

Future Local Governance Engagement Exercise

Overview of responses and points for consideration

The survey contained three question routes: questions for respondents in parished areas, questions for respondents in non-parished areas, and questions asked of all respondents. Results from these routes are therefore considered separately. Percentages are based on the number answering each question, not the full number who took part in the exercise.

Measure	Recorded result	Comment
Overall participation	445 survey records; 439 answered Question 1	Response totals vary by question because of routing and skipped questions.
Respondent type	424 respondents identified as residents (96.6%)	Respondents could select more than one category. Twenty identified as parish councillors and seven as district councillors.
Location	156 selected Bromsgrove Centre; 21 selected unparished Rubery; 268 selected a named parish	The geographical spread was uneven. The largest parish response groups were Wythall (47), Catshill and North Marlbrook (33), Alvechurch (30), Hagley (29) and Stoke (27).

Responses from non-parished areas

Questions 3 to 11 explored views in the non-parished areas. Depending on the question, between 179 and 184 people responded. The results indicate interest in retaining or strengthening local influence following reorganisation, but do not point to one settled governance model.

When asked which local area they felt most connected to, respondents used a mixture of town-wide, neighbourhood and estate-level descriptions. Of 180 responses, 75 (41.7%) were coded as Bromsgrove town centre and central areas. Other recurring identities included Aston Fields (17), Rubery (19), Sidemoor (11), Charford (9), Sanders Park (6) and Oakalls/Parklands (5), with a further 29 spread across other Bromsgrove neighbourhoods.

This suggests that local identity is not expressed at one consistent geographical scale. A larger Bromsgrove identity appears important to many respondents, while a substantial number identify more closely with distinct neighbourhoods. If a review is commenced, this would support testing boundaries and governance options rather

than assuming at the outset that either one town-wide body or several smaller bodies would best reflect community identity.

Question	Key result	Outcome
Local elected representation	• 54.6% favoured additional elected representatives at community or neighbourhood level. • 13.7% favoured local representation without necessarily electing new representatives. • 20.2% considered unitary representation sufficient.	There was a clear preference among respondents for some form of local representation, but not complete agreement that this must involve an additional elected tier.
Where decisions should be made	• 44.8% favoured some decisions at neighbourhood/community level. • 40.4% favoured shared decision-making. • 7.1% favoured decisions being made by the unitary authority.	Most respondents wanted a local role in at least some decisions. The question did not define which powers or services should sit at each level.
Whether governance should be considered	64.1% said yes, 14.1% no and 21.7% were unsure.	This supports further consideration of options, but is not in itself a preference for a particular structure or evidence of support for its detailed costs and function

Preferred approaches

Question 7 allowed more than one answer. Neighbourhood-level arrangements such as local committees received the most selections (43.5%). A mix of parish councils and neighbourhood arrangements was selected by 22.3%, a single parish or town council covering a larger area by 21.2%, smaller parish councils by 8.2%, and no new structure by 14.1%; 11.4% were unsure.

This suggests that neighbourhood committees had the broadest initial appeal, while there was also interest in parish or town council arrangements.

Costs, funding and practical concerns

The main concerns were confusion about responsibilities (51.1%), additional cost to residents (49.5%), insufficient local interest or participation (40.1%), overlap between councils or committees (37.4%), inconsistent representation between areas (36.3%) and complexity (31.3%). Only 12.1% selected that they had no concerns.

Funding responses were mixed. General funding from the future unitary authority was the most selected option (38.5%), followed by a combination of unitary and locally raised funding (27.9%). Locally raised funding alone and no additional funding each received 12.8%. On a parish or town council precept, 27.2% said they would support one and 41.7% said they might support one depending on cost and benefits. A further 21.7% would not support an additional precept and 9.4% were unsure.

These responses indicate that cost and clarity would be central to any later consultation. The combined 68.9% who were supportive or potentially supportive of a precept should not be described as unconditional support: the larger group made its view expressly dependent on the level of cost and the benefits provided.

Current visibility and understanding of parish councils

The parish-route questions provide a useful indication of how visible existing parish councils are to respondents and how far people understand or know how to access them. The results show a difference between recognising that a parish council exists and understanding its work or knowing how to engage with it.

Measure	Result	What it may indicate
Awareness that the area has a parish council	• 67.8% aware • 10.9% unsure • 21.3% not aware (395 responses)	Existence was known to around two-thirds, but nearly one-third were unsure or unaware.
Awareness of responsibilities and activities	• 25.4% very aware • 31.0% fairly aware • 18.8% slightly aware • 24.9% not aware (394 responses)	56.3% reported being very or fairly aware, while 43.7% had only slight or no awareness.
Knowing how to contact or get involved	• 44.6% knew how • 13.3% had heard of ways but were unsure • 36.7% did not know • 5.4% unsure • (392 responses)	Practical accessibility appears weaker than general recognition: 55.4% did not give an unqualified yes.

Some respondents described parish councils as accessible, responsive and important to village identity. Others reported limited visibility, poor communication, difficulty influencing decisions, concerns about accountability, or uncertainty about the value received for the precept. These are differing experiences rather than findings that apply equally to every parish.

For the Working Group, this suggests that the presence of a parish council does not automatically mean that residents understand its role or feel able to engage with it. If a new parish or town council were considered, visibility, communication, transparency, accessibility and arrangements for ongoing public participation would be important design and implementation issues, alongside its legal structure and budget.

Views asked of all respondents

Awareness of reorganisation and governance arrangements

Statement tested	Very/fairly aware	Slightly/not aware
District councils are expected to be replaced by larger unitary authorities	61.2%	38.8%
Bromsgrove District Council is expected to cease as a district council from 2028	53.9%	46.1%
Existing parish councils continue unless changed through a separate legal process	33.4%	66.6%
Future unitary authorities should establish neighbourhood governance arrangements such as neighbourhood area committees	26.9%	73.1%

Awareness was therefore strongest for the broad move to unitary local government and lower for the consequences for parish councils and neighbourhood governance. This limits how far preferences about unfamiliar structures can be treated as settled views. Several comments also said that respondents needed clearer explanations of the options, powers, responsibilities and costs before they could give an informed view.

Importance and expected impact of representation

Of the 441 respondents, 90.9% considered good community representation extremely or very important. At the same time, 67.3% expected reorganisation to have a negative impact on local representation, compared with 10.2% expecting a positive impact, 6.1% no impact and 16.3% who did not know. This shows concern about local voice but not support for any particular solution.

Themes from written comments

The comments included views both for and against additional local structures. Recurring themes included:

- Concern that a larger authority could feel remote, with local knowledge, identity and smaller communities receiving less attention.
- A desire for visible and accessible local representation, with clear powers and influence.
- Concern about cost, duplication, bureaucracy and whether a precept would provide proportionate benefits.
- Mixed experiences of existing parish councils. Positive comments referred to responsiveness, village identity and support for local facilities; critical comments referred to limited communication, insularity, accountability, effectiveness and value for money.
- Interest in practical local issues and distinct place identities, together with requests for clearer information and evidence that consultation will influence decisions.