# 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. **48%** backed creating two unitary councils, **29%** supported one unitary council for the whole county and **19%** didn't support any reorganisation of local councils in Worcestershire. 3,179 of the respondents 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.