



## Shape Worcestershire - Council changes survey 2025

### County wide headline results THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The Shape Worcestershire – Council Changes Survey 2025 included two free text questions. Firstly, respondents were given the opportunity at question 7, where they were asked to choose their preference for local government reorganisation, to provide the reasons for their choice. A total of 4,236 respondents gave a preference, and a further 3,179 went on to provide a comment<sup>1</sup>.

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 responses overall, 1,563 added a free text comment.

The following report provides a summary of the most common themes coming from those comments, broken down by question. The analysis sits alongside the ‘Headline Countywide Results July 25’ report, which provides the statistical data across the county for every question.

**Question 7: Based on the information provided, which option for local government reorganisation do you currently prefer? Please tell us the main reason/s for your choice.**

7. 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		28.68%	1215
2	Two unitary councils - one for North Worcestershire and one for South Worcestershire		47.83%	2026
3	I don't have a preference		4.15%	176
4	I don't support reorganisation of local councils in Worcestershire		18.86%	799
5	I'm not interested		0.47%	20
			answered	4236
			skipped	13
Please tell us the main reason/s for your choice: (3179)				

<sup>1</sup> 10 comments were received from respondents who did not make a preference selection.

## Preference 1 - One unitary authority:

Of the 1,215 respondents (29%) who selected 'one unitary authority' as their preference for local government reorganisation, 924 gave a reason for their choice.

The prevailing argument for one council is that 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. It would also 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.

There is broad rejection from these respondents to 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.

Concerns were expressed about the administrative overhead of two councils, duplication of senior roles and inconsistent service delivery between areas, including potentially higher Council Taxes. Some respondents also emphasised the need to empower local (parish and town) councils under a single unitary authority.

## Common themes for one unitary authority:

### 1. Cost savings and efficiency

- Economies of scale: A single authority reduces duplication of services, staff, management structures, and back-office functions, offering savings and better value for taxpayers.
- Lower transition costs and disruption: Avoids the cost and disruption of splitting existing county-wide services (e.g., highways, education, adult and children's social care).
- Streamlined processes: One governance structure simplifies procurement, service delivery, and resident interactions and avoids duplication.
- Strengthens Worcestershire's competitiveness for funding and investment and avoids intra-county competition.
- Unified tax base allows cross-subsidisation between more affluent and more deprived areas.

### 2. Service consistency, simplification and improvements

- One clear point of contact for residents, with less confusion about which authority is responsible ("one stop shop").
- Avoids confusion and disparities between district policies and provision (described as a "postcode lottery").
- Delivers uniform services across the county (social care, planning, refuse collection, etc.) with consistency in service standards and policies.
- Residents hope a single council would lead to more efficient services, better inter-agency coordination, and shared best practices, specifically mentioning disabled services, adult care and business support as areas that could benefit.

### 3. Preservation of Worcestershire's identity

- Strong emotional and practical support for retaining the county as a whole.
- References to Worcestershire's historical and cultural coherence.
- Desire for "One Worcestershire" to avoid unnecessary geographic or administrative splits.
- Reflects how most residents already see themselves — as part of "Worcestershire," not as "North" or "South."

### 4. Better governance and accountability

- A single unitary is seen to enhance decision-making, and reduce responsibility being passed on to others.
- It would enable coherent planning for cross county services like transport, social care, housing.
- One authority is seen to avoid potential conflicts between competing authorities.
- It provides a chance to improve productivity and trust

### 5. Fairness and equality

- A single authority would better manage diverse urban and rural needs.
- It could balance wealthier and more deprived areas for fairer service provision and funding.
- North/South split seen as creating structural inequality and competition for resources.

