one for South Worcestershire
- ■ I don't have a preference

Worcester City Council
As a Worcester City Council employee, which reorganisation option do you think would work better?

Number of responses: 84

- One unitary council
- Two unitary councils
- I don't have a preference

(18% — One unitary council, 65% — Two unitary councils, 17% — I don't have a preference)

Shape Worcestershire focus groups - reports

The focus group reports are available via the following link:

https://shapeworcestershire.org/survey-results#775d8a6b-fb59-4c1f-8dc9-42909d3ba5d5

- Shape Worcestershire focus groups - overview report (pdf)
- Shape Worcestershire focus groups - all public comments (pdf)
- Shape Worcestershire focus groups - parish/town council feedback (pdf)