



Shape Worcestershire - focus groups overview report

22 July 2025

As part of the Shape Worcestershire public engagement campaign, each borough/city/district council committed to running at least one focus group in their area. Some chose to run more.

Respondents to the Council changes survey, which took place in June 2025, were asked whether they were interested in taking part in a focus group to discuss the issues covered in the survey. A total of 410 respondents across the county indicated they were interested in being part of a focus group. Some of these were invited to attend a local focus group.

This report provides a short overview of the 11 focus groups that took place and presents some headline themes. Notes from each focus group are collated and attached in Appendix A.

1. Purpose and focus group format

The purpose of the focus groups was to gather qualitative data, to be considered alongside the results of the Council changes survey, to provide richer and more in-depth insights into views and opinions about the future of local councils in Worcestershire.

Through guided discussions with small groups of people we sought to encourage a genuine exchange of views and ensure everyone had the opportunity to contribute.

A written guide including a standard set of questions and a slide deck were produced to support the facilitation of the focus groups and help ensure a consistent approach, regardless of the council area they took place in. Additionally, the first focus group for each council was facilitated by the same person (Wychavon's Research, Data and Projects Officer) supported by one or more officers from the host council.

Each focus group began with introductions and a short slide presentation about local government reorganisation, how the Worcestershire councils currently work and the two unitary options for Worcestershire.

For all the focus groups, except the VCSE one, discussions were guided using the five questions set out below. In most of the sessions, a significant proportion of the time was spent discussing the two options for Worcestershire.

- How aware are you of plans for reorganising local councils in Worcestershire?
- How well do you understand each of the two proposed options for Worcestershire?
- Which option do you prefer and why?

- What matters most to you about how councils are run and council services?
- Is there anything more you would like to tell us about the reorganisation?

Towards the end of each session, participants were provided with a short explanation about what happens next and informed that the Government will decide which proposals to take forward. Participants were thanked for their contributions.

2. Focus group details

The table below contains details of the 11 focus groups that took place. Despite high levels of interest in attending a focus group, many of those invited were either unable to attend or didn't respond to the invitation. Some of those who said they would attend didn't turn up.

Borough/city/district	Focus group date	Number of participants	Type of participants
Bromsgrove	1 July 2025	8	Residents
	10 July	5	Hagley residents
Malvern Hills	8 July 2025	10	Residents
Redditch	7 July 2025	11	Residents
	17 July 2025	5	Housing tenants
Worcester	9 July 2025	6	Residents
	16 July	10	Residents
Wychavon	25 June 2025	4	Residents
	15 July 2025	16	Residents
	16 July 2025	8	VCSE representatives
Wyre Forest	17 June 2025	8	Residents

In addition to the focus groups listed, Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills and Wychavon District Councils held separate events with parish and town councils. Outcomes from these events are attached in Appendix B.

3. Key themes

Taking an overview of the views expressed across all the focus groups, a range of key themes emerge. These are summarised below.

- Strong levels of engagement and thoughtful contributions and reflections from participants, indicating interest in and concerns about local government reorganisation in Worcestershire. Lots of questions were posed during some of the sessions.
- Varied levels of awareness and understanding of LGR amongst participants.

- Many participants had a general understanding of the two options for Worcestershire but had questions about the details. Some questioned why other options, for example east / west unitaries, weren't being considered.
- A strong desire for more detailed information, particularly financial, to improve understanding and help some participants make a more informed choice.
- Participants were interested to hear views for and against both options and most recognised there were issues and benefits with both models. Some changed their views as a result of the focus group discussions.
- Mixed views about the preferred option for Worcestershire were expressed during each focus group. However, in nine of the focus groups more participants favoured two unitaries than one. The VCSE focus group was fairly evenly split and marginally more participants in the Wyre Forest focus group favoured one unitary council.
- Those preferring a single unitary council felt that the potential financial savings, opportunities for economies of scale, improved efficiency and better fit with strategic authorities outweighed any concerns about a large single authority. This model would also reduce confusion about who does what.
- Those preferring two unitary councils felt this model would enable a better understanding of local needs and tailoring of services, offer greater local accountability and work better given the geographical and socio-economic differences between the north and south of the county. Some also mentioned the established partnership working already in place between some of the district councils.
- Some participants were keen to express their satisfaction with their current borough/city/district council and felt that change was unnecessary. Some of these described the two unitary option as the 'least worst' of the two options.
- Significantly more concerns were expressed about the impact of reorganisation than opportunities identified. Key concerns included:
 - Future levels and quality of services, particularly non-statutory service, and a desire to retain local service delivery.
 - Adult social care, children's services, SEND and housing tenancies in Redditch.
 - Loss of community voice and a reduction in the number of councillors / local democracy and accountability,
 - Loss of local identity. This was particularly strongly felt in Redditch, Malvern Hills and Wychavon.
 - Increasing costs, Council Tax and loss of funding.
 - Impact on vulnerable people / inequalities between a more urban north and rural south. Concerns that villages would be forgotten.
 - Additional burdens and demand being placed on the voluntary and community sector.
 - Cost of redundancies and disruption to service delivery when reorganisation takes place.
- Interest in parish and town councils taking on additional responsibilities/ services, although some questions and concerns about their capacity to do this.
- Infrastructure is important in any new unitary council/s. This was felt particularly strongly in Bromsgrove and Wychavon

- Shared learning and experiences of reorganisation from other areas including Cumbria, South Gloucestershire, Wales, the previous Herefordshire and Worcestershire Council.
- Some concerns about the influence of political agendas / personal views.
- Concerns about the short timescales involved and some mistrust about the influence of the engagement process on the final decision and whether local people's views will be listened to.
- Some concerns about how any model will be implemented and whether reorganisation and efficiencies will lead to better or worse outcomes.

4. Appendices

Appendix A contain the notes from the focus groups listed below:

- Bromsgrove focus group on 1 July
- Bromsgrove focus group on 10 July
- Malvern Hills focus group on 8 July
- Redditch focus group on 7 July
- Redditch focus group on 17 July
- Worcester focus group on 9 July
- Worcester focus group on 16 July
- Wychavon focus group on 25 June
- Wychavon focus group on 15 July
- Wychavon VCSE focus group on 16 July
- Wyre Forest focus group on 17 June

Appendix B contains the key outcomes from the parish and town council events held in the Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills and Wychavon districts.