### 6. Strategic capability, planning and infrastructure

- One authority viewed as offering a stronger voice in lobbying central government, particularly on attracting central government funding, regional partnerships and securing inward investment.
- Enables county-wide infrastructure and development planning (e.g. transport, housing, roads, business growth).
- Avoids fragmentation that would disrupt major projects like highways or SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) services.
- Better alignment with existing structures and partnerships, like NHS Integrated Care Systems (ICS), police, health statutory partners, and economic strategies (e.g., M5 corridor) allowing joined-up decision making.

### 7. Alignment with government criteria

- Many responses cite the government's devolution and efficiency priorities as helping with their decision, with a number mentioning that two councils wouldn't meet the 500,000-resident threshold. Although this is now confirmed as being a recommendation from government many respondents used this fact as a reason for their preference.
- Some felt that a one unitary authority better protected the north of the county, particularly Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre Forest, from becoming subsumed into Birmingham/West Midlands/Staffordshire in the future.
- These respondents see the single authority as more likely to meet devolution criteria.

## 8. Localism and empowering parish councils

- Some believe that a larger unitary authority can still support local needs through local offices or locality-based work.
- Several responses suggest that while a single strategic authority is preferred, more decision-making should be devolved to local (parish/town) councils for community-level responsiveness.
- This dual-layer model is proposed to combine efficiency with local engagement and knowledge

A smaller number of respondents expressed frustration at the lack of data available in the engagement exercise on financial savings, pros and cons of each model, or service impacts. They felt unable to make a fully informed decision until more details are available.

A number of respondents did say that they don't see the need for change but, if change must happen, they have chosen 'one unitary' as the better option. They worry that LGR could result in bad reorganisation, with high transition costs, disruption and the risk of losing experienced staff.

### **Common themes raised against the 'two' unitary model by those who prefer the 'one' unitary model:**

Concerns include:

- Two unitary councils viewed as more expensive and complex, undermining the goal of efficiency.
- Concerns that splitting essential county-wide services (e.g. adult social care, children's services, highways) into two authorities would fragment delivery, create inefficiencies, and lead to inequity in service provision
- Risk of unequal resource distribution, especially to rural or southern areas, which may create rivalry or imbalance between North and South (e.g. bias toward Worcester City or Birmingham influence).
- Fear that two authorities would perpetuate current inefficiencies rather than solve them.
- Seen as divisive, inefficient, and politically risky — especially for areas in the North.
- Smaller population sizes not meeting government viability recommendations and being unbalanced in North and South.

## Preference 2 – Two unitary authorities:

Of the 2,026 respondents (48%) who selected 'two unitary authorities' as their preference for local government reorganisation, 1,570 gave a reason for their choice.

Supporters of the two-council model believe it 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 that support the North/South option are also cited as logical and positive reasons for a two unitary model. Many feel that a two-unitary model 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 authority, 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.

## Common themes for two unitary authorities:

### 1. Reflects geographic, social and economic differences

- There was broad consensus from respondents that two unitary authorities better reflect the areas' distinct demographics, economies, and identities.
- Many respondents prefer the two unitary option because they feel that a North and South authorities better reflect the natural differences in the two parts of the county. The North is seen as more urban, industrial and commuter-heavy, and connected to Birmingham, whereas the South is seen as rural, agricultural and tourism-based, and is aligned better with the South West.
- It is believed these north vs south differences, which drive divergent needs in infrastructure, planning and service delivery, would be better served by two unitaries.

### 2. Preserves local identity, local knowledge and localism

- Respondents value local identity, local knowledge and community character, which they see as being a strength of a two unitary model. Some fear that this might be eroded in a large one unitary.
- Some responses stress the importance of decision-makers having direct knowledge of local communities, including living in those communities, which they believe will be stronger in a two unitary model.
- A two-council model is seen as maintaining local pride and cohesion better than a centralised, "one-size-fits-all" model.

### 3. Service delivery, efficiency and equality

- Local services are seen as more effective and tailored under smaller, more focused councils.
- Two councils would still be large enough to be strategically viable, but small enough to remain efficient and focused.
- Many respondents felt that the already established existing shared services and collaborations between district councils (e.g. Redditch and Bromsgrove in the north and Wychavon, Malvern and Worcester already sharing services in the South) function well, and these would continue into a two unitary authority making this a more simple change than to a single unitary.
- Moving to two councils and building on existing collaborations is considered by respondents as less disruptive and easier to implement, which is better for continuity of service delivery.
- A two council option is felt by many to be a way to maintain local responsiveness, especially with already responsive, well-run and efficient local councils coming together as two unitaries.
- There was widespread criticism of Worcestershire County Council's perceived current performance. Respondents felt that this may continue to be the service standard in a one unitary model, which they want to avoid, especially the impact on services like healthcare, planning and transport.

### 4. Local representation and democracy

- Respondents who would prefer two unitary councils see smaller councils as enabling more responsive, accountable, accessible, representative and regionally informed governance.
- It is felt that two councils will be able to offer greater democratic accountability and responsiveness to local needs.
- Local decision-making is seen as vital for civic trust and effective governance. Respondents feel that this could be maintained better in a two unitary authority than in a large one unitary authority, where they worry it might be lost and replaced by "faceless" governance, bureaucracy, and lack of local accountability.
- There is a preference for councils that understand the specific needs of their constituents rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach.
- Desire to retain local governance structures that are more familiar and accessible to residents (e.g., Wychavon praised multiple times).

### 5. Fairness and equality

- Respondents believe two smaller unitary authorities would keep a focus on the needs of smaller towns and rural areas and avoid any 'Worcester-centric' bias. Respondents were particularly worried about areas such as Broadway, Stourport, Evesham, Malvern, etc.
- There is a perception that funding will be more balanced across areas in a two unitary model, without smaller areas being forgotten.
- Desire to retain or improve democratic representation and ensure local voices are heard, especially in rural and smaller communities, which will be better served through a two unitary model.

## 6. Cost vs quality

- Whilst some respondents who prefer a two unitary model acknowledge that one unitary could provide potential cost savings and streamlined services, they don't believe those savings would outweigh the damage to local governance, which could be avoided in a two unitary model.
- Some respondents still believe efficiency can be achieved by shared services between two councils and by working more agilely, without sacrificing local relevance.
- While some respondents acknowledge efficiencies or cost savings as a goal, the majority prioritise quality, responsiveness and fairness over blanket cost-cutting, which they believe will be better served by a two unitary model.

As with those who chose 'one unitary' as their preference, a number of the 'two unitary' respondents support change reluctantly, viewing the two council option as a pragmatic compromise. Some reject all forms of restructuring, seeing it as politically driven and top-down, although have chosen two unitaries as the least bad option to protect local identity, accountability and service relevance.

Respondents also expressed some political distrust about reorganisation and about the government's motives for it. Some fear that there is a central government agenda, and there are other concerns about undue influence from national parties, especially the Reform Party and Conservatives.

Some respondents also called for more public involvement in the final local government reorganisation decision before it is made, and possibly a referendum before any reorganisation.

### **Common themes raised against the 'one' unitary model by those who prefer the 'two' unitary model:**

Concerns include:

- 'One' unitary is too large, remote, impersonal and bureaucratic, risking inefficiency and weaker community engagement.
- Risk of centralisation around Worcester, leading to neglect of smaller towns like Stourport, Redditch, Evesham and Kidderminster.
- Dilution of local knowledge and identity.
- Weakening of local democracy, representation and responsiveness to local needs.
- Poor past performance of other large councils cited frequently, (e.g. Worcestershire County Council, Birmingham, Herefordshire and Worcestershire merger in the past).

## Preference 3 – ‘I don’t have a preference’:

Of the 176 respondents (4%) who said they ‘didn’t have a preference’ for local government reorganisation, 89 gave a reason for their choice.

Most respondents 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 deep concern about losing local representation, increasing bureaucracy, or creating regional inequality.

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

## Common themes for ‘I don’t have a preference’:

### 1. Lack of information and understanding

- Overwhelming concern that not enough detail has been provided about the proposed reorganisation.
- Many respondents don’t understand the differences between the two options.
- Calls for clearer communication, detailed plans and real-world examples or cost-benefit data.

### 2. Scepticism and distrust

- Widespread belief that the consultation is a box-ticking exercise, with little faith that public opinions will be considered.
- Distrust in local government competence, especially around transparency, accountability and responsiveness.

### 3. Concern about local representation

- Fear that a single large council might become too remote, losing touch with local needs.
- On the flip side, two councils might create inequality or conflict between areas (North/South divide).
- Desire for balanced support between urban and rural areas.

### 4. Apathy and resignation

- Many express apathy, saying “it won’t make a difference” or “they’ll do what they want anyway.”
- Others admit they haven’t researched enough or feel disengaged from local governance.

## 5. Support for reorganisation – with conditions

- Some support for streamlining into fewer councils than the current arrangement, if it leads to cost savings or efficiency.
- Others emphasise the importance of protecting local services, especially for children, transport and rural areas.

## 6. Preference ambiguity

- The majority either don't have a clear preference or see pros and cons in both options.
- A few say "leave things as they are", while others lean slightly toward one or two councils—but only if justified by data.

## Preference 4 – ‘I don't support reorganisation of local councils in Worcestershire’:

Whilst it was made clear in the information provided that not reorganising is not an option, respondents were still given the opportunity to choose this preference. Of the 799 respondents (19%) who said they ‘don't support reorganisation’ for local government, 573 gave a reason for their choice.

The free text responses reveal strong opposition to proposals for merging local councils in Worcestershire into one or two larger unitary authorities.

Respondents see the existing councils as effective, locally responsive and better equipped than unitary authorities to serve diverse communities across the county. 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 widespread 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, with many seeing the decision as already having been made.

Overall, residents 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.

There were also some concerns specific to council housing tenants in Redditch, who are worried that reorganisation will cause rent increases, delays in repairs and

reduced support. Comparison to Birmingham City Council's failure were frequent amongst this group of respondents and used as a warning.

## **Common themes for not supporting local government reorganisation:**

### **1. Strong support for current district councils**

- Many respondents expressed satisfaction with their existing district councils (some were specifically mentioned by name), saying they work well and offer good services.
- Many comments argue "if it isn't broken, don't fix it."
- Positive experiences cited with current councils and scepticism about the benefits of reorganisation.
- Fear that reorganisation will worsen services or add unnecessary complexity.

### **2. Concerns about loss of local knowledge, identity and representation**

- Strong concern that larger unitary authorities will lack understanding of local issues. There is a strong preference for "local decisions made by local people".
- Local councillors are viewed as accessible, knowledgeable, and committed.
- Respondents expressed concern that under a unitary model, representatives might not even be from the communities they serve and won't understand or prioritise local issues.
- There is a deep sense of community identity tied to the current districts that people fear will be lost, and a worry that local needs, especially in rural areas, may be overlooked in favour of city-centric decisions and the influence of smaller towns will be reduced.
- A significant concern is that unitary authorities will be too large and remote, weakening residents' ability to influence decisions, being less responsive and out of touch with community need. They are also seen by some as less democratic and less accountable.

### **3. Urban vs rural divide**

- Deep concern that rural communities would lose out to urban centres in terms of funding and services.
- Worries that smaller or more rural areas will be deprioritised in favour of populous urban centres like Worcester.
- Belief that Worcestershire is too diverse for a one-size-fits-all council.
- Fear that one or two large councils can't adequately address the unique characteristics of each town or rural community.
- Villages and rural areas feel particularly vulnerable under a centralised structure.

### **4. Financial doubts and fear of increased costs**

- Strong scepticism that cost savings from reorganisation would materialise. Some questioned: "*Where is the evidence this will save money?*"

- Concerns about merging councils with different states of financial health, absorbing the debt or poor performance of other councils.
- Repeated claims that proposed changes will not save money, and instead will increase costs, cause job losses, and disrupt services.
- Fears of redundancy costs, waste and higher Council Tax without improvements in service.
- Many believe previous reorganisations into large councils (e.g. Birmingham, Shropshire) have shown the opposite effect: higher costs, reduced services, and bureaucratic inefficiency, often causing other financial struggles and potential mismanagement.

## 5. Accountability, transparency and politics

- Strong criticism of how the engagement has been conducted — too short notice, poor communication and inadequate information.
- Suspicion that decisions are predetermined and not truly democratic.
- General suspicion that this is a top-down decision with little public consultation.
- Concerns that changing to larger councils could reduce transparency, increase corruption and weaken democracy.
- Some contributors suspect political motivations, particularly concerns about Labour's intentions or central government control. A number also raised 'gerrymandering' and an intention to reshape voter demographics.
- Some fear that changes serve political agendas rather than community benefit and are not true devolution.

## 6. Fear of service decline

- Specific fears about services: planning, adult social care, SEND provision, road maintenance, public halls and NHS collaboration.
- Worries about deterioration in service quality (e.g. rubbish collection, emergency repairs, health services), especially in non-statutory and localised services (parks, transport, leisure, etc.) under broader, less focused management.
- Concerns that unique or successful local services would be cut or diluted.
- Worries that amalgamating councils will reduce the quality of housing repairs, customer service and access to help, including difficulties in contacting council representatives.

## 7. Preference for two unitary authorities (if change is inevitable)

- While many oppose any change, a significant minority prefer two authorities (North & South Worcestershire) over one, if forced to choose.
- However, many still oppose any reorganisation at all.

## Preference 5 – 'I have no interest':

Just 20 respondents (0.5%) selected that they have 'no interest' in local government reorganisation. 13 gave a reason for their choice.

The key issue most often raised by the small number of respondents was a lack of trust that structural reorganisation will lead to any real improvement in services or governance. It includes scepticism that changing to just one or two councils will solve the current underlying problems of perceived inefficiency, poor decision-making and wasting public money. Some feel that regardless of the structure, the same people and systemic issues will persist.

## **Question 11: Do you have any other comments, suggestions, or concerns about the proposed reorganisation?**

The final free text question within the public engagement survey was question 11. This was essentially a catch all so that respondents could share anything else they wanted. Of the 4,249 responses to the survey, 1,563 (37%) went on to provide some further views.

There is a comprehensive reflection of these below to provide a full flavour of what respondents said in response to this question, and to indicate the strength of feeling about LGR in Worcestershire. Many of the comments are very similar to those expressed in response to Question 7, however some additional key themes also emerged.

### **Urban vs rural differences**

- Recognition that unitary authorities can work well in cities, but may struggle in rural settings.
- Challenges like travel distances and car dependency highlighted.
- Current services (e.g. bin collections, leisure facilities, recycling) seen as high quality in some districts.
- Concerns about urban-rural divide and uneven resource allocation.
- Emphasis on the distinct social, economic and cultural differences between North and South Worcestershire.
- Some support a single unitary authority for efficiency and cost-saving, however others advocate for two authorities to reflect different urban/rural needs and avoid central dominance (particularly from Worcester City).
- Strong argument for two unitary authorities due to vastly different needs between North (urban, industrial) and South (rural, agricultural).
- “One-size-fits-all” models seen as ineffective.
- Repeated concern rural and smaller towns will be deprioritised in favour of larger urban centres like Worcester.
- Calls to recognise different needs of rural areas (e.g., isolation, transport, services).
- Many prefer two unitary authorities over one: seen as a better balance between local knowledge and efficiency and easier to understand different needs of North and South Worcestershire.

- Rural communities fear being marginalised or overlooked by a single, larger authority dominated by urban priorities.
- Calls to recognise the differing needs and challenges of urban and rural areas.

### **Loss of localism and representation**

- Fear that councillors will cover too large an area, making them less accessible and responsive.
- Anxiety about smaller communities being overlooked in favour of urban centres (e.g. Worcester).
- Cultural pride and heritage (e.g. Worcestershire's historic identity, local archives, civic symbols) viewed as at risk.
- Calls for more clarity and fairness in distributing new duties and resources.
- Loss of historic and community identity.
- Fear that centralisation will lower service quality and increase loss of local nuance.
- Strong concern that larger unitary authorities would dilute local voices.
- Repeated preference for smaller, more local councils or two-unitary authorities over a single authority.
- Support for two-unitary option to better reflect local distinctiveness.
- Anxiety over loss of local facilities, local decision-making, and risk of centralisation to Worcester or other urban hubs.
- Doubts that larger units will be able to maintain high-quality, responsive, and locally tailored services (e.g., planning, refuse, highways).
- Concern that a single authority would create a distant and impersonal bureaucracy.
- Current systems (Wychavon, Redditch, etc.) are seen as more responsive and connected to communities.
- Worry about being overwhelmed with public enquiries and services if the unitary model reduces district-level visibility.
- Widespread fear of losing the character and culture of towns (e.g., Bromsgrove, Pershore, Redditch).
- Anxiety over green belt development and loss of heritage.
- Residents fear decisions will become remote, made by people with little local knowledge.
- Strong resistance to the idea of becoming subsumed under larger bodies like Birmingham or a county-wide council.
- Worries that decision-making will move away from people who live in, know, and care about the areas.
- More difficult to contact councillors.
- Fewer opportunities for in-person engagement.
- Concerns about already poor communication being made worse.
- Concerns about losing direct accountability and democratic representation.
- Strong preference for decisions and services to remain locally controlled.

## Accountability and governance

- Desire for transparent, fair representation—with local councillors ideally living in the areas they serve.
- Requests for clearer lines of responsibility and public understanding of new structures.
- Suggestions that two councillors per division may be needed.

## Parish and Town Councils

- Some view parish councils as ineffective, duplicated roles, or dominated by ex-district/county councillors.
- Parish and town councils seen as vulnerable: lacking resources or influence to fill the gap.
- Widespread concern about overburdening unpaid and overstretched parish councils with more responsibilities without adequate support or remuneration.
- Concern over reduced influence of Parish and Town Councils.
- Parish councils fear they'll become the only accessible "local face" of governance.
- A few suggest empowering parish councils rather than creating new neighbourhood councils.
- Concerns parish and town councils may lose influence or funding.
- Volunteer-based councils lack the capacity or funding to take on extra duties.
- No clear information on how parish funding or staff increases will be handled.

## Accountability and service quality

- Perception of councillors as career politicians rather than community advocates.
- Consultation process seen as rushed, top-down, and possibly pre-determined.
- Calls for referenda or more transparent, inclusive decision-making processes.
- Non-statutory services (parks, libraries, leisure, culture) feared to be deprioritised in favour of high-cost statutory services (social care, children's services).
- Rural residents especially fear service degradation due to distance, lower density, and car dependency.
- Praise for existing district councils (e.g., Wychavon, Malvern Hills) contrasted with worries about "levelling down."
- Concerns that digitalisation (call centres, chatbots) will alienate non-digital residents.
- Risks to services for older people, disabled residents, and those with SEND.
- Digital exclusion as services move online.
- Fear of service decline post-reorganisation, particularly in rural and northern areas like Redditch, Stourport, Wyre Forest.
- Increased use of automated systems / online-only services will make it more difficult for vulnerable people.

## Financial concerns and cost-saving scepticism

- Cost of consultants, IT systems, rebranding, redundancy packages could outweigh savings and perceived as unnecessary.
- Previous reorganisations cited as examples of over-promising and under-delivering.
- Fear council tax could rise; savings would come instead from service cuts.
- Calls for transparent economic modelling and independent scrutiny.
- Deep concern about hidden or underestimated costs of reorganisation.
- Repeated claims that reorganisations “never save money,” with comparisons to other failed mergers or financially troubled councils (e.g., Birmingham).
- Asset-stripping worries, especially from well-managed districts to cover deficits elsewhere.
- Some argue that one unitary would be more cost-effective.
- Widespread scepticism that council tax will decrease or that real savings will be realised
- Fears of unequal distribution of resources – particularly rural areas losing out to urban centres.
- Reorganisation seen by many as a money-wasting exercise, with uncertain or delayed cost savings.
- Some acknowledge the need for efficiency and streamlined services, but don't see this as the right method.
- Strong fear that better-managed councils (e.g., Redditch) will have to cover the debts of poorly managed ones (e.g., Birmingham).
- Concerns about higher council tax, increased rents, and risk of bankruptcy.
- Demand for clearer financial analysis before decisions on where the money is spent and contractor costs.
- Calls for audits, transparency, and stopping waste (e.g., high executive pay).
- Some suspect savings from reorganisation will be exaggerated.
- Requests for clear costings, evidence of projected savings, and comparison with other areas that have reorganised.
- Some call out existing councils for inefficiency or waste.
- Concerns council tax will rise to fund new offices/staff.
- Fear savings from "economies of scale" will not materialize; instead, services may be cut.
- Several comments highlight pride in well-run districts like Wychavon, arguing it would be unfair for their residents to subsidise areas with less prudent management.
- Calls for clear costings, open debate, and impact assessments.
- Strong emphasis on value for money rather than just cost-cutting.
- Fear that urban centres (e.g., Worcester) could attract disproportionate investment.

## Alternative proposals and reorganisation legitimacy

- Many call for strengthening and better funding of existing councils.
- Investing in digital back-office efficiencies rather than restructuring.

- Exploring collaboration with neighbours (e.g., Herefordshire, West Midlands Combined Authority).
- Revisiting council tax banding for fairness.
- Calls for decisions to be made by local officers or in partnership with communities.
- References to past reorganisations that failed (e.g. NHS, CCGs, Children's Services).
- Deep cynicism about government motives, effectiveness, and the long-term outcome.
- Some support splitting into two unitary authorities, aligned with natural boundaries (e.g. River Severn), to better reflect local identities.
- Strong push for transparency, co-design, and democratic involvement in any transition.
- Cynicism that decisions were pre-made ("rearranging deckchairs on the Titanic").
- Consultation process seen as rushed, top-down, and possibly pre-determined.
- Belief changes are driven by political advantage rather than public benefit.
- Anger at delayed elections, perceived party-political objectives, or cost-cutting motives.
- Many feel uninformed or confused about the plans and their implications.
- Strong demand for better public consultation, comparative costings, and resident-led decision-making.
- Widespread scepticism that reorganisation will actually improve services.
- Perception that the proposal is a political move by central government to consolidate power or impose cost-cutting measures.
- Lack of clear, evidence-based argument from the authorities on why change is needed.
- Instead of reorganisation, residents want councils to focus on fixing local problems (e.g., policing, youth facilities, road repairs) and improve existing services.
- Many people think the current system "works," and see reorganisation as unnecessary, disruptive, or purely politically driven.
- Criticism that decisions may already have been made regardless of public input.
- Comments see reorganisation as a "top-down vanity project," eroding local democracy, or driven by political aims.
- Others want to keep the current county/district split, but improve coordination instead.

## **Planning, Housing & Environmental Protections**

- Concerns about overdevelopment, loss of greenbelt, strain on infrastructure.
- Calls to protect local environment, nature reserves, and heritage buildings.
- Calls to include environmental sustainability and active travel as central planning considerations—not as afterthoughts.
- Several contributors stress the need for climate adaptation and long-term thinking.
- Ensure fairness in development and planning